



chamber

# **BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER**

A STRATEGIC VISION FOR A THRIVING  
SOUTH BEND REGION, 2025 - 2030

---

UPDATED AUGUST 2025

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY . . . . . 3
- INTRODUCTION . . . . . 3
- VISION STATEMENT . . . . . 3
- MISSION STATEMENT . . . . . 3
- ECONOMIC OVERVIEW . . . . . 4
- CHAMBER SWOT . . . . . 4
- STRATEGIC PRIORITIES . . . . . 6
- STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS . . . . . 6
- TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION . . . . . 13
- PERFORMANCE METRICS . . . . . 13
- CONCLUSION: BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER . . . . . 15
- CHAMBER ORGANIZATION CHART . . . . . 15

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South Bend Regional Chamber enters this next strategic planning cycle with a strong foundation of progress and momentum. Building on the *300 by 30* initiative, our bold goal to grow St. Joseph County's population to 300,000 by 2030, the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan charts the path forward for even greater impact.

Framed under the theme **"Building the Future Together,"** this plan reflects the Chamber's role as a convener of business, government, and community partners, and as the Lead Economic Development Organization for St. Joseph County. It outlines six key strategic priorities that will guide our work in advocacy, economic development, member value, marketing and communications, operational excellence, and talent attraction and retention.

Together, these priorities reinforce the Chamber's mission: to serve as the voice of business and a driver of initiatives that strengthen the regional economy, support employers, and enhance quality of life. They also ensure that the Chamber remains not only a catalyst for investment and growth, but a trusted partner in shaping a more prosperous, innovative, and inclusive future for the South Bend region.

## INTRODUCTION

**Founded in 1909, the South Bend Regional Chamber (SBRC) has served as the voice of business and a catalyst for regional growth for more than a century.** Representing over 1,300 employers and 60,000 workers across St. Joseph County, the Chamber is widely recognized as one of Indiana's most influential business organizations. With a Gross Regional Product exceeding \$16 billion annually, the county plays a vital role in the state's economic competitiveness.

The Chamber is among only 146 nationwide to earn the prestigious 5-Star Accreditation from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a distinction held by just two organizations in Indiana. This recognition underscores SBRC's commitment to delivering exceptional value, advocacy, and leadership to its members and community.

Through an integrated model that combines traditional chamber services, economic development, and destination marketing (Visit South Bend Mishawaka), SBRC advances business growth, talent attraction, and regional visibility. This collaborative approach maximizes resources, balances business and community needs, and amplifies the region's reach.

The 2025–2030 Strategic Plan builds on this foundation by outlining how the Chamber will champion pro-business policies, strengthen employer success, and position the South Bend region as a hub of innovation, talent, and investment.

## VISION STATEMENT

To be a catalyst for a prosperous, resilient, and innovative South Bend region, where businesses thrive, communities connect and opportunities abound for future generations.

## MISSION STATEMENT

To drive sustainable economic growth in the South Bend region by championing and supporting the needs of business, fostering strategic partnerships, and engaging the community.

# ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

The South Bend region has undergone a remarkable transformation. Once ranked among *Newsweek's* “Top 10 Dying Cities,” St. Joseph County is now recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* as a Top 25 U.S. Place to Live and serves as a hub for manufacturing, technology, and medical services. The county anchors a regional population of 1.1 million with a labor force of more than 550,000.

## KEY MILESTONES INCLUDE:

- More than \$18 billion in committed economic development projects since 2021.
- Nearly \$900 million in housing and mixed-use developments supporting workforce growth.
- \$95 million in READI 1.0 and 2.0 grants, leveraging \$800 million in public and private investment.
- Transformative projects such as AWS's \$11 billion data campus, GM/Samsung's \$3.5 billion EV battery plant, AM General's \$8.8 billion military contract, and Verbio's \$230 million biofuels facility.
- Expanded collaboration among government, K-12 and higher education, and global investors.

The Chamber has been a driving force in this momentum, leading initiatives in business attraction, policy advocacy, workforce development, and destination marketing. The 2025–2030 Strategic Plan builds on this progress to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth for the region.

# CHAMBER SWOT

To guide the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan, the South Bend Regional Chamber conducted a comprehensive SWOT analysis, assessing organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This evaluation was informed by lessons learned from the 2020–2023 Strategic Plan, insights gathered through member surveys and stakeholder interviews, and an internal review of program performance and resource capacity. By drawing on multiple perspectives, the analysis provided a balanced understanding of how the Chamber can continue to advance its mission in a competitive and rapidly changing environment.

The SWOT served as more than a routine planning exercise; it became a critical checkpoint to assess where the Chamber is most effective, where operational improvements are needed, and where external dynamics create both risks and opportunities. Key findings underscored the Chamber's strength as a trusted advocate and convener, supported by proven business retention, workforce, and advocacy capabilities. At the same time, the analysis highlighted challenges such as inconsistent branding, limited visibility of efforts, and the ongoing need to demonstrate clear return on investment to members.

Notably, the process underscored that the Chamber's work does not take place in isolation. Global market shifts, political uncertainty, changing workforce dynamics, and increasing competition for membership all influence the environment in which members operate. The SWOT highlighted how these external forces intersect with local conditions —such as the region's reliance on a single flagship attraction and limited development-ready sites—shaping the priorities that follow.

These findings provided the foundation for the goals, objectives, and tasks outlined in the six Strategic Areas of Focus. By grounding the plan in a thorough assessment of organizational capacity and external realities, the Chamber can pursue strategies that are realistic, targeted, and positioned to create measurable impact for members and the broader community.

# SOUTH BEND REGIONAL CHAMBER SWOT ANALYSIS

## STRENGTHS

- Recognized as the leading business organization and trusted source for business intelligence.
- Proven advocacy, business retention/expansion, and market research capabilities.
- Strong workforce partnerships with education, industry, and community stakeholders.
- Operational efficiency, financial stability, and best-practice recognition.

## WEAKNESSES

- Inconsistent branding and underutilized digital marketing channels.
- Limited available sites for new development and low community awareness of Chamber efforts.
- Difficulty retaining graduates and demonstrating ROI to members.
- Region is anchored by one primary attraction, highlighting the need to broaden promotion of other assets.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Expand digital strategies to increase visibility and engagement.
- Leverage technology and advocacy to strengthen business support and policy impact.
- Grow workforce programs, YPN, and personalized member engagement.
- Diversify revenue and promote a wider array of attractions and events to enhance tourism alongside the flagship destinations.

## THREATS

- Maintaining relevance in a rapidly changing communication environment.
- Political and economic uncertainty; competing agendas with other organizations.
- Shifting education policy and fluctuating workforce funding.
- Membership competition from other organizations and digital platforms

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The South Bend Regional Chamber's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan is built around six key priorities that reflect member needs, employer input, and the region's economic opportunities. These priorities expand on the direction outlined in the Executive Summary, providing the framework for the goals, objectives, and tasks that follow.

- **Advocacy & Public Policy:** advancing pro-business policies, strengthening government relations, and providing clear, timely analysis for employers.
- **Economic Development:** leading with data and thought leadership to attract jobs, investment, and new industries while supporting existing businesses.
- **Marketing & Communications:** elevating the Chamber's brand and amplifying the stories of business success and community impact.
- **Member Value & Services:** delivering connections, programs, and resources that create measurable benefits for members.
- **Operational Excellence:** practicing disciplined financial management and building strong internal systems that sustain a high-performing organization.
- **Talent Attraction & Retention:** connecting employers to recruitment and training resources, raising career awareness, and advancing employer-driven workforce strategies.

Together, these priorities provide a clear roadmap for how the Chamber will deliver value, strengthen the regional economy, and position St. Joseph County for long-term prosperity.

# STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

To advance the Chamber's mission and deliver on its 2025–2030 Strategic Priorities, the plan is organized into six Strategic Areas of Focus. These areas translate broad priorities into specific goals, objectives, and tasks that guide the Chamber's day-to-day efforts and long-term impact.

Each area provides a structured framework:

- **Goals** define broad outcomes that support the region's prosperity.
- **Objectives** establish measurable, actionable steps toward those goals.
- **Tasks** outline the specific activities needed to achieve results.

This structure ensures the Chamber remains disciplined, transparent, and responsive to member needs while positioning St. Joseph County as a leader in business growth, talent development, and community vitality. Together, these Strategic Areas of Focus provide the operational blueprint for how the Chamber will implement its priorities. They link high-level vision to measurable outcomes, ensuring that progress can be tracked, resources aligned, and impact clearly demonstrated to members and the community. By following this framework, the Chamber will not only deliver value in the near term but also sustain momentum for long-term economic growth and competitiveness.

# ADVOCACY

## Goal 1: Strengthen the Chamber's role as the leading advocate for business in St. Joseph County.

### Objectives

- Build and maintain strong relationships with local, state, and federal officials to ensure business interests are represented.
- Monitor and communicate key policy developments that directly impact the regional business climate.

### Tasks

- Host Third House Sessions, Legislative Affairs Forums, and policy briefings to connect members with elected officials.
- Use legislative tracking software and regular Chamber updates (newsletter, social, policy alerts) to keep members informed.
- Represent the business community in public meetings, testimony, and one-on-one conversations with legislators.

## Goal 2: Advocate for funding and infrastructure that support business growth.

### Objectives

- Collaborate with community partners to secure funding for projects that drive regional competitiveness.
- Promote infrastructure investments in transportation, broadband, and utilities that support business development and housing growth.

### Tasks

- Support regional capital projects such as US 31 improvements and actively participate in the US 31 Coalition.
- Engage in advocacy for transformational projects, including the South Shore rail realignment, the University of Notre Dame Link pathway connecting campus to downtown South Bend, and State Road 2 interchange improvements.
- Champion infrastructure initiatives that expand broadband access, improve mobility, and unlock new business and residential development opportunities.

## Goal 3: Be the trusted source of public policy information for business and local governments.

### Objectives

- Provide timely, clear, and actionable analysis on legislation and regulations that affect the regional business community.
- Equip employers and local leaders with resources to understand policy impacts and engage in advocacy efforts.

### Tasks

- Produce Legislative Updates, Policy Alerts, and an Annual Legislative Wrap-Up to summarize key issues and outcomes for members.
- Develop fact sheets, presentations, and talking points to help businesses and local leaders navigate complex policy topics.
- Conduct member feedback sessions to assess business sentiment on proposed policy changes.
- Coordinate with regional partners to align on messaging, ensuring a unified business voice at the local, state, and federal levels.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Goal 1: Serve as the leading source for regional economic data and insights.

### Objectives

- Expand the accessibility and usability of regional economic data through digital platforms and member resources.
- Provide data-driven insights to help businesses, site selectors, and policymakers make informed decisions.

### Tasks

- Publish and maintain the Chamber's Economic Dashboard, providing up-to-date labor market, wage, and industry data.
- Share insights through podcasts, newsletters, presentations, and exclusive member briefings on key economic and policy issues.
- Supply customized economic and labor analytics to employers, investors, and site selectors.
- Provide data support for grant applications, site development projects, and employer expansion plans.

## Goal 2: Establish the Chamber as the regional voice and thought leader on economic competitiveness.

### Objectives

- Position the Chamber as the key business advocate in local and regional planning processes.
- Promote the Chamber's expertise and highlight economic development wins.

### Tasks

- Develop an Annual Economic Report showcasing investment, job creation, and wage growth in St. Joseph County.
- Represent the business community in comprehensive plans, transportation studies, and strategic growth initiatives.
- Partner with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), local governments, and higher education institutions to align economic strategies.
- Engage in public forums and speaking opportunities to raise awareness of business priorities and opportunities.

## Goal 3: Position St. Joseph County as a premier destination for business growth, investment, and success.

### Objectives

- Market St. Joseph County and Indiana as competitive locations for new and existing industries.
- Deliver proactive business retention and expansion (BRE) services to strengthen employer confidence and investment.

### Tasks

- Conduct regular retention visits with employers to assess needs, mitigate risks, and identify growth opportunities.
- Showcase regional assets including location, workforce, infrastructure, quality of life, and tax advantages through marketing materials, site visits, and outreach campaigns.
- Provide connections to state programs, workforce training resources, and incentive tools that directly support employer growth.
- Deliver real-time business intelligence to support business attraction, expansion, and retention efforts.

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

**Goal 1: Leverage the Chamber's trusted and influential brand to drive engagement and advocacy for the business community.**

## Objectives

- Increase awareness of the Chamber's leadership role, resources, and impact among members, stakeholders, and the public.
- Strengthen engagement through consistent, compelling storytelling across digital, print, and in-person platforms.

## Tasks

- Expand the reach of the Behind the Region and Inside the Region podcasts to highlight business trends, projects, and leadership voices.
- Deliver regular newsletters, media outreach, and social campaigns that showcase the Chamber's advocacy, programs, and member impact.
- Promote the Chamber's Data Dashboard as the go-to source for regional economic and workforce insights.
- Enhance brand visibility through community events, sponsorships, and partnerships that highlight the Chamber's role as the voice of business.
- Expand use of video storytelling, podcasts, and digital campaigns to showcase Chamber impact.

**Goal 2: Demonstrate the Chamber's impact and highlight member successes to reinforce the value of engagement.**

## Objectives

- Showcase the Chamber's achievements, partnerships, and measurable impact on the regional business community.
- Elevate member contributions to economic growth and community vitality through consistent recognition and storytelling.

## Tasks

- Publish an Annual Report that demonstrates Chamber impact, features member success stories, and highlights regional economic progress.
- Launch ongoing social media campaigns to spotlight member milestones, new investments, and community engagement.
- Expand recognition through award programs, ribbon cuttings, and business spotlights that celebrate regional growth and innovation.

**Goal 3: Ensure the Chamber's sustainability through expanded partnerships and diversified support.**

## Objectives

- Build strategic partnerships that enhance Chamber programs and amplify visibility for the business community.
- Broaden support for Chamber initiatives to reinforce organizational sustainability and impact.

## Tasks

- Develop innovative opportunities for businesses to align their brand with Chamber programs, communications, and events.
- Explore new membership and partnership models that provide added value for businesses and stability for the Chamber.
- Elevate the Chamber's brand presence through targeted marketing that differentiates it as the region's leading business advocate.

# MEMBER SERVICES

**Goal 1: Deliver meaningful value and services that strengthen member businesses and deepen engagement.**

## Objectives

- Expand opportunities for member connection through high-impact events, programs, and networking.
- Provide resources and tools that help members grow, adapt, and stay competitive.

## Tasks

- Provide direct business-to-business connections through Chamber-led introductions, matchmaking at Coffee & Conversations, and curated networking at signature events such as Business After Hours.
- Collaborate with Marketing to launch a member campaign that highlights Chamber benefits such as Solutions for Success, the Young Professionals Network (YPN), and the Data Dashboard.
- Conduct annual member satisfaction surveys and one-on-one listening sessions with top employers to identify service gaps and opportunities.

**Goal 2: Strengthen connections and collaborations that expand the regional business community.**

## Objectives

- Broaden opportunities for engagement by connecting members, non-members, and community partners with Chamber resources.
- Leverage collaborations with other business associations and nonprofits to increase regional impact.

## Tasks

- Encourage participation in signature events (Salute to Business, Business After Hours, YPN events) and track engagement KPIs.
- Elevate the Ambassador Program to showcase member leadership, foster connections, and drive stronger retention.
- Partner with smaller chambers, trade associations, and nonprofits to expand SBRC's reach and amplify member visibility.

# OPERATIONS

**Goal 1: Safeguard the Chamber's financial health through disciplined management and efficient systems.**

## Objectives

- Maintain sound financial practices that align resources with strategic priorities.
- Streamline processes and improve organizational efficiency, including oversight of IT systems and vendor management.

## Tasks

- Implement multi-year financial planning to align resources with strategic goals.
- Develop a succession and continuity plan for financial operations to safeguard institutional knowledge.
- Review vendor contracts and service agreements annually to identify cost savings and efficiency gains.

**Goal 2: Foster organizational strength through leadership in HR and internal operations.**

## Objectives

- Ensure HR practices that support compliance, consistency, and a positive workplace culture.
- Provide financial oversight and compliance management of grants to ensure reporting accuracy.

## Tasks

- Lead staff onboarding, maintain HR systems, and ensure compliance with employment policies.
- Facilitate staff training and professional development opportunities in partnership with department heads.

# TALENT ATTRACTION & RETENTION

## Goal 1: Position the Chamber as the leading connector between employers, talent, and workforce resources.

### Objectives

- Support employers by connecting them to recruitment, training, and retention resources available through regional and state-level partners.
- Amplify and promote employer-driven workforce initiatives to ensure broad awareness and adoption.

### Tasks

- Coordinate the Chamber's Summer Connect Program to connect students with local employers and provide immersive career experiences.
- Lead *Educator Externships* and *Career Fellowships* to connect employers with educators and training providers, strengthening alignment between curriculum and workforce needs.
- Maintain and expand the Chamber's *Industry ConnectED* platform as a central hub for students, educators, and businesses to explore high-demand careers.
- Serve as the voice of employers by gathering workforce feedback and sharing needs and best practices with educators, policymakers, and workforce partners.

## Goal 2: Promote career awareness and provide employers with actionable workforce insights.

### Objectives

- Highlight high-demand, high-wage careers to strengthen awareness among students, educators, and the community.
- Deliver workforce intelligence and connections that help employers address recruitment and retention needs.

### Tasks

- Produce *Career Pathway Videos* and digital content to raise career awareness while showcasing real employer opportunities.
- Convene workforce briefings and employer roundtables to identify hiring challenges and share retention best practices.
- Collaborate with training providers and workforce boards to connect employers directly to talent pipelines, including internships, apprenticeships, and externships.

## Goal 3: Advance employer-led strategies that enhance recruitment, retention, and workforce readiness.

### Objectives

- Identify barriers that limit employers' ability to recruit and retain talent.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to implement solutions that expand workforce participation.

### Tasks

- Conduct employer workforce surveys to assess gaps in skills, recruitment, and retention.
- Partner with employers, government, and nonprofits to address barriers such as transportation, childcare, and housing that impact workforce participation.
- Share employer-led best practices in recruitment, retention, and workplace flexibility through the Chamber.

# TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

As outlined in the Chamber’s SWOT analysis and Strategic Priorities, the ability to adapt and innovate is essential to long-term success. Technology not only supports internal operations but also strengthens our role as the Lead Economic Development Organization and the voice of business. It enables delivery across all Strategic Areas of Focus, from advocacy and data-driven economic development to member engagement, workforce initiatives, and operational excellence.

By investing in the right platforms, the Chamber leverages technology to:

- Expand access to real-time data and analytics for members and investors.
- Improve transparency and efficiency in advocacy, communications, and member services.
- Enhance workforce development through virtual learning, networking, and job-matching tools.
- Strengthen organizational capacity by streamlining core processes and financial management.

## KEY TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

- **Advocacy Tools:** Legislative tracking software (Hannah News IndianaNet) provides real-time monitoring of state-level legislation, enabling accurate policy analysis and streamlined communication with members.
- **Member Engagement & Networking:** Virtual platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom extend programming through online briefings, career chats, and networking events. Podcasts (Behind the Region and Inside the Region) and the digital Chamber Magazine amplify stories of business impact, economic trends, and community leadership. Social media campaigns, e-newsletters, and digital advertising broaden member visibility.
- **Member Services & Management:** CRM systems (MemberClicks/Personify and Accrisoft) streamline member databases, engagement tracking, automated renewals, billing, and personalized communications. The Chamber’s online jobs board connects employers with qualified candidates.
- **Data & Analytics:** Proprietary tools, including Lightcast labor analytics, IMPLAN economic impact modeling, and customized dashboards, provide actionable insights on wages, benefits, and industry trends. Chamber leadership regularly shares this data through reports and presentations that guide decision-making for businesses and policymakers.

Technology is not a stand-alone function — it is integrated across all Chamber priorities. By continuing to invest in data, digital engagement, and secure, user-friendly systems, the Chamber will remain adaptive, innovative, and equipped to serve as the region’s trusted partner in business growth.

# PERFORMANCE METRICS

Delivering measurable results is central to the Chamber’s mission and to the confidence of our members, investors, and community partners. As outlined in the Strategic Priorities and Strategic Areas of Focus, the Chamber’s value lies not only in programs and services but also in the outcomes they create for business and the regional economy.

To ensure accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement, the Chamber tracks performance across multiple dimensions, from advocacy and economic development to member value, operational excellence, and workforce initiatives. These metrics provide a clear line of sight between strategic priorities and real-world impact, allowing members and stakeholders to see progress in tangible terms.

## ADVOCACY

- The number of policy initiatives influenced or supported by the Chamber.
- Member participation in advocacy forums, briefings, and policy events.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Number of new and existing businesses supported.
- Total capital investment secured and estimated economic impact.
- Jobs created and retained through business attraction and retention efforts.

## FINANCIAL HEALTH

- Annual revenue from membership dues, sponsorships, grants, and events. (Internal)
- Budget performance and financial stewardship. (Internal)

## MARKETING & BRAND ENGAGEMENT

- Engagement levels measured by email open and click-through rates.
- Website traffic, social media reach, and number of campaigns.

## MEMBERSHIP

- Annual retention and new member growth rates.
- Year-over-year participation in Chamber programs, events, and services.

## TALENT ATTRACTION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Number of students, educators, and businesses engaged in Chamber-led workforce programs and events.
- Number of businesses participating in Chamber workforce events and programs.

## QUALITY OF PLACE

- Number and value of Visit South Bend Mishawaka (VSBM) projects supported.

# CONCLUSION: BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

The 2025–2030 Strategic Plan provides a clear roadmap for how the South Bend Regional Chamber will continue to serve as the voice of business, the region’s Lead Economic Development Organization, and a catalyst for prosperity. By advancing our six Strategic Areas of Focus, Advocacy & Public Policy, Economic Development, Marketing & Communications, Member Value & Services, Operational Excellence, and Talent Attraction & Retention, the Chamber is committed to creating measurable impact for members, employers, and the broader community.

This plan is not static; it is a living framework designed to evolve alongside the needs of business and the realities of a rapidly changing economy. Through disciplined execution, data-driven decision making, and strong partnerships, the Chamber will strengthen its role as a trusted leader while positioning St. Joseph County for continued growth, innovation, and competitiveness.

Importantly, this plan builds on the momentum of the Chamber’s bold “300 by 30” vision, setting the stage for population growth, economic vitality, and quality-of-life enhancements that will carry the region into the next decade.

Ultimately, the success of this plan depends on collaboration. By working together with our members, investors, community leaders, and partners, we will continue building the future together, ensuring the South Bend region remains a place where businesses thrive, talent flourishes, and residents enjoy a high quality of life.

## CHAMBER ORGANIZATION CHART

