

Executive Summary

Chester County has made foundational investments in economic development that are paying off. Large industrial sites attracted companies that are creating thousands of jobs and boosting the tax base. Communities are welcoming new residents and visitors. Retail, restaurant, accommodation, and entertainment developers have Chester County in their sights. This strategic plan positions the county to take advantage of these and other opportunities for better paying jobs while at the same time preserving what makes Chester County special.

Chester County has a winning mix of assets, opportunities, and natural advantages to attract businesses and people to invest in the community. One is its location on I-77 between Charlotte and Columbia, and it also has a manufacturing base, natural resources for outdoor recreation, and small-town quality of life that make up a few of the reasons people are moving to the county. Like many rural places, Chester County has challenges with infrastructure, schools, limited resources, and small towns that need investment. Capitalizing on economic development opportunities such as Scout Motors' suppliers, commercial/retail development, workforce upskilling, talent recruitment, and community connections are part of this strategic plan. The SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) identified the main threat as failing to adequately plan for the growth that is and will take place. This strategic plan is one process that addresses the need for long range planning.

The strategic plan is built on the county's assets and is designed to capitalize on Chester County's opportunities while addressing challenges and mitigating threats. The first goal is to attract companies that will provide quality jobs and diversify the economy. Quality jobs will help retain the county's best and brightest young people and enhance the quality of life. Goals around marketing, career awareness, business retention and expansion, and supporting community development initiatives are also part of the strategic plan. The need for the county to invest in infrastructure to meet the demands of growth is woven throughout the plan.

Economic Development Strategic Plan Goals

- Invest in Sites and Buildings to Attract Companies with Quality Jobs
- Market Chester County to Attract Businesses and Talent
- Increase Career Awareness and Job Opportunities for Citizens
- Retain and Expand Existing Businesses
- Support Community and Economic Development Initiatives that Advance Chester County Economic Development's Mission
- Continue to be a Leading Rural Economic Development Organization in South Carolina

Chester County has a history of success in economic development. That success is due, in large part, to strong business leadership support, professional staff, consistent focus on the foundations of product development and marketing, and coalition building. The Chester Development Association sponsorship of this strategic plan is one example of widespread support for the economic development program. Chester County's recent investments in planning, parks, recreation, and tourism is another example of strong support for economic development.

One key data point tells the story of Chester County – **wages are growing at a faster rate** than comparable counties, the laborshed region, the Charlotte region, and the state of South Carolina. After decades of stagnate population growth and lower than average wages, the investments the county has made over many years are paying off. The key now is to capture the full advantage of those investments to ensure prosperity reaches all of Chester County.

Economic Development Strategic Plan

The mission of Chester County Department of Economic Development is to create an environment that encourages new business investment, supports existing business expansion, fosters entrepreneurship, and welcomes visitors which supports public services, opportunities for citizens, prosperity, and quality of life.

Economic Development Strategic Plan Goals

The Chester County Economic Development Strategic Plan comes at an important time for the county. Companies are creating thousands of new jobs; developments are attracting thousands of new residents; and new tourism destinations are offering people more reasons to visit Chester County. These investments create opportunities to provide more quality of life amenities to citizens, and at the same time create a need for comprehensive planning and strategic public investments. For Chester County to grow and maintain its rural, small-town character, Chester County Economic Development will need to work collaboratively and plan deliberately with its partners and allies.

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Goal: Invest in Sites and Buildings to Attract Companies with Quality Jobs

The supply chain for Scout Motors, Inc., located in Blythewood, presents a unique opportunity for Chester County to attract small- to medium-sized advanced manufacturing companies. Communities that have quality, available buildings and shovel-ready sites will be able to capture more of the economic impact from the \$2 billion Scout Motors project and several other large economic development projects in the region.

Infrastructure is key to Chester County's product development strategy. Current limitations on infrastructure must be addressed to keep pace with current and projected growth.

Strategy: Invest in the next generation of industrial sites and buildings.

Action Steps:

- Maintain a current Product Development Plan that lists priority product development initiatives such as due diligence to be performed, site preparation/grading needed, infrastructure upgrades needed, next spec building location, etc. The plan should include cost estimates. The plan could be a 1-2 page concise document that easily communicates CCED's site and building development priorities.
- Strategically invest in public or public-private control and development of an industrial site and/or park. Whereas Chester County has relied on the private sector for industrial site development in the past, growth pressures will drive more land toward residential and commercial development and escalate pricing. Public-private partnerships can preserve land for industrial development.
 - One example is the HWC Site, which the county has already optioned.
 - Organize a leadership tour of Gaston County, NC, as a best-practice community for product development in the Charlotte region.
- Develop a public-private model for spec building development. CCED could invest in land and partner with a private developer to build a spec building. There are loan funds from Santee Cooper through which the county could develop a spec building. There are also private developers in South Carolina who engage in public-private partnerships. A spec building has been a priority for the county's one-cent capital improvement funding in the past and could be re-prioritized in future capital improvement plans.
 - Identify, assess, and prioritize sites for spec buildings, always keeping at least two priority sites identified.
 - Plan to fund/partner with a developer to complete a spec building every two years. Some communities in South Carolina set aside a percentage of new FILOTs for product development. Chester County has such a fund designated for economic development.
 - Complete an economic impact analysis of companies locating in spec buildings to show the full direct, indirect, and induced impacts resulting from investing in the spec building program.
- Develop a grant program for private landowners to complete due diligence. This could be a grant from the CDA to complete a Phase 1 or other due diligence, so sites are more prepared. (Gaston County, NC, developed a program like this.)
- Certify one site/park a year to ensure that Chester County has an inventory of Palmetto Sites, Duke Energy Ready Sites, and other sites with complete due diligence.

Strategy: Advocate for investments in water and wastewater across the county.

Action Steps:

- Participate in Chester County capital improvement and comprehensive planning processes to ensure that infrastructure is being extended to growth areas in the county.
- Organize a tour of other communities that have made significant investments in infrastructure to support economic development.
- Develop “what if” modeling of the economic impact and related capacity needs of infrastructure to spotlight the limitations of current capacity.



Goal: Market Chester County to Attract Businesses and Talent

Chester County has a strong competitive position to attract new companies and talented people. CCED does a great job of telling the “Chester County story.” The marketing strategy recommends refining and refreshing the message and deploying it through communications, public relations, and digital promotions.

Strategy: Market Chester County to attract companies that will boost wages and provide quality job opportunities.

Action Steps:

- Focus the external marketing strategy on:
 - Chester County target clusters: advanced materials, motor vehicles, aerospace, chemicals, electric/electronics (including electric vehicle batteries)
 - Supply chain of existing businesses
 - Scout Motors’ suppliers
 - Telling the story of how Chester County is changing with new residential and commercial development opportunities.
- Update clusters on the website and add competitive position information on each cluster. Include a video testimonial. Develop a downloadable brochure for each cluster.
- Continue to participate in the business attraction programs of I-77 Alliance, Charlotte Regional Business Alliance, SC Department of Commerce (SCDOC), and other allies where there is alignment with Chester County’s target sectors. Plan to attend:
 - Trade shows
 - Marketing events
 - Site Consultant events
 - Regional and national commercial realtor events
 - Visits to existing business headquarters and prospective new companies
 - Lead generation conferences and events
- Host SCDOC for a tour of Chester County’s sites, parks, buildings, and key industries every two years.
- Make an annual presentation to SCDOC on Chester County’s target sectors, competitive advantages, and product availability.
- Increase e-marketing to site consultants, brokers, and regional and state allies. Use a lead generation firm to expand CCED’s database of consultants and brokers. Examples include:
 - Eblasts of announcements as well as new sites and buildings available.
 - Social media posts of industry expansions.
- Invest in a professional photography library to have quality images for external and internal marketing. CCED can share the library with allies, including education partners, through a user agreement that ensures consistency of use.
- Conduct a third-party review of the brand, collaterals, and website every three years to ensure they stay fresh and updated.

Strategy: Market Chester County to attract and retain top talent.

Action Steps:

- Work with I-77 Alliance partners to develop and launch a regional talent attraction marketing strategy. [Move Up](#), an Upstate Alliance initiative, is a good example of a talent attraction strategy that includes promoting lifestyle, careers, skills development, and employment opportunities. Another example from the Charlotte region is [Charlotte's Backyard](#).
- Add more details to the “Lifestyle” section of the website:
 - A relocation guide can be developed in partnership with a relator’s association. The guide should include information on housing, schools, communities, and regional recreation and entertainment.
 - A cost of living calculator to spotlight the lower cost of living than Charlotte.
- Showcase people and their stories in CCED social media. Coordinate messaging and posts with allies such as realtors and employers to elevate the visibility of Chester County and #ChooseChester.
 - Stories of entrepreneurial startups.
 - Profile people who have moved to Chester County.
 - Spotlight young people who finished an education/training program and now work in a Chester County business.
 - See the [Humans of New York](#) as an example of telling people’s stories.



Goal: Increase Career Awareness and Job Opportunities for Citizens

One role of economic development organizations (EDOs) is to be a connector of business and education. Chester County can be that connector by sharing information with businesses about opportunities for training, promoting local job opportunities, and informing educators of in demand skills.

Strategy: Expand education and workforce development opportunities for students, workers, and adult learners.

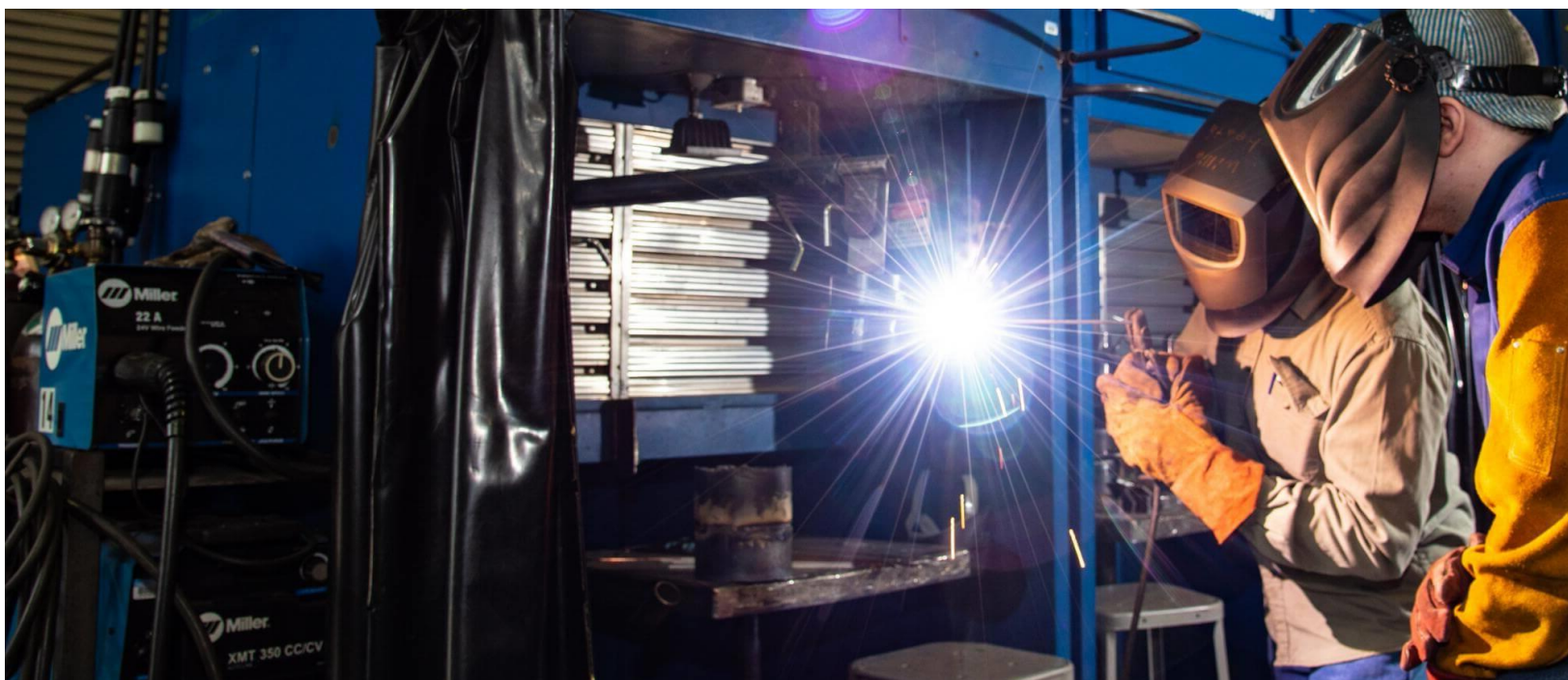
Action Steps:

- Explore forming a coalition similar to [Iredell Ready](#), an initiative designed to help students and residents, K-12 through retirement, identify the opportunities to pursue their individual career pathways and find gainful employment with industry.
- Support increased funding for capital improvement projects of Chester County Schools, technology and equipment investments, and recruitment and retention of teachers.
- Support the development of a “career center” on a site in the Chester Technology Park.
 - Organize a tour of best practice career centers in similar communities.
 - Host an industry and education roundtable to develop a high-level concept for the career center.
 - Provide letters of support to funding agencies/grant applications.
 - Take a lead in identifying companies that may support the center with donations of equipment, technology, and funding.
- Raise awareness about the increase in state funding for apprenticeships and use information from Apprenticeship Carolina to create a “how to start a program” brochure for Chester County.
 - Make apprenticeships a “Lunch and Learn” topic at an industry networking program.
- Promote changes to the state’s incumbent worker training program (E-Zones) that reduce the required length of employment for eligibility and open up funding for soft skills training.
- Lead a coalition to create a Chester County summer work experience program similar to the best practice program in Giles County, VA. The county, businesses, educators, and Goodwill Industries partner to provide high school students summer work experiences in local companies. The county pays a portion of the students’ wages.
- Develop a “Chester County Internship Toolkit” that outlines steps employers can take to create an internship and promote with Chester County Schools, York Tech, and other regional educational institutions. Make the toolkit downloadable from the Workforce section of the website.
- Develop a one-page brochure for teachers on opportunities to connect students and businesses – shadowing, internships, business guest speakers, etc.

Strategy: Raise awareness of Chester County career pathways and job opportunities.

Action Steps:

- Expand career awareness of students, educators, and parents through an aggressive marketing campaign such as [Be Pro Be Proud](#) (which has been in Chester County), CTE opportunities, York Tech training programs, dual enrollment options, work experiences, etc. The “Iredell Ready” example includes marketing and outreach.
- Work with Chester County Schools to develop additional career awareness programs and provide sponsorships. Examples include:
 - Manufacturing Week engagement in schools to get students touring modern manufacturing facilities.
 - Internship matching event.
 - Robotics team/clubs/competitions. This can be done with other types of clubs related to clusters as well.
 - “Employment signing events” similar to sports scholarship signing promotions.
 - Student and educator/administrator tours of businesses and industries across the county.
- Participate in college career fairs, expos, and other career events and encourage local employers to participate as well.



Goal: Retain and Expand Existing Businesses

The majority of new investment and job creation in a community come from existing businesses. In the past, Chester County had a staff position focused on business retention and expansion. This strategic plan advocates for an additional staff position so a renewed focus can be placed on helping local companies overcome hurdles to expansion.

Strategy: Formalize and implement a Business Retention and Expansion Program that builds relationships, identifies and solves hurdles to expansion, and fosters a strong business climate.

Action Steps:

- Develop a comprehensive directory of Chester County industries and businesses.
- Implement a proactive BRE visitation program making retention and expansion visits to large employers, fast-growing companies, and target clusters.
- Deploy an annual existing business survey that gathers information for the BRE program such as in demand skills, topics for lunch-and-learn programs, and future space needs.
- Use a customer relationship management program to track information gathered during business visits to ensure efficient follow up.
- Add a webpage under the “Industry” menu that lists services that CCED provides to existing businesses. This could include a downloadable brochure for the BRE Program that includes.
 - Expansion Assistance
 - Sites & Buildings
 - Education and Workforce Development Connections
 - Grants, Incentives, and Financing Program Support
 - Connections to state programs for export assistance, sustainability, etc.
- Partner with ally organizations to host quarterly or semi-annual networking events. This could be lunch-and-learns featuring a speaker on a topic of importance to industry.
- Organize events to celebrate Manufacturing Week. Example events: Facility tours, social media campaign celebrating manufacturing, manufacturing presentations in schools, networking lunch with keynote on a current manufacturing topic, etc.
- Develop social media campaigns to promote existing businesses in concert with special events such as Manufacturing Week, Small Business Week, Economic Development Week, etc.

Strategy: Produce studies and information that support the growth and expansion of existing businesses.

Action Steps:

- Conduct a wage and benefits survey every three years.
- Develop a business resource list for the website that includes local and state agencies such as the Small Business Development Center, readySC, SustainSC, etc.
- Develop a “B2B” page on the website with a list of companies that have contracting opportunities for local businesses (e.g., maintenance, cleaning, component parts, etc.).
 - Encourage businesses to engage in the state’s B2B program.
- Distribute an e-newsletter to existing businesses. It could contain a business spotlight, upcoming local, regional, and state events for business, and a case study of how CCED supported a local business.
- Gather information on existing businesses’ future utility needs to inform water and wastewater planning.

Goal: Support Community and Economic Development Initiatives that Advance CCED's Mission

For Chester County to capture the full economic benefit of recent large industrial announcements, investments in placemaking, entrepreneurship, housing, entertainment, retail, and commercial development need to be made. It will take leaders from local governments, Chamber of Commerce, recreation and tourism, education, CCED, and businesses collaborating and working together to reach the community's vision.

Strategy: Develop and implement an internal communications plan to connect communities and organizations.

Action Steps:

- Host an annual event – State of the County, Economic Development Summit, CCED Annual Meeting, etc. – that is open to all of Chester County and highlights economic development priorities, spotlights companies, showcases best practices of partners, etc.
- Through a marketing/communications contractor, increase social media activities that promote existing business, events of allies, entrepreneurs, Chester County leaders, and positive news.
- Produce an annual report and quarterly update reports and share with local governments, investors, and the public. This is an example of a [monthly report](#) from Wilkes EDC, NC.
- Host quarterly informal coffee/lunch meetups with municipal and county administrators to keep informed and identify opportunities for collaboration.
 - Have the CDA Chair host regular coffees/meet-ups with elected officials of municipalities and the county. This could be added to the CDA web-based calendar under development.

Strategy: Leverage the Retail Strategies study.

Action Steps:

- Share the Retail Strategies study with the community through an “unveiling” event.
- Create a “landing page” to promote Chester County’s retail market.
- Add large commercial sites to CCED’s online database of available properties.
- Market Chester County to large commercial developers.
- Meet with the Small Business Development Center and strategize on how they can use the information to support entrepreneurs who want to start retail businesses.
- Post information from the study on the website under the “Doing Business” menu on a new page called Retail Development.
- Create a recruitment brochure/package for retail/commercial developers.
- Use data from the study to develop “market profiles” for each community (see below).

Strategy: Partner with the Chamber and other ally organizations to support entrepreneurial startups and small business growth.

Action Steps:

- Promote Chamber, SBDC, and other organizations' events targeted to entrepreneurs and small businesses on social media.
- Jointly host an event on "How to Do Business with Chester County Manufacturers."
- Explore with the Chamber the possibility of conducting a feasibility study for an entrepreneurial facility such as an incubator, cowork space, makerspace, and/or an accelerator. CCED's contribution could be grant writing support, study sponsorship, and connections with business leaders.

Strategy: Partner with local and state organizations to provide market data and information that advance community and economic development initiatives.

Action Steps:

- Develop a 1-2 page "market" or "community" profile for each municipality that includes basic market data. These can be posted on the website and emailed to commercial and residential developers.
- Develop a market area profile/package of information for housing developers that includes a housing profile, approved developments, developments under construction, and projections.
- With research support from the I-77 Alliance, respond to specific market data requests for information from commercial and residential developers.

OUR COMMUNITIES

Chester

Chester, our largest municipality dubbed "Pretty Little City on the Hill," abounds with historic buildings and lore and is home to the annual HILLarity Festival.

Historic District

Covering 250 acres and boasting 475 properties, the Historic District includes the downtown "Hill District" which features modern city amenities with traditional Southern allure.

Great Falls

Great Falls, our second largest city by population and the future home of the Great Falls Whitewater Center, stands apart with large rock outcroppings and its Catawba River setting.

Fort Lawn

Two of our county's busy highways, SC-9 and US-21, converge in our third largest municipality, Fort Lawn, named for one of the town's original settlers, the Forts.

Richburg

Offering large sects of land suitable for industrial growth, Richburg is home to two professional football and baseball players as well as a NASCAR driver.

Lowrys

The historic town of Lowrys features *The People's Free Library of South Carolina*, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

Goal: Continue to be a Leading Rural Economic Development Organization in South Carolina

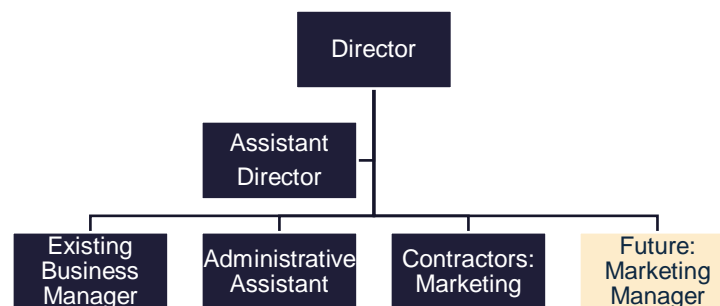
Chester County Economic Development is recognized as a leading rural economic development organization in South Carolina. It won *Trade and Industry Magazine's* 2024 Corporate Investment/Community Input Award, *Business Facilities'* 2023 Deal of the Year Impact and Small EDO of the Year awards, and the International Economic Development Council's Bronze Award for Economic Development Organization of the Year. Over many years, the program has invested in the foundations of product, people, and place. Top-notch professional staff promote the county, identify and pursue development opportunities, and build coalitions of partners to bring more resources to the county.

Strategy: Staff for success.

CCED's staffing model must expand to implement the strategic plan. The recommendations below for additional staff are made along with recommendations to increase public and private funding.

Action Steps:

- Add a staff position to support the BRE Program and investor relations.
- Expand marketing and communications capabilities and capacity through contractors and eventually another position.



- Conduct a compensation and benefits review every 2-3 years to ensure CCED can retain its talented professionals and recruit when new positions open.
- Budget for staff professional development and professional certifications to ensure staff stays on the leading edge of economic development.

Strategy: Fund implementation of the strategic plan.

Action Steps:

- Request the county fund a new existing business manager position to support the capacity needed for strategic plan implementation. This position is urgently needed to support existing businesses and overall implementation of the strategic plan.
- Request the county allocate some or all of the \$500,000 in the economic development fund to jump start implementation of the strategic plan and match 1:1 with funds from the Chester Development Association. The county's economic development account is funded by reserving 4% of the fee-in-lieu payments; thus, allocating it back to economic development creates a performance based funding loop.
- Develop a long-range funding strategy that includes:
 - Increased Chester County commitment to fund additional staff and operations.
 - Increased private sector funding to support marketing, talent attraction, site/building development, and special studies.
 - Complete a private sector fundraising feasibility analysis through an independent third-party.

Projected Public + Private Funding Needed for Implementation Above the Current Budget

2025	2026	2027
\$225,000	\$300,000	\$400,000
Includes Existing Business Position but does not include site control or development.	Includes Existing Business position but does not include spec building construction.	Includes Existing Business position and marketing position.

Strategy: Measure the county's return on investment in economic development.

Action Steps:

- Conduct economic impact analysis of projects to show the direct, indirect, and induced impacts of CCED-led projects.

Strategy: Institutionalize strategic planning in the CCED culture.

Action Steps:

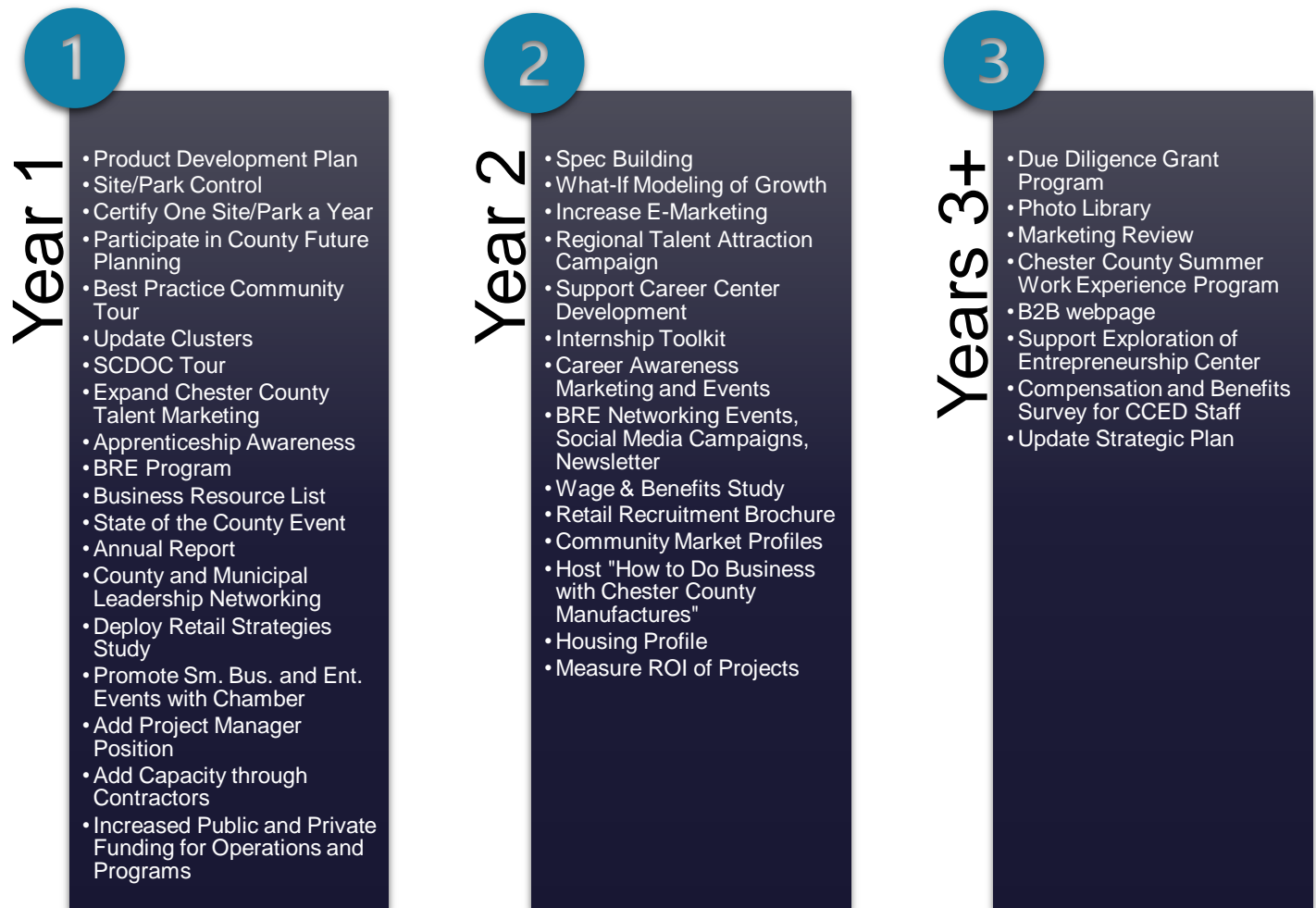
- Review the strategic plan monthly at staff meetings and quarterly at board and county council meetings.
- Publish an annual report that tracks progress of strategic plan implementation.
- Conduct an annual planning retreat to make course corrections to plan as new market information is learned and react to new developments in Chester County.
- Plan for a comprehensive update every 3-5 years.



Implementation

Chester County Economic Development will need strong support from Chester County, Chester Development Association, municipalities, local allies, and regional partners to implement the strategic plan. In addition to ongoing program activities in business attraction, marketing, and product development, there are several new initiatives and programs recommended in this strategic plan. The implementation guide below assumes an increase in public and private funding, allowing CCED to expand existing programs, fund special studies and projects, and contract for services.

Every year, we recommend reviewing the strategic plan for needed updates. This could be done in a planning retreat setting with the Chester Development Association and county leadership. Every three to five years, conduct an update to the strategic plan.



Metrics

There are three types of metrics tracked in economic development. Program metrics measure the activities and outcomes of programs such as the business attraction program. These are used to track the performance of economic development programs and are most useful to a board and governing body. Below is a recommended dashboard for program metrics.

Organizational metrics measure the health of the organization, looking at funding stability and employee and board satisfaction. These are used to understand the sustainability of the organization. Example organizational metrics also include council/elected leader satisfaction, private sector engagement, and employee satisfaction.

Community well-being, or economic health indicators, are measures of how well the community is doing. Data on educational attainment and per capita income are used for these measures. Because economic development programs should impact these indicators over a long period of time, they are not annual measures of the program's success. However, it is still important to track. CCED should track and report data such as population growth, unemployment rate, labor force, wages, new business starts, and building permits and use the data for planning.

CCED Dashboard

