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A Revitalization Plan for DeKalb, IL

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A Revitalization Plan for DeKalb, IL

November 6, 2015

Prepared for

The America's Best Communities Competition



**#PROUDLY
#DEKALB**



Prepared by

Northern Illinois University

Center for Governmental Studies

Competition Sponsors



A Revitalization Plan for DeKalb, IL was prepared by Mim Evans and Brian Richard of the Center for Governmental Studies at Northern Illinois University at the request of ReNew DeKalb. Questions and inquiries regarding the contents of this report may be directed to Mim Evans (mevans@niu.edu).

The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the NIU project team alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of NIU and/or its trustees.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
New Leadership.....	3
Northern Illinois University.....	4
Shifting Population.....	4
Geographic Advantages.....	5
Internal Investment.....	6
Chapter 2: Community Outreach.....	7
Community Conversations.....	7
Dialogue Model.....	7
Marketing and Promotion.....	8
Community Conversation Locations.....	8
Participants.....	9
Student Outreach and Input.....	11
NIU and City Government Input.....	11
The ABC Team.....	12
Vision and Goals.....	13
Chapter 3: Short Term Tactics.....	17
Proposed Projects and Programs.....	17
Arts, Culture and Entertainment Corridor-The ACE Corridor.....	18
Virtual Incubator-LaunchPad.....	25
DeKalb Coworks.....	28
DeKalb Food Hub.....	32
SmartSpace Community Learning Center.....	36
Branding/Marketing.....	40
DeKalb Leadership Institute.....	42
Organizing Plan Implementation.....	47
Chapter 4: Relation to Vision, Goals, and Best Practices.....	48
Potential Funding.....	51
Measuring and Communicating Success.....	53
ABC Best Practices.....	53
Implementation Timeline.....	56
Communicating Success.....	58
Letters of Support.....	59
John Rey, Mayor, City of DeKalb.....	60
Doug Baker, President, Northern Illinois University.....	61

Robert Pritchard, State Representative, 70th District, Illinois House of Representatives..... 63
Thomas Choice, President, Kishwaukee College..... 64
Douglas Moeller, Superintendent, DeKalb Community Unit School District 428..... 65
Jill Tritt, Chair, Board of Directors of the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce..... 67
Jennifer Jeep Johnson, Vice President, DeKalb Area Arts Council..... 68
Mark Eddington, District Manager, DeKalb Sanitary District..... 69

Executive Summary

Over \$350 million in public and private investment, a new mayor and a new NIU president have DeKalb poised for success. The new leaders realize that their futures are linked, bringing a new commitment to cooperation between the city and university. The ABC competition has energized business and civic leaders to join them in a community-wide effort to envision a vibrant community with entertainment, employment, and business opportunities for all residents.

As a first step towards creating a long term vision, the city and university partnered to hold a number of ‘community conversations’ at various locations around the city to elicit input from community members about the future of DeKalb. Additionally, more targeted input was elicited from student groups and community leaders. In all, hundreds of community members identified assets, gave criticism, and provided suggestions to enhance the quality of life in DeKalb. The information gathered was used to create an overall vision and set of strategic goals for the city and the ReNew DeKalb ABC team. The vision adopted by the ReNew DeKalb ABC team is as follows:

VISION: DeKalb is recognized as a 21st century community with a thriving university and a vibrant downtown. DeKalb’s residents, businesses, government and university community are engaged in a dynamic interplay of energy and creativity that retains and attracts businesses with living-wage jobs. DeKalb’s leaders are diverse, visionary, and adaptable, and work together to continue to grow our city.

Thirteen specific goals support the vision. Based on these goals, seven projects were identified to move the community towards achieving its vision. The goals are either supported by the projects or they will be outcomes resulting from the success of the projects.

In selecting projects to include in the plan, the team focused on DeKalb’s current strengths and challenges. Therefore, it was decided to focus on four segments of the area economy: the arts, local foods, education, and high technology. In addition to focusing on these segments of the economy, each project had to offer opportunities to multiple segments of the population. Thus, each project has entry points for multiple potential participants ranging from major employers to school children. The projects are designed to demonstrate that DeKalb is business friendly, attractive to potential students and residents, and encourages the growth of all its residents.

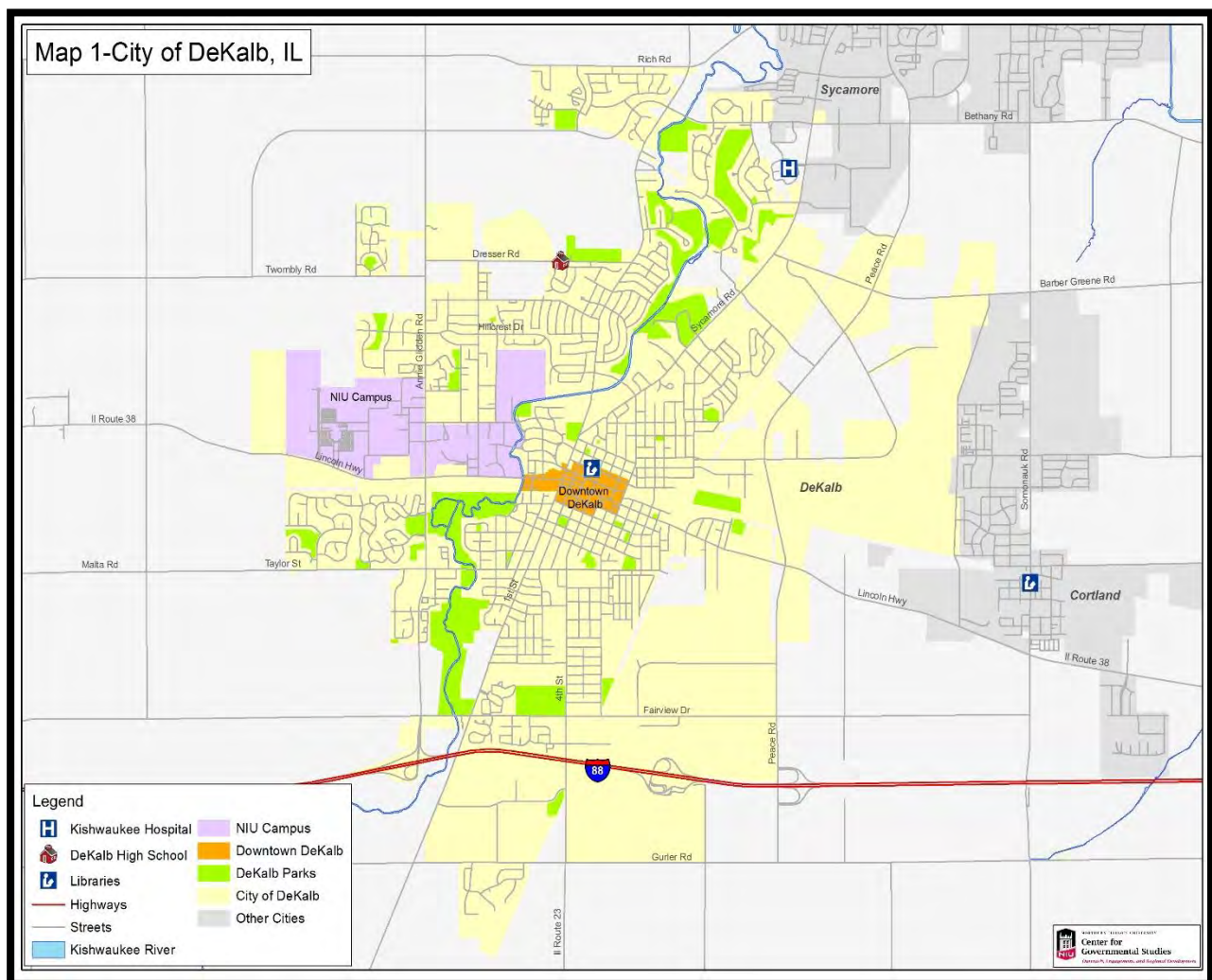
By 2017, the seven projects described in the revitalization plan will bring residents, businesses, government and the university together with heightened energy and creativity. Local foods processors in the food hub, artists, and growing companies housed in the co-working space will take advantage of business assistance provided by the incubator. Graduates of the leadership institute will serve on the boards of our identified projects and programs while also serving on community civic boards and commissions. The community will have a sense of direction as articulated by the community branding effort. These synergies will boost business formation, growth, and attraction creating well-paying jobs that are attractive to graduates of NIU and area residents that went elsewhere for college or jobs and want to return. The collaborative relationships will increase DeKalb’s capacity to move forward with additional projects. The projects will be visible to the DeKalb community. Residents will be proud of the progress and have an understanding of how they can participate in the success. The community will be united in moving towards achieving the vision.

Chapter 1: Introduction

DeKalb is a city of 44,000 residents located in northern Illinois about 60 miles directly west of downtown Chicago. Northern Illinois University (NIU), a comprehensive university with enrollment of approximately 20,000, is located in the city. DeKalb is poised to take advantage of opportunities provided by new leadership in the city and the university, a changing population base, geographic advantages, and significant internal investment. These factors have created momentum in DeKalb. This report outlines recent activities and future plans that will build on community assets to develop a 21st century economic center.

DeKalb recognizes the importance of placemaking. Placemaking leverages a community's assets and potential to create public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and wellbeing. DeKalb has many existing unique assets around which "place" may be created, including its neighborhoods, NIU, the downtown, the newly expanded library, the medical campus, and the gateways to the east and west of the City, to name but a few.

Placemaking
Leverages a community's
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DeKalb has additional assets to build on, including historic places, abundant artistic and cultural resources, a system of 44 parks, and underutilized features such as the Kishwaukee River. The city has many other green spaces that provide beauty and respite, good and plentiful water, some of the richest agricultural land in the world, and a burgeoning local food movement. DeKalb also has organizations dedicated to good environmental practices, such as the DeKalb County Community Gardens, NIU's STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) and environmental programs, and the Citizen's Environmental Commission.

NIU recently spearheaded the installation of a high speed fiber data network throughout rural northwestern Illinois. The network is managed by iFiber, a provider of extremely high speed (up to 1GB) network transport services to both the public and private sector. It provides subsidized access directly to eligible public sector organizations such as schools, community colleges, libraries, healthcare facilities, municipalities, and county and public safety facilities.

New Leadership

In early 2013, DeKalb elected a new mayor, John Rey and a few months later, Doug Baker was inaugurated as NIU's new president. This change in leadership brought a new commitment to cooperation between the city and university as the leaders realize their future success is linked. Mayor Rey has stated that the university is the key to economic success for DeKalb. Likewise, President Baker acknowledges that the attractiveness of DeKalb is an important factor in NIU's ability to attract students. The two meet on a regular basis, something that did not occur under previous administrations.

The result of this cooperation has been joint planning, co-investment, and partnerships such as the city and university police departments investing in communication systems that allow seamless interaction between the two forces. In addition, City and university officers ride together on patrols in and around campus.

Another example is Camp Power, an initiative that is led by the city and supported by community partners, NIU and local nonprofit agencies. Camp Power is a free, collaborative summer program offered on-site to children and families living in the University Village housing development (DeKalb). When the City and NIU conducted a Housing Study in 2014, the neighborhood containing University Village was identified as having significant risk factors. University Village is the City's largest multi-family housing complex with 534 units. The surrounding neighborhood is home to 5,332 residents, with a median household income of \$15,037. More than 95% of the 497 PK-12 students in the neighborhood are on free or reduced lunch. In addition, 683 of the 2,128 dwelling units in the neighborhood are subsidized housing and all but 2 of the housing units are rented.

This community based, collaborative summer program responds to identified issues of child hunger and youth crime that occur throughout the community during the summer months. Camp Power is a culturally relevant, multi-dimensional wellness program offering an academic academy, daily nutritious lunch service, structured physical activities, nutrition education, layered mentoring, life skills training, family engagement activities, employment opportunities to parents, walking field trips to nearby recreation sites, exposure to a range of community resources, and daily interaction with police officers.

Northern Illinois University

NIU contributes a number of assets to the community. As the largest employer in the region, it represents many well-paying jobs and provides access to higher education and life-long learning opportunities. As a result, the proportion of DeKalb residents with at least a bachelor's degree is significantly higher than the state and national averages. The active civic engagement of NIU faculty and administrators adds to the leadership capacity of the region. The presence of thousands of students adds to the vitality and diversity of DeKalb. The university also brings access to resources and amenities that can support economic development and improve quality of life.

Northern Illinois University

The university brings access to resources and amenities that can support economic development and improve quality of life.

The university's renewed commitment to the community benefits the local economy, particularly in the areas of innovation and entrepreneurship. There are a number of units within the university that can support local companies in their efforts to become more globally competitive and profitable. Examples include EIGERlab, College of Business Experiential Learning Center, and Springboard.

NIU's EIGERlab serves as a resource for both start-ups and existing companies to develop and commercialize new ideas, and create and sustain profitable business models. The NIU EIGERlab Center for Product Design supports innovators and entrepreneurs with engineering, product development, computer-aided design, and commercialization/product management.

In DeKalb, Springboard is an NIU initiative that employs university students with opportunities to assist entrepreneurs with market analysis, export opportunities, and legal/regulatory issues. Springboard provides a means for entrepreneurs and small companies to work with students without having to manage them on a day-to-day basis. When necessary, faculty expertise is brought in to specific projects.

Shifting Population

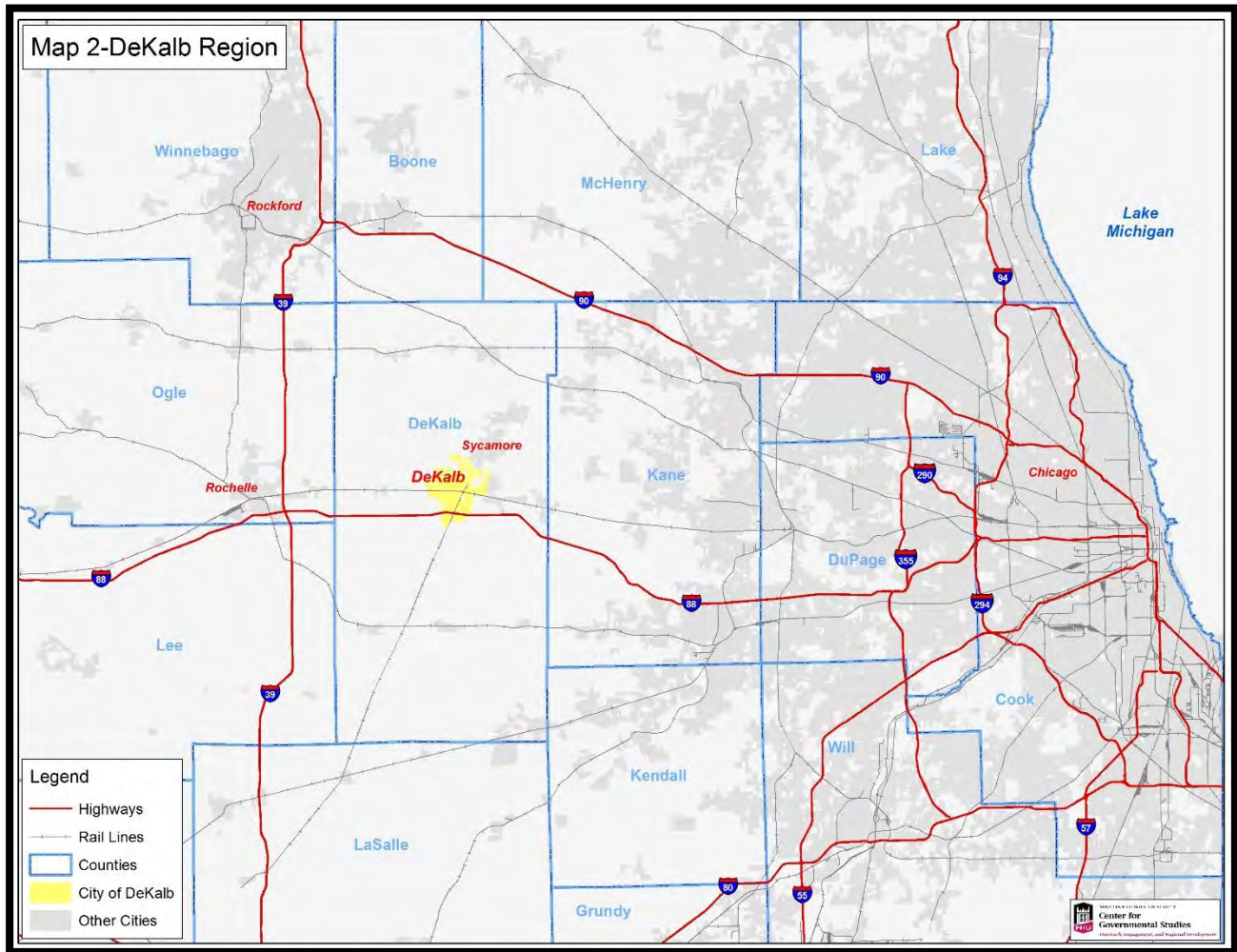
The university provides DeKalb with a youthful energy not often seen in other rural towns its size. The median age is 23.8 years¹, much younger than the national median of 37.3 years. Almost one-quarter of the population is between 20 and 24 years old. While the youth bring energy to DeKalb, the low average age is also an indicator that young people are leaving when they finish school. Opportunities need to be expanded to entice recent graduates to make DeKalb their home.

Citywide demographic shifts over the past two decades have resulted in an ethnic and racial mix that closely mirrors the nation. The African-American population has grown from 9% percent in 2000 to 12.5%. Similarly, Hispanic residents grew by 60% since 2000 and now constitute 13% of the population. This demographic mix is quite different from that found in many declining rural communities and may be an indicator of a population profile that will distinguish growing communities from those that decline as a result of an aging and shrinking population. Thus, DeKalb becomes an interesting location to test innovative programs that might be useful in other parts of the country.

¹ Demographic data was obtained from U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey.

Geographic Advantages

The city's location just along the transition from the western edge of the urbanized area to rural farmland presents both advantages and challenges for DeKalb. The DeKalb area has a relatively low cost of living when compared to cities located closer to Chicago, making it a potential regional center for commuters to the greater Chicago area. DeKalb has easy access to major markets in Chicago and suburbs as well as excellent access in all directions due to the proximity of I-39 (15 miles) and I-88. It also is within an easy commute of large manufacturing centers including Aurora, the Quad-Cities, and Rockford. In addition, DeKalb is on the main line of rail lines with as many as 45 trains passing through the city daily.² It has an airport that can accommodate the needs of small and medium size businesses. Finally, it is 15 minutes away from the Union Pacific's (UP) Global III Intermodal Terminal in Rochelle, one of 4 such terminals in the Chicago area.



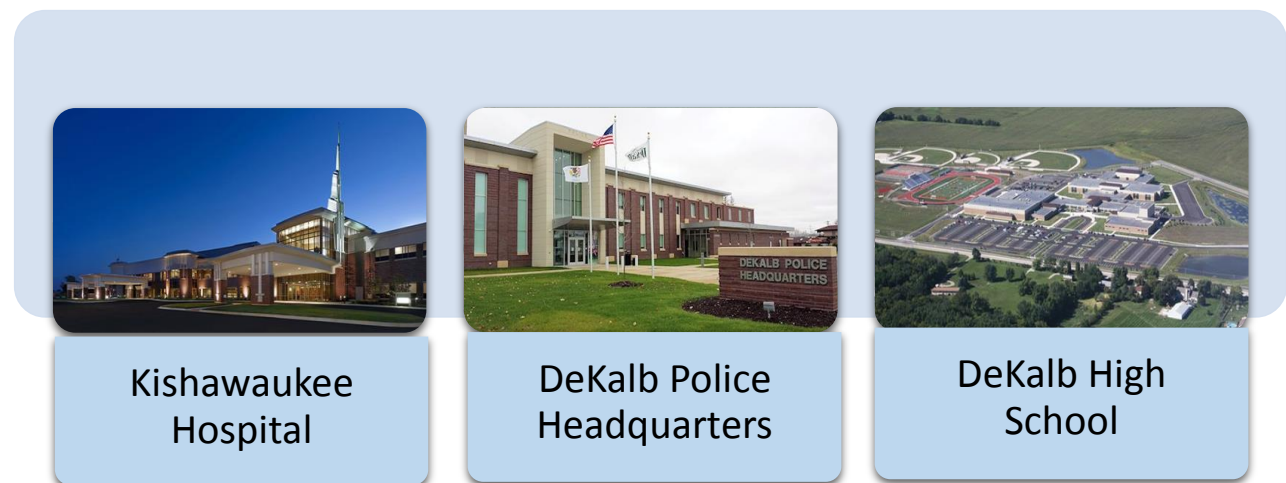
² Dahlstrom, Katie. "DeKalb County officials don't sweat local rail traffic – or its cargo." *The Daily Chronicle*, October 3rd, 2014. <http://www.daily-chronicle.com/2014/10/03/DeKalb-county-officials-dont-sweat-local-rail-traffic-or-its-cargo/aa8t0at/?page=1>

Along with the benefits of a location near an urbanized area, there are challenges. The urban amenities and job opportunities for spouses lead many people who work in DeKalb to live outside of the city. Just 28% of people working in DeKalb also live in the city. Another 23% live elsewhere in DeKalb County. About 23% live to the east in the urban counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, and Will. As people typically shop closer to their homes, this 'leakage' of DeKalb employees to other residential areas represents a significant opportunity to reclaim economic activity in DeKalb.

DeKalb is bordered to the north by the city of Sycamore. The boundary between the two cities is imperceptible and people cross it regularly without realizing which city they are in. Sycamore is home to many DeKalb employees and is seen as a desirable place to live because of perceived higher quality housing, an attractive school district, and lower crime rate. The two cities share a large commercial area and residents benefit from many of the same assets.

Internal Investment

The community has made a number of investments in infrastructure and quality of life in recent years. Over \$350 million has been invested in downtown streetscape improvements, fiber network (\$14.5 million), an expanded public library (\$25.3million), a new high school (\$73.9 million), a new hospital and medical clinic, new police station, expansion to Kishwaukee College, and improvements to NIU facilities. In addition, a \$40 million expansion to the DeKalb 3M facility is under construction. Much of this investment was funded from local sources, an indicator of the level of commitment to building capacity in the DeKalb area.



These factors have built capacity and encouraged local “buy-in” to transform DeKalb into a modern city that is attractive to entrepreneurs, employers, university students, recent graduates, and current and future residents.

The next chapter outlines recent efforts to gather input from members of the community. This input was used to build a vision and strategic goals for the community. Chapter 3 describes a set of short term tactics based on projects and programs designed to move DeKalb towards achieving that vision. Finally, the projects and programs are related to the plan’s vision and goals, along with the guiding principles and best practices outlined in the America’s Best Communities *Community Revitalization Toolkit* in Chapter 4. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how success will be measured and communicated.

Chapter 2: Community Outreach

DeKalb's revitalization plan is based on input from a cross section of the people who live and/or work in the city. It was obtained through a series of community conversations, regular meetings of a committee representing diverse interests, surveys targeting specific groups, interviews with representatives of different interests, smaller groups focused on specific proposed projects, and regular input from City and NIU leadership and staff. All of this community outreach was critical for two reasons. The first was to ensure that the plan reflected the needs and wishes of the community. The second was to ensure that there would be strong support to implement the plan. A description of the various ways in which community input was obtained follows.

Community Conversations

The City of DeKalb funded an extensive outreach effort to capture the opinions and ideas about the future of DeKalb from people who live, work, and/or learn in the city. The information gathered would inform a strategic planning effort by the City and the revitalization plan to be submitted for the ABC competition. In total, information was received from 321 people who attended conversation cafes (including those who attended multiple conversations), 91 who completed a survey, and 2 additional sets of emailed comments. NIU's Center for Governmental Studies (CGS), was contracted to facilitate the outreach process and organize and summarize the information obtained.

Input was to be obtained on the following topics:

- what people who live, work, and/or learn here think about DeKalb's future;
- issues and opportunities associated with that future;
- assets on which to build; and
- opportunities for residents to become more engaged with their community.

Five questions were identified to obtain that information:

1. What do you think makes a city a great place in which to live?
2. Which of these qualities does DeKalb have?
3. Looking at these qualities, what can the City of DeKalb do over the next 10 years to improve your community - to make (or keep) it a great place to live?
4. How can **you** be more connected and engaged with your community?
5. What are you most proud of when thinking about DeKalb?

Dialogue Model

These questions were posed by NIU CGS facilitators and two community volunteers who hosted small roundtable discussions around the city following a "community café" model. Community cafés offer hosted dialogues of 60-90 minutes that take place in small groups of 3-8 people. A host sets up the conversation and, for purposes of DeKalb's discussions, worked from a short script that ensured a similar format was used across the 48 tabletop discussions.

Each host captured pertinent points from his/her discussion on flipchart sheets to keep the conversation focused. These points, along with additional notes taken by NIU-CGS personnel, were transcribed and

incorporated into this document. Only first names were requested and the hosts emphasized that names would not be used in writing up the conversations.

Marketing and Promotion

In an effort to engage people from throughout DeKalb, these community conversations were promoted in multiple ways:

- Flyers in English and Spanish were posted at 90 sites throughout the city, including public facilities (e.g., the library), grocery stores, laundromats, multi-unit residential buildings, rental offices, churches, community-based organizations, and other places with significant community traffic. Thirteen locations were identified for Spanish only posters.
- A press release was prepared and sent to local media. It was picked up by the local newspapers as well as NIU media.
- Radio advertisements were developed for three local stations after community feedback indicated that outreach would be more effective using that medium.
- The City created a web page on its website dedicated to strategic planning. All available information about the process was posted as well as links to an online survey in English and Spanish that contained the same five questions discussed in the community cafés.
- Community influencers, including the ABC team, were invited to “talk up” the event and encourage widespread community participation. The focus was primarily on communities with low income and minority residents.

CGS reached out to Latino, African-American, and Asian communities as well as high school and university students. The mayor emailed approximately 60 leaders from the nonprofit, private, faith-based, and public sectors to participate.

Community Conversation Locations

Fourteen locations throughout DeKalb were used to host 15 community conversation sessions with one location used twice. These were selected in consultation with City staff and aldermen to ensure that each ward had at least one nearby location. Efforts were made to identify neutral settings in which people would feel comfortable sharing their candid perceptions and opinions. Each community conversation was held at a location that is ADA accessible, and transportation was available at no cost to participants. Caregivers were informed that children could attend. Locations included:

- Asian American Center of NIU
- Barsema Alumni and Visitors Center
- City Hall
- Conexión Comunidad
- DeKalb High School
- DeKalb Wesleyan Church
- Faranda’s Banquet Hall
- First Congregational United Church of Christ
- Hopkins Park Community Center
- New Hope Baptist Church
- NIU, Holmes Student Center
- Police Department
- River Heights Golf Course
- St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

Participants

In total, 48 small group discussions were held between May 1 and July 31, 2015. People were allowed to participate in as many of these discussions as they wished, so the total of 321 participants includes an unknown number of duplicates. The sessions were open to those that lived and/or worked in DeKalb. CGS staff who attended these discussions estimate that between 10 and 20 people attended more than one. An additional 91 people completed an online survey. Finally, 2 sets of comments were provided directly to the City and were incorporated into the analysis.

Of the 321 participants, 260 (81%) provided demographic information about themselves. Of these 260 people, 85% self-identified as residents of the City of DeKalb. Non-residents identified 12 other communities throughout the Chicago region as their home town. Participants who identified their home wards in DeKalb were distributed as follows:

Ward	Percentage of Ward
Ward 1	7%
Ward 2	14.5%
Ward 3	12%
Ward 4	9.5%
Ward 5	25%
Ward 6	< 1%
Ward 7	2%
N/A	28%

Approximately 69% of the participants self-identified as Caucasian, 6% African American/Black, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 4% Asian, and 2% bi-racial. The remaining 14% did not provide race or ethnicity information. There were 245 participants providing age information which included 6% that were 21 or younger, 25% were 22-43, 42% were 44-64, and the remaining 27% were 64 and older.

Participants identified many aspects of DeKalb as assets and features about which they were proud. The most commonly mentioned include:

- Desirability as a community in which to live, work, and raise a family.
- Blend of a small town feel and a university presence; country living but near Chicago.
- Diverse, hard-working, friendly, and generous people.
- A shared community value of caring and extensive network of social services.
- Variety of cultural activities.
- Quality educational institutions.
- History and agricultural heritage.
- Varied faith community.
- Abundant green space, parks, and recreation.

Despite these many assets, participants also described the lack of a strong sense of identity as one of DeKalb's biggest challenges. Several factors contribute to this. One is the sense that DeKalb and NIU have been separate communities, despite DeKalb's being described as a "university town." While some acknowledged progress on this issue, others still felt that the university and city could work better together.

Another contributing factor is that DeKalb suffers from a perception problem related to public safety, the quality of its schools, and negative incidents occurring in the past few years that have garnered media attention. It was thought that if the data were closely examined, these perceptions would be disproved. Improving the image of DeKalb to both internal and external audiences was viewed as essential to the city's future.

Perception is Reality

Improving the image of DeKalb to both internal and external audiences was viewed as essential to the city's future.

Participants connected environmental sustainability to a number of opportunities, such as employment for youth in the summer to maintain parkways and greenways, encouraging green entrepreneurship, and using local food to build community and create a sense of place. Many other opportunities exist for the City to support the natural environment, including working with the County to conserve agricultural land and top soil, exploring alternative energy options, using more environmentally friendly approaches to maintaining green spaces, and promoting what is currently being done.



Participants described community vitality as stemming from a strong business community, a thriving downtown, a rich array of cultural and recreational activities for people of all ages, and a flourishing natural environment.

A **strong business sector** provides needed goods and services to city residents, wages to its employees, and tax revenues to the City. The employment opportunities they offer are key to retaining college graduates and young families, as well as providing low income residents with pathways out of poverty. Participants described the need for an expanded employment base that includes more middle-skill and high-tech opportunities and for connecting under-skilled workers with training programs.

Many suggestions focused on providing a **friendlier and more attractive business climate**, particularly for local businesses and start-ups. Attention to the mix of retailers in downtown DeKalb is needed as part of a downtown revitalization effort. Leveraging the innovation and entrepreneurship resources of NIU was identified by a number of participants as an opportunity that has yet to be realized.

People who wish to live in DeKalb and enjoy and contribute to its community vitality need **appealing housing choices**. Attracting and retaining a mix of people and families require a range of housing options. Participants observed that there was considerable affordable housing in DeKalb, but much of it was not quality housing. A lack of housing for middle and upper-middle class individuals and families also was described.

Diversity was described in many ways: ethnic, racial, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, disability, and sexual orientation. Prejudicial attitudes are a problem encountered by students and residents who have experienced discriminatory behavior first-hand. The social and economic isolation of residents in University Village and other low-income neighborhoods was identified as another form of discrimination.

This gap between rhetoric and behavior led some participants to **differentiate between diversity and inclusion**. One individual observed "There's an appreciation for cultural diversity, but not a lot of embracing." Others described prejudice by long-term residents and polar views among segments of the

community, some of which was linked to income disparity. These opposing attitudes are a major challenge to **forging a single, strong DeKalb identity**.

Participants called for efforts to increase the participation of diverse groups in the community. Encouraging local business to welcome and cater to different groups, continuing and expanding DeKalb's "Beloved Community" dinners, pairing different cultural events, and offering cultural competency training were among the suggestions for making DeKalb a more inclusive city.

Student Outreach and Input

Gathering input from NIU students was particularly important for several reasons.

- NIU student enrollment is key to financial stability of the university.
- NIU students comprise a significant consumer group for DeKalb businesses, housing, and services.
- NIU students are a source of future residents, employees, entrepreneurs, and community leaders.

NIU student leaders were invited to a focus group to discuss their views on DeKalb and what would make the city more attractive to them. The student leaders then organized a survey of students living in residence halls. The written survey was distributed at residence hall meetings and 75 students returned completed questionnaires. Key findings from the focus group and survey are summarized below.

- Students are not attracted to the current downtown businesses.
- Students are most interested in national brands that they are familiar with from elsewhere.
- DeKalb is not seen as having enough or the right kind of entertainment.
- Crime is considered a problem.
- DeKalb's residential areas are unappealing due to safety concerns, condition of housing, or the type of housing available.
- Students cited a lack of convenient public transportation as an obstacle to shopping in DeKalb.
- Students are very interested in helping to make DeKalb a better city by participating in planning efforts, providing input on their needs and desires, and informing fellow students about city planning efforts and opportunities to get involved.

NIU and City Government Input

NIU and the City of DeKalb have developed a working relationship that is new to DeKalb. The two entities agree that their future growth is dependent on the policies, plans, and actions that each takes moving forward. They are now collaborating in ways that were not done before. Therefore, the input of these two entities was sought throughout the planning process. The plan reflects the needs and desires of both the City and the University and both are in support of its implementation.

The ABC team regularly provided updates to the City and University through draft documents, meetings, and representatives of each who were members of team or smaller project groups. Feedback from the City and University was considered, and where possible, integrated into the plan.

Mayor Rey and President Baker have made their staffs available to assist in developing the plan and instructed them to look for ways that their projects can be brought in line with the plan. A willingness to continue to look for ways to assist in the plan's implementation has been expressed by both parties.

The ABC Team

A team of people representing business, nonprofit, educational, governmental, and media sectors was assembled to develop the revitalization plan. Members included:

- ❖ Frank Roberts-First National Bank (Team Chairman)
- ❖ Cohen Barnes-SundogIT
- ❖ Marvin Barnes-Cushioneer Industries
- ❖ Brett Brown-Burnes, Cronauer & Brown Law
- ❖ Dee Coover-Executive Director DeKalb Public Library
- ❖ Jennifer Diedrich-City of DeKalb Economic Development Coordinator
- ❖ Ellen Divita-City of DeKalb Director of Community Development
- ❖ Matt Duffy-Executive Director DeKalb Chamber of Commerce
- ❖ Jennifer Groce-Community Affairs, NIU
- ❖ Tom Kuschman-Frontier Communications Corporation
- ❖ Tim Lehan-Lehan Drugs
- ❖ Jason Mangum-Executive Director DeKalb Park District
- ❖ Alex Nerad-Executive Director Egyptian Theatre
- ❖ Eric Olson-Shaw Media
- ❖ Grace Waller-Videographer
- ❖ Denise Weinmann-RVG Milner Carpenter Realty

The ABC team met weekly throughout the plan development process. This team was charged with utilizing the community input to arrive at a vision statement and goal strategies, selecting the projects and programs that would comprise the short term tactics, and preparing a final document that included all the elements to be included in the revitalization plan. NIU's Center for Governmental Studies assisted in preparation of the plan.

ReNew DeKalb ABC Team



Vision and Goals

The team incorporated community input from a variety of sources to create an overall vision and set of strategic goals. The recently developed vision and goals for the City of DeKalb were also considered. The revitalization plan's vision and goals closely align with those of the City. The vision adopted by the team is as follows:

DeKalb is recognized as a 21st century community with a thriving university and a vibrant downtown. DeKalb's residents, businesses, government, and university community are engaged in a dynamic interplay of energy and creativity that retains and attracts businesses with living-wage jobs. DeKalb's leaders are diverse, visionary, and adaptable, and work together to continue to grow our city.

Thirteen specific goals support the vision:

1. Support continued placemaking in downtown through business, residential, and institutional development.
2. Create destination gathering places that serve the community and draw people from throughout the region to DeKalb.
3. Collaborate with NIU and City of DeKalb to create an attractive university town for students, faculty, staff, and residents.
4. Foster economic, educational, social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for everyone.
5. Encourage activities and events that showcase DeKalb's diverse population and cultures.
6. Create a vibrant business environment that supports existing enterprises while attracting new investment and entrepreneurs citywide.
7. Build on DeKalb's strengths in education, high technology, local foods, and the arts.
8. Increase residents' access to living-wage jobs.
9. Create an attractive climate for new residents and residential investment.
10. Identify and recruit a diverse cadre of community-based leaders.
11. Coordinate and facilitate the projects initiated by various community interests and organizations.
12. Train and place community leaders in project and organization management.
13. Create a positive image of DeKalb through internal and external marketing efforts.

A number of specific projects and programs were proposed based on the vision and strategic goals. Each proposed project or program is intended to help achieve one or more of the goals and move DeKalb towards achieving the vision. However, the projects were also designed to work together so that the overall impact of implementing all was greater than the sum of the individual project impacts. In selecting projects to include in the plan, the team focused on DeKalb's current strengths and challenges as presented in Chapter 1. Therefore, it was decided to focus on four segments of the area economy:



In addition to focusing on these segments of the economy, each project had to offer opportunities to multiple segments of the population. A successful 21st century community must provide avenues for all residents to participate in the economy in a meaningful way. Thus each project has entry points for multiple potential participants ranging from major employers to school children. The projects are designed to demonstrate that DeKalb is business friendly, attractive to potential students and residents, and encourages the growth of all its residents.

While DeKalb has made great progress in developing the collaborative teams that will be needed to achieve its vision, not all partnerships are in place. Implementing the proposed projects will provide an opportunity for the ABC team to work toward developing these partnerships between businesses, the university, city government, and other governing bodies and nonprofits. These collaborative teams will then be ready to take on additional projects that will continue to grow DeKalb over the long term.

Based on the input from the community and the characteristics of the city, the team initially came up with a list of 19 projects. The list was refined through an iterative process. Considered in selecting the final projects and programs were the following criteria:

- Is it doable?
- What will the impact be?
- Does it further the vision and goals?
- Is there community support?

The ABC team selected seven projects as short term tactics to support the vision and goals. These projects, described in detail in Chapter 3, include:

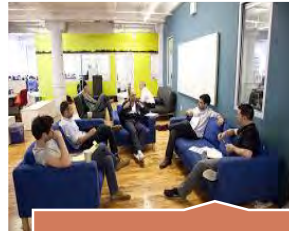
1. ACE Corridor- an arts, culture, and entertainment district
2. LaunchPad Virtual Incubator- a website and network of advisors, progressing to a physical incubator
3. DeKalb Coworks- a coworking space
4. DeKalb Food Hub- a multipurpose local foods production and distribution center
5. SmartSpace- a STEAM education center (science, technology, engineering, arts, math)
6. Branding and Marketing
7. DeKalb Leadership Institute- a leadership development program



ACE Corridor



LaunchPad



DeKalb Coworks



DeKalb Food Hub



SmartSpace



Branding and Marketing



DeKalb Leadership Institute

Project and Program Focused Groups

Small groups focused on each proposed project or program. These groups were comprised of ABC team members and additional community members with a particular interest or expertise in the specific project or program. Some of the small group members were invited to participate because of their known interest or expertise while others volunteered.

The small groups researched their specific projects or programs and consulted with other community members and outside experts as needed. They developed the detailed descriptions of what would be included, timelines, and assigned responsibilities. Each small group reported its progress and recommendations to the ABC team at weekly meetings. Detailed descriptions of each project or program follow in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Short Term Tactics

DeKalb's economic revitalization plan is based on building an approach to economic development that increases capacity for continued growth well into the future. It begins with a handful of interconnected short-term projects and programs that will establish a platform for larger projects in the future. The DeKalb approach will be based on a network of organizations collaborating on projects and programs that meet the needs of new and growing businesses, while offering opportunities to all DeKalb residents. Key to the success of the DeKalb approach is leadership provided by the ABC team in collaboration with the City of DeKalb, Northern Illinois University, and other area organizations.

Specifically, the DeKalb approach will:

- Focus on segments of the local economy in which DeKalb has a strong competitive position.
- Provide technical assistance and connections that nurture new and existing small businesses.
- Provide physical space where some new businesses will operate and others can find the equipment and facilities they occasionally need, and where the business community at large can meet to exchange ideas and assist each other.
- Provide opportunities for area residents to participate in and benefit from proposed projects.
- Create an identity for DeKalb as a 21st century community that is entrepreneur friendly, attractive to potential students and residents, and encourages the growth of all its residents.

A description of each project/program follows.

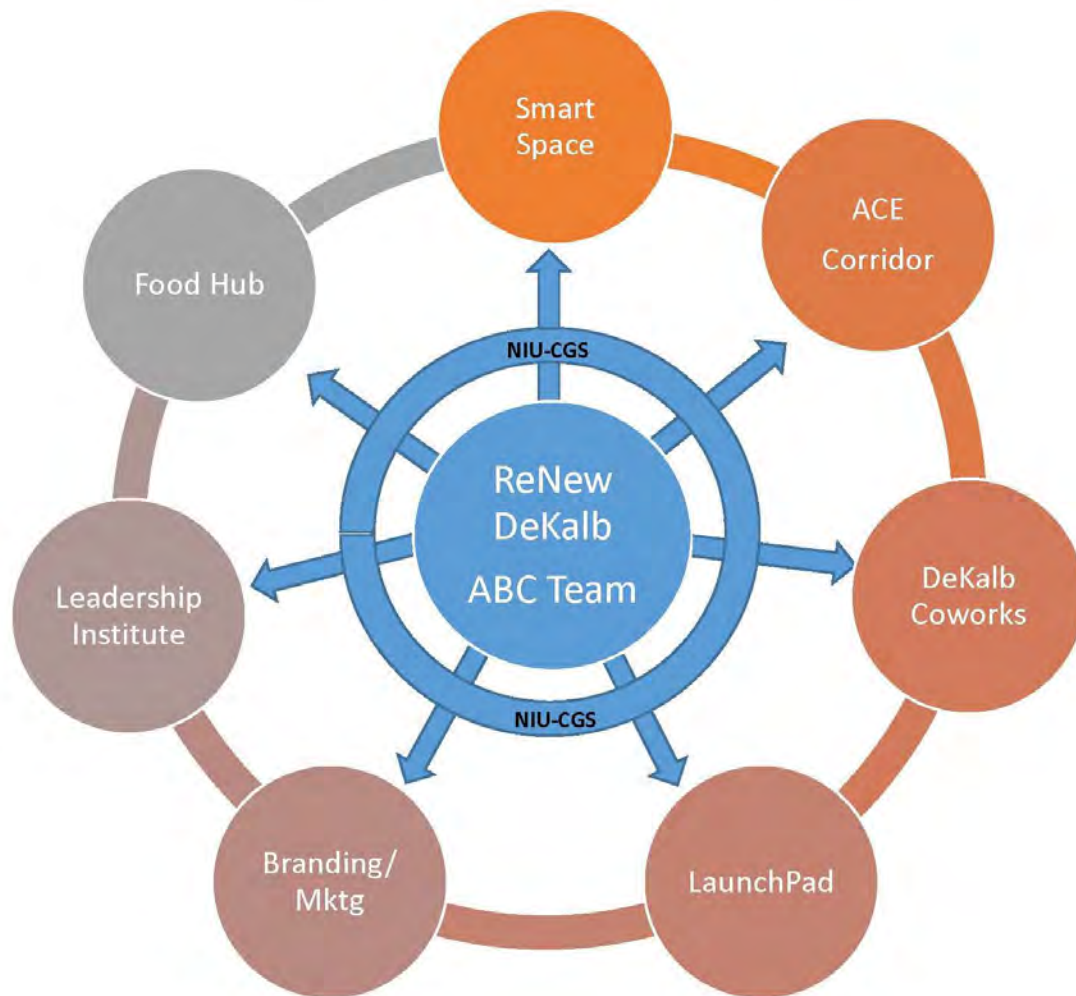
Proposed Projects and Programs

The following seven projects and programs comprise the short term tactics that will launch the revitalization plan.

1. ACE Corridor- an arts, culture, and entertainment district
2. LaunchPad-a virtual incubator website and network of advisors, progressing to a physical incubator
3. DeKalb Coworks- a coworking space
4. DeKalb Food Hub-a multipurpose local foods production and distribution facility
5. SmartSpace-a STEAM education center (science, technology, engineering, arts, math)
6. Branding and marketing
7. DeKalb Leadership Institute-a leadership development program

While each project/program has benefits on its own, each is also an important component in establishing the DeKalb community development approach. It is anticipated that all projects will be developed through the collaboration of multiple local organizations, establishing relationships that further develop DeKalb's capacity for future growth. All of the projects are short-term tactics with long-term growth potential. Keeping this macro view in mind and its importance in building the capacity for long term growth is key to understanding the rationale for the entire plan. An additional important aspect of the plan is that if each project is strategically located, significant progress can be made toward the reuse of underutilized space and the continued growth of a vibrant and resilient downtown. A description of each project or program follows.

DeKalb Plan-Short-Term Tactics



Arts, Culture and Entertainment Corridor-The ACE Corridor

There is much evidence that the arts can make a valuable contribution to a city's economy. Nationwide, the creative economy supports an estimated 4.1 million jobs and generates \$22.3 billion in government revenue. Attendees at arts events spend an average of \$24.60 per person per event, after admission fees (source: Americans for the Arts). In DeKalb, the arts already make a significant contribution. In DeKalb, the economic impact of the Egyptian Theatre has been estimated at \$1.5-2 million for the 2014-15 season. This estimate is based on spending by over 30,000 attendees at 135 events along with the spending of the theatre itself on operations, maintenance and capital projects (source: Egyptian Theatre, DeKalb, IL.).

DeKalb is home to many arts related enterprises and activities. Northern Illinois University has a respected programs in the visual and performing arts. There are currently 525 students enrolled in visual arts programs at NIU. Another 650 NIU students not majoring in the arts also participate in arts programs. The university annually plays host to 9 visiting artists and 8 guest lecturers in the visual arts. There are 275

students enrolled in music degree programs. The School of Music hosts approximately 200 performances each year. The campus is home to two concert halls and two large rehearsal spaces, and is well equipped with the most current technology for music production. In addition, NIU has a Community School for the Arts (CSA) which offers programs in music, theater and visual arts. The CSA currently serves 536 participants drawn from 40 cities. During the summer, the CSA offers several summer camps primarily for teens. These camps attracted participants from 14 states during summer 2015.



Egyptian Theater, Downtown DeKalb

The previously mentioned Egyptian Theatre is a unique historic structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Over \$1.5 million was invested in restoration and improvement of the theater between 2006 and 2012. The Egyptian hosts live performances including shows, concerts and recitals. The theater is home to the largest auditorium and largest movie screen in DeKalb County. The Stagecoach Players is a long established community theater. The Ellwood House is a restored historic home and museum closely tied to DeKalb's history as the birthplace of barbed wire. It is estimated that half of the Ellwood House's 8,800 annual visitors come from out of town.

The nearly complete expansion of the DeKalb Public Library has created a state of the art 65,000 square foot facility. The new library, in addition to housing a large collection of books and other media, includes meeting and performance spaces.



DeKalb Public Library Expansion

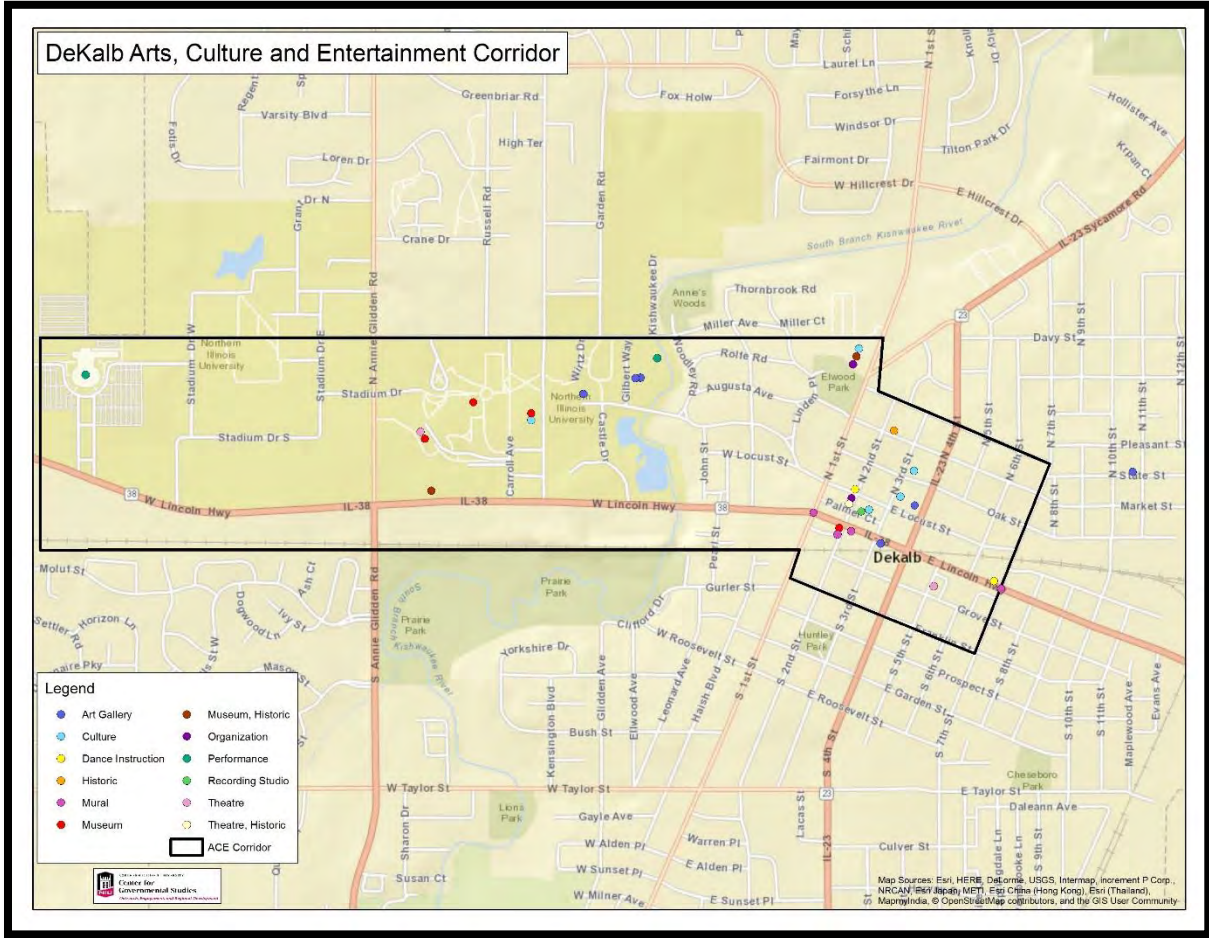
The city is home to approximately 40 arts related businesses ranging from musical instrument makers to designers and photographers. DeKalb plans to leverage its substantial creative economy for future economic growth through arts based placemaking by designating a cultural district.

Cultural **districts** are **defined** as well-recognized, labeled areas of a city in which a high concentration of cultural facilities and programs serve as the main anchor of attraction. They help strengthen local economies, create an enhanced sense of place, and deepen local cultural capacity. (Americans for the Arts). DeKalb's cultural district will be called the ACE Corridor, an acronym for arts, culture, and entertainment. It will include museums, performing arts venues, art galleries, historic areas of town, public art in the city, buildings on the National Register, and arts related businesses. The map below shows the anticipated approximate boundaries and existing concentration of arts related activities.

Cultural Districts

Well-recognized, labeled areas of a city in which a high concentration of cultural facilities and programs serve as the main anchor of attraction. They help strengthen local economies, create an enhanced sense of place, and deepen local cultural capacity.

-Americans for the Arts



Placemaking around the arts generally takes two forms. The first is a planned arts oriented geographic area of the community that is created by designation and deliberate city-led arts related development. The arts base may not exist prior to designation of the area and the primary driver is government policy and actions. The second is an organically grown district based on a geographic area that already is home to a number of arts related establishments. In this case, designation and public policy facilitate the continued growth and recognition of this area. DeKalb's ACE Corridor is based on the organic model.

While DeKalb has a substantial arts community, it is not well known as an arts destination. The goal of the ACE Corridor is to raise the visibility of the arts and encourage its growth, thus attracting visitors and new businesses. As envisioned, the corridor would include identifying signage, wayfinding to assist visitors in finding all the venues, coordinated identification of each venue, and additional public art within the corridor.

There are several examples of successful corridors, districts, or trails similar to the one proposed for DeKalb. Construction began on the Indianapolis Cultural Trail in 2007, with the first section completed in 2008 and all sections completed in 2013. The entire trail is 8 miles long and cost \$63 million to complete.

Along the cultural trail in Indianapolis, property values have increased within one block of the trail by 148% for a total of \$1 billion (Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Inc.). Businesses also report more customers and higher sales, and residents feel safer downtown since construction of the 8-mile trail, according to a survey conducted by Indiana University's Public Policy Institute. The assessment measured the economic impact of the trail from 2008 to 2014 and examined 1,747 parcels within 500 feet of the trail. The institute also sent questionnaires to 66 businesses and 558 trail users.

Cumberland, Maryland is closer to DeKalb in population at 21,000 and is located in a rural area. The Cumberland Arts and Entertainment District was established in 2002 and doubled in size in 2007. A joint effort of the Allegheny Arts Council and the City of Cumberland, the district is focused on downtown and combines arts venues, businesses, and artists' residences into a vibrant area popular with both artists and visitors. The success of the district is attributed to effective marketing, tax incentives, and redevelopment grants, along with extensive positive media coverage. The Cumberland district is part of Maryland's Arts and Entertainment District program. The most recent numbers for the combined 22 districts in Maryland show a gain of 6,000 direct, indirect, and induced jobs, nearly \$571.4 million in state GDP, and approximately \$38.5 million in tax revenue impact (FY2014 Maryland Arts and Entertainment Districts Economic Impact).

DeKalb's ACE Corridor is based on an existing cluster of arts related businesses, venues and educational spaces. It would formally designate this area as an arts concentration, with the intention to increase the number of arts activities and artists residing in the area. It would extend from approximately 7th street on the east to the Convocation Center on the NIU campus to the west. The corridor would provide artists with appropriate spaces to do their work, retail opportunities to sell their products, event spaces to gather the community, and visitors to enjoy the arts. Over the long term, it is anticipated that artists also would live in or near the corridor and that buildings would be renovated for use by the arts or as residences. Financial incentives to encourage these improvements would be investigated.

The ACE Corridor is intended to benefit the entire community. Efforts will be made to reflect DeKalb's diverse population through the arts. All members of the community will be invited to actively

participate in the many arts activities that are anticipated. Outreach to DeKalb residents who may otherwise be less likely to participate in the arts will be built into planned activities and opportunities.

Anchor institutions are a valuable asset and can aid in the long term success of an arts district. DeKalb's ACE corridor would be anchored by several strong institutions including the Egyptian Theatre, the DeKalb Public Library, the Ellwood House, and the NIU campus. These existing institutions generate a reliable flow of visitors within the corridor.

Short-Term Tactics

Creating a successful cultural district takes more than a city resolution and a designated geographic area.

It is now clear that successful cultural districts cannot be created unilaterally by municipal mayors or chambers of commerce as engines of economic development. Rather, a successful cultural district depends upon a willing network of cultural producers and associated institutions, favorable geographic and infrastructural settings, and public interest and support.³

DeKalb's ACE Corridor is supported by the DeKalb Arts Council, Northern Illinois University, the DeKalb Park District, the City of DeKalb, the Egyptian Theatre, Citizens Community Enhancement Commission, and individual arts related enterprises. Public interest and support has been demonstrated by attendance at the Egyptian Theatre, long standing support for the Stagecoach Players, and the number of students participating in music activities at all school levels. This strong base of support, in addition to the arts assets of the community, make the success of the ACE Corridor more likely.

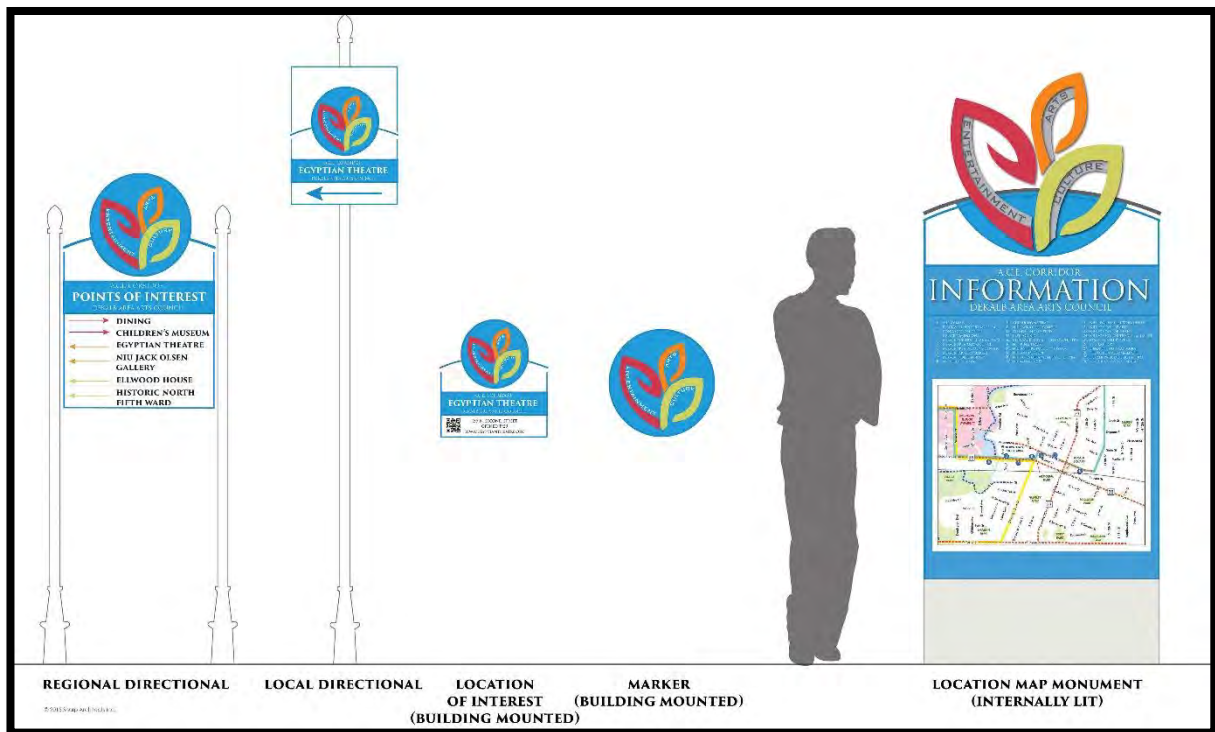
There are many projects planned for the short-term. These projects are designed to launch the ACE Corridor, create an image of the area as an arts destination, and create the excitement and traffic to generate interest in bigger projects over the long term. Each of the projects is described below.

1. Wayfinding and signage: The ACE Corridor will have a unified theme and identification of attractions throughout. There will be marked entrances, directional signs, signage on buildings housing participating enterprises or venues, and attractive and fun markers along the way. Brochures and online information will be available to aid visitors.
2. New activities: There will be new activities to generate visits to the ACE Corridor. A Liquid Sunshine display throughout the city is planned for the upcoming outdoor season. This involves creating 30 different stenciled designs over 50-60 locations. The artwork is only visible when it rains. Some of the stencils will be used to introduce the ACE corridor to the community and visitors. A First Fridays program will include arts related businesses and venues being open on the first Friday of the month. Special arts related activities will be planned. Corridor restaurants and shops will be encouraged to participate by planning special dinners, sales or entertainment in their spaces.
3. University arts downtown: NIU will investigate bringing more of its arts programming into downtown DeKalb. The School of Music will consider beginning an annual jazz festival to be held both on campus and downtown. The Community School for the Arts will consider a downtown location for rehearsal, display and instructional space. The presence of the CSA in downtown would give NIU a permanent arts presence downtown.
4. Annual outdoor sculpture exhibition: An annual display of ten large sculptures is planned to be located throughout the community. The sculptures would be the centerpiece for arts activities

³ Sean Thornton, Advocates Forum, University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, 2012.

particularly in the warmer months. The sculptures would be changed annually, perhaps with the community purchasing one piece from each exhibition to add to the city's permanent collection.

5. Improvements to the Egyptian Theatre: The Egyptian Theatre has not been able to reach its potential because of the lack of air conditioning and other needed improvements. The City of DeKalb has budgeted \$50,000 for a study to determine the full operational potential of the theater with the needed improvements. It is hoped that this initial study will be followed by design and engineering work leading to the completion of the improvements, thus allowing for programming during the summer months and better usage of the theater during all months of the year.
6. Policies and programs to encourage business and residential growth: The long term goal for the ACE Corridor is for the arts venues and businesses to grow in size and number. It is also hoped that artists of all types will be interested in living in the corridor as well as working there. Organizations and agencies in a position to influence the location of businesses, venues and residences will be brought together to discuss what policies and programs could be adopted to encourage this growth and investment in the corridor. Among those to be brought into the conversation are the City of DeKalb, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb County, DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, and the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce.



ACE Corridor Signage

Cost Estimates

Liquid Sunshine	\$1,500
Sculpture Exhibit	\$15,000
Egyptian Theatre Study	\$50,000
ACE Corridor Signage and Marketing-estimates pending	

Responsibilities

- ACE Corridor designation, signage, marketing: DeKalb Area Arts Council (DAAC), City of DeKalb (COD), ReNew DeKalb (RD), Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), Citizens Commission on Community Enhancement (CCCE)
- Liquid Sunshine: COD
- Sculpture Exhibit: NIU, DeKalb Park District (DPD), COD, CCCE
- Egyptian Theatre: Egyptian Theatre, COD
- First Fridays: DAAC, NIU, DeKalb Chamber of Commerce
- NIU arts downtown: NIU
- Policies and Programs: RD, COD, DeKalb County, DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation (DCEDC), CCCE

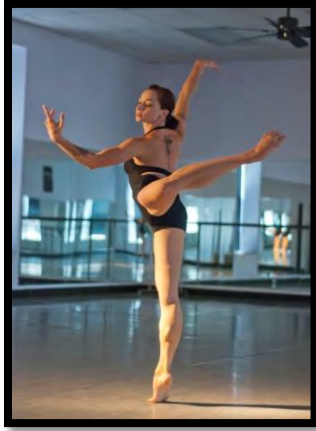
Economic Impact and Measuring Success

The economic impact of the ACE Corridor over the short-term is expected to be primarily the additional spending of visitors who come to take part in the various arts activities. This includes direct spending on the activities themselves, including arts related businesses, and related spending at non-arts businesses such as restaurants and shops. Over the longer period, new businesses and jobs will be created, investments will be made in buildings, and new residents will find homes in the area.

Baseline data has been collected on event attendance and businesses in the corridor. This data can be collected again after the corridor is established to determine if gains have been made. Improvements to buildings will be tracked and gains in EAV determined. Sales tax revenue before and after the creation of the corridor will be compared.

During the 11 month period, the degree to which each of the following milestones is achieved will be a measure of success.

- City Council designation of the ACE Corridor
- Design and implementation of an ACE logo and signage
- Debut of the First Fridays program
- Opening of the first annual outdoor sculpture exhibit
- Increased NIU sponsored arts activities help off campus and within the ACE Corridor
- Egyptian Theatre study completed



Local Voices: Miranda Cordes, Owner/Director of Dance Dimensions

I am one of the many businesses in DeKalb that would strongly benefit from the development of the ACE Corridor. Our dance studio, Dance Dimensions, is located on Lincoln Highway in downtown DeKalb. I have dreams to expand the studio into an entire Performing Arts Center, where we would offer not only dance classes, but musical theatre, acting and voice lessons as well. I would love for the many theatre and dance programs in the area to come together and collaborate our ideas and efforts. I feel each of us being a part of the ACE Corridor could help unite these programs and give us a feeling of comradery. By working together, it would allow us to share our different areas of expertise with each other and create magical things. The ACE Corridor could be our platform in uniting our arts community.

Virtual Incubator-LaunchPad

A business incubator is a service provider that offers a comprehensive package of services (more than one) designed to support, facilitate and accelerate the growth of new and growing businesses⁴. A virtual business incubator does this with services and tools that are – at least to a significant extent – independent of the location of the service provider and/or the users of these services. This contrasts with a physical incubator where services are provided to the tenants of the facility. There are benefits and challenges to each type of incubator.

Incubators provide three types of services: business development, networking, and finance. Business development services emphasize training and mentoring that help entrepreneurs improve their capacity to start and grow a business. Networking brings entrepreneurs, investors, volunteers, and service providers together to allow them to find ways to add value to each other's businesses. Finance services focus on providing capital, typically combined with mentoring support. Many incubators provide a combination of these services.

The DeKalb incubator will begin as a virtual incubator without a dedicated full-time staff. The incubator will draw on the expertise available at NIU, other area small business resource providers, and a dedicated set of local business leaders that will be active in the consulting process with entrepreneurs. The longer term goal is to evolve into a fully staffed physical incubator.

Initially, the incubator will be modeled after the Fox Valley Entrepreneurship Center (FVEC) in a nearby community (<http://www.fvec.org/>). The FVEC is a virtual collaboration of expert advisors and mentors who surround qualified entrepreneurs with the resources they need to achieve growth. This model relies heavily on a knowledgeable and well-connected advisory board that are active in the business consulting process. The board consists of local subject area leaders in accounting/ finance, legal/regulatory,

⁴ Information for Development Program (infoDEV), 2011. *Lessons on Virtual Business Incubation Services*.

marketing, human resources, operations, and information technology. Businesses are referred to the appropriate member.

Economic Impact

In 2013 there were 338 new business starts in DeKalb County⁵ (data are not available at the city level). These startups are categorized as self-employed, Stage 1 (average startup employment of 4), and Stage 2 (average of 18 employees). Nearly 800 new jobs would be created over 20 years if the incubator can assist in the formation of one additional business in each of these categories and those businesses grow at an annual rate of 5 percent. That amounts to employment growth of almost 2 percent, which is significant for this type of effort.

Implementation

The incubator will be operated by local business leaders with support from NIU's Springboard initiative. A local advisory board made up of ABC Team members, business leaders, and representatives from the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, and other small business development support services will match regional resources with needs of participating entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs.

While the advisory board will be the primary source of expertise, the presence of NIU provides the incubator with access to expertise that normally wouldn't be found in a town the size of DeKalb. As directed by the advisory board, Springboard (<http://www.niu.edu/springboard>) will employ graduate and undergraduate students from finance, economics, law marketing, and potentially other academic disciplines to provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs at the appropriate stage of product development or business maturity may be referred to NIU EIGERlab and can access prototyping and other innovation support, commercialization and product management services available through the NIU EIGERlab Center for Product Development (<http://www.eigerlab.org/center-for-product-development>).

Other resources in the region that will be connected with DeKalb entrepreneurs include business assistance services from Kishwaukee College and a Small Business Development Center at Waubensee Community College. The new addition and remodeling of the DeKalb Public Library which is downtown and has adequate free parking will be able to support this project with meeting/study rooms, a collaboration classroom with software and IT assistance.

Going forward, the advisory board will seek funding to staff the virtual incubator. This will allow for more intensive services to be provided. The staff member will be able to work one-on-one with entrepreneurs on the development of business plans, entrepreneurship training, product development, and the identification of funding sources. Potential funding sources include the U.S. Small Business Administration and local and national entrepreneurship foundations.

Responsibility/Partners

An advisory board of local business leaders will be formed. The advisory board will serve two functions. First, they will provide strategic guidance to the incubator. Second, they will serve as advisors to

⁵ National Establishment Time-Series, <http://www.youreconomy.org/index.ye>

entrepreneurs seeking assistance. Advisory board members will be recruited with the assistance of the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation and the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce.

NIU colleges have a long history of engagement with area businesses and it is the intent of the ABC Team to work with university leaders to expand this engagement. Utilizing the Springboard student model, students can be deployed to help businesses conduct research to address specific challenges and opportunities. Students are available to work on a project-by-project basis focused on new market analysis, product development, and legal/regulatory issues.

Preliminary cost estimate

Website development and hosting	\$2,500
Administrative support	\$4,000
Marketing	<u>\$1,000</u>
Total	\$7,500

Performance Metrics

A number of milestones will be met during the 11 month implementation period. First, advisory board members will be identified and recruited by the end of March 2016. Once in place, they will oversee the development of a website, policies and procedures for handling inquiries, and investigate entrepreneurial assistance tools. These steps will be complete in time for an October 2016 launch of the website. Beginning with the website launch, marketing efforts will advertise available services in the community.

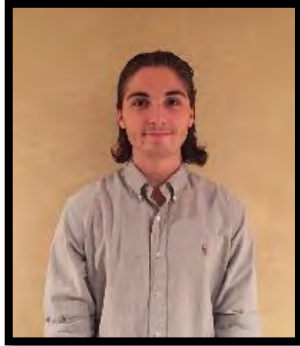
About 1,700 small businesses (less than 20 employees) operate in DeKalb County⁶. In addition, there are over 5,900 ‘nonemployer’ businesses⁷. If the incubator helps 6 small businesses per month in the first year, it will reach 1 percent of these small businesses.

⁶ US Census Bureau, County Business Patterns 2013.

⁷ US Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics 2013. Most nonemployers are self-employed individuals operating unincorporated businesses with no paid employees (known as sole proprietorships), which may or may not be the owner's principal source of income.

Long-Term Vision

Once demand is identified through operation of the virtual incubator, plans for a physical incubator will take shape. Resources to provide tenant office space and incubator staff will be obtained. Programmatic offerings such as business counseling, planning assistance, and business plan competitions will benefit incubator tenants as well as users of nearby coworking space and a food hub.



Local Voices: Lance Sauter, Aspiring Entrepreneur

Being only eighteen years old with little to no experience in the business world, the incubator program would be an invaluable resource to me as I begin my new business. I am confident that the guidance and advice of the many participating members of the incubator program will greatly improve and strengthen the foundation of my business in these early stages. This program would provide much needed assistance in the following areas; the development of a thorough and effective marketing plan, in depth financial advice, future management guidance, and an opportunity to network and develop relationships with the participating community leaders. Having the chance to consult a knowledgeable group would continue to be advantageous for me throughout the many stages of growth my business may achieve. The positive effects of the incubator program on my business would be immeasurable, and I would greatly appreciate this opportunity to work with this business-educated group.

DeKalb Coworks

Coworking space is an alternative to leasing individual office space. It is an attractive option for home based businesses looking for an out of the home location, remote workers whose employers are located some distance away, independent contractors, and entrepreneurs just starting their businesses. Coworking spaces offer several different kinds of work spaces within a single facility. These spaces can include a reception area, common areas with workstations, private offices, meeting rooms, project rooms, and areas for socializing. Additional facilities may include kitchens, coffee bars, showers and locker rooms, classrooms, and other specialized spaces. Services offered can include a business address and mailbox, document production, receptionist, and arrangements for events.

Users of coworking space may pay for memberships rather than leasing space. This allows a member to try out the concept with a very small financial commitment. The target market for this type of space is workers who for a variety of reasons are working outside of a larger employer's facilities. This number grew from 17.6 million in 2002 to 23 million in 2013 (U.S. Census data on non-employer establishments).

Another market for coworking space is larger employers downsizing their office space and either assigning former office based employees to find less expensive locations or replacing employees with independent contractors. While there is evidence that the kinds of people who are the target audience for coworking space are increasing in number, is there evidence that the coworking concept is attractive to them? While composite statistics on usage are not available, anecdotal evidence indicates that coworking spaces are

successful in many different locations. While the highest concentrations are in New York and San Francisco, successful projects can now be found in cities and suburbs across the country.

DeKalb has characteristics that make it a good coworking location. The university is encouraging the growth of startup businesses that will benefit from inexpensive space and the opportunity to make connections. University staff often have spouses who are either employed some distance away or self-employed, both situations in which coworking can be attractive. It is estimated 3.2% of DeKalb workers are homebased. This is an increase from 2.4% since 2000. A large percentage of these workers are in the types of occupations that can be accommodated in coworking space. Approximately half of the residents of DeKalb who work remotely are between the ages of 20 and 44 years, an age group that has responded positively to coworking in other cities. DeKalb's excellent transportation linkages to Chicago and its suburbs, and smaller cities in all directions makes it a practical location for workers serving a broad geographic area.

DeKalb Coworks will serve more than the kinds of workers described above. The space can help provide opportunities to others in the community. Local non-profit organizations in need of affordable office or meeting space, particularly with access to a receptionist and office equipment, will find coworking a viable new option. The meeting spaces can be used by community groups and technical assistance classes could be opened to students and home based workers.

Retaining NIU graduates in DeKalb is highly desirable as this educated group can be a valuable addition to the workforce, start new businesses, and become permanent residents. Easing the route for these graduates to work in DeKalb is an objective of several of the proposed projects. DeKalb Coworks would provide an opportunity for those who either are starting a business or who work remotely to establish a work address and benefit from all the co-work space has to offer at an affordable price.

DeKalb Coworks may differ from coworking spaces found elsewhere. The proximity of NIU and its engineering and scientific research may generate demand for the inclusion of a makers' space associated with the office space. An analysis of the supply of meeting and event space may indicate that the DeKalb project should include more space suitable for these uses. Likewise, there may be a greater demand for dedicated office spaces than in other communities.

Economic Impact

Coworking space has a direct impact on the businesses that utilize the facility. It also can have a significant impact on surrounding businesses. Some of the anticipated impacts are listed below.

- Encourage the growth of existing businesses
- Provide affordable space for new businesses
- Strengthen the small business community by encouraging interaction and providing technical assistance onsite
- Attract new workers/businesses to DeKalb by providing a unique work environment
- Attract new residents to DeKalb by making it easier for two career households to have both workers located in DeKalb
- Generate new customers for nearby businesses
- Encourage entrepreneurship among youth by providing affordable space

- Support nonprofits by providing affordable and better space as well as access to meeting rooms and office equipment, and the opportunity to network with the business community
- Bring a vacant building back into use and improve its condition
- Generate tax revenue through increased equalized assessed value for the renovated building and increased sales tax revenue from growth in sales at nearby businesses
- Make connections for DeKalb small businesses outside of the area through the nationwide coworking space network

An 8,000 square foot coworking space will accommodate approximately 80 workers on a daily basis. Some of these workers will represent new businesses that will grow the DeKalb economy and create additional jobs. In addition, DeKalb cowork space users will spend money in surrounding businesses. It is estimated that each office employee spends approximately \$102 per week in the surrounding area, depending on the number and types of businesses available (National Council of Shopping Centers). All merchants in DeKalb will potentially benefit from these expenditures, but downtown businesses are in an advantageous position. The more businesses and greater variety of businesses within walking distance of DeKalb Coworks, the greater the impact will be on downtown, both increasing sales and sales tax revenue generated by existing businesses, and encouraging the opening of new businesses and improvements to buildings. A successful coworking space can be a catalyst for significant downtown improvement and increased equalized assessed value, leading to rising property tax revenues.

Implementation

In the process of researching the potential for coworking space in DeKalb, the founders of an existing a coworking space were contacted and have expressed interest in creating a space in DeKalb. They have viewed possible locations and begun investigating the costs of retrofitting existing buildings. The DeKalb ABC team will continue to explore options with this developer. The interest of an experienced coworking space developer and operator is significant for two reasons. First, it indicates that there is potential for the successful development of this use in DeKalb. Second, working with an experienced developer increases the likelihood that the proposed project will be successfully developed and managed.



DeKalb Coworks

Cost Estimate

The cost of implementing this project is largely dependent on the cost of the building, and whether the building is purchased or leased. One estimate of the cost to convert an older building in downtown DeKalb is \$100 per square foot including furnishing the space. For an 8,000 square foot facility, this would total approximately \$800,000, exclusive of the purchase price or lease rate of the building. Several different options for acquiring the space are under investigation including outright purchase of the space, leasing the space, or a profit sharing arrangement with the owner of the space.

Responsibilities

The ABC team will continue to work with the potential developers to implement a coworking space. The developers will assume responsibility for project feasibility, including space evaluation, space design, marketing, price structures and other management issues. The ABC team will work with the developers to establish an advisory board and ambassadors, conduct focus groups, and identify sources of funding and potential partners.

Measuring Success

Over the long-term, sales tax revenue and EAV will be tracked to see what the impact of DeKalb Coworks is on the local economy. New businesses and total employment downtown will be monitored. During the 11 month timeframe, the degree to which the following milestones have been achieved will be measures of success.

- Site location selected
- Feasibility study completed
- Funding sources identified
- Developer identified



Local Voices: Eric Johnson, Attorney

I know that my business would benefit from the creation of a shared professional workspace. Like many Millennials operating a small business, I am striving to keep my overhead down while providing my services. When I started my law practice I made the choice to forego a commercial office space and work out of my home to save money and get the business on its feet. While this model has been working for me it has not always been ideal with two children under 4 and a puppy running through the house. A shared work environment would give me space to meet with clients, a quiet place to work and do research, and most importantly allow me to network with other small business owners. This networking with other professionals could lead to an untold number of new ideas and partnerships. A shared work environment will also give businesses a place to start their journey as they attempt to grow into a traditional brick and mortar model as well as give a home to the many people who would like to take the next step with a home office. Finally, I believe this shared space model could be an attractive option for people getting ready to graduate from one of the many professional level programs at NIU and start the process of keeping graduates in DeKalb.

DeKalb Food Hub

According to the National Good Food Network, a regional food hub is a “business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.”

DeKalb’s efforts to create a food hub have been growing out of the success of the DeKalb County Community Gardens (DCCG). Over the previous two years, DCCG has produced nearly ten tons of food donated to local food pantries, day care centers, schools, community meal locations, senior citizen centers and housing units, as well as to the meals on wheels program. DeKalb County Community Gardens was selected by America in Bloom as the best and the most “dynamic” community garden project in North America in 2013. Building on this success, its leaders are currently investigating the feasibility of creating a food hub which may include vegetable aggregation and processing capabilities, produce freezing, cold storage, fresh food market, and/or a shared-use community commercial kitchen.

Demand and Impact

The goal of the food hub is to support more locally grown, locally processed food. This will provide local economic benefits from three sources. First, replacing imported food with locally produced products keeps money in the local economy that would otherwise flow out. This is known as ‘import substitution’.



DeKalb County Community Gardens

The second, related, source comes as local farmers produce higher value products. Finally, producing value added products from local farm products will generate jobs and income.

There is increasing demand for local foods from institutional purchasers. These include university dining hall facilities, public schools, the regional hospital, and elderly care facilities. This was made official policy with a 2010 resolution that Illinois state agencies and state-owned facilities would locally source 20% of all food purchased. Fully or partially state funded institutions such as public schools and hospitals have a goal of locally sourcing 10% of food purchased by 2020.

There is also potential to increase sales to other local consumers. Illinois only produces 4% of the food its residents consume. When farm products are imported from Iowa, California, or Mexico, money flows from local consumers to the producers in those regions. When a local producer receives payment for produce, a significant portion of those dollars are re-spent in the local economy. This creates additional local jobs and income through the multiplier effect.

Local farmers also can earn higher profits by replacing commodity crops with fruit, vegetable, and meat which produce higher incomes per acre. One of the barriers keeping them from making this transition is a lack of understanding of the potential local market for these products. A food hub addresses this by connecting local consumers and institutional buyers with current and potential producers.

A survey of producers in the region was conducted in spring 2015. Key findings include:

- 70% of producers believe they would be able to increase production if a food hub existed
- 62% of producers indicated that a regional food hub in DeKalb would be beneficial to them

- Producers indicated that important functions of a food hub include
 - Refrigeration
 - Washing station
 - Commercial kitchen
 - Transportation
 - Freezing capacity
 - Cold storage
 - Loading dock
 - Aggregation/packaging facility
 - Education programs

A DeKalb food hub fits into the recently announced FARM Illinois (Food and Agriculture RoadMap for Illinois) initiative. The aim of this initiative is to position Illinois as a leader in the evolving global food and agriculture system. One goal is to bridge urban Illinois with the rural, to connect the multimillion dollar market of the 9 million people in the Chicago Metropolitan area with the rural food and agriculture. A food hub in DeKalb would be strategically located at the gateway to the Chicago market and rural areas north, south, and west, along the I-88 and I-39 corridors.

The food hub will have a social and educational focus as well. It will expand DCCG's current partnerships with the local homeless shelter and food pantries. It will work with NIU and community college culinary arts and nutrition students to provide real-world, hands-on, community engaged training.



DeKalb Food Hub Northwest Corner



DeKalb Food Hub Southwest Corner

Implementation

The feasibility of the DeKalb Food Hub is currently being studied by NIU, in partnership with DeKalb County Community Gardens and the City of DeKalb. This work will build on the survey conducted by students, described above. The feasibility study will determine the appropriate scope and scale of operations that will ensure financial stability. The scope of operations may include produce aggregation, washing, packaging, processing, and institutional/wholesale/ retail distribution. The examination of scale will determine the appropriate facility size, staffing levels, producer capabilities, and market demand. Potential funding sources for capital costs and operational expenses will be investigated as well. The study will involve students from finance, marketing, health & nutrition, and law, supervised by appropriate faculty and staff members.

Responsibility/Partners

DeKalb County Community Gardens will assume operational responsibility for the DeKalb Food Hub. Community partners will include the City of DeKalb, NIU, local non-profit and social service agencies, and institutional buyers in the region.

Preliminary Cost Estimate

Funding for the feasibility study has been secured. The cost of opening the food hub will depend on the outcome of the feasibility study and the cost of securing and fitting a building for the appropriate operations.

Performance Metrics

In the short term (1 year), success will be measured by the determination of the appropriate operational model for the food hub. The long term success of the food hub will be measured by measures of local farmers served, local distribution, food processing, and financial stability. Specific metrics are difficult to identify pending the results of the feasibility study.



Local Voices: Bryan Flower, Owner/Operator, Red Home Farm and Coordinator Food Systems Laboratories, Northern Illinois University

I see the benefits of a food hub in DeKalb County from multiple angles. As the owner and operator of a small farm, the food hub could connect the local community with our farm and the products that we have to offer benefiting all parties. Marketing and distributing ones' product is a major component to the success of any small business and the food hub could play a major role in that area. As a Chef who teaches at NIU, the benefit of being able to utilize the food hub to acquire local and seasonal ingredients whilst supporting the local community would be a huge benefit. It would add another dimension of education to the experience that our students already receive. A teaching kitchen could give the community the opportunity to make the best use of the ingredients that come into the hub. As a culinary educator, I could see the benefit of helping members of the community learn new cooking methods that would make use of the products and avoid processed foods that lend to the decline in personal health.

SmartSpace Community Learning Center

Science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) skills are recognized as key areas for young learners, right from the very start, and remain crucial throughout life. The next generation of innovators must learn how to communicate and connect in an increasingly fast-paced, tech-centered world. NIU and the City of DeKalb are exploring development of SmartSpace, an innovative, one-of-a-kind community learning center. SmartSpace would provide visitors of all ages with fun, hands-on, interactive experiences that explore science, technology, art, and math (STEAM), increasing their STEAM interest and skills, and exposing them to careers in the STEAM professions. A cutting-edge community learning center would benefit both the DeKalb community and NIU by helping to anchor downtown renovation, attracting tourism and revenue for area businesses, and establishing the city as a university town on the rise.

Developing Innovators that will Shape the Future of our Community

NIU's award-winning Center for P-20 (Pre-K through graduate school) Engagement, housed within the University's Division of Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development, is known statewide as a leader in the field of college and career readiness. Additionally, the Center is the home to NIU STEAM Works, the region's premier provider of informal learning opportunities for students, families and educators. In FY14, STEAM Works programming engaged 46,714 P-12 students; 2,763 P-12 teachers; 11,800 community members; 1,372 NIU students; and 280 NIU faculty members – about 63,000 people.

NIU STEAM Works is leading the development of SmartSpace exhibits and programming, which are being explored by NIU, the City of DeKalb, and other local partners. Made up of the program units described below, STEAM Works seeks to power a passion for learning by providing a broad spectrum of high quality, interdisciplinary learning opportunities that improve the lives of students, educators, and community members. SmartSpace would provide a home where these programs can deliver their highly creative activities together.

STEM Outreach

STEM Outreach (<http://www.niu.edu/stem/>) delivers on and off-campus programs and activities that increase science, technology, engineering, and mathematics literacy and enthusiasm among P-12 students, their families, and educators. Annually, STEMfest, the program's largest event, continues to grow at a phenomenal rate, and in 2015 welcomed over 7,500 visitors, 600 volunteers, 70 scout troops, and over 30 buses of visiting student groups.

STEM Read

STEM Read (<http://www.stemread.com>) uses live and online programs to inspire readers to learn more about the science, technology, engineering, and math concepts in popular fiction books. Readers enjoy the books on their own or with school or library groups and then meet at NIU or connect with staff online to explore the science behind the fiction through hands-on activities, immersive field trips, expert interviews, author visits, interactive web games, collaborative writing projects, and other STEAM activities.

SmartSpaceNIU.com

SMARTspace@NIU (<http://smartspaceniu.com/>) is the home of interactive online STEAM Works activities that promote student creativity through problem-based learning opportunities designed to help learners

collaborate, engage in activities, display the art work and games they create, develop innovative solutions to authentic problems, and make connections across multiple disciplines.

NIU Center for Economic Education

The NIU Center for Economic Education (http://niu.edu/econ_edu/) uses the existing talent and reputation of Northern Illinois University to transform the economic and financial skills of current and future generations. The Center offers resources and services such as teacher workshops, student contests, pre-service events, and activities delivered online and face-to-face.

Professional Development Institute

The P-20 Center delivers professional development (PD) to teachers across this large region. Events such as “Steaming it Up,” a one-day summer retreat on integrating STEAM into classrooms, and edCamp Northern Illinois will be moved to Smart Space, where visiting teachers will have access to the extraordinary facilities and equipment as well as downtown amenities.

Building Community Identity through Engagement and Collaboration

SmartSpace would breathe new life into downtown DeKalb, providing much needed room for further expansion of innovative community programs that connect the STEM fields with arts and culture. NIU has and will continue to be a core component of the DeKalb community, yet certain divisions between town and campus have persisted for years. The learning center would create an unprecedented level of access to NIU’s resources where local community members can experience and contribute to cutting-edge research and educational experiences. In turn, students, faculty, and staff at NIU would be provided with community engagement opportunities and real world experiences on an entirely new level. New research projects, internships, volunteer opportunities, and more would emerge as departments and programs from across the university are offered the opportunity to play key roles in the development and operation of the learning center.

Representatives from the DeKalb Fire Department, which has funding and resources for community outreach efforts they are looking to expand, see SmartSpace as a unique opportunity to blend the education they do with the already popular STEAM-based programming and exhibits being continually developed by NIU.

SmartSpace would also develop partnerships with the large number of non-profit, cultural, and education-based organizations in the area, providing increased visibility and access to a wider audience. By working with and showcasing often unknown, high-quality local resources, the learning center would give citizens an amazing chance to explore a variety of subject areas and get our children interested in interdisciplinary learning and the importance of diversity within our community. NIU STEAM Works already has terrific partnerships with the Midwest Museum of Natural History, the Ellwood House Museum (home to an early-adopter family among the first to use new technologies), the DeKalb Park District, Argonne National Laboratories, and DuPage Children’s Museum, along with many other local organizations. These current partnerships would develop even further within the context of SmartSpace, benefitting all involved.

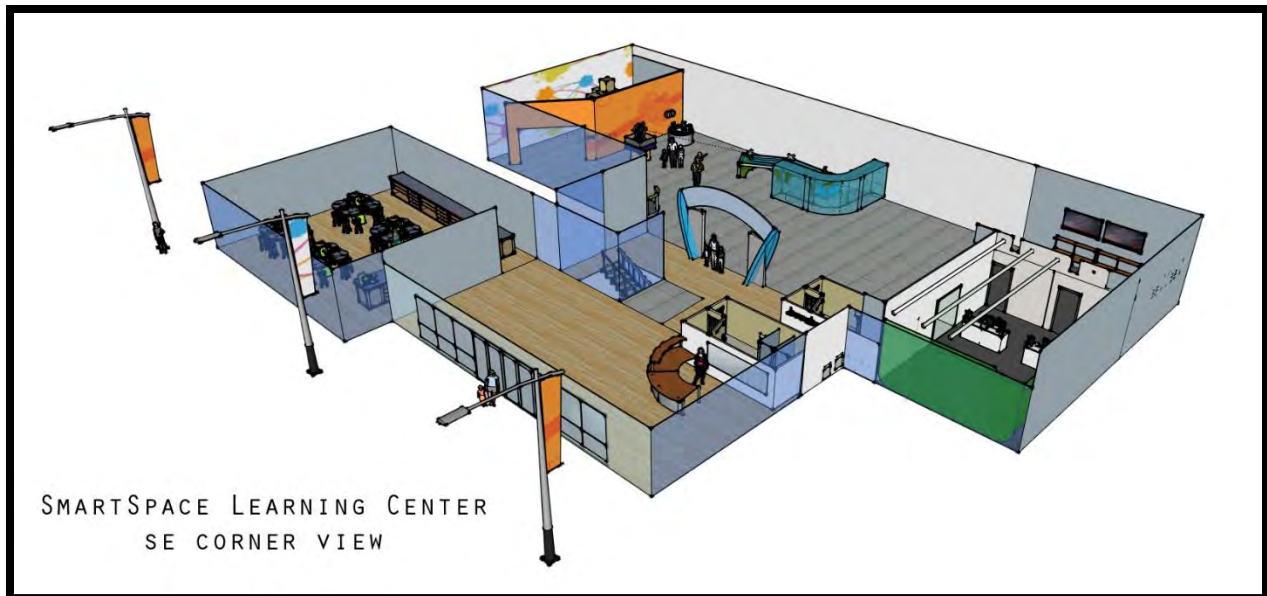
Ultimately, SmartSpace seeks to serve the community by combining the best components of children’s museums, science centers, community art centers, maker spaces, and public access to university resources. When science, technology, engineering, and math intersect with arts, culture, and the

humanities, powerful things begin to happen. This is the environment the members of our community will find and help to develop at SmartSpace.

Demand

In recent needs assessments done by the community revitalization effort Re:New DeKalb and by the DeKalb Public Library, residents strongly expressed a need for more family-oriented recreational opportunities in central downtown. The geographic footprint for SmartSpace includes regular NIU STEAM Works clients in Lee and Ogle counties to the west; Boone, Winnebago, and McHenry to the north/northwest; Kane; DuPage; western Cook; and a limited draw from CPS 299. With longer hours, expansive programming for teens and adults, good working relationships with low-income school districts, and connections to NIU students and faculty, an initial estimate of approximately 96,000 total visits annually is a good prediction.

Attendance and program estimates are also based on the background knowledge and working experience of P-20 Center staff and the review of actual annual operating budgets from similar local institutions and extensive research into nonprofit organizational planning and budgeting in similar sized organizations.



Implementation

Conversations between the City and NIU are continuing to explore programming possibilities such as those described above. SmartSpace would be connected to the innovation and incubation operations on campus and in DeKalb. Implementation plans will be developed as after agreement on programming and financial feasibility have been reached by NIU and the City of DeKalb. The P-20 Center at NIU will lead the implementation process.

Preliminary Cost Estimates

- Expenses Year 1: \$3,700,000 (renovations, exhibit and space design and build out)
- Expenses Years 2-3: \$242,293 (startup expenses)

Responsibilities/Partners

NIU – Programming and Staffing, Development of Space/Exhibits

City of DeKalb – Assist in securing or providing space at with associated rental and utility costs as low impact as possible on SmartSpace operation budget

Current and Potential Community Partners

- DeKalb Public Library
- Historic Egyptian Theatre
- DeKalb School District
- DeKalb Park District
- Midwest Museum Of Natural History, Ellwood House Museum
- Other area cultural partners

Performance Metrics

Milestones for Success – First 11 Months

- Months 1-6 – NIU and City possible locations, programming, and financial feasibility.
- Month 6-11 – Agreements reached on programming, financial feasibility, and location. Formal Memoranda of Agreement negotiated and executed.

Measuring Long-Term Success and Impact

Several quantitative and qualitative metrics can and will be used to measure the success of SmartSpace long-term and the positive impact it will have on the community.

- Growth in general attendance and program attendance
- Growth in membership numbers
- Repeat visitations
- Increased partnership activities with other DeKalb cultural opportunities, which will see their attendance grow
- Growth in university student interest, program integration, volunteering, and ultimately NIU enrollment
- Number of area students exposed to NIU through SmartSpace enrolling at NIU



Local Voices: Denise Fleming, Technology Teacher, DeKalb CUSD 428

DeKalb School District continues to see a need for students to engage in innovative hands-on technology activities to promote the STEAM fields. DeKalb High School has hosted the Students Involved with Technology (SIT) Conference for the past seven years for the northern Illinois area. The first year attracted 75 students to the full-day technology conference and now, seven years later, our numbers are over 350 students. Students are excited to present and learn from each other on topics ranging from photo editing, computer programming, creating and editing videos, game design, and robotics. Our schools are also seeing an increase in the number of students interested in robotics. Some of our elementary schools are implementing BeeBots Robotics in the lower elementary grades, Lego Robotic in the upper elementary grades, STEM Kits in our middle schools, and a newly created FIRST Robotics team in our high school. Students crave opportunities to apply science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematical skills. Their enthusiasm for these activities is promoting collaboration, problem-solving, time management, real-world situations, and skills that are necessary for future job opportunities.

Branding/Marketing

While the ABC team and others in the city are working to create new and exciting opportunities, there is concern that the benefits of these new opportunities will not be fully realized if the city’s image is not improved. This has been a particular concern for NIU as it competes for a shrinking pool of traditional college students.

While DeKalb has areas in which it is striving to improve, some of the perceived negative aspects of the community are not supported by facts. For example, when NIU students residing in residence halls were asked their impression of DeKalb’s residential areas, they cited fear of crime. However, when DeKalb is compared to other university towns in Illinois, it does not have an unusually high crime rate, as shown below. This illustrates the power of image, whether it is based on fact or a misperception.

Comparative Crime Statistics For Universities and Cities Combined*				
Crimes Per 1,000 Residents	DeKalb (NIU)	Champaign-Urbana (UIUC)	Bloomington-Normal (ISU)	Macomb (WIU)
2014	35.7	40.3	24.3	25.1
Violent Crimes	4.4	6.4	3.3	3.6
Property Crimes	31.3	33.8	21.0	21.5
2013	37.8	41.1	29.4	29.2
Violent Crimes	5.4	6.6	4.0	2.9
Property Crimes	32.4	34.5	25.4	26.3

*Crime rate data unavailable for Charleston and Eastern Illinois University.
 Source: Illinois State Police, Uniform Crime Reporting, 2014.

An internal branding and marketing campaign has already begun. This effort began when representatives from key DeKalb organizations came together to learn what each group was doing to help avoid silos of information. This DeKalb Marketing Group continued meeting monthly to share information, look for ways to cross promote the great initiatives each organization was involved in, and share this information with the entire community. Participants included the DeKalb Park District, DeKalb School District, KishHealth System, DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, City of DeKalb, DeKalb Chamber, DeKalb Public Library, Egyptian Theatre, DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, NIU, and others. The group has since grown to include local business owners, realtors, financial institutions and creative organizations.

The group began working to change the story of DeKalb by focusing on the positive stories. After DeKalb was named a quarter finalist in the ABC Competition, the group evolved into the Marketing/Communication Committee for ABC. At that point it was decided to coordinate messages using a singular # and #ProudlyDeKalb was selected. The Proudly DeKalb brand has been widely adopted within the community, appearing at events and on media material. The website has had over 6,000 views and over 2,300 unique visitors. There are 1,574 Facebook fans and over 600 Instagram followers. The new brand and marketing campaign will compliment #ProudlyDeKalb by unifying the community around a positive theme they can share beyond the city limits.

While some of the branding and marketing effort will be targeted at dispelling misperceptions, people who arrive in DeKalb must find more than the absence of negative factors. Therefore, the brand must be based on true local assets. DeKalb's economic revitalization plan is based on growing from the assets it has in place. The new projects that have been proposed, along with other improvements, must be in place to some degree before the marketing campaign can be launched.

While local assets are key, a brand cannot be based on local assets alone. If the city is to successfully differentiate itself from other cities when competing for visitors, residents, students or businesses, there must be something unique about the assets that form the basis for the brand. The community's people, sense of place and opportunities for the future will be presented in a way that shows that DeKalb is a unique and welcoming city on the rise.

It is also imperative that the brand be supported and used by organizations, businesses and agencies across the city. Proudly DeKalb has already brought together representatives from many groups to work together and this will be very helpful going forward. A brief survey of selected local business and organization leaders indicated that all supported the concept of a city brand and felt it would be helpful to them.

A consultant with expertise in brand development and marketing for small cities will be retained to carry out this effort. The following questions will be addressed:

- What is uniquely positive about DeKalb?
- What is the current perception of the city by residents and non-residents?



- What perception is desired?
- How will different groups within the city use the brand in marketing themselves?

The end products will be a logo, slogan, narrative about the city, and list of steps to communicate the story to both residents and non-residents.

Cost estimates for creating a brand and marketing it vary widely. Deciding the scope of work and obtaining estimates from consulting firms will be part of the work plan going forward.

Responsibilities

Proudly DeKalb will continue to lead the local branding and marketing campaign. The ABC team will retain a consultant expert in brand development and marketing for small cities.

Timeline

The community directed Proudly DeKalb effort will continue. The outward directed brand and marketing must be based on what people will find when they arrive in DeKalb. The many projects and programs proposed in this plan will help create a new reality for the city. Significant progress on implementation of this plan should be made before brand development and marketing can begin.

The achievement of the following milestones will be measures of success during the 11 month timeframe:

- Research into the current image of DeKalb both locally and outside of the city
- Retention of a branding and marketing expert



Local Voices: Tami Armstrong, Vice President and Marketing Director, National Bank & Trust Co

The investment in a strong, believable brand is transformative. A strong DeKalb brand will give residents a reason to believe and attract the household and commercial growth needed to support economic vitality which benefits all. NB&T would consider making a financial contribution towards this effort. I am happy to serve or assist in the branding project.

DeKalb Leadership Institute

Revitalizing the economy of any community is a complex undertaking requiring the collaboration of the public, private and nonprofit sectors. A steady supply of leaders from each of the sectors is critical to making this plan a reality. DeKalb has a strong base of organizations, businesses and public agencies devoted to improving the city as a place to live, do business, learn and visit. However, as in many communities, there is often a shortage of people who are willing to make the commitment to lead and also have the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders. This plan proposed to create a program that will generate future leaders.

The Need for Leaders

DeKalb has a shortage of leaders in several areas. For example, while the city has many excellent elected officials, some elections have reflected a lack of competition for open offices, resulting write-in candidates or people running unopposed.

While DeKalb is in need of more leaders and a more diverse group of leaders, the community has several existing leadership programs, including the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Academy, the DeKalb Community Foundation's Youth Engaged in Philanthropy, Kishwaukee Education Consortium Business Leadership Academy, and the NIU Leadership Academy.

NIU's Center for Nongovernmental Organization Leadership and Development (NGOLD) is an interdisciplinary center serving nonprofit leaders, researchers, students and faculty. NGOLD works to strengthen the nonprofit sector through academic programs that offer degrees and certification in community leadership and civic engagement. NGOLD also provides internships and volunteer opportunities in community based organizations, and opportunities for networking and technical assistance for nonprofit professionals, leaders, and volunteers.

These existing programs have provided training to leaders who were instrumental in the success of several projects including the KEYS Initiative (Keep Encouraging Youth to Succeed), CATCH Program (healthy eating in the schools), Dog Park, Senior Vehicle Safety Check, and updated marketing for Meals on Wheels. Graduates of the Chamber's Leadership Academy led the successful effort to pass a \$110 million school referendum. Four of the five sub-committee chairs were graduates of the program. While three of the previous referendums had failed, this one passed with 65% approval.

DeKalb has a history of leaders forging a path forward for the community. The DeKalb Chamber of Commerce created and the DeKalb City Council adopted a series of Sustainable Economic Vitality Papers in 2005. These leaders recognized the need for the city to work together to achieve sustainability, and through collaboration were able to accomplish the objectives set forth in the papers. Future leadership efforts can build on these successes.

A New Leadership Program

The DeKalb Leadership Institute will build on the success of the existing programs and ideas drawn from programs in other communities. The following programs have elements that will be considered for inclusion.

- Kansas City Metropolitan Area Community Leadership Program-trains existing leaders as well as potential leaders; provides collaboration labs for leaders to come together to work on community challenges.
- Zion-Benton Area Leadership Academy-addresses leadership succession and places graduates in leadership positions.
- Aurora Regional Chamber of Commerce Leadership Academy-initiated a program to attract potential leaders from minority communities.
- Illinois Nonprofit Leadership Academy-trains nonprofit organizations to take leadership roles in addressing community issues.

An informal survey of 75 current NIU students on whether they were interested in becoming more involved in community planning in DeKalb found that over 25% responded yes, often with great enthusiasm and ideas ready to share. The new program will include NIU students both to provide them with an additional educational experience and to enable the community to benefit from their ideas and education. Further, this is an opportunity to develop a community pipeline with the potential to connect NIU students to the community beyond their time at the institution. This has the potential to increase the number of students who graduate and choose to reside in or continue to give to the DeKalb community. The following program is an example that reaches out to university students.

- Champaign-Urbana-United Way Emerging Community Leaders Program-includes university students and encourages the formation of a philanthropic, professional and social community among its participants.

The Leadership Institute will have benefits beyond training leaders. With DeKalb's diverse community, creating a common experience for people with different life experiences can help unify the community. The relationships established can lay the foundation for future collaboration among people who might not otherwise approach each other. Participation in the program will give individuals the skills and opportunities to help create the community they want to live and work in, increasing retention of residents, and perhaps converting some who commute to jobs in DeKalb into residents. The leadership program also will develop an ever growing group of ambassadors for the city.

Building Capacity

Building the capacity to make change is a key component of DeKalb's plan. The Leadership Institute is critical to building capacity. The program will include the following components:

- Exposure: The participants will be exposed to the variety of leadership opportunities available in DeKalb. They will learn the roles of the private, public and nonprofit sectors, the various organizations and agencies and their missions, and how they interact to create change.
- Educate: Participants will learn leadership skills necessary to confidently pursue a leadership position. This may include interpersonal skills, the ability to read a spreadsheet, understanding different organization structures, the basics of how government works and other topics.
- Placement: Leadership program graduates will be assisted in finding leadership positions that interest them and match their skills. A commitment to take an active role in the growth of the community will be a requirement for participation.

Who Will Participate?

Community leaders should be representative of the community. With a diverse population, the DeKalb Leadership Institute will strive to include a diverse group of potential leaders. Some ways in which this may be achieved are by contacting organizations that serve different segments of the population or different geographic areas in the city and asking them to recommend potential leaders or provide a means to publicize the opportunity to become a leader, personal contacts with people who may have leadership potential, public announcements of opportunities to participate in the leadership program, recommendations from employers, schools, and others. As needs arise for leaders with specific knowledge or experiences, people fitting that description can be sought out and offered the opportunity to participate in the program.

Student Participation

The Leadership Institute will include opportunities for NIU, Kishwaukee College and DeKalb High School students. It is beneficial to the community to retain graduates of these schools in the community. They help grow the skilled workforce and population. By bringing students into the program, they can develop ties to the community that may lead them to stay after graduation. They also bring new ideas to addressing city issues and can help create a community that is more attractive to prospective students. Finally, the connections that students make while participating in the program and in leadership positions can help them develop the contacts that lead to jobs after graduation. High school students currently have several programs that provide leadership opportunities for them. The inclusion of high school students in aspects of the new leadership program will be investigated. High school students will be made aware of the leadership opportunities that are available to them as they graduate and move on in their lives, whether at a NIU, Kishwaukee College, or in a non-academic setting in DeKalb.

Responsibilities

The DeKalb Chamber of Commerce has an existing leadership academy. The experience gained by chamber in running this academy positions them well to take the lead in the new expanded DeKalb Leadership Institute. The NIU Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning (NIU-OSEEL) will coordinate the student component of the leadership program.

Economic Impact and Measuring Success

While the economic impact of the new Leadership Institute may be difficult to measure, the role of strong leaders in implementing the projects proposed in this plan and developing plans for future projects is invaluable. It is also anticipated that the growing cadre of leaders will form their own community, improving cohesiveness within DeKalb as a whole. They will also be a growing group of articulate and knowledgeable ambassadors for the city in multiple situations.

The success of the program in training new leaders can be measured by the number of participants and the growth in interest in participating in the program. It also can be measured in terms of the number of leadership positions in the city that are filled by program graduates.

The degree to which the following milestones are completed by the end of the 11 month period will be measures of success:

- Summit held with organizations currently offering leadership programs
- Summit held with organizations that could benefit from a leadership program
- New program developed and ready for launch

Costs

Costs for the Leadership Institute will be minimal. Donations will be sought to cover any costs.

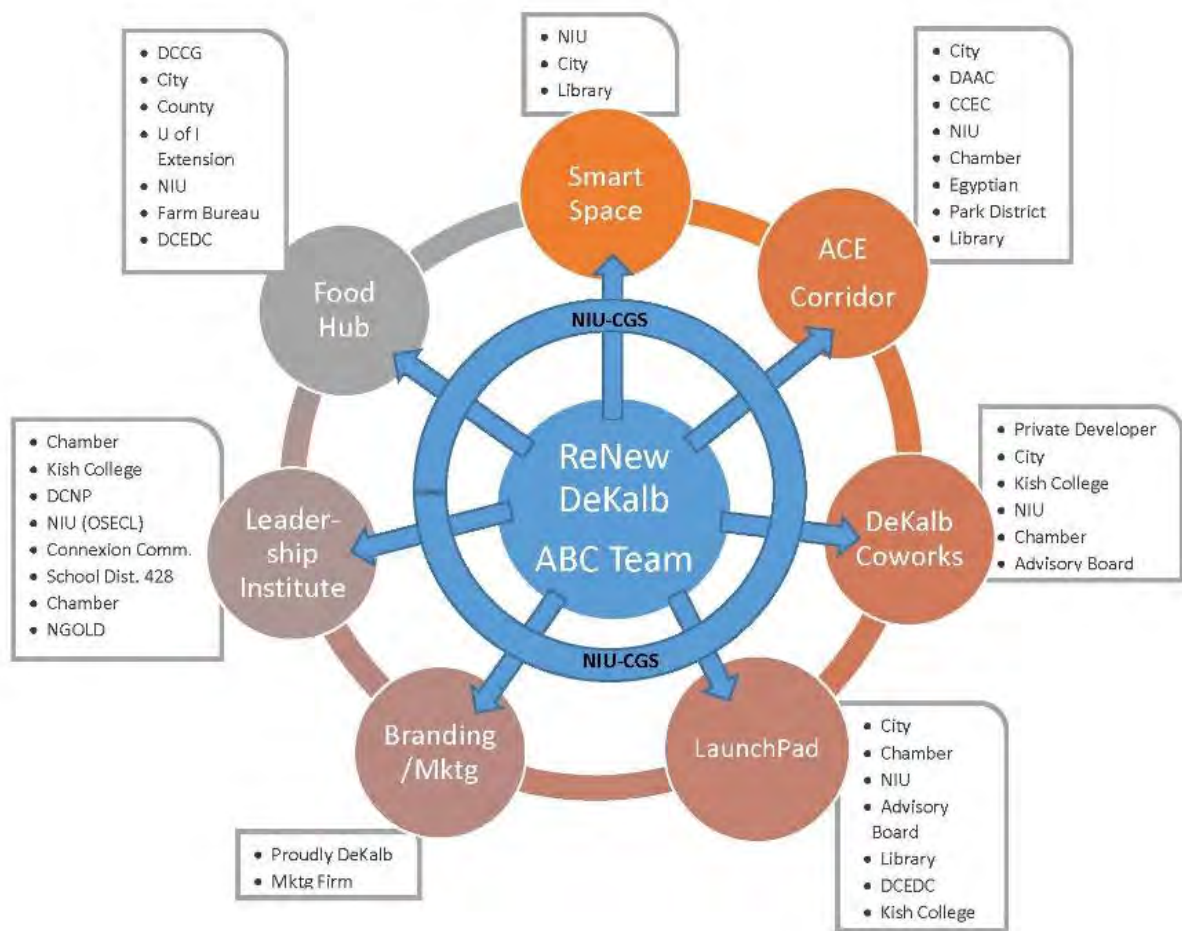


Local Voices: Lisa Cummings, Community Health Liason, KishHealth System
I was fortunate to be a part of the Leadership Academy through the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce. This opportunity opened up the doors for many partnerships and collaborations with local and county leaders and helped spearhead many smaller coalitions that are working on improving the health of the county. This is a very exciting time for us as wellness is at the Cornerstone of our strategic Plan. Enhancing the leadership development in DeKalb County would only enhance and expand the resources and partnerships that we have created with other local organizations and make them stronger. "

Organizing Plan Implementation

Implementation of the DeKalb Plan will be coordinated by the ABC team. Each project or program within the plan will be delegated to a task force composed of people with a passion for the project and the expertise to help it succeed. Where necessary, outside experts will be hired to assist. NIU's Center for Governmental Studies will continue in its role of assisting ReNew DeKalb and the task forces in coordinating, researching and implementing the projects. An organization chart is below.

DeKalb Plan Implementation



Chapter 4: Relation to Vision, Goals, and Best Practices

As described in Chapter 2, the ABC team incorporated community input from a variety of sources to create an overall vision and set of strategic goals. The vision adopted by the team is as follows:

DeKalb is recognized as a 21st century community with a thriving university and a vibrant downtown. DeKalb's residents, businesses, government, and university community are engaged in a dynamic interplay of energy and creativity that retains and attracts businesses with living-wage jobs. DeKalb's leaders are diverse, visionary, and adaptable, and work together to continue to grow our city.

Thirteen specific goals support the vision. The goals are either supported by the projects described in Chapter 3 or they will be outcomes resulting from the success of the projects.

1. Support continued placemaking in downtown through business, and residential, and institutional development
 - This goal is supported by the majority of the projects. *LaunchPad*, *DeKalb Coworks*, *ACE corridor*, and *Food Hub* are all expected to be located in or near downtown.
2. Create destination gathering places that serve the community and draw people from throughout the region to DeKalb
 - This is a major focus of the *ACE Corridor* and *SmartSpace Learning Center*. The outdoor art installations, studios, entertainment venues, and cultural/entertainment events, and unique learning opportunities will all be tourism draws and provide local residents with reasons to visit downtown.
3. Collaborate with NIU and City of DeKalb to create an attractive university town for students, faculty, staff, and residents
 - Students are attracted to a community with a variety of entertainment options and professional/educational opportunities. The *ACE Corridor* will make DeKalb a more attractive place for students to spend time and offer new opportunities to perform, exhibit their work, and perhaps begin a professional career.
 - *LaunchPad* and *SmartSpace* will support students' creativity and exploration of business opportunities. The *Food Hub* will provide both a place to purchase local, healthy foods and also a place for students to explore opportunities in the food industry. The *DeKalb Leadership Institute* will be promoted to students in order to recruit and train the next generation of leaders that will shape DeKalb as a town that is appealing to young residents as well as offering current students an opportunity to

make contacts in the DeKalb professional community that may lead to employment options.

4. Foster economic, educational, social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for everyone

- NIU is one of the most racially diverse universities in Illinois. The university recently hired its first Chief Diversity Officer to build on this strength. Several of the projects are focused on promoting opportunities for the increasingly diverse population of DeKalb. For example, diversity of leadership is a core goal of the *DeKalb Leadership Institute*. *DeKalb Coworks* and *LaunchPad* can assist with the startup and growth of small businesses ranging from high technology to personal services.

5. Encourage activities and events that showcase DeKalb's diverse population

- The arts have traditionally been a way for diverse populations to express themselves, and the *ACE Corridor* will highlight this. Programming is expected to include events that jointly highlight different cultures.

6. Create a vibrant business environment that supports existing enterprises while attracting new investment and entrepreneurs citywide

- Most of the projects contribute to this goal. *LaunchPad*, *DeKalb Coworks*, *SmartSpace Learning Center*, and *Food Hub* all will provide support to small, growing businesses and early stage entrepreneurs. The *ACE Corridor* and *branding and marketing* projects will serve to increase quality of life factors that are critical to attracting new business to a community.

7. Build on DeKalb's strengths in education, high technology, local foods, and the arts

- The purpose of *SmartSpace Learning Center* is to support students in their explorations of arts and technology. Many of the other projects are designed to support entrepreneurs as they develop new products and businesses.
- *LaunchPad* and *DeKalb Coworks* will provide direct services to nascent businesses. The *Food Hub* will support producers and processors of local food. The *ACE Corridor* will provide outlets for local artists to display and sell their artworks and encourage additional arts studio space.

8. Increase residents' access to living-wage jobs

- Many DeKalb residents now commute significant distances to their jobs. Supporting entrepreneurs helps them grow and create well-paying jobs locally. *LaunchPad*, *DeKalb Coworks*, and the *Food Hub* will help businesses thrive and hire more local residents.

9. Create an attractive climate for new residents and residential investment
 - People desire to live in or near an active community core. It is expected that the *LaunchPad*, *DeKalb Coworks*, *ACE Corridor*, and the *Food Hub* will take place in or near downtown DeKalb. The vibrancy generated by these activities will make the downtown neighborhood more attractive to restaurants, bars, and retail shops. In turn, this development will make downtown DeKalb more attractive as a place to live.
 - Developers will fill residential demand by converting existing buildings or constructing new ones. Owners of existing housing in poor condition may be motivated to upgrade their properties. These downtown dwellings will be attractive to NIU faculty, staff, and other professionals currently commuting in from the Chicago suburbs.
10. Identify and recruit a diverse cadre of community-based leadership
 - The *DeKalb Leadership Institute* will work with community organizations that serve different segments of the DeKalb population to identify and recruit potential leaders into leadership training. The program will also include opportunities for local students.
11. Coordinate and facilitate the projects initiated by various community interests and organizations
 - The leaders that are trained by the *DeKalb Leadership Institute* will drive projects for which they have a passion. By successfully bringing in a diverse group of potential leaders, this will ensure that projects from all parts of the community have champions.
12. Train and place community leaders in project and organization management
 - This is the primary goal of the *DeKalb Leadership Institute*.
13. Create a positive image of DeKalb through internal and external marketing efforts.
 - This is included in the short and long term goals of the *branding and marketing* project. The plan calls for continuing #ProudlyDeKalb internal marketing and developing a unique brand to be used for external marketing.

Potential Funding

Many of the projects will require significant funding to become successful. A number of potential funding sources have been identified.

Potential Funding Sources		Project
Federal		
	US Small Business Administration	LaunchPad
	USDA Rural Business Development Grants	LaunchPad, Food Hub
	USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program	Food Hub
State of Illinois		
	Community Services Block Grant Program	Food Hub
	Tourism Attraction Development Grant Program	ACE Corridor
Local Government		
	City of DeKalb TIF funds	DeKalb Coworks, Food Hub, ACE Corridor, SmartSpace, Branding and Marketing
Institutional		
	Northern Illinois University	SmartSpace, ACE Corridor
	KishHealth Systems	SmartSpace, Food Hub
Nonprofit/philanthropy		
	DeKalb Community Foundation	SmartSpace
	Surdna Foundation	Food hub
	Entrepreneurship focused philanthropies	LaunchPad
Corporate		
	Google	SmartSpace
	Microsoft	SmartSpace
	ComEd	SmartSpace
	Ideal Industries	SmartSpace
	Private equity investors	DeKalb Coworks, Food hub

Federal

USDA Rural Business Development Grant program is a competitive grant designed to support targeted technical assistance, training and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas that have fewer than 50 employees and less than \$1 million in gross revenues

The *USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program (CFPCGP)* has existed since 1996 as a program to fight food insecurity through developing community food projects that help promote the self-sufficiency of low-income communities. Community Food Projects are designed to increase food security in communities by bringing the whole food system together to assess strengths, establish linkages, and create systems that improve the self-reliance of community members over their food needs.

State of Illinois

The *Community Services Block Grant* (CSBG) program is designed to provide a range of services which assist low-income people to attain skills, knowledge and motivation necessary to achieve self-sufficiency. The program also may provide low-income people immediate life necessities such as food, shelter, medicine, etc. Among other services, CSBG funding is a primary resource for leveraging and providing nutritional assistance. Typical programs include: federal surplus food distribution, community gardening projects, food banks, and other nutrition-related programs.

The intent of the *Tourism Attraction Development Grant Program* (TAP) is to provide matching grants to assist in the development or improvement of tourism attractions that increase the economic impact of tourism throughout Illinois.

City of DeKalb

A number of the projects may be eligible for City of DeKalb *tax increment financing* funds. These include DeKalb Coworks, food hub, ACE Corridor, SmartSpace, and branding and marketing efforts. Under certain conditions, the city may directly appropriate funds for a project.

Institutional

NIU provides programming, exhibit development, student employees/interns/volunteers, and fundraising support.

KishHealth Systems operates the local hospital. Federal funding for such hospitals is increasingly tied to community health. Thus, they are interested in projects such as the food hub that can increase local access to fresh, healthy food. In addition, hospitals have an interest in a well-trained, technically proficient workforce. SmartSpace will be an important part of training that workforce locally.

Nonprofit/philanthropy

DeKalb Community Foundation consistently supports NIU STEM programming and is interested in continued downtown development.

The *Surdna Foundation* seeks to foster sustainable communities in the United States -- communities guided by principles of social justice and distinguished by healthy environments, strong local economies, and thriving cultures. They fund projects to spur the growth of regional food infrastructure (e.g., food hubs, vertical food supply chains, regional food shed planning initiatives linked to regional transportation and economic development). In addition, we want to support best practices on regional food supply business models and innovative regional, state and local policies. We're also looking to highlight and help replicate food supply programs that contribute to anti-poverty strategies and build strong local economies.

Corporate

Google continues to be a financial supporter of NIU STEM initiatives.

Microsoft has expressed interest in support SmartSpace.

ComEd recently sponsored and NIU STEM-focused exhibit at the \$100,000 level.

Ideal Industries, a local manufacturing firm, continues to be a financial supporter of NIU STEM initiatives.

Private Equity Investors

While business models are still being evaluated, a couple of projects may attract private sector, profit-seeking investors.

Measuring and Communicating Success

Over the short term, successful progress on the seven projects will be quite tangible.

1. LaunchPad will have a website created by September 2016 and marketing efforts will commence. From that point, metrics will include number of inquiries handled, customer satisfaction, and business starts and expansions.
2. DeKalb Coworks will identify a suitable location by July 2016 and be open for business by March 2017. After opening, utilization (number of tenants), customer satisfaction, and profitability will serve as measures of success.
3. The ACE Corridor will have a number of visible milestones:
 - City Council designation of the ACE Corridor (March 2016)
 - Design and implementation of an ACE logo and signage (March 2016)
 - Debut of the First Fridays program (April 2016)
 - Opening of the first annual outdoor sculpture exhibit (July 2016)
 - Increased NIU sponsored arts activities help off campus and within the ACE Corridor (ongoing)
 - Egyptian Theatre study completed (May 2016)
4. The Food Hub operating model will be detailed by the end of 2016. Going forward, metrics will include number of farmers served, volume of food processed and distributed, entrepreneurs supported, and financial stability.
5. SmartSpace Learning Center will make significant progress in various aspects of project assessment
6. The branding and marketing effort will have a brand identified for external marketing by the end of 2016. This effort will also be focused on internal marketing of the successes of the other six projects in this plan.
7. The DeKalb Leadership Institute will be ready for launch by March 2017.

The longer term success of the projects will be more difficult to track. Success of the overall set of projects will increase business starts, increase enrollment at NIU, attract new citizens to DeKalb, and increase the tax base. While most of these are relatively easy to measure, it is difficult to link changes to the specific projects.

ABC Best Practices

The DeKalb plan and projects are aligned with the guiding principles and best practices outlined in the America's Best Communities *Community Revitalization Toolkit*.

The plan is...

...Place-Based. The plan both builds on local assets and is designed to enhance DeKalb's sense of place. The projects support local artists and entrepreneurs in their efforts to build on existing local assets such as the Egyptian Theatre, the university, and the existing downtown core. New iconic community spaces and facilities will be created through the

designation of the ACE corridor, the development of unique downtown assets such as DeKalb Coworks and Food Hub, and the SmartSpace. The concentration of these projects downtown will strengthen the physical center of the DeKalb community as a place to gather for activities of all kinds.

...*Locally-Driven*. The leadership of DeKalb put considerable effort into soliciting feedback from all parts of the community before crafting the plan. The projects expand this by supporting new businesses and civic leaders to create a better future for the community.

...*Sustainable*. None of the projects is a significant user of non-renewable natural resources. The food hub promotes local production of healthy foods, rather than relying on food that is trucked in from hundreds or thousands of miles away. By focusing projects in the downtown area, the reuse of existing structures is encouraged and concentration in the core of community, rather than sprawl, is encouraged.

...*Inclusive to Process*. Significant effort was put into recruiting diverse participants in the community conversations conducted as part of the planning process for this plan. Informational flyers were printed in both English and Spanish. Community influencers were contacted by NIU staff regarding their willingness to promote the event.

...*Inclusive to Opportunity*. The DeKalb Leadership Institute will make every effort to recruit potential leaders that represent all facets of the community. These leaders will drive new programs and projects that build on the assets and address the needs of the portions of the community that they represent. Every project has a means of entry for any DeKalb resident, from participating in an art class, to attending a class on starting a business, learning at the SmartSpace, or helping in a community garden affiliated with the Food Hub.

...focused on *Creativity and Innovation (Creative Economy)*. The plan is heavily focused on supporting the innovation and creativity of local citizens. The ACE Corridor will promote and grow the artistic assets already present in the community. The SmartSpace will encourage creativity in high technology endeavors. LaunchPad and DeKalb Coworks help reduce barriers to entry for new creative economy businesses.

...focused on *Entrepreneurship*. Several components of the plan provide direct or indirect support to entrepreneurs. This support is focused on the agricultural heritage of the region and the innovations coming out of the university.

...focused on *Youth Engagement*. Like most rural areas, many of DeKalb's young people leave the community for opportunities elsewhere. This is especially noticeable in a university town. The innovation and entrepreneurship support envisioned in this plan will generate new businesses that will provide opportunities for students and new graduates of NIU. Some aspects of entrepreneurship support, namely NIU's Springboard, directly engage students in helping local entrepreneurs solve specific problems. This effort connects the students with the local business community and provides them with real-world experience that gives them a head start when they graduate and enter the workforce. Some will capitalize on business ideas of their own and start businesses with

the support of LaunchPad and the SmartSpace Learning Center. The DeKalb Leadership Institute will connect directly with NIU students and young people in the community.

...focused on *Community Leadership Development*. One of the core projects of this plan is focused on recruiting, training, and placing a diverse cadre of local civic leaders.

...focused on *Collaboration*. The DeKalb community has come together in recent years to conceive and fund a number of projects that have improved the city's infrastructure and quality of life. The letters of support for this plan are an indication of its wide support across government, business, and social organizations in the community.

...focused on *Community Buy-in and Engagement*. Chapter 2 of this plan describes the level of engagement and buy-in for this plan. Individuals and organizations have stepped up to take responsibility for the various projects in the plan.

...focused on *Markets beyond Borders*. One of the geographic advantages of DeKalb is its proximity to one of the largest urban areas in the world. Greater Chicago stretching from Milwaukee to the north around Lake Michigan to northern Indiana is home to nearly 10 million people. This provides a tremendous market for DeKalb entrepreneurs to support the growth of their businesses and refinement of their products. Success in this market will inevitably lead to success on a national or global scale. The branding and marketing program will bring DeKalb's story to these broader markets. LaunchPad, DeKalb Coworks, ACE Corridor and SmartSpace will deliver unique opportunities for people in those markets when they investigate all that DeKalb has to offer.

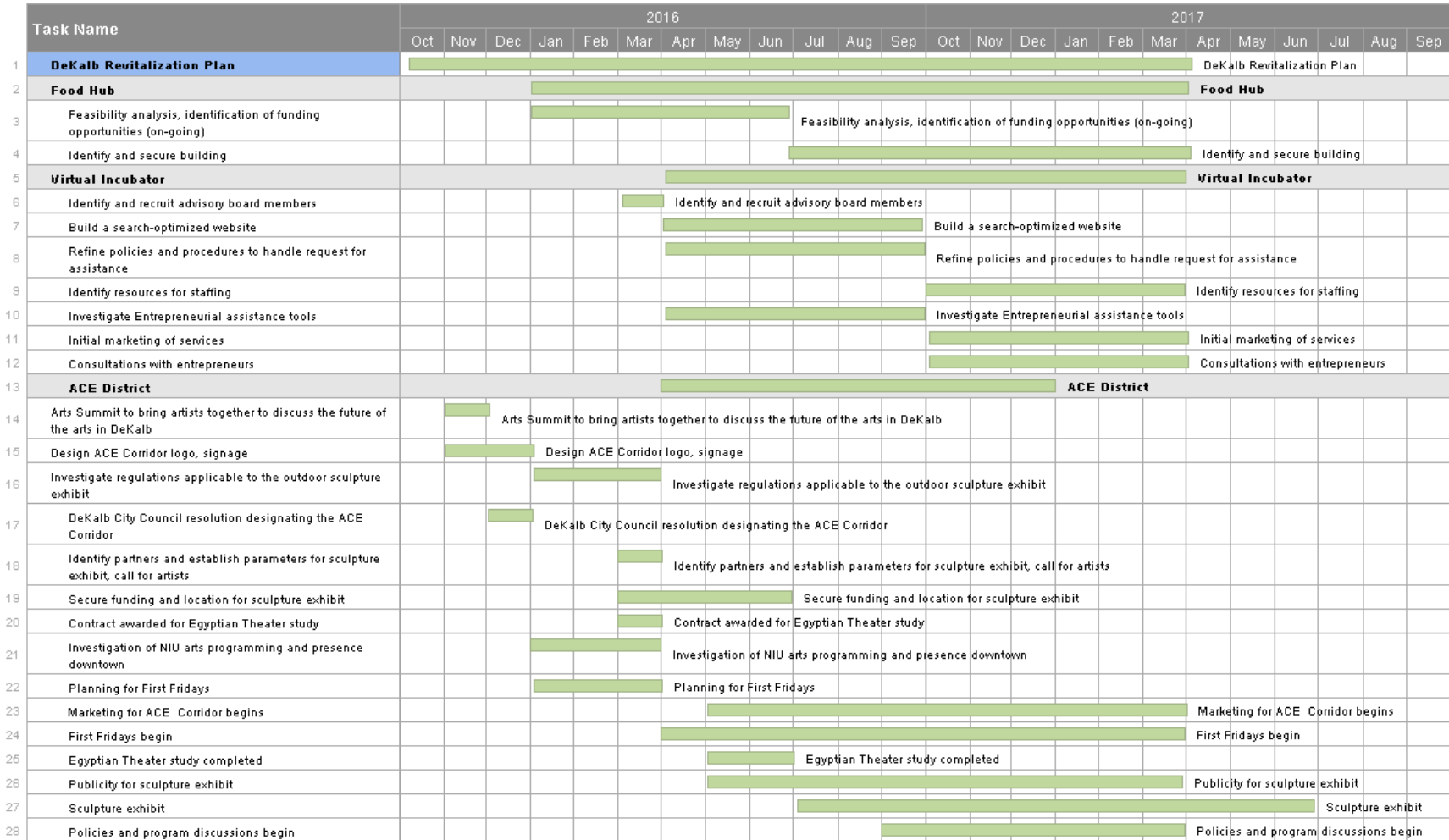
...focused on *Multiple Forms of Capital*. Recent investments have improved the built capital in DeKalb. The process of building the plan tapped into the considerable social capital that is present in the community. The university produces intellectual capital beyond what is typically present in similar sized rural towns. Specific aspects of the plan build on the cultural capital of the region (i.e. the food hubs focus on the agricultural heritage and assets). The plan outlines a variety of potential sources of financial capital to cover the costs of the proposed projects.

...focused on *Market Demand*. Much of the short-term tasks of this plan are focused on determining the level of market demand for the various projects described. For example, the food hub will likely include aggregation and distribution of locally grown produce. But, the feasibility of a commercial kitchen, meat processing, and other value-added activities will also be explored to determine if they are appropriate for the DeKalb market. Some of the projects are based on demonstrated demand, such as the ACE Corridor where existing arts organizations are already serving a large customer base.

...focused on *Community Marketing and Branding*. The 'capstone' project of this plan creates a unique brand and promotes that brand outside of the local region. The brand will highlight the community heritage, the strengths created by the recent investments, and the progress made as the plan is implemented.

Implementation Timeline

The following chart shows the timelines over the 11 month implementation period for completing tasks associated with the projects. Several have considerable momentum and tasks may begin before the anticipated March 2016 beginning of the ABC implementation period.



Over the next several years, the seven projects will bring *residents, businesses, government, and the university together in a dynamic interplay of energy and creativity*. Local foods processors in the Food Hub, local artists, and growing companies housed in DeKalb Coworks will take advantage of business assistance provided by LaunchPad. Graduates of the DeKalb Leadership Institute will serve on the boards of LaunchPad, DeKalb Coworks, and the Food Hub. These synergies will boost business formation, growth, and attraction creating well-paying jobs that are attractive to graduates of NIU and natives that went elsewhere for college or jobs and want to return.

It is expected that the majority of these projects will take place in or near downtown DeKalb. The vibrancy generated by these activities will make the downtown neighborhood more attractive to restaurants, bars, and retail shops. In turn, this development will make downtown DeKalb more attractive as a place to live. Developers will fill residential demand by converting existing buildings or constructing new condos and apartments. These downtown dwellings will be attractive to NIU faculty, staff, and other professionals currently commuting in from the Chicago suburbs.

Communicating Success

There are plans to communicate and celebrate the success of the plan. The ABC team will issue regular updates on all projects through social media, the local press, and civic presentations. The community will be invited to an annual event to view the achievements of the past year and discuss plans for the future. However, DeKalb is already excited about the progress that has been made in moving the community forward. The excerpt below is from a letter written by the chair of the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, but sums up the feeling of many DeKalb residents.

“...it is DeKalb’s inclusion in the ABC grant competition that has spurred noticeable advancement for the Chamber. I have witnessed members’ animated conversations about how DeKalb has always been a great place to live, work, raise a family and retire, and now perhaps the rest of the nation will know this! I have heard of groups going out of their way just to be in a photo with the “Proudly DeKalb” sign. I was present when an ABC Team leader said...that no matter what happens, the positive attitudes stimulated by DeKalb being part of the ABC process will continue, and with this the momentum exists to ensure that the initiatives laid out in our application move forward. Dynamic communication, solution-driven planning, and focusing on the positive are real results that DeKalb...has experienced because of America’s Best Communities. This has been the chance of a lifetime for our little community. We are making the most of it!”



Letters of Support



200 South Fourth Street
DeKalb, Illinois 60115
815.748.2000 • cityofdekalb.com

November 2, 2015

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is with pleasure that I submit this letter of support for the Quarterfinalist submission of the America's Best Communities grant from the City of DeKalb. Over recent months, our local grant committee has led this initiative, generating positive momentum and interest across the entire City of DeKalb.

Representatives from private and public organizations have brought a strong focus, building community spirit, identifying and showcasing areas of community pride and accomplishments. They have focused attention on those areas of potential to further expand community assets.

City Council has added a Proudly DeKalb component to the agenda of Regular meetings. This provides the opportunity to acknowledge activities and accomplishments and places such positive efforts in front of the entire community.

Growing upon a strong agricultural/industrial legacy, the City of DeKalb has an economic base complemented by private/public investments in medical and educational sectors. Private industry continues to choose expansion in DeKalb – 3M Corporation is constructing 900,000 square feet of warehouse expansion, adding to their campus which serves international and domestic distribution needs. Kishwaukee Health System, Kishwaukee College and Northern Illinois University are local institutions, contributing to a positive economic climate.

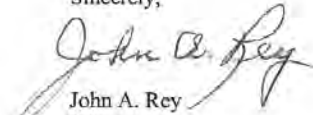
The America's Best Communities grant provides capital infusion to a specific project, providing our citizens further progress toward a healthy, vibrant 21st century community.

The grant preparation has this community focused on a vision we can reach together. Our community can be a better place in which to live and grow with: robust selections of goods and services; job opportunities, providing living wages; residential options for various lifestyles and quality commercial/industrial development.

The local Workforce Development program and Enterprise Zone designation initiatives foster development and attraction of talent and skills, assuring a strong work ethic in our labor force. Embracing an innovative spirit, places our community in a better place where future generations will flourish – as they live, learn, grow and stay.

I am delighted to support the next step in this competition. It helps us grow into a brighter future!

Sincerely,



John A. Rey
Mayor



**Northern Illinois
University**

Office of the President

Douglas D. Baker, President
Altgeld Hall 300
DeKalb, Illinois 60115-2828
815-753-9500
Fax 815-753-8686
www.niu.edu

Frontier/ABC Submission Review Committee

Re: DeKalb, IL - America's Best Community

November 3, 2015

It is my honor and privilege to submit this letter in support of the DeKalb Revitalization Plan submission for Frontier's America's Best Community competition. DeKalb plays a major role in the life of our university, as does Northern Illinois University in the life of our larger community. The DeKalb Revitalization Plan speaks to our strong partnership and the respective skills we both bring to implement our shared vision.

As NIU continues to expand a robust portfolio of university and community-based initiatives, we are reminded of the mutual benefits that accrue to both partners when we work together. The DeKalb Revitalization Plan is needed to help guide such efforts. NIU looks forward to continuing to work with the ABC Team in the next round as we further explore, develop, and implement promising projects and programs.

We are proud to call DeKalb home, and fortunate to work with city partners with a track record of productive collaboration in community revitalization projects. Frontier's America's Best Community competition challenges us to push the envelope and bring to fruition a set of projects that would truly change the face of our university town.

Public universities and cities throughout the country are facing challenges that can only be solved by collaborative efforts. Declining state support, cash-strapped K-12 schools, deteriorating infrastructure – these and many other issues make it imperative for public institutions to work together for solutions. I'm proud to say that NIU has found a very skilled and willing partner in the City of DeKalb as we jointly address the improvements needed to make our university and our community a more compelling place to live, work, and attend school. The ABC Revitalization Plan links city and university assets with a shared vision for a more vibrant community.

Over the past several months, a joint team of university and community leaders worked tirelessly to explore initiatives that would make the most difference in the lives of our students and citizens. They held more than a dozen community listening sessions to seek input on those ideas and to surface other concepts that respond to the needs of residents and promote catalytic change. In the end, they produced a plan that would propel DeKalb and Northern Illinois University to the ranks of America's best and most livable communities. That these conversations were instigated in large part by the Frontier competition speaks volumes about the value of this unique philanthropic effort.

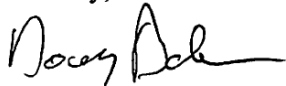
Your Future, Our Focus

Northern Illinois University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution.

We are excited about the next phase of this competition and commit ourselves to an even deeper university-community partnership. A more vibrant “communiversity” is a worthy goal that will serve our region well and underscore the value of corporate investment in America’s cities.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this endorsement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Baker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Douglas Baker

President

Northern Illinois University

Your Future, Our Focus

Northern Illinois University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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ROBERT W. PRITCHARD
STATE REPRESENTATIVE · 70TH DISTRICT

October 28, 2015

Re: Frontier Communications – America’s Best Communities

Dear Selection Committee:

I am pleased to lend my full support to the City of DeKalb’s application in the second phase of the America’s Best Communities competition. As a quarterfinalist in the competition, DeKalb has continued to develop and sharpen its Community Revitalization Plan to best fit the needs of its diverse population, encourage business growth and economic development, and improve the quality of life for its residents. I have been monitoring this process and am impressed with the number of stakeholders that have been involved, the strong support and involvement from community organizations, and the results.

The plan that you will review has been developed with not only ideas from the community but also discussions over each element in the plan with NIU students and staff, community leaders, citizens and a broad array of stakeholders. The plan reflects research on economic development trends and approaches that have worked successfully in comparable communities.

I am specifically impressed with the aspects of the plan dealing with a virtual incubator, co-work space and SmartSpace Learning Center. These elements respond to the opportunities provided by a research university and its graduates, the growing business community and strong local manufacturing. The Food Hub will take advantage of the close proximity to rich agricultural land and metropolitan market place, and market trends demanding healthy, locally grown foods. The Arts, Culture and Entertainment Corridor holds the potential for enhancing already vibrant individual visitor/tourist attractions in an even more cohesive manner that will facilitate marketing.

Another aspect of the plan recognizes the importance of developing community participation and leadership in all levels of local government and non-profit organizations. It proposes to enhance the skills of individuals, provide mentoring and utilize in a more focused way the extensive community volunteering and internships of university and college students.

Hopefully you will visualize the excitement, opportunity and vision presented in this plan. If I may be of any assistance as you review the document, please do not hesitate to contact my office at (815) 748-3494.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert W. Pritchard".

Robert W. Pritchard



Dr. Thomas L. Choice, President
(815) 825-2086, ext. 2010 • Fax: (815) 825-9020
tom.choice@kishwaukeecollege.edu

October 28, 2015

Frontier Communications – “America’s Best Communities” Competition

To Whom It May Concern:

DeKalb, Illinois, is a community with a large population of people who have grown up in the town, been educated locally all the way through undergraduate and graduate degrees, have gone to work in the town, raised their children here, and who care deeply about this community. But like many communities, DeKalb faces issues which a strong group of community leaders from all sectors have come together to address. While this effort began before the announcement of the America’s Best Communities initiative, ABC has provided additional incentive for us to focus our efforts on improving and reinvigorating our community.

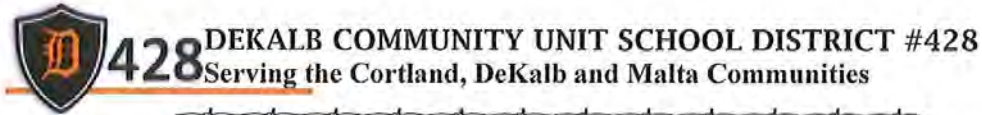
People from throughout the community have been actively involved in crafting the plan which identifies the projects and programs most important to the people of DeKalb and which will have the most impact on encouraging business growth and promoting the city as a great place to live, work and visit. No constituent group has been forgotten as input has been solicited via community conversations conducted as part of the City Council’s strategic planning process, many meetings held with groups of stakeholders, surveys of a number of community leaders, regular meetings of City staff, and significant input from students and staff of Northern Illinois University located in DeKalb.

Kishwaukee College is the local community college serving the residents of DeKalb. We have also been actively involved in the ABC discussions and planning recognizing our key role in the accomplishment of the plan’s goals and aware of the many benefits to the College which will come with its implementation. A strong and vibrant DeKalb will enable us to attract and retain more residents of our district and increase the number of students we may serve, will provide an attractive place to live for current and prospective faculty and staff who work at the College, and will attract both small and large businesses whom we may serve through our many workforce development programs and customized offerings.

The College is steadfastly committed to the projects and programs which have been identified and College staff and resources will be made available to ensure their successful completion. I strongly support the City of DeKalb’s application to move forward as America’s Best Community!

Sincerely,

Thomas L. Choice
President



Dr. Douglas Moeller Superintendent of Schools Phone: 815-754-2330 Fax: 815-758-6933 doug.moeller@d428.org	Ms. Andrea Gorla Assistant Superintendent Business & Finance Phone: 815-754-2329 Fax: 815-758-6933 andrea.gorla@d428.org	Dr. Jennie Hueber Director of Curriculum and Instruction 815-754-2297 815-754-2215 jennie.hueber@d428.org	Ms. Cristy Meyer Director of Student Services 815-754-2290 815-754-2215 cristy.meyer@d428.org	Mr. James Bormann Director of Human Resources 815-754-2328 815-754-2345 jim.bormann@d428.org
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November 2, 2015

Dear America's Best Community Review Committee,

DeKalb Community Unit School District (CUSD) 428 serves the educational needs of over 6,300 students. We have a very diverse student population, and we pride ourselves on offering a broad range of programs to engage *all* our children. This dovetails nicely with the objectives and projects in DeKalb's plan if selected as a finalist for America's Best Communities.

Educational opportunities are critical to the quality of life in any community, and also the means by which our children can realize upward social mobility. In DeKalb CUSD 428, we partner with local social service providers and institutions of higher learning, including Northern Illinois University (NIU), to help our students develop to their potential. We have a formal Professional Development School (PDS) relationship with NIU, and each year more than 260 NIU students are placed in DeKalb CUSD 428 schools for clinical observation, student teaching, co-teaching, and internships for school social workers and psychologists. We also have many educators seeking administrative licensure from NIU serving their internship within our schools.

With regard to specific DeKalb projects for America's Best Communities, our music and art programs at DeKalb High School mirror the goals of Project 5: Arts, Culture, and Entertainment Corridor. Each year a district-wide art competition is held at the Egyptian Theatre in downtown DeKalb. Our high school marching band has received national recognition in competitions, and performed at major Bowl College Series (BCS) games the past two years. Our a cappella group, Enharmonic Fusion, has also won national recognition and performed at Rockefeller Center in New York. Our madrigal group performs at multiple assisted living and social service agencies, as well as at NIU.

"SCHOOL, COMMUNITY, FAMILY... A PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION"
901 South Fourth Street, DeKalb, IL, 60115 P: 815-754-2350 / F: 815-758-6933



428 DEKALB COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT #428
Serving the Cortland, DeKalb and Malta Communities



Dr. Douglas Moeller Superintendent of Schools Phone: 815-754-2330 Fax: 815-758-6933 doug.moeller@d428.org	Ms. Andrea Gorla Assistant Superintendent Business & Finance Phone: 815-754-2329 Fax: 815-758-6933 andrea.gorla@d428.org	Dr. Jennie Hueber Director of Curriculum and Instruction 815-754-2297 815-754-2215 jennie.hueber@d428.org	Ms. Cristy Meyer Director of Student Services 815-754-2290 815-754-2215 cristy.meyer@d428.org	Mr. James Bormann Director of Human Resources 815-754-2328 815-754-2345 jim.bormann@d428.org
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For Project 6: Leadership Development, the school district addresses this for both our students and administrative staff. Approximately 12 high school seniors are selected each year to participate in the Senior Business Leadership Academy, which is run through the Kishwaukee Educational Consortium. For our school administrators, each year since 2009 we have had two or three enrolled in the DeKalb Leadership Academy, which is run by the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce.

There is a significant amount of collaboration that takes place between all taxing bodies within the City of DeKalb, as well as private business and the Chamber of Commerce. This collaboration has created a synergy that has helped all entities to better serve our community. But there is still much work to be done. This is why I fully support DeKalb's continued pursuit of being named America's Best Community. Please contact me if I can be of any assistance in furthering this goal.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Moeller, Ph.D.
 Superintendent of Schools
 DeKalb CUSD 428
 901 S. Fourth St.
 DeKalb IL 60115
 (815) 754 - 2330

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Jill Tritt, Chair, Board of Directors of the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce



DeKalb Chamber of Commerce
*Promotion, Representation,
Education, Communication*

164 E. Lincoln Hwy. ▪ DeKalb, IL 60115
815-756-6306 ▪ Fax: 815-756-5164
www.dekalb.org ▪ chamber@dekalb.org

October 30, 2015

To: Decision makers with America's Best Communities

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please let this serve as a letter in support of the application by DeKalb, Illinois for America's Best Communities.

For calendar year 2015 I have had the pleasure of serving as Chair of the Board of Directors of the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce. This is my sixth year as a Board member with the Chamber. Each year Chamber members, Board and staff have put their best foot forward to advance and serve the business interests of our community. This has resulted in increased programming, efficient and collegial service, and financial stability. We have experienced steady growth in the number of our members, the attendance at all of our key events, and the participants on our various committees. Most notably, our Chamber financials reflect a current ability to invest in long-term needs.

In light of these accomplishments, it is DeKalb's inclusion in the ABC grant competition that has spurred noticeable advancement for the Chamber. I have witnessed members' animated conversations about how DeKalb has *always* been a great place to live, work, raise a family and retire, and now perhaps the rest of the nation will know this! I have heard of groups going out their way just to be in a photo with the 'Proudly DeKalb' sign. I was present when an ABC Team leader said, at a Chamber Public Policy Committee meeting, that no matter what happens, the positive attitudes stimulated by DeKalb being part of the ABC process will continue, and with this the momentum exists to ensure that the initiatives laid out in our application move forward.

Dynamic communication, solution-driven planning, and focusing on the positive are real results that DeKalb and the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce have experienced because of America's Best Communities. This has been the chance of a lifetime for our little community. We are making the most of it!

Sincerely,

Jill M. Tritt
The Foster & Buick Law Group, LLC

Jennifer Jeep Johnson, Vice President, DeKalb Area Arts Council

To Whom it May Concern;

I write on behalf of the newly formed DeKalb Area Arts Council, and in support of the City of DeKalb's efforts to receive the ABC Grant. DeKalb is a wonderful place in which to live, work, learn, and raise a family. From our perspective, it is also a place for artists, artistic organizations, and cultural endeavors. To that end, we have been working very hard for the last couple of years to lay a solid foundation for DAAC, and while we have made tremendous headway through purely volunteer efforts, it is with great excitement that we are able to consider what may be possible for our city, should we be the beneficiary of this grant.

Many of the programs planned by our grant committee would directly benefit artists, and arts businesses, but none would have as immediate of an impact as the Arts, Entertainment, and Culture Corridor. The designation of the ACE Corridor would help our community to see the richness of the artistic community we currently have, as well as to draw new artistic development to the downtown area; a two-fold benefit, as it will cultivate the arts in our community, and benefit the other businesses in the area by allowing them to market themselves as part of the Corridor. Through DAAC's research efforts, we have also learned that many people in our community are simply unaware of all that DeKalb's artistic community offers, so the designation of the ACE Corridor would help to identify where our art is being produced.

DAAC is proud to call DeKalb home, and we are proud to be in the running for this grant, the receipt of which would make a huge impact in our community.

Very Truly Yours,



Jennifer Jeep Johnson

Vice President, DeKalb Area Arts Council

Mark Eddington, District Manager, DeKalb Sanitary District

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ASST. TO MANAGER, ADMINISTRATION

November 2, 2015

Frontier Communication

Re: City of DeKalb – America’s Best Communities

Dear Review Committee:

Agents from the DeKalb Sanitary District (District) were recently invited to participate in the City of DeKalb’s (City) strategic planning workshops. As the wastewater authority for the City, it was an invaluable opportunity to be a part of an open exchange of ideas and concepts that will no doubt improve our community. This workshop included a diverse cross-section of community leaders and citizens. It was an excellent opportunity for the citizens to share their own ideas to move our community forward. This type of public outreach and collaboration is but one example of how the City of DeKalb is indeed one of America’s Best Communities and worthy for consideration of this prestigious award.

The District is one of many governmental agencies that work with the City of DeKalb on a daily basis for our common customers. The City and District are equally yoked in efforts to enable our community to thrive. The District is currently designing a state of the art biological upgrade to its wastewater treatment facility that will ensure enhanced water quality in the Kishwaukee River for years to come. By investing an estimated \$50 Million in itself, the District is confident that the City will be positioned to welcome new commercial, industrial, and residential development to our community.

This is a very exciting time for the City and the District. We are equal partners in our collective future and realize our spirit of cooperation toward our common goals only enhances the pride we have in this community. Please consider the City of DeKalb for the America’s Best Communities award as it is indeed a great community.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or wish to discuss any of these matters further.

Sincerely,

DeKalb Sanitary District,

Mark Eddington, P.E.
District Manager

cc: file.