



State of the Region:
FINGER LAKES
2021 Annual Report



NEW YORK
STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY.

Regional Economic
Development Councils



Executive Summary

Message from the Co-Chairs

The understatement of the century: 2020 was a challenging year for all. The global COVID-19 pandemic changed our world, and it undoubtedly changed our community. It will likely be some time before we understand the full scope of impact this crisis has had on the Greater Rochester region.

Throughout it, all, your Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (FLREDC) worked tirelessly to provide the latest information, guidance, and services to businesses, organizations, non-profits, and the larger community during their most trying times. As a result, we have continued to lead Greater Rochester on our path toward greatness.

There is a saying that “a smooth sea makes not a skilled sailor.” 2020 tested our resiliency in ways we could never have imagined. It called to reckoning some of our most pressing social issues. It forced us to work smarter, be more agile, and, most importantly, to pull together. It made us stronger.

The accompanying report will offer insight into some of the incredible work being done throughout the Finger Lakes Region based on our key priorities: (1) job growth; (2) increasing regional wealth; (3) driving private investment; and (4) reducing poverty. The report will also delve into some of the strategic partnerships in which our region has engaged to achieve success in each priority like the one with ROC2025. Our report endeavors to make clear the region’s commitment to looking at each of the priorities through a lens of equity and inclusion.

To date, through the REDC competition, our region has been awarded **\$721 million** for 950 projects—among the most money and greatest number of projects in New York State. So, as we look toward Round 11 with a renewed commitment to building back better, we can rest assured that our collective passion, determination, and vision will result in even greater success for the Finger Lakes Region.

As we move forward from pre-pandemic to post-pandemic, we must not only open our economy and society but also undertake needed change to realize the role we play in addressing other pervasive issues such as economic, social, and environmental justice. This Council will continue to endorse equitable and sustainable business practices and corporate social responsibility among businesses and organizations within our nine-county footprint. Our regional recovery effort cannot simply return us to where we were pre-pandemic but position our region to realize the Governor’s vision of building back better and revitalize our Finger Lakes Region.

Our community is robust with leadership in every industry—from healthcare and education to manufacturing, . As you read through this report, please be mindful of how you, your business,

and your network can assist in achieving success around our key priorities. Can you help to create jobs here at home? Can you offer ideas for investment that will benefit the community as a whole? Can you commit to helping reduce poverty, improve educational opportunities, and promote equity and inclusion?

As we honor the ones we have lost to this virus, we look with renewed hope towards the future. This organization, like many others in our community, has walked through the fire. We will continue to serve as a beacon in the storm for Greater Rochester/Finger Lakes businesses and a bold leader on the path ahead.

Bob Duffy, Co-Chair
Denise Battles, Co-Chair

Report Summary

A Decade of Growth in the FLX

Ten years ago, Governor Andrew Cuomo established # regional Economic Development Councils across New York State to encourage community-based collaboration and investment to spur economic growth and prosperity for all New Yorkers.

The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (FLREDC) wishes to thank the governor for his foresight and actions that helped to reverse the cyclical decline plaguing upstate New York for decades. We also thank our community partners from our nine-county region for sharing their unwavering commitment, expertise, and guidance to this program. We have a decade of solid progress and impressive accomplishments because of their willingness to help us envision the possibilities, identify the opportunities, and take the steps needed to succeed.

Investments in the Region

As a catalyst, the economic support of New York State has helped FLREDC build confidence and momentum among its regional stakeholders to drive economic growth and attract substantial additional investments. Since 2011, awards for the Finger Lake region total over \$721 million for 950 projects from the annual Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) process. These projects represent \$2.7 billion in total investment, leveraging \$721 million in state support by a ratio of more than 7 to 1.

New York State programs like the Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI) and the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) continue to transform the Finger Lakes regional economy. In Rochester, these investments helped accelerate the region's photonics industry, revitalized its downtown, waterfront, and cultural institutions, such as the Strong National Museum of Play, and helped attract exciting new job-creating businesses. Leveraging DRI funds, Batavia, Penn Yan, Geneva, and Seneca Falls continue to revitalize their downtowns with residential, business, and recreational projects that appeal to residents and tourists alike. The 2019 priority projects identified by FLREDC are also in motion.

Economic Recovery

A sustained recovery is underway in the Finger Lakes Region, with year-over-year job growth in 11 of the past 12 months and renewed vitality in most key economic sectors. From April 2020 to April 2021, the RMSA added 62,500 jobs, an increase of 14.1%. While the region is up from a year ago, it remained down 35,800 from the same time *two* years ago. As the recent acceleration in recovery continues to narrow that gap, employers in most sectors once again face challenges finding job applicants and skilled labor to operate their businesses at total capacity.

FLREDC continues to work with its community partners in the Finger Lakes Region to align training, education, and workforce development efforts with the skills needed for in-demand jobs.

Stakeholders in education, community-based organizations, workforce development boards, and government agencies continue to improve their communication and coordination to define career pathways and provide skilled workers for the high-demand sectors of our economy.

The FLREDC 2019 Workforce Development summit identified additional ways to grow our region's workforce, including employer-based training programs and business/K-12 partnerships. Others include the expansion of apprenticeship opportunities and programs to improve job readiness skills.

Lasting Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic catapulted everyone into uncharted territory. The FLREDC [2020 Finger Lakes Economic Recovery Report](#) represented a significant push by Governor Cuomo to give regional councils a voice in how the State would provide economic recovery assistance. Stakeholders rallied with FLREDC to identify regional and cross-cutting priority needs due to COVID. The results not only showed the fragility of the systems underpinning our regional economy, but also how COVID exacerbated the deep-rooted racial and socioeconomic inequities and inadequacies faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC):

Accessible and affordable childcare. By June 2020, at least 25% of Monroe County child care centers closed temporarily when working families needed it most.

Innovative workforce development. Workers choosing to retire or not return to work due to uncertainties around the duration of the pandemic leave employers struggling to reopen and operate at total capacity.

Equal access to opportunities. Systemic inequities keep Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) from accessing resources needed to compete in the marketplace and the workforce.

Broadband and digital literacy. Urban and rural residents have inadequate or no internet access to fully engage with online education, telemedicine, and remote employment.

Community revitalization. After the tragic events in 2020 resulting in civil unrest in our region, ways to safely bring people together are necessary to heal and rebuild a sense of community.

Adequate transportation. Postponement of the much-anticipated transit system expansion limited greater access to everyday needs, work, and school.

Looking Ahead

This past year, overshadowed by COVID-19, made it clear that there is no going back to life as it was. Fortunately, it also validated our region's tenacity and ability to pivot in the face of adversity. Our 2019 decision to modify the FLX Forward regional economic strategies to align with New York State's economic strategy positions our region to build back better by creating an interdependent economic ecosystem that supports diverse sectors and communities so that everyone can thrive.

FLREDC recognizes that Economic Justice is not a new challenge. Instead, it's a challenge of pervasive patterns of discrimination and disparity in our systems and region that we must address and reverse with new ideas, actions, and momentum. Only by eradicating systemic barriers and investing in distressed urban and rural communities in our region can we move the Finger Lakes Region forward together.

We continue to be grateful for the support of New York State and remain committed, energized, and engaged in moving the Finger Lakes Forward.

*Brookings Institution, Metropolitan Policy Program. As reported in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, May 19, 2019.

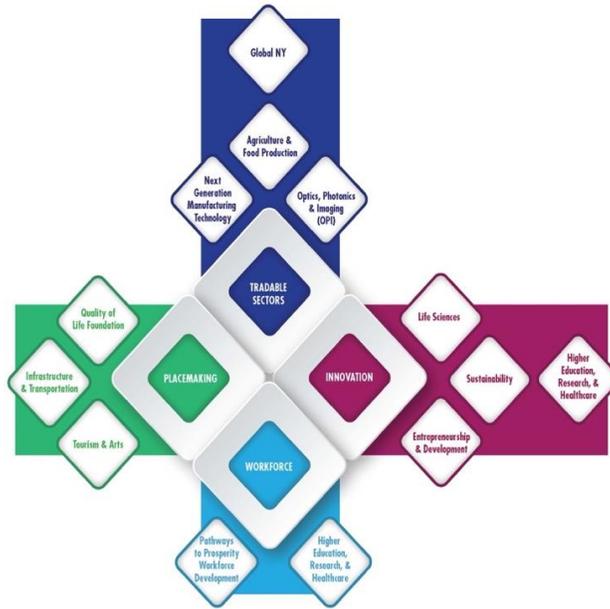
Part One: Strategic Update

Identifying Strategic Opportunities Through a Shared Lens

Economic development investment decisions happen through a lens focused on regional priorities that build on and support statewide goals.

The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (FLREDC) strategic plan aligns with New York's statewide four-pronged economic strategy and reflects the comprehensive nature of our region's industry strengths.

On the ground, expertise from the community and private sectors across the region advise our work to ensure clarity in vision and action to keep the Finger Lakes Region moving forward for all.



[Caption] FLREDC aligns its Finger Lakes Forward regional strategies with New York State’s four-pillar economic strategy: Tradable Sectors, Innovation, Workforce, and Placemaking.

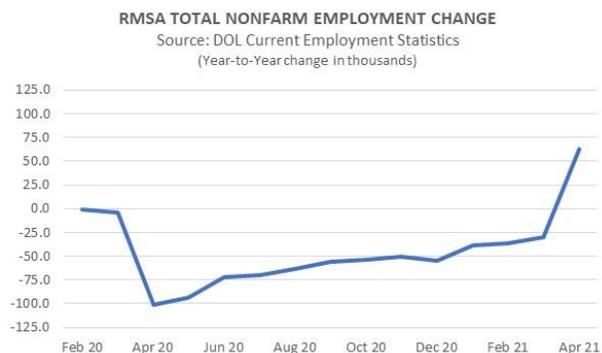
a. Regional Priorities

i. Progress: Accelerating Post-Pandemic Growth

COVID-19 served as a major shock to a Finger Lakes Regional economy that had been growing steadily over the previous decade. Consider: In the 10 years preceding February 2020 (the last month before COVID-related impacts began to be seen in the data), the Rochester Metropolitan Statistical Area (RMSA) added 36,000 jobs. But at the depth of the downturn in April 2020, it had shed almost one-in-five jobs, or more than 101,000 in total. The year since has brought sustained recovery, with year-over-year job growth in 11 of the past 12 months and renewed vitality in most key economic sectors.

From April 2020 to April 2021, the RMSA added 62,500 jobs, an increase of 14.1%. That includes growth of +62,100 (16.8%) in private sector employment. The region outperformed the national (+10.9%, +13.3%) and statewide (+13.0%, +15.9%) benchmarks for both metrics during the period. There remains work to get to full pre-pandemic employment levels, however. While the region is up 62,500 jobs from a year ago, it remains down 35,800 from the same time two years ago. The recent acceleration in recovery will continue to narrow that gap.

As noted in the FLREDC [2020 Finger Lakes Economic Recovery Report](#), the pandemic

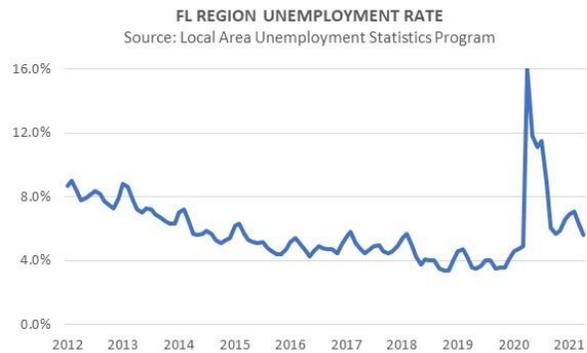
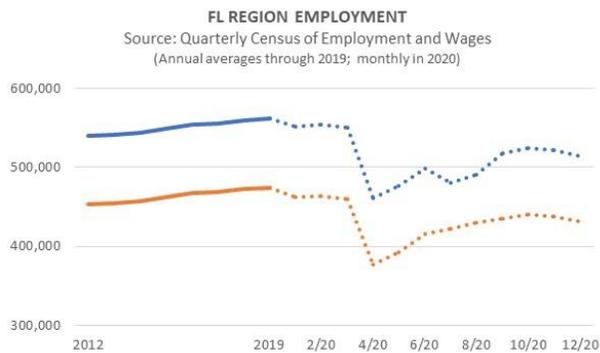


impacted different sectors in different ways. Fortunately, nearly every primary sector has shown a sustained rebound over the past year. Leisure and Hospitality, which had been the hardest-hit sector, has now added jobs 11 of the past 12 months and is +19,000 compared to April 2020.

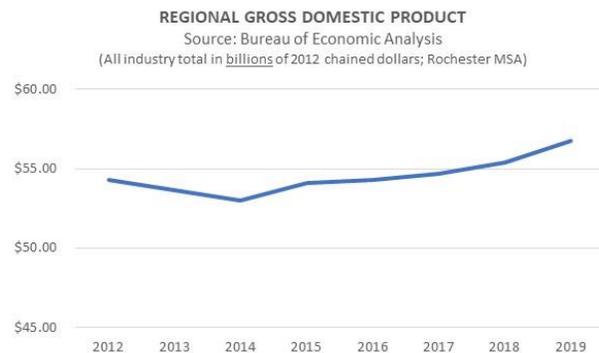
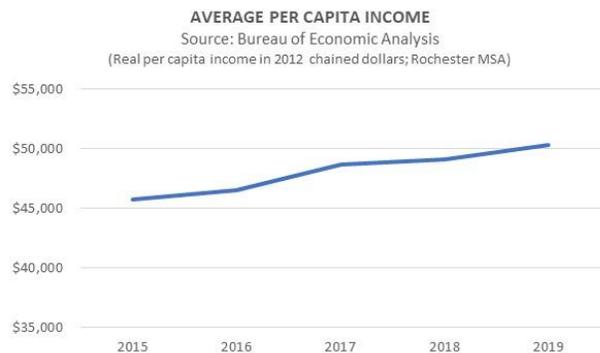
Over the same period, Retail Trade is +10,800, Professional and Business Services is +6,000, Manufacturing is +5,400, and Education and Health Services is +5,300. The Construction sector, which demonstrated considerable resiliency during the pandemic and returned to its pre-pandemic level in August 2020, is now +6,900 over the past year. The lone “soft” spot among key sectors is government, where state employment remains -800 and federal -100 year-over-year.

The RMSA continues to demonstrate improved vitality on other key metrics as well. Its labor pool outlook continued to improve in April, with the Civilian Labor Force growing 2.1% above year-earlier levels. Moreover, its unemployment rate improved nearly a full point in April, decreasing to 5.6%. Since April 2020’s peak COVID rates, the RMSA unemployment rate has improved more than nine points. And although unemployment in the City of Rochester continues to run ahead of the region at large, its rate has improved more than a full point in each of the past three months and now stands at 8.4%.

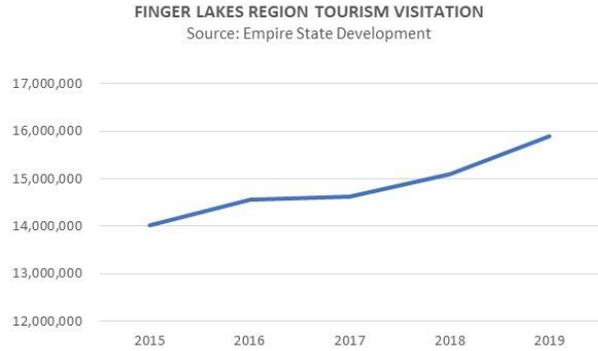
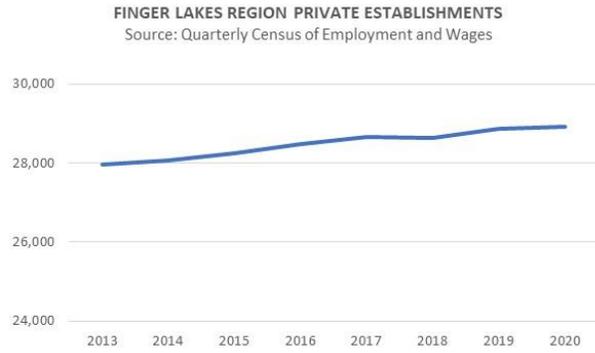
GOAL 1: GROW JOBS



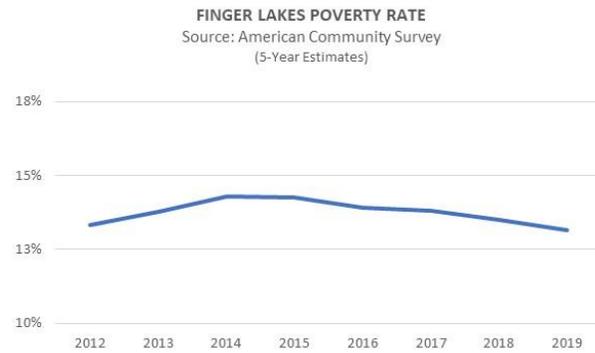
GOAL 2: INCREASE REGIONAL WEALTH



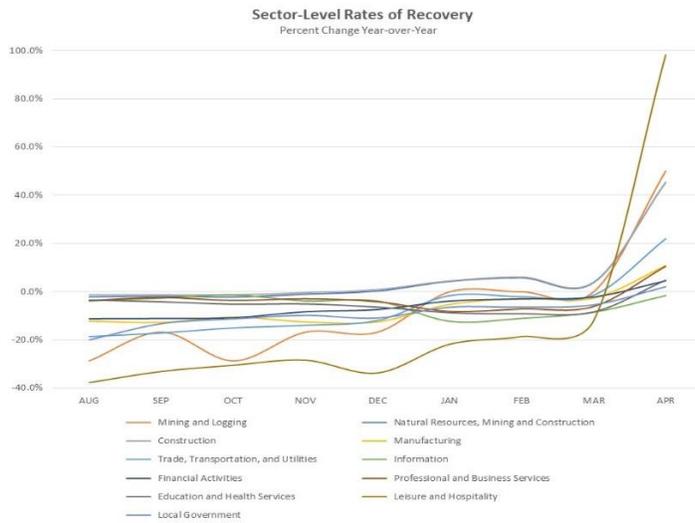
GOAL 3: DRIVE PRIVATE INVESTMENT



GOAL 4: REDUCE POVERTY



ii. Existing challenges related to COVID 19



Recovery rates continue to vary by sector, but nearly every industry category of the Finger Lakes Region’s economy has improved from the initial COVID-induced downturn of last spring. The most

significant bounce back has occurred in the Leisure and Hospitality sector—the hardest hit of any last year, its job level nearly doubled (+98%) from April 2019 to April 2020. Other notably strong bounce backs over the period include the Mining and Logging sector (up 50%), Construction (up 45%), Trade, Transportation and Utilities (up 22%), and Manufacturing (up 11%). Among private sector industries, only the Information sector remains down year-over-year (by 1.5%), but it continues to accelerate toward pre-pandemic levels.

iii. Keeping the FLX strategy on track

The FLREDC Strategic Plan Framework

In 2019 the FLREDC engaged in a comprehensive review of the Finger Lakes Forward regional strategic plan to examine how to accelerate economic growth beyond the Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI), which was nearing the end its five-year implementation runway. This process both validated our main strategies and recommended new ways to reinvigorate our economic development ecosystem, key activities, and coordination. We added two new strategic industry pillars—Healthcare & Life Science and Software & IT—along with new emphasis on digital adoption across all industries and the establishment of new five-year targets for each primary goal:

- GROW JOBS: 30,000 net new jobs
- INCREASE REGIONAL WEALTH: 20% increase in per capita income
- DRIVE PRIVATE INVESTMENT: 10% increase in private GDP
- REDUCE POVERTY: 20,000 individuals elevated out of poverty

The culmination of this valuable process also resulted in five regional growth priorities and created a new regional economic alliance called **ROC2025**. Modeled on some of the country's most innovative and world-class regional growth frameworks, ROC2025 is a bold partnership that drives the Finger Lakes forward through collaboration and increased private-sector and philanthropic resources to achieve the public targets associated with our strategic plan. This partnership includes FLREDC, along with key economic development organizations like the **Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce (GRCC)**, **Greater Rochester Enterprise (GRE)**, **Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (RDDC)** and **Visit Rochester**. [The Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates industrial development agencies and the City of Rochester are also active participants.](#)

Since its inception in April 2019, ROC2025 has endeavored to raise \$25M to help achieve our regions new five-year goals through advancing these five regional growth priorities:

Regional Talent Strategy

The Finger Lakes Region's business-led approach strengthens its workforce by focusing on the immediate workforce demand, while aggressively increasing the pipeline of skilled talent for future supply and demand. Effective, business-led talent development strategies are increasingly important as the workforce skills shortage becomes a leading challenge faced in the region. Public

and private investments through ROC2025 strive to increase regional college graduate retention, expand co-op and internship opportunities, ease connectivity between employers and job seekers, and address issues of economic access for all. GRCC is the ROC2025 partner leading these efforts in collaboration with the myriad of educational, workforce and talent organizations throughout the region.

Business Retention and Expansion

Approximately 90% of job growth in New York State, and 80% of growth nationally, comes from homegrown companies. ([Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)) Small firms—especially young firms—drive a disproportionate amount of that growth. Rochester and the Finger Lakes continue to add business development staff capacity and coordination tools across partner organizations in ways that expand our ability to proactively outreach and nurture the region’s incumbent firms and entrepreneurs, and ensure they have the resources to grow. GRE serves as the ROC2025 lead, working with our county industrial development agencies and any other economic development partners that can assist any business expansion opportunities.

Targeted Business Attraction

Successful companies, talent, innovation, strategic location, and a low cost of doing business are among the many assets the Finger Lakes Region can leverage to support further investments in our area. GRE specifically targets high-tech markets that align with our region's competitive advantages: advanced manufacturing, including semiconductor, medical device, material science; optics, photonics & imaging; agriculture and food processing; software & IT; energy innovation; and life sciences.

Downtown Growth and Innovation

Research confirms a vibrant urban core and quality of life are vital for economic development, especially for mid-size cities, where quality of life factors explains roughly 50% of regional disparities in economic performance. Emerging businesses cite quality of life as a key component in talent attraction. Further, millennials and other young professionals—a key demographic of the workforce and tomorrow’s business and community leaders—seek to locate in and around vital, dense, and culture- and entertainment-rich urban areas. RDDC helps guide ROC2025 support efforts, including pilot funding for innovative projects that amplify population growth, stimulate activity, and catalyze place-building.

Regional Branding and Marketing

Innovation and invention by Rochester’s imaging giants paved the way for the world we now live in, from medical testing to space exploration, digital capture and transmission, and more. The imaging industry remains central to and a focal point of the Finger Lakes regional economy today, with thriving narrative characterized by new technologies, rich culture, exciting startups, foundational discoveries, and fresh voices. GRE works with Visit Rochester and all ROC2025 partners to develop a renewed “place brand” that will better identify and promote the area, both within the region and beyond.

Rising Up the Ranks

To date, ROC2025 has secured pledges and commitments totaling \$11.3M in support of its multi-year capacity building plan, and its partners have already invested nearly \$2.8M in the regional priorities identified above. Combined with the continued support from NYS and the FLREDC for hundreds of key projects, the approach is working. Compared nationally to its 53-metro benchmark group, ROC2025 made progress closing the performance gap between the Greater Rochester region and its peer metros, achieving increased rankings on several key metrics in its first two years.

Peer Group Rankings

JOBS: Up 8 points

LABOR FORCE: Up 17 points

REGIONAL GDP: Up 26 points

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: Up 6 points

PRIVATE ESTABLISHMENTS: Up 5 points

A NEW STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Economic Justice

This year, FLREDC adopted one significant change to its regional strategy: a heightened priority on Economic Justice to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion within our regional economy. FLREDC has always worked to expand economic opportunities for all, but more needs to be done as historic and structural disparities continue to undermine our regional goals—and more importantly—a thriving future for all our residents. To amplify this new regional strategic priority, a section dedicated to Economic Justice appears later in this report. We also incorporated this cross-cutting priority into our regional strategic framework graphic to illustrate its role in the FLX Forward strategic plan.

[House graphic with caption]

The FLREDC framework includes **GOALS** with defined metrics to measure our progress; industrial **PILLARS** that strengthen and contribute to our economy’s comprehensive nature, interconnectivity, and interdependence; and **ENABLERS** vital to the fueling our success—all built on a **FOUNDATION** that reinforces the things that make our region a wonderful place to live, work, and play.

iv. Projects That Advance Our Strategy

Many projects and initiatives serve to implement the FLREDC’s regional strategies. This section highlights some of those, organized using the largest NYS funding initiative—the Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI)—and the ROC2025 priority focus areas.

Upstate Revitalization Initiative: Finger Lakes Forward

By spring 2019, the FLREDC had nearly committed all the \$500 million funding to approximately 100 projects from the NYS URI. This commitment was made more than a year ahead of the five-

year target and the projects funded represented some of the largest and most impactful to achieving the goals of the Finger Lakes Forward strategy.

Over the past two years, progress on many of the URI-funded projects has continued, while others have not yet come to fruition, and some have been cancelled. The full list of projects statuses is listed at the end of this report. Below are updates on some of the signature URI initiatives.

AIM Photonics

The **American Institute for Manufacturing Integrated Photonics (AIM Photonics)** is now fully operational across all its national consortium partners, including its primary facilities at **SUNY Polytechnic's Albany NanoTech Complex** and the **Test, Assembly, and Packaging (TAP)** facility at Rochester's Eastman Business Park. The operational milestone, which occurred in 2019, achieves the Department of Defense's primary program goal of building a US based, integrated photonics, "Eco System."

Several events have occurred recently, including the development of an advanced "integrated photonic" COVID Sensor led by the University of Rochester, enabled by AIM, and includes local companies Ortho Clinical Diagnostics and Syntec Optical. Also, in collaboration with RIT and MIT, more than 4000 people around the world have signed up and have been trained in AIM Academy's on-line Photonic Integrated Chip (PIC) design course. The worldwide participation in the course has demonstrated the global interest in integrated photonics technology. Providing fabrication and packaging support to companies as they move from concept to market is an important aspect of the Integrated Photonic Eco System. A local company has recently licensed integrated photonic technology enabling their launch of a key new product.

The recent appointment of Dr. Tod Laursen, acting SUNY Poly president, will replace FLREDC Co-Chair Bob Duffy as the new AIM Leadership Council Chair. Also, the customer base utilizing the capabilities at the TAP facility continues to expand. Growth in Academic, Government and Industry users has been realized. The TAP facility, which is capable of microelectronic packaging in addition to integrated photonic packaging, is in the former Eastman Kodak research building that was sold in 2020 by ON Semiconductor to FabExchange, a global leader in cleanroom infrastructure. FabExchange will work with AIM to ensure long-term viability of TAP and attract other tenants the building.

Nearing the end of its five-year federal contract, AIM recently received a sole source "Request for Proposal" in June 2021 for a seven year follow on award from the U.S. Department of Defense. This follow-on award will enable the R&D and commercialization work to continue as integrated photonic technologies and associated products continue to evolve.

ROC the Riverway

The City of Rochester, in partnership with the FLREDC and several NYS agencies, continue to implement Governor Cuomo's \$50 million investment in the ROC the Riverway initiative, which consolidated dozens of waterfront project ideas into a single connective vision for revitalizing the

Genesee River corridor through downtown Rochester. ROC the Riverway is helping fuel the local economy by enhancing major assets that will attract people, jobs, and investment – and renew Rochester’s identity as a vibrant community.

The ROC City Skatepark opened to fanfare in November 2020. The \$3.1M project alongside the Genesee Riverway Trail under the Frederick Douglass-Susan B. Anthony Bridge includes mini-ramps and ledges, stairs and handrails, competition bowls and a main skate promenade, along with opportunities for public art and performances.

Other completed projects include the **Genesee Riverway Trail through Center City** and the **Joseph A. Floreano Rochester Riverside Convention Center North Terrace**. Per the plan, significant upgrades to major facilities along the river, including more at the convention center, and the **Rundel Memorial Library** continue to progress through phases of procurement, engineering, design, and construction. The major redesign of **Charles Carroll Plaza** and **Genesee Crossroads Park** is underway should be complete in 2023.

Corn Hill Navigation continues to work with the City and State to put a sightseeing in rotation on the Genesee River and hope to launch it by next summer.

West River Wall construction to maintain necessary flood protection and naturalize much of the shoreline between Corn Hill Landing and Ford Street began in August 2020. A new public landing opposite Fitzhugh Place will better connect the Corn Hill neighborhood to the river to calm traffic and create a more pedestrian-friendly space.

Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial first-phase improvements at the multi-purpose facility on Exchange Boulevard are complete. The audio/visual system, public restroom improvements, concourse concession area enhancements, and a new locker room suite/dressing room space for large productions will enhance the patron experience. Designs for phase two, which received \$6 million in state funding through the Finger Lakes Forward URI, continue to move forward and include an exterior river terrace at the facility, opening the building to views of the river, as well as additional renovations to the arena's dated infrastructure.

More possibilities for ROC the Riverway

Development plans are underway to renovate the vacant, historic **Aqueduct Building** complex for modern mixed-use. The pre-pandemic closure of the **Riverside Hotel** on East Main Street at the river means this marquee property re-opened to include a hotel that will also serve the Rochester Riverside Convention Center. Incredible opportunities also exist to expand public ownership and access to the **High Falls** area as a potential public park with a visitor center and direct access to the land within the river gorge.

The City and State continue to work with local stakeholders to structure an entity to manage many of the ROC the Riverway projects, as well as existing programs and projects on the Genesee

River. With a community work group in place, officials hope to have an entity up and running as more projects come online.

[RTR Milestone Infographic with caption] The ROC the Riverway Program consolidates more than two dozen transformational projects along the Genesee River into a unified strategy. More progress happens every day around this natural asset that throughout history has been central to our region's economic growth.

Finger Lakes Venture Fund exceed its targeted goals. Managed by Excell Technology Ventures, the fund has invested \$7.5M in 16 companies to date. The required match over the 10-year life of the fund is \$38.5M. Excell has already logged \$55.8M from private co-investors, representing an 8:1 leverage ratio against a targeted goal of 2:1. These 16 companies created 220 new jobs; over 50% also project adding more new jobs. In addition, the Fund realized a successful exit when Heart Health Technologies (HHI), a telehealth company with technology from both RIT and UR, was sold to Casana with Austin McChord (Founder/CEO of Datto) stepping in as the startup's new CEO.

Grow-NY, the agriculture and food business competition that spans the Finger Lakes, Central NY and Southern Tier regions, is now in its 3rd year and participants continue to increase their employment, increase their sales, and bring value to the Grow-NY community. Real Eats, the first top prize winner of 2019, has increased its sales by 250% and has grown to 75 employees and has created 100 indirect jobs in the Grow-NY region. The other Grow-NY winners have already added 75 direct jobs to their payroll in NYS.

Luminate NY continues to be the world's largest business accelerator for startup firms in the optics, photonics, and imaging industries and is now in its 4th cohort, attracting a larger number of companies and global interest this year despite the pandemic. The Luminate accelerator, located at NextCorps in downtown Rochester, helps promising optics and photonics companies advance their technologies and businesses through a community of resources, including financial support. In June 2021, two past winners, Sun Density and Circle Optics announced they will both be expanding by 60 new jobs each in the heart of Rochester's Downtown Innovation zone.

The Strong National Museum of Play, one of the most significant tourist attractions in the Finger Lakes Region, is in the middle of its major, multi-year expansion and the associated Neighborhood of Play. Enabled by the filling of the Inner Loop's east section, The Strong is adding a 90,000 square foot addition that will nearly double its size and the number of visitors it attracts annually. In April 2021, The Strong celebrated the completion of Phase 1, which is a massive, yet whimsically colorful, parking garage to serve the museum and the new Neighborhood of Play, which has already seen the completion and full leasing of over 230 market-rate units at Vida apartments and the current construction of a new Hampton Inn hotel next door. All told, The Strong and Neighborhood of Play will invest over \$150 million into this neighborhood and continue to serve as the region's top tourist destination.

The Rochester Data Science Consortium (RDSC) leverages the data science expertise and high-performance computing resources at UR to provide businesses and organizations with cutting-edge data science services and solutions. Since 2018, this URI-funded consortium has created 170 new data science jobs at the university. RDSC works with various organizations of different sizes and from several industries to help them improve their products and services with data analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and cloud computing. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, RDSC partnered with Common Ground Health to provide real-time community insights related to COVID-19. Currently, RDSC is working with local startup **WexEnergy Innovation** to optimize its product algorithm for improved energy efficiency. In addition, **L3Harris, Carestream, and URMC** are among the leading employers in the region working with RDSC on several projects related to imaging, machine learning, and cloud computing.

IEC Electronics is a manufacturer of electronic components and solutions based in Wayne County for over 50 years. In 2019 they broke ground on a new 150,000 square foot facility in the Town of Newark that opened in early 2021. Combined with their existing facility nearby in Newark, this new project will enable IEC to both retain over 400 existing jobs and create another 350 more.

Monroe County Systems Integration Project (SIP) at United Way of Greater Rochester is a community-wide initiative focused on transforming service delivery, supported by innovative technology. SIP's 360-degree digital dashboard coordinates an individual's needs with services provided by a diverse network of nonprofits, individuals, vendors, and government agencies. Over the past year, SIP partnered with hundreds of organizations and individuals to distribute PPE to frontline staff and prevent COVID-related evictions. Current pilots in development focus on employment navigation and youth behavioral health. Well on its way to engaging 10,000 diverse individuals in the development process, SIP will be fully implemented in March 2024. Its success will empower residents to advocate for their health and well-being and easily access confidential and person-center solutions. SIP will also ensure our community invests in programs and services that support positive outcomes for those they serve.

Regional Talent Strategy

As the lead in talent related activities in the community's **ROC2025** initiative, the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce focuses on programs and initiatives that will drive talent to the Greater Rochester region, engage and elevate the existing residents, and make the connection between employer and job seeker a fruitful, positive experience.

Campus ROC is a new [one-stop hub](#) for Greater Rochester's college students and alumni from our 19 regional colleges and universities to discover why #GreaterROC is the best place to live, work, and play as a student and graduate. CampusROC seeks to engage with students in the #GreaterROC region to bring them together for special events, personal and professional development, networking, and social engagement. We strive for our students to fall in love and choose #GreaterROC post-graduation.

College Fest will be inaugural annual event for college students curated to deliver the five best hours of their life in Rochester. The event features an internship alley for regional organizations, restaurant hunts for exploring the neighborhood, live music from student performers, games, competitions and activities, raffles, and downtown employer spotlights.

Greater ROC Careers is a new regional career [portal](#) is designed to make the connectivity between Greater Rochester employers and individuals looking for a career in the area a friendly, easy-to-use alternative to finding a great job. It is free for regional employers to post jobs, showcase their organization and search the database of job seekers. Individuals looking for a career can upload credentials, apply to positions on-line, sign up for career alerts, and tap into job search tools as well as community resources.

ROC Remote is new regional talent strategy currently under design that will incent fully remote workers who have the option to work from any location, to choose the Greater Rochester Region as their place to live, work, and call home.

Veterans Connect Initiative links transitioning soldiers to employment, housing, and related services in Greater Rochester through a sustained program that emphasizes employer engagement and connectivity, relocation support, and family assistance.

Innovation Square construction moved forward for this exciting urban campus where higher education students will live, learn, and innovate. Set in the former Xerox Tower in the heart of Rochester's downtown, this project aligns with **Campus ROC** and will welcome students from area colleges including **University of Rochester (UR)**, **Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT)**, **Nazareth College**, **St. John Fisher College (SJFC)**, and **SUNY College at Brockport** starting in Fall 2021.

UR graduated 100 medical students early in 2020, with many of them now serving our community. They also worked with the State to move their nursing students into the workforce more quickly to meet the anticipated need.

The Golisano Institute for Developmental Disability Nursing at SJFC began accepting applications for its inaugural Golisano Fellowship in Developmental Disability Nursing (ID/DD), a 12-month program designed to develop nursing thought leaders who support and promote the health and well-being of persons with ID/DD across their lifespan and settings.

SUNY Brockport announced its new **Community Justice degree** in January, the first of its kind in the nation to apply an anthropological approach to the criminological pursuit of justice. Educating students about how societal systems interact with personal histories to create different realities for different people is key for cultivating careers in advocacy and human rights, the legal or law enforcement fields, humanitarian and community workers, and forensic specialists. The college also launched its first doctoral program—**Doctor in Nursing Practice**—this spring to answer the growing demand for DNP-prepared nurses. The curricula build on traditional master's programs by providing content in evidence-based practice, quality improvement, and systems leadership,

among other key areas to meet the changing demands of the nation's complex healthcare environment and assure quality patient outcomes.

Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) is home to the Community College Undergraduate Research Initiative (CCURI), a successful model for undergraduate research that is grounded in a case study methodology that engages students in deep conceptual understanding and exposes students to ongoing CCURI research projects. Students then explore research opportunities through instruction that can be employed at the course-level (Course Undergraduate Research Experience-CURE), program-level (Program Undergraduate Research Experience-PURE), or through a summer program (Summer Undergraduate Research Experience-SURE). The third component of the CCURI model connects students to the research community so they have opportunities to present findings at conferences and can transfer to four-year research institutions to pursue STEM degrees.

Business Retention and Expansion

Pearl Technologies, an industrial cutter manufacturer, finalized plans to renovate and upgrade its Seneca Street headquarters and manufacturing facilities in the Town of Savannah, Wayne County. The project will facilitate the production of industrial knives replacing manufacturing that is currently being outsourced overseas and create 60 new jobs here.

Assured Edge Solutions custom vegetable processing and co-packing company plans to grow its manufacturing operations at the Cornell Agriculture and Food Technology Park in the City of Geneva. Moving into the new space will allow the innovative company to create and retain jobs. Assured Edge Solutions expects to be operational in the new space in the fall of 2021.

Mosaic Microsystems, a Rochester-based microelectronics and photonics packaging company, received a \$250,000 investment commitment from New York Ventures, the venture capital arm of Empire State Development. A total of \$2.4 million in funding was raised in this round, led by strategic investors **Samtec** and **Corning Incorporated**.

Premier Packaging Corporation, part of a growing ecosystem packaging companies, will move into a 105,000 square-foot, newly constructed facility located in Wiregrass Business Park in the Town of Henrietta, Monroe County and create 40 new jobs. The company provides paper board packaging to some of the country's largest digital photo finishing, food packaging, and medical device companies.

ABX Innovative Packaging Solutions (ABX), a flexible packaging firm, will grow its operations by 40 new jobs in the Town of Macedon, Wayne County. The company will purchase new equipment and undertake infrastructure improvements to accommodate the expansion of its green solution flexible packaging manufacturing operation.

ProAmpac, a leading flexible packaging manufacturer, began building a 25,000- square-foot addition at its existing facility to establish an innovation center in the Town of Ogden, Monroe County. The center will focus on packaging development and design and host events and training for regional and global consumer packaged goods companies and vendors.

Pace Electronics, an electronics contract manufacturer, will expand its operations in the Town of Williamson, Wayne County and construct a new 55,000 square-foot facility. The expansion will allow the company to retain and create more than 40 jobs.

Carestream began a \$3 million expansion of its film finishing operations at Eastman Business Park in the City of Rochester. Phase one includes the addition of 16,000 square-feet of space at its current location, the purchase of new machinery and support upgrades to the buildings' utility infrastructure, dark rooms, packaging lines and the addition of a new wet lab.

Business Attraction

Greater Rochester Enterprise (GRE) leads the regionals targeted attraction efforts and had 34 projects wins in 2020 totaling \$554 million of capital investment by the companies, 2,152 new jobs, and 1,582 jobs retained. From January to June 2021, there are 19 more wins totaling \$902 million of new capital investment by the companies, 1,809 new jobs, and 758 jobs retained.

AMS, a leading supplier of high-performance sensor solutions worldwide, will build an imaging center of excellence producing state-of-the-art consumer image sensors and product validation to support key US customers. The new R&D and design center will expand the Austrian company's connection with nearby RIT and other tech startups in the region at the beautifully reimagined Riverwood Tech Campus, which also includes companies like Alstom, Innovative Solutions, Pharos, Token, and others that have made this former Kodak facility a unique and inspiring home for their future endeavors.

Fuel cell and battery technology is an industry space that has been a strength and strategic focus and this past year has brought some incredible new projects to the region:

Plug Power, a leading alternative energy technology provider will invest \$290 million in the construction of a state-of-the-art green hydrogen fuel production facility and electric substation at the Western New York Science and Technology Advanced Manufacturing Park (STAMP) located in the Town of Alabama, Genesee County. As the first build at the site, the company will fund the construction of a 450-megawatt electric substation to support its expansion, as well as future growth opportunities at the business park. The company also announced plans for a \$125 million Innovation Center in the Town of Henrietta, Monroe County, which will be the world's first Gigafactory for Proton Exchange Membrane technology to power a variety of electric vehicles.

HYZON Motors, a next generation fuel cell heavy vehicle supplier established by Asia-based Horizon Fuel Cell Technologies, announced plans to renovate 78,000 square-feet of existing building space on Quaker Meeting House Road to fast track its growth in the Village of Honeoye Falls, Monroe County.

Li-Cycle Incorporated, a North America based lithium-ion battery resource recovery company, will further grow its operations in New York State. The company will invest over \$175 million dollars in a lithium-ion battery recycling 'Hub' on a 15.4-acre land parcel at Eastman Business Park (EBP).

National consumer brands major job development projects happening in Rochester. Construction of three **Amazon** facilities to handle last mile delivery, mid-mile sorting, and large robotic fulfillment will bring over 1,100 jobs to the area. A new customer center from **T-Mobile** will add 1300 jobs.

Downtown Growth and Innovation

Rochester Downtown Development Corporation (RDDC) currently tracks \$744.3 million in the downtown development pipeline. Massive residential conversions—including mixed-income projects to welcome underserved populations—continue to breathe life into underutilized or vacant downtown buildings—56 completed or in process—in downtown Rochester, which more than 7,780 people call home. With 19 additional projects underway adding 1,379 new housing units, RDDC anticipates another wave of residents will move in, yielding a downtown population of more than 10,000 by 2023.

With downtown sitting in the middle of one of the poorest cities in the country, REDC recognizes that successful downtowns are diverse places and should feel like they belong to everyone. To that end, many of the new housing projects downtown are either mixed income or target specific underserved populations.

Downtown living fuels the organic growth of the **Downtown Innovation Zone (DIZ)**, an unconventional business sector of innovation and creative class enterprises. This sector continues to absorb downtown's loss of more traditional office space tenancy, occupying a range of spaces including large footprints in conventional office towers, edgy urban lofts, business incubators, and coworking spaces. In August 2019, the DIZ had 99 innovation and technology companies and 91 creative class enterprises. A handful of existing companies grew rapidly throughout the pandemic, including **Datto**, **CGI Communications**, **LiveTiles**, **VisualDx**, **Brand Networks**, and **Second Avenue Learning**. By the end of 2019, the DIZ also became home to **Blackbird.AI**, **Catalant Technologies**, **Boundless Connections**, **Digital Hyve**, **ITX**, **Mindex**, **Sitehub**, and **Workinman**.

Five business incubators are up and running or under development: **NextCorps**, **Luminate**, **RIT Center for Urban Entrepreneurship (RIT CUE)**, **Roc Game Dev**, and **The Commissary**. In addition, eight coworking spaces opened downtown and a ninth anticipated by the end of 2019. Both RIT

CUE and The Commissary focus on engaging entrepreneurs from disadvantaged zip codes and backgrounds to support DEI.

NextCorps received a federal grant of \$743,000 from the Economic Development Administration to launch a new software accelerator program to help idea-stage software entrepreneurs go from concept to revenue in less than 12 months—no coding experience required. Run by multiple-time software startup founder, Matt Foley, the flexible, hybrid educational program will teach entrepreneurs how to evaluate and validate their business ideas and use no-code development tools to build prototypes. Student interns from **UR** and **RIT** will work alongside program participants. Local software and professional services companies will mentor and assist participants, including **Datto, Live Tiles, ITX Corp, Innovative Solutions, Armory Square Ventures, Bonadio Group, Nixon Peabody, T4 Verge, Rivet CX, One Spark, VisibleMR, Advise.us,** and **FocusGroupIt. Excell Partners** will provide venture capital and investment training.

Calero-MDSL technology expense management company officially opened its new headquarters in downtown Rochester in October, committing to create up to 100 new jobs over the next five years. The new space includes a clean, modern, and open work design that gives teammates a vibrant, comfortable, and safe environment in which to return to work.

The Digital Game Industry Association of Rochester (DGIA) formed this past year to engage Rochester's unique talent and institutional assets and be a player in this fastest-growing sub-sector of tech worldwide. DGIA engages digital game studios, **RIT's MAGIC Center, The Strong National Museum of Play, RDDC,** and the **City of Rochester, the Eastman School of Music's Beale Institute,** and **Roc Game Dev,** the region's first indie game developer coworking and incubation space.

Eastman School of Music's Leadership Institute fuels "Arts in the Loop," a community-based initiative designed to energize downtown by leveraging the arts, entertainment, media, and technology sectors to activate a more vibrant street experience in the core of the center city.

To address the infrastructure issues that accompany downtown growth, **ROC2025** funded the creation of a **21st century parking strategy** that embraces the coming trends and shifting downtown market realities, including the continuing privatization of public parking garages, impact of Uber and Lyft, generational shifts in car usage, and the advent of self-driving cars.

Regional Branding and Marketing

GreaterROC, a bold and audacious regional place-brand media campaign launched to tell our story and serve as the basis for an in-region and external marketing campaign extolling Greater Rochester's incredible assets and all it offers.

Visit Rochester launched a media campaign in the Capital and Hudson Valley regions promoting the region as a family-friendly destination scores of unique and beautiful resources within a 50-

mile radius. Interest was strong, with nearly 8 million impressions, more than 2 million completed video views on social platforms and connected TV, and more than 60,000 click-throughs to the campaign landing page.

The Lake House on Canandaigua opened in the middle of a global pandemic to amazing recognition, including the 2021 'It List' from Travel + Leisure. Located next door to NY Kitchen, the partnership of the two entities elevates tourism in the heart of the Finger Lakes.

Irondequoit Bay State Marine Park resiliency projects to repair damage sustained from historic flooding in 2019 are complete. Also finished are modifications to **Culver Road** that will reduce the potential for road closure during high water events. Funding came from the Lake Ontario Resiliency and Economic Development Initiative (REDI).

Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery, located on the grounds of the former Sampson Naval Training Station and Sampson Air Force Base site in Romulus, Seneca County, will be the first official state veterans cemetery in New York. The site is one of the most historically significant military sites in the Finger Lakes Region, having served more than 1 million servicemen and women.

Frontier Field improvements are underway to meet new Major League Baseball standards set for 120 affiliate league teams, including the Rochester Red Wings. The requirements include larger clubhouses for home and visiting teams, better field lighting, and improved training facilities for players.

Seneca Park Zoo completed plans for its Trailside Café, slated to break ground in June 2021, when the final phase of its master plan begins. Phase One of the zoo's expansion received a \$1.5 million grant from Empire State Development in 2015.

b. Statewide Priorities

Over the last 10 years the FLREDC has helped address many statewide priority initiatives. Much of that work continues, but this year's FLREDC annual report includes detailed updates on a few: Workforce Development (including associated barriers like childcare and broadband/digital access), Life Sciences, Downtown Placemaking, and Environmental Justice (as included in the new Economic Justice section later in this report).

i. Workforce

As the Finger Lakes economy reopens and recovers from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, aligning training, education, and workforce development efforts with the skills needed for in-demand jobs remains our region's central strategy. And as the economy changes and occupations require more technical skill and greater educational attainment, we're faced with a need to efficiently reskill workers at a larger scale, with an objective to train and place learners in good-

paying jobs within high-demand sectors where they will be less vulnerable to future displacement, and where persistent vacancies within industry are able to be filled.

FLREDC supports the collaborative efforts of industry sector stakeholders, educational institutions, community-based organizations, workforce development boards, and government agencies to define career pathways to provide skilled workers for the high-demand sectors of our economy and ensure future economic growth in our region.

Progress

A combination of traditional and new sub-strategies that benefit employers and workers gained increased importance in the Finger Lakes Region to move the economy forward in our tight labor market. FLREDC supports the following initiatives to ensure our regional workforce and employers can contribute to a full and robust economic recovery.

Support employer-based training

The 2019 Workforce Development hosted by FLREDC identified the creation of employer-based training programs as a key strategy that benefits employers by customizing training to their specific skill needs and workers through an earn-while-you-learn approach to skill development. Examples include **on-the-job training, apprenticeships, clinical experiences, co-ops, and internships**. To create these programs, FLREDC encourages employers to apply for funds and incentives available through the **Workforce Development Initiative (WDI)** and the **New York State Department of Labor incentives**.

Successful employer-based programs such as **G.W. Lisk's Advanced Manufacturing Machinist Training Program** and **Isaac Heating & Air Conditioning's ITEC training offerings** provide pathways to well-paying careers, as do the 50-plus area companies and training providers awarded funding through the state's **WDI**.

Building on traditional apprenticeship programs in construction and other skilled trades that remain vitally important in the region, expanding **apprenticeship programs into non-traditional sectors** such as health care, IT, food service, and other industries is crucial to growing our post-pandemic economy.

Improving diversity in employer-based training programs remains an important goal of the FLREDC. The **Multi-Craft Apprenticeship Preparation Program (ROC MAPP)** brings historically disadvantaged populations into the construction and building trades. **Foodlink's Career Fellowship**, the first culinary New York State registered apprenticeship training program, welcomed its third apprentice group last year. A long-time supporter of Foodlink's fight against food insecurity and poverty, FLREDC supported the nonprofit's successful CFA funding applications to create its commercial kitchen at its Mt. Read Boulevard site in Rochester and a WDI funding award for the Career Fellowship program. This program was critical to Foodlink's pandemic relief efforts, providing meal production for people in need.

Encourage Business/K–12 Partnerships

The Finger Lakes is a statewide leader in Business/K-12 partnerships, another key strategy identified at the summit. Solving our skills gap will rely on strengthening these partnerships and expanding them to all sectors of the regional economy.

Creating awareness among our middle- and high-school students of the hundreds of available in-demand jobs and career opportunities helps prime the talent pipeline by encouraging local students to explore future job opportunities in their own backyards. To that end, the **Finger Lakes Advanced Manufacturers' Enterprise annual meeting** brings together educators and employers to discuss career pathways and brainstorm ways for businesses and the K–12 system to work more closely together. The **Genesee F.A.S.T.** program connects students to in-demand careers in food processing, advanced manufacturing, skilled trades, and technology fields through several programs. **GLOW With Your Hands** is a program that showcases dozens of career opportunities for hundreds of students with hands-on demonstrations. Similar efforts take place in our region's eastern counties through **Finger Lakes Works With Their Hands**, and **Rochester Careers in Construction Day** in Monroe County.

Garnering local and national attention is the Rochester Technology and Manufacturing Association's (RTMA) **Finger Lakes Youth Apprenticeship Program** that connects area high school juniors and seniors with job shadowing, paid co-ops, and Matching Day events at local advanced manufacturers. RTMA partners with area schools, including our region's excellent BOCES programs and the Rochester City School District's Edison Career & Technology High School to provide these opportunities to area students.

Improve job readiness skills

Job readiness shows up at or near the top of nearly every employer's list and is also a top concern of education and workforce development professionals. Cognitive skills such as basic reading, writing, math, and problem solving are important for employees as they enter the workforce and begin a career, but so are "soft-skills" like time management and punctuality, ability to work well with others in a team setting, being ready to learn, and accepting instruction and direction. In fact, these life skills are often a main determinant of career success.

Job training programs such as the **Young Adult Manufacturing Training Employment Program (YAMTEP)**, and ROC MAPP's Project Phoenix include strong job readiness components. Youth employment programs such as **Rochester Works' Summer Youth Employment Program**, the **City of Rochester's Summer of Opportunity Program**, **BOCES co-ops and internships**, and other programs throughout the region help young people gain valuable experience in the life skills necessary to successfully navigate the world of work.

Post-Pandemic Challenges

With all that works in the Finger Lakes Region, challenges remain, especially as the region begins to build back better following the pandemic's economic impacts.

Finding Job Applicants and Skilled Labor

The region quickly returned to a pre-pandemic problem facing area employers: difficulty finding workers needed to grow their businesses, or in some cases, returning to staffing levels experienced before March 2020. At that time, the regional unemployment rate was 4.6%, and by April 2020, it hit 16%. The area went from historically low unemployment rates to historically high unemployment rates in a few short weeks.

As the region builds back, the unemployment rate continues to trend downward, and now sits at 4.8% as of this writing. At the same time, there are thousands of job openings in the Finger Lakes Region.

Many of these job openings require trained, skilled technicians with various competencies. The Monroe Community College (MCC) Future of the Technician Workforce Study documented this need in the region's burgeoning advanced manufacturing, optics and imaging, and tech sectors. Local companies need workers skilled in coding, data analysis, cybersecurity, and many other technological skills. Education and training programs in the region must continue to align to meet growing industry demand. The **Rochester Institute of Technology's Cybersecurity Bootcamp**, which trains people with or without prior coding or IT experience in the skills needed for positions in IT and computer systems security, is an example.

While economists, employers, and workforce professionals point to several factors impacting the challenge to finding job applicants and skilled labor, two were exacerbated by the pandemic and will continue to impede workers' access to the labor market: **the need for stable, affordable, and accessible childcare** and **the growing digital divide** in the Finger Lakes Region.

Childcare: Our economy cannot fully recover, and families cannot fully return to work without it. Last year, child care programs, including afterschool and summer care, faced extraordinary financial and operational hardships due to COVID-19, placing the already economically fragile childcare sector on the verge of collapse. In fact, 96 child care programs closed in Monroe County since the start of the pandemic, accounting for nearly 15% of all programs active in April 2020. Particularly significant are losses in the City of Rochester, where licensed capacity was down by 18% since April 2020.

Parents in rural counties reported that COVID made an already bad situation even worse. Providers operated on slim margins during the best of times: reduced enrollment during the pandemic, combined with new costs related to implementing COVID-related health and safety standards, threatened the viability of many businesses.

With companies and schools fully reopening, the childcare sector has fewer slots for children, given the multitude of closures. A recent statewide survey found 74% of NY parents say afterschool school-age care helps them KEEP their jobs. Currently, there are not enough afterschool or summer slots in NYS. Recent survey data ([Afterschool Alliance](#)) reflects that for every child in an afterschool program, four are on a waiting list.

An example of a successful quality child care program in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic is the **Greater Rochester Summer Learning Association (GRSLA)**. United Way Community Impact Funded partner, GRSLA provided a five-week, evidence-based remote summer enrichment program to ensure 129 rising kindergarteners in low-income families would be ready for school in the fall. Staff made weekly front porch visits to families and dropped off a total of 744 Science-at-Home and Play-at-Home kits, books, \$45,000 in basic needs gift cards, and 2,064 books. Also, staff performed wellness checks and communicated with families via phone and text, provided 14 interactive Zoom sessions, and created 21 pre-recorded YouTube videos. Each family received a “Front Porch Portrait” as a remembrance of the program participation. This program built upon past successful programs funded with URI dollars. UWGR facilitated program funding through the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

The Digital Divide: Virtual job search and training services exploded during the pandemic, demonstrating their capability, flexibility, and speed to support workforce development strategies in the Finger Lakes Region.

Virtual job fair platforms hosted by local employers, Workforce Development Boards, and the state’s Department of Labor helped workers find jobs. Local and statewide **virtual training platforms** such as **Finger Lakes Works’ SkillUp Finger Lakes** (705 course completions), the **Workforce Development Institute’s Future Skills Exchange**, the **New York State Department of Labor’s partnership with Coursera** (1,200 regional participants), and **SUNY for All** helped workers enhance their skillsets. Synchronous online learning through **Finger Lakes Community College** accelerated home health aide and CNA training remotely to New York City workers during the height of the pandemic.

However, vulnerable families in our region had limited or no access to these job training and employment opportunities, as well as telehealth, online instruction for their children, and access to critical social services. Many households in the Finger Lakes Region—where Rochester’s poverty rate of 31.3% places it third on the list of the 10 poorest U.S. metropolitan areas—cannot afford sufficient bandwidth and connected devices or lack access altogether. Research from **ROC the Future** (June 2021) shows that counties and census tracts have multiple broadband providers yet, depending on the county, 21%–33% of households have either cell only or no internet service and 11%–24% of households own either a smartphone only or no device at all. Furthermore, a significant portion of the urban and rural population throughout the Finger Lakes Region resides in areas with deficient broadband speeds and cell phone signals.

Pre-pandemic, many residents relied on public schools, library systems, places of worship, and even coffee shops for access. Post pandemic, it’s clear that addressing the need for affordable high-speed internet—which has increasingly become a necessity akin to basic infrastructure like clean water systems, roads, and bridges—is essential to connecting distressed communities with opportunity. It’s also essential for driving business growth and job creation across all sectors throughout the region.

In addition to the Governor’s Broadband for All initiative, two public/private partnerships provide a solid beginning towards ensuring that those who lack computer hardware, computer skills, and broadband access to participate in our economy are not left behind.

In March 2021, Monroe County Executive Adam Bello announced the creation of the **Monroe County Advisory Task Force on Broadband** to assist in the County’s development of a Community Access Plan for High-Speed Internet. The task force will identify barriers to service, examine public and private sector roles in providing high-speed internet services, and seek partnerships to ensure that any County plans to expand broadband access align with New York State and regional goal.

In December 2020, the **Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition** membership—predominantly regional public library systems—adopted a strategic plan. Its action items support the formation of community partnerships to advocate for digital Inclusion through intentional strategies and investments that will reduce and eliminate historical institutional and structural barriers to access and use technology.

The FLREDC [2020 Economic Recovery Report](#) includes the extensive recommendations to address these underpinning workforce issues. Thanks to the many community stakeholders on the FLREDC Childcare and Digital Divide work groups convened with help from UWGR and NYS Assemblyman Harry Bronson.

Economic success includes all people as the economy grows, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability status. Yet, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in our region experience consistently higher rates of unemployment and lower wages than their white peers. The same disparities hold true for those with disabilities. As we discuss in greater detail in the Economic Justice section of this report, our community must work together to break down systemic and institutional inequities that hold people back and hinder our collective economic growth.

Support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Businesses in the Finger Lakes Region and across the state want a diverse workforce. It’s not only the right thing to do ethically, but it also makes economic sense. The 2020 McKinsey & Company report [Diversity Matters](#) [link] documents improvements in financial performance among companies with diverse workforces. Yet, many employers have difficulty attracting and retaining diverse employees. We need to assist our employers in this endeavor by promoting tools and strategies that increase the pipeline of diverse candidates, encouraging inclusion and cultural competency in the workplace to retain these workers. A specific list of tools and strategies can be found in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion section of the appendix.

Recruiting a diverse workforce is one thing, but retaining that workforce is another. Or as McKinsey states “it’s the workplace experience that shapes whether people remain and thrive.” Companies in the Finger Lakes Region intent on creating and retaining a diverse workforce are

hiring Diversity, Equity & Inclusion managers, directors, or chief officers; promoting mentorship and buddy programs for new hires to help diverse candidates navigate the workplace; and are taking a close look at company culture to assess how receptive their organizations are to people of different backgrounds and identities.

It's important to note that diversity includes people with disabilities. While gains were made in employment among New Yorkers with disabilities in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate for the disabled soared during the pandemic and remains much higher than that of non-disabled New Yorkers. High unemployment also translates to high poverty rates for people with disabilities. As hiring increases with the re-opening of the regional economy, and as the community works to diversify its labor force and break down barriers to employment, we must include people with disabilities.

Supportive services

In many ways, the pandemic highlighted barriers to employment that workers, especially the working poor, need to overcome to move into successful employment and careers, and out of poverty. Childcare, high-speed Internet, transportation, workplace wellness programs like Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), and life skills like financial literacy remain important areas to address. Too often, these barriers force trainees out of jobs and training programs—if they can enroll in the first place.

FLREDC champions worker retention efforts that assist trainees with critical needs that continue through training and into job placement. Increasingly community-based organizations and training providers offer follow-up job coaching services to help companies retain trained workers. The **Greyston Center for Open Hiring Rochester** opened its doors last summer and utilizes a successful model of support following job placement. The **Employer Resource Network** through **Heritage Christian Services** offers similar supports, as does **ACCES-VR's Worker Retention Service**.

Construction on **Monroe Community College's FWD Center** downtown begins this summer. A key economic and workforce development project of FLREDC and Monroe County, the center will be a catalyst in developing the workforce for our region's economy while expanding public and private sector partnerships that will collaboratively bolster the creation of a larger pool of technician talent.

New rapid training, retraining, and upskilling programs will include fundamentals of automation, robotics, mechatronics, as well as industrial-focused smart and information technology. The FWD Center design will grow and adapt to the changing and emergent technologies that drive future work environments within advanced manufacturing, information technology, health care, skilled trades apprenticeship, and professional services. An additional focus will be on **skilled trade and youth apprenticeships** to address the variety of industrial and trades-based talent regional businesses need. MCC's Economic and Workforce Development Center will augment FWD Center program offerings and provide **entry-level job training in health care and professional services**. To grow the educational pipeline, an **early college program model** will focus on exposing high

school students to the advanced smart technologies that they will likely encounter early in their career.

The FWD Center will be a true regional workforce model. An ongoing dialogue with industry while intentionally developing strong partnerships and joint ventures with regional workforce organizations, industry associations and educational institutions will guide operational and programming decisions. Currently, planned FWD Center partners include **Genesee Community College, Finger Lakes Community College, BOCES, RIT, UNICON, Rochester Technology and Manufacturing Association, GRE, NYS Department of Labor, RochesterWorks!, and Monroe County.**

Mpower, a partnership between **MCC** and **Monroe County Economic Development (COMIDA)**, leverages flexible funding to recruit, train, and place workers quickly into the most in-demand careers in the region with a focus on short-cycle training. The program also helps displaced workers, career-changers, and under-skilled workers move into high-demand, self-sustaining jobs through customized training tailored to the employer's needs. Mpower also connects workers with much-need career counseling, childcare, transportation assistance, and food support services in the community.

The **Genesee F.A.S.T.** program, previously mentioned in this report, aligns Genesee County's K-12 system, the region's higher education institutions, and non-credit programs to provide rapid skills training to job seekers to meet the needs of employers with in-demand careers in food processing, advanced manufacturing, skilled trades, and as technicians in a variety of industries. The partnership includes Genesee County Economic Development Center, Genesee Community College, the GLOW Workforce Development Board, and the region's higher education institutions.

Life Sciences

The Finger Lakes Region is home to Upstate NY's largest and most active biomedical research and life sciences business activity, positioning the region as a state center for innovation and economic growth in the life sciences. Strategic public and private investments in the region's life sciences R&D infrastructure, business support programs, and workforce development programs continue to harness biomedical innovation and transform it into new commercial opportunities, jobs, and economic growth.

Strong foundation of research funding. In federal FY20, institutions and businesses in the region received approximately \$186.9 million in **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** funding, making the Finger Lakes the largest recipient in Upstate NY.

The **UR**, Upstate NY's premier life science research institution, receives more NIH funding than any other outside New York City. The university's biomedical research enterprise has more than 3,000 faculty, post-docs, grad students, and support staff. **URMC** has many leading research programs,

including neuroscience, cardiovascular disease, cancer, vaccine biology, and musculoskeletal diseases, many of which rank among the top in the nation in NIH funding.

Rich ecosystem of biomedical R&D and innovation. The **Empire Discover Institute (EDI)** is a \$47 million partnership between the **UR**, the **University of Buffalo**, and **Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center** that translates over \$1 billion of untapped biomedical research into a robust pipeline of commercially viable therapeutics. This drug-discovery pipeline works on relatively later-stage, high-value research project with \$35.4 million in funding over five years from Governor Cuomo's Life Sciences Initiative.

Programs at RIT in biotechnology, environmental technology, microsystems engineering, biomedical engineering, data science, additive manufacturing, bio-modeling, and bio-printing research programs have broad applications for medical devices, diagnostics, and remote and wearable health monitoring technologies. The **RIT MAGIC Center** is a potential innovation center for developing new digital media, wearable technology, and virtual and augmented reality solutions to health challenges. The **IdeaLab**, a partnership between **RIT** and **Rochester Regional Health (RRH)** provides student work experience in the health care and life sciences fields to develop innovative solutions for a wide range of medical needs.

Anatomy and physiology students at **FLLC** participate in a **Case Western Reserve University** pilot study for an emerging mixed reality educational tool. Using **Microsoft HoloLens** smartglasses and holographic anatomical images from HoloAnatomy software, students and instructors can virtually explore organs and body systems. Initial findings indicate students learning in mixed reality are scoring higher on exams than those in traditional classes using textbooks and plastic models.

National leader in degrees per capita in critical life science fields. Colleges and universities in the Finger Lakes are national leaders in producing graduates with degrees in fields critical to life science companies. Among metropolitan statistical areas with more than 1 million people, the Finger Lakes Region ranks **2nd per capita in STEM degrees, 6th in biological and biomedical sciences degrees, and 12th in life sciences degrees.**

RIT graduates more than 400 students per year prepared to work in the life sciences, health care, and biotechnical fields. **SJFC, Roberts Wesleyan College, Nazareth College, SUNY Geneseo, SUNY Brockport, and MCC** are home to several programs in pharmaceutical development, biomedical sciences, and biomedical engineering. Additionally, the **Rochester General College of Health Careers (RGCOHC)** is a private, independent, not-for-profit academic institution entity of the RRH System offering an Associate in Applied Science with a major in nursing—an LPN to ADN program.

Growing entrepreneurship, business incubation, and acceleration programs. The **RIT Venture Creations, NextCorps**, an affiliate of the UR and a NYSTAR-designated Regional Technology Development Center, and other facilities enrolled in the state's START-UP NY program help early-stage life sciences companies thrive. These startup companies leverage the capabilities and expertise of precision manufacturers, software development firms, and research institutions in the

region. The diverse and highly skilled technical and engineering environment is fertile ground for collaboration in developing, prototyping, and commercializing medical devices, biotech products, and healthcare IT applications.

Established cluster of life science companies. The region has more than 150 life sciences companies employing tens of thousands of individuals, including nationally recognized leaders such as **Carestream Health, Ortho-Clinical Diagnostics, and CooperVision**. Additionally, **URMC** and **ACM Global Laboratories**, a for-profit affiliate of RRH, provided critical testing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collectively, the life sciences sector is a multi-billion-dollar market in the Finger Lakes. Already a domestic leader in medical device manufacturing, Rochester has the largest optics and imaging (OPI) technologies cluster in the US. The intersection of life sciences with optical technologies positions the Finger Lakes Region to become a national leader in biophotonics.

Post-Pandemic Challenges

Growth and job creation in the life sciences sector, especially the pharmaceutical and biotech fields, takes years of nurturing because of the significant investments required, long product development cycles, and significant regulatory hurdles they must overcome before bringing products to market. For early-stage companies, significant gaps in cash flow, limited access and inventory of low-cost specialized facilities and equipment to conduct research and product development, and a regional dearth of serial entrepreneurs with the necessary experience to guide their growth compounds the challenges.

Growth Opportunities

The life sciences sector would benefit from workforce development programs coordinated more tightly with sector needs.

Increased opportunities for collaboration with research institutions from other regions would help to accelerate the commercialization of biomedical research discoveries.

More research and business partnerships in emerging technology fields such as photonics, data science, bioinformatics, and virtual/augmented reality to develop next-generation diagnostic, drug development, R&D, and personalized medicine technologies

Develop shared community R&D resources, such as current good manufacturing practices facility that will serve both academic and industry researchers for biotech and pharmaceutical development projects

Israeli Startup Engagement

Accelerating innovation in life sciences, health care delivery, and collaboration to provide new models of care and technology in the post-pandemic world requires assistance from a global community. With more than 500 startups, the Israeli Life Sciences and Digital Health sector

pioneered solutions that deliver significant impact worldwide and leads the industry in innovations that mirror many of the needs outlined in this plan, including hospital in the home, mobile health, long-term care, emergency planning, biotech, artificial intelligence/machine learning, med devices, and more.

GRE and ESD already coordinate efforts with the Government of Israel to learn relevant technologies and encourage multi-faceted collaboration with providers, payers, and life sciences companies. For example, during COVID, our health sector used many Israeli technologies to enhance clinicians' productivity, monitor patients, and execute virtual clinical trials. **A local life sciences company has a large, multi-year contract with an Israeli biotech startup** to manage a global clinical trial generating employment for over a dozen FTEs. In addition, **two Israeli startups plan to establish US headquarters in Rochester**, providing jobs and economic development while enhancing the quality of life of our citizens. Funding for a public-private collaborative to heighten our activity with the Israeli ecosystem would build on this progress. In addition, it would accelerate the adoption of medical innovations to improve care and lower costs for the community. Lastly, it would extend success to other regional and state sectors, such as Smart Cities, Agribusiness, Sustainability, Security, and more.

Prototype Development Lab

NextCorps will create a Prototype Development Lab in its new downtown Business Accelerator in the Sibley Building. The project will allow early-stage companies and inventors to build prototypes of medical devices and other health care and life science-related technologies and provide a training platform for student engineers. High-resolution additive printers, computer-controlled mills and laser-cutters, inspection devices, and optoelectronic design and testing tools will be available to create working prototype devices for life science applications. Area college students in fields like biomedical engineering will staff the facility and gain valuable skills working directly with inventors, engineers, and entrepreneurs on projects.

Upstate New York Biotech Commercialization Hub (UNYBC)

To accelerate life science technologies and devices emerging from institutions, the UR, RIT, and SJFC create a scalable consortium model. Once refined, the model will expand to more Upstate NY institutions. The UNYBC Hub would connect regional researchers, startup incubators, the National Institutes of Health Clinical and Translational Science Institute program (NIH CTSA), venture capital investment entrepreneurs, and the Upstate NY biotechnology community. This network would identify and assess technologies with commercial potential and foster their development through expertise, support, training, funding, and transfer to the private sector. These activities include business creation mentoring, prototype and manufacturing services, entrepreneurial development, intellectual property, regulatory evaluation, and clinical trials support.

Digital Health Startup Accelerator & Competition

Mirroring the success of Luminate NY and building off our strengths in life sciences, the Finger Lakes Region should seek to establish a similar program for the digital health industry. Digital health uses technology—including data science & analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), mobile & wearable devices, and applications—to improve healthcare availability, delivery, and quality. The

demand for digital health innovation encompasses providers, patients, pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers, and payers. A digital health accelerator and competition would attract and grow the most promising digital health companies here and around the globe, create jobs, and attract additional investment to the region.

Placemaking in the Finger Lakes

Downtown Revitalization Initiative

Even when surrounded by unprecedented uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, city, private, and public entities in the Finger Lakes Region showed tenacity and leadership in their efforts to keep **Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI)** projects moving. DRI aligns with NYS' placemaking strategy designed to transform downtown neighborhoods into vibrant communities in which to live, work, and raise families.

As DRI project owners ramp up again, many still face challenges, including receiving timely bid proposals from contractors inundated with project requests and labor shortages. Higher lumber and materials costs for construction also make some question whether their project remains feasible. Still other awardees are moving full steam ahead.

Round 4 Update: Seneca Falls (Seneca County)

Awarded \$10 million in 2019, Seneca Falls announced its 12 core DRI projects in May 2021 to increase tourism and visitor interest, commercial appeal, and housing opportunities for new and existing residents. A rejuvenated downtown Seneca Falls will bring additional mixed-use spaces, provide affordable housing for all levels of income, encourage additional development and investment interest, and ultimately boost the local real property tax base.

North Canalside Enhancements

People's Park improvements include new pathways and decks overlooking the canal, burying utility lines, and providing better access to the Canal from downtown.

Heritage & Information Center of Seneca Falls

Upgrades to the Heritage and Information Center to include façade improvements, updating permanent interior exhibits, installation of a new elevator and renovations to boater spaces.

Daniels Block Renovations

Conversion of vacant 3rd floor space into five new accessible residential loft units serviced by a new three-stop elevator.

Other DRI Projects

- National Women's Hall of Fame Enhancements
- "It's A Wonderful Life" Museum Improvements
- State Street Station Renovation
- The Gould Hotel Renovation

- Historic Huntington Building Restoration
- Culinary Arts Studio and Apartments
- Residential Units at the Finger Lakes Health Institute
- Community Recreation Enhancements
- Ludovico Sculpture Trail Enhancements
- \$600,000 Building Improvement Fund

Round 3 Update: Penn Yan (Yates County)

Penn Yan has 15 DRI projects invigorating investment in its historic downtown, predominately in retail and food, leaving no storefronts available for rent. These activities created additional commercial and residential units through the DRI target area, providing year-round opportunities for residents and visitors, and propelling long-term regional prosperity.

Historic Laurentide Inn Renovations

June 2020 marked the opening of the Laurentide Beer Company. Appealing to locals and tourists alike, the owners acquired a neighboring building to handle capacity constraints.

1 Eleven Liberty

Once design, engineering, environmental review, and scope of work concluded, construction of residential and commercial units at 1 Eleven Liberty moved forward to meet a June 2021 leasing target.

[Photo caption] Lieutenant Governor Kathleen C. Hochul touring the nearly completed market-rate apartments at 1 Eleven Liberty, a Building Improvement Fund project.

Downtown Streetscape Improvements

The completion of preliminary design plans and initiation of environmental studies moved forward for streetscape enhancements along Water and Wagener Streets to improve walkability for an improved pedestrian experience.

Other DRI Projects

- Indian Pines Park and Keuka Outlet Trail Network Expansion
- Blue Heron Bakery Opened
- The New Knapp on Main
- Struble's Arcade
- Water Street Townhomes
- Belknap Rehabilitation
- 126 Main Street
- The Little Elm Restaurant
- Maiden Lane and Main Street
- The Sampson Theatre
- Milly's Pantry Expansion

Round 2 Update: Batavia (Genesee County)

Batavia has 8 DRI projects, including 80 new residential units and interior and exterior building improvements to over 45 commercial units. A few projects include transforming abandoned industrial brownfields into thriving mixed-use developments. These projects carry a total estimated capital investment over \$65,000,000 leveraged from the \$10 million DRI award. The estimated jobs created or retained is 190.

Ellicott Place Mixed-Use Gateway to Downtown

Construction began at Ellicott Place, one of the first DRI projects to do so. With 10 new upper-floor residential units downtown with elevator access and over 16,000 sq ft of rehabilitated commercial space, the redevelopment complements the nearby Ellicott Station project, establishing a new downtown gateway.

City Centre Indoor Market and Event Space

With the roof construction complete, the City Center project is ready for design work. The committee reviewed the feasibility study in its entirety, which includes a conceptual development for a mixed-use building coined “Bank Street Corridor.” The Prospectus for redevelopment efforts down the road is ready to go!

Jackson Square

Enhancement decisions for this public plaza will transform it into a lively hub and common space for community interaction and a unique alleyway node configuration to connect to multiple businesses.

Other DRI Projects

- Regional Performing Arts Center at Batavia City Centre
- YMCA and 's Healthy Living Campus
- Building Improvement Fund
- Ellicott Station
- Renovate former Genesee Bank and Carr's Department Store Buildings

Round 1 Update: Geneva (Ontario County)

The City of Geneva leveraged a \$10 million DRI funding award to attract over \$18.5 million in additional public and private investments for DRI projects and the New York State Finger Lakes Welcome Center. A dynamic and thriving place to live, work, and play, the city has seen a significant increase in residents, tourists, and developers investing time and resources in the community.

Streetscape and Intersection Enhancements

Construction preparations continued for the signature streetscape to enhance the attractiveness and functionality of the city's downtown district for pedestrians and all modes of transportation,

including bicycle amenities. Expanded public sidewalk areas will feature seating, table top games, trees, and green infrastructure planting areas.

Complete Streets Approach to Routes 5 & 20

Geneva awarded the construction contract for the transformation of Routes 5 & 20 into a multi-modal complete street to provide ease of access from downtown Geneva to the Seneca Lake shoreline for pedestrians and cyclists.

Lake Tunnel Solar Village

Construction of the green waterfront community with 20 homes with 8 vacation rentals continued in 2020. The dwellings are 100% net-zero energy for sustainability and an easy walk to downtown, lakefront trails, boat launches, and the Finger Lakes Welcome Center.

Other DRI Projects

- Brewery and Education Center
- Phase IV Public Marina
- Patent Block Redevelopment
- The Dove Block Redevelopment
- The Smith Opera House
- Microenterprise Assistance Program Fund for Adaptive Reuse

c. New” Challenge: Economic Justice

Economic Justice is defined as the provision of opportunity for all residents—especially historically excluded Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)—to benefit from and contribute to economic prosperity where they live. Communities that support economic justice initiatives recognize that a more inclusive economy provides longer-term benefits and vitality for the community and the entire region.¹

Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council recognizes that economic justice is not a new challenge. Instead, it’s a challenge of pervasive patterns of discrimination and disparity in our systems and region that we must address and reverse with new ideas, actions, and momentum. To bring economic justice to the forefront in our community, FLREDC voted to make it a regional priority in the FLX Forward strategic plan. Pivoting our economic justice trajectory requires a thoughtful, integrated, and collaborative review that brings community leaders and residents to the table: private sector, financial institutions, business owners, public sector entities, entrepreneurs, and BIPOC who have been historically excluded from these systems.

To that end, we will form a strategic-level **Economic Justice Task Force** of diverse community stakeholders that includes BIPOC community members that complements, not replicates, existing community efforts. In the short-term, the members will:

- Review the recommendations brought forth during the creation of this annual report included in **Appendix A**.

- Set short- and long-term goals to pursue and include measurable outcomes for the recommendations that align with our regional and statewide priorities.
- Make policy recommendations to advance solutions.

When faced with important decisions, our Haudenosaunee neighbors and the original stewards of the Finger Lakes Region adhere to the ancient philosophy of the Seventh Generation Principle: “The decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world **seven generations** into the future.” We welcome your participation in this ongoing conversation as we review these recommendations that will inform our next steps.

i. Why now?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the [Urban Institute](#) ranked Rochester 241 out of 274 cities on overall inclusion, 236th on economic inclusion, and 223rd on racial inclusion.

Only by eradicating these systemic barriers and investing in distressed urban and rural communities in our region can we move the Finger Lakes Region forward together. The pandemic had a devastating impact on our region. Those hit hardest were urban and rural communities, most specifically BIPOC communities. COVID exacerbated the deep-rooted racial and socio-economic inequities and inadequacies throughout systems underpinning our regional economy that prevent equity and equality for all:

- Accessible and affordable childcare
- Innovative workforce development
- Affordable housing options
- Equal access to opportunities
- Broadband and digital access
- Access to health care
- Ample, affordable, and reliable COVID testing
- Revitalized communities
- Adequate transportation

As a result of these traumatic experiences, so many of which unfolded throughout 2020, the Human Services Office of Minority Health reports that Black Americans face far higher rates of mental illness than white people. It is also noted that BIPOC experience more severe forms of mental health conditions due to unmet mental health needs and lack of access to mental health care, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

At such a pivotal time in our history, we have work to do.

ii. FLREDC through the lens of Economic Justice

At the request of Governor Cuomo last summer, FLREDC rallied community stakeholders to create a [2020 Economic Recovery Report](#) for the Finger Lakes Region, providing recommendations about

what the region needed from the State to address the COVID-19 impacts. Economic justice rose to the top of the list. The report included the following recommendations:

Leverage existing resources and support emerging programs. Local chambers of commerce, Monroe County, the City of Rochester’s Office of Community Wealth Building and Department of Neighborhood and Business Development and entrepreneur support organizations, like the Rochester Economic Development Corporation’s (REDCO) Resource Partner Enhancement Program and Revitalize Rochester Fund and the Rochester Financial Empowerment Center (RFEC), provides resources to small businesses.

Pledge to be more thoughtful and diverse in hiring practices. Champion open hiring strategies and create sustainable employment for those looking to become more self-sufficient, as articulated in RMAPI’s Employer Pledge.

Harness community voice. Engage community members in the planning, implementation, and decision-making process to ensure the solutions are community-centered and comprehensive.

Streamline and improve programs and initiatives. Make it easier for more small business owners to navigate the state’s Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) certification process and promote its benefits, including new sales opportunities and free business development training.

Strive for long-term change through recently formed groups and organizations. For example, the City of Rochester/Monroe County combined Commission on Racial and Structural Equity (RASE) is a 21-person commission formed in June 2020 to develop policies and legislation designed to overcome systemic racism and inequality.

The 2020 report brought FLREDC full circle. Since its inception in 2011, the Council has strived to be a catalyst for economic justice, contributing to the community conversation on poverty.

In the early years of the REDC initiative, Governor Cuomo asked each Council to create an “Opportunity Agenda” to help distressed communities overcome the challenges that prevented them from fully participating in the state’s economic revitalization. The first recipient selected by FLREDC was El Camino neighborhood, located in northeast Rochester’s “Crescent of Poverty.” Approximately 35 blocks and with a population of 5,652, El Camino faced several challenges: chronic urban poverty; a transitory population subjected to substandard housing; a significant and impactful lack of educational attainment; and high unemployment. The Council’s Opportunity Agenda proposal directly addressed the link between education and employment in El Camino, with a fundamental belief that creating access to jobs will help rebuild and revitalize this and other urban neighborhoods. By 2014, the Council expanded its Opportunity Agenda to include the entire City of Rochester to target several challenges: a transitory population in substandard housing; a significant and impactful lack of educational attainment; high unemployment; and chronic urban poverty.

When Rochester Area Community Foundation (RACF) released its landmark report on childhood poverty in 2014, the Rochester Anti-Poverty Task Force formed with over 20 cabinet members and individuals dedicated to addressing poverty in Rochester that serves as a model for the rest of the

state. The following year, FLREDC joined with then-Assemblyman Joe Morelle, Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren, and then-Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks to lead the creation of the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI). United Way of Greater Rochester convened community stakeholders to provide the collaboration and coordination necessary to tackle poverty on a comprehensive and community-wide scale:

- Rebuild struggling neighborhoods with quality support services (for example businesses, healthcare, childcare, community schools) to help make them safe, healthy, and livable.
- End the activities and actions that continue racial inequity in public policies, institutional practices, and other cultural norms.
- Help heal people and communities suffering from repeated experiences with trauma through support and services that are sensitive to experiences like abuse, addiction, and violence.

To support RMAPI's work, FLREDC added Poverty Reduction as an overarching goal of the Finger Lakes Forward regional URI plan and created Pathways to Prosperity (P2P), a cross-cutting, enabling strategy with \$50 million in URI funding.

To ensure the intentions of project owners aligned with RMAPI's goals, FLREDC created a P2P funding form requiring an anti-poverty impact statement that identified the measurable ways their projects will help reduce poverty in the region, increase economic security, and improve pathways to prosperity. This simple tool provided the clear lens FLREDC need to evaluate projects and inspired other Councils to adopt similar requirements.

By 2019 FLREDC committed nearly all \$50 million to P2P implementation through NYS programs, especially the Urban Revitalization Initiative (URI) and the annual Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) programs, by 2019.

FLREDC also established an Environmental Justice Work Group in 2019 to identify baseline conditions that would inform equitable and environmentally responsible economic development strategies to positively impact citizens residing in or affected by environmental justice areas. Recommendations from this work group are also in the appendix below.

iii. The Correlation Between DEI, Economic Recovery, and Long-term Vitality

In society, the structure and governance of enterprises reflect the values of those who hold power. Current financial and economic systems—established centuries ago to cultivate and protect the rights of a select few—perpetuate a problematic structure deeply rooted in a humbling history of frustration and enduring pain.²

Discriminatory practices like redlining and racial covenants gave way to current discrimination in the form of inequitable lending practices and income discrimination by landlords that continue to limit housing options for BIPOC.³ Redlining was especially prevalent in Rochester's old Third and

Seventh Wards and surrounding neighborhoods. Today, these neighborhoods host concentrations of Black and Brown people living in poverty and dealing with crime and reduced prospects for housing, education, and jobs.⁴

Disinvestment also extends into rural communities of the Finger Lakes Region, impacting migrant farmworkers, originally African Americans from the South during the Great Migration, and now primarily Latinx.

Redlining is just one example of how housing—a traditional pathway to prosperity—has been segregated and riddled with discriminatory practices for generations. These same issues litter pathways to employment, education, health care, and wealth acquisition, and others.⁵

Understanding how pervasive economic injustice is in society sheds light as to why a prosperous region like the Finger Lakes also has urban and rural pockets of abject poverty. Some people choose to believe that racial inequity is behind us, and that the poor need to make their own way. Yet, every day, economic injustices continue and perpetuate poverty in the region.

When faced with important decisions, our Haudenosaunee neighbors and the original stewards of the Finger Lakes Region adhere to the ancient philosophy of the Seventh Generation Principle: “The decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world **seven generations** into the future.”

iv. **Economic Justice Already at Work in the FLX**

There are positive examples of Economic Justice work happening in the Finger Lakes Region. Several community initiatives promote collective problem solving to systemic injustices. Others leverage proven strategies from other communities to lift historically marginalized populations. All provide our community with a strong foundation on which to build. Here are just a few of the many examples at work in our region:

ROC2025 accelerates economic growth and vitality in our region. Modeled on some of the country's most innovative and world-class regional growth frameworks, ROC2025 set out to drive job growth, increase metro GDP, expand household wealth, and reduce poverty.

Commission on Racial and Structural Equity (RASE) is a city/county commission formed in June 2020 to develop policies and legislation designed to overcome systemic racism and inequality. Serving on RASE are 13 community members and eight city and county officials representing a cross section of the area.

Roc the Future is a collective impact initiative of community stakeholders working together to improve academic achievement for the children of the City of Rochester. The project is a member of the StriveTogether network national movement impacting the lives of 13.7 million youth and counting from cradle to career.

Pueblo Nuevo I & II, a housing development project of Ibero American Development Corporation, includes 75 new affordable homes across 16 residential buildings under construction in Rochester's El Camino Neighborhood. Nineteen apartments in the development are reserved for adults with developmental disabilities. The transformation of 20 vacant, underutilized, or dilapidated lots across a five-block area around North Clinton Avenue includes a community green space with gardens, walking paths, a playground, and a picnic pavilion that connects the city-funded La Marketa. Plans for the El Camino Community Center are also underway.

Climate Solutions Accelerator of the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region is an inclusive, nonpartisan nonprofit that prioritizes climate solutions that both hastens emissions reductions and promote health, safety, and economic prosperity for all community members.

The City of Rochester works with community organizations to promote energy efficiency, reduce the use of fossil fuels, and make the switch to clean energy. **Energy Smart Rochester** provides tips, actions, and resources to increase energy efficiency in buildings and to promote beneficial electrification in our community. **Action for a Better Community** administers the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), focuses on energy efficiency improvements including insulation and lighting as well as health and safety issues in the home. **PathStone's Home Rehabilitation and Energy Service** programs create and preserve assets for low- and moderate-income individuals, families, and communities through coordinated housing rehabilitation, energy services, and community-based revitalization programs. **NeighborWorks** conducts free home energy audits for income-eligible households through EmPower and Assisted Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® programs. **Rochester ENergy Efficiency and Weatherization (RENEW)** helps income-qualified Rochester homeowners live in safer, healthier, and more energy-efficient homes.

Interrupt Racism is the Urban League of Rochester's racial equity and justice initiative, activating Rochester organizations and businesses in the fight against racism by meeting them where they are with accessible training and encouraging coaching so that their team members may thrive in a diverse, inclusive, and equitable community.

Eviction Prevention Pilot Initiative (EPPI) is a Monroe County Systems Integration Project (SIP) at United Way of Greater Rochester launched in 2020. Funded through URI, the project used 211/Lifeline as its main point-of-entry to pre-screen 4,500 applications for rent assistance. EPPI distributed all \$4.3M of the CARES Act funding dedicated directly to rent, serving more than 1,900 qualified households. Also, SIP automatically shares applicant information with participating community-based organizations to help renters access to legal or financial counseling and basic needs. EPPI also minimized COVID-19 hardships for landlords.

Center for Open Hiring understands that employment is the first and most critical piece in an individual's path out of poverty. The Rochester Center opened in June 2020 to provide underserved and often overlooked individuals ages 17 through 65 with no-cost job skills training, one-on-one coaching, and job placement assistance to facilitate engagement in the workforce and increase employability. After a year of outreach to more than 60 business leaders in need of

entry-level workers in areas such as production, construction, or cleaning, Zweigle's and CleanCraft are two of the first businesses to formally embrace open hiring practices, with many more in the onboarding process. The business model fuels the success of Greyston Bakery in Yonkers, NY, a profitable social justice enterprise that produces 40,000 pounds of world-class baked goods daily for companies like Ben & Jerry's and Whole Foods Market and retail customers through its online store.

RMAPI champions a *Wildly Important Goal (WIG)* to get local employers to adopt the \$15 minimum wage. The UR, the region's largest employer, and Monroe County and several nonprofit organizations signed on, bringing WIG past the halfway mark toward its 10,000 jobs goal. This increase will improve the overall standard of living for **minimum wage** workers, many of whom are BIPOC.

[Insert chart provided by Joe Hamm, already sent to Kleehammer]

Reimagine RTS, a four-year project, culminated with the implementation of a new transit system in Monroe County on May 17, 2021, that makes it easier for residents to reach essential destinations and for employers to recruit and retain employees. The more frequent, reliable, and connected RTS strongly aligns with the ROC2025 priority area of Downtown Growth and Innovation. The new system's backbone is a frequent network of 10 bus routes that run every 15 minutes during the peak weekday travel times of 6 AM–6 PM. Twenty more local routes run every 30 minutes during peak travel times, three crosstown routes boost connectivity, and nine commuter routes open up access to people in areas beyond the City of Rochester. In addition, the new RTS On Demand service operates in seven zones throughout the community, improving access in areas that historically had infrequent service.

Revitalize Rochester Fund, established in concert with the State, FLREDC, City of Rochester, and REDCO, expands wealth-building opportunities in urban neighborhoods. FLREDC provided \$10 million to support the strategic revitalization plan and strengthen neighborhood economies by targeting investment in low-income commercial corridors. The funds are available for the Neighborhood Commercial Development Program, Catalytic Predevelopment Loans, Building Renovation and Streetscape Grants, Urban Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Program, Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Enhancement Grants, Worker Cooperative Business Revolving Loan Program, and Worker Cooperative Business Development Loans.

Inner Loop North follows the successful completion of the Inner Loop East project. The City of Rochester held five virtual community advisory committee meetings from March 2020–March 2021 to evaluate plans to convert some or all the northern section of the Inner Loop. This project could reconnect downtown Rochester with several Rochester neighborhoods, the Public Market, and High Falls.

DEI On Campus has been a priority on public and private colleges and universities across the Finger Lakes Region. One example is the **State University of New York (SUNY)**, with campuses in Geneseo, Brockport, and many community colleges. Access, equity, and inclusion are the

foundation principles that helps SUNY create more inclusive, representative campuses, and achieve equity in student success outcomes. Its 2018 **Promoting Recruitment, Opportunity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Growth (PRODiG)** program helps diversify faculty relative to its increasingly diverse student body. A 25-point **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan** that followed in 2021 strives to close the racial equity gaps and eliminate cultural and institutional racial discrimination across SUNY.

SUNY College at Geneseo strives to broaden understanding, heighten awareness, awaken empathy, and foster empowerment of all individuals. A collaboration between its Chief Diversity Officer and a team of faculty and staff has established a novel program called **Advancing Cultural Competency Certificate (ACCC)**, featured at the American Council on Education’s (ACE) 2021 Annual Meeting. The program empowers individuals with cross-cultural knowledge, understanding, tools, skills, and resources to increase self-awareness around identity and culture and translate that into inclusive and culturally supportive environments that positively impact the cultural climate across an organization. Since 2018/19, 141 staff, faculty, and administrators at Geneseo have participated with growing demand.

Monroe Community College has worked in earnest to centralize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles in all areas of campus life and operations, from establishing itself as a national leader in **Guided Pathways** educational reform, to (more recently) launching the DEI Workgroup for Teaching and Learning—which will hold its inaugural institute, Frameworks for Racial Equity, in the summer of 2021. MCC’s **Teaching and Creativity Center (TCC)** provides DEI-based professional learning for teaching and non-teaching faculty and staff. While equity-minded practices, such as inclusive teaching, have long been incorporated into the TCC’s programming, DEI—particularly in terms of racial equity—was formalized as a priority in its strategic plan and professional learning objectives several years ago. The TCC continues to adjust programming in response to campus-based, regional, and national circumstances regularly.

Appendix A

Economic Justice Recommendations Received by FLREDC

In the preparation of this annual report, FLREDC embarked on an extensive process to gather community feedback to inform its burgeoning work in economic justice. The following is list of recommendations generated by a group of over 30 stakeholders convened by Rochester Area Community Foundation at the request of the FLREDC. These stakeholders, charged with offering economic justice recommendations to the Council, reviewed the [RASE Commission](#) report, the [City of Rochester’s Equity and Recovery Agenda](#), the [Rochester 2034](#) comprehensive plan, among other relevant documents and reports. In fact, the following recommendations represent the input of thousands of our Finger Lakes’ residents, in that each of the contributing reports featured robust community engagement strategies in their development.

A-1: Recommendations

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Focus on regional equity, as opposed to just individual-level inequity. This invites consideration of strategies like regional tax sharing and a tax on non-resident income for the city of Rochester
- Create a review process with the NYS Comptroller or other office for state-administered federal recovery funds to ensure an Inclusive Recovery, particularly for racially equitable expenditures
- Advocacy for and implementation of strategies to eliminate racial hiring bias, including accessible diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) training for small businesses in the region that employ nearly 60% of the population. Tax incentives for businesses that meet industry set diversity goals should also be explored
- New York State should set mandatory diverse hiring goals for its non-MWBE vendors and contractors
- Evaluate existing resources (Local chambers of commerce, Monroe County, and the City of Rochester's Office of Community Wealth Building) for their cultural competency and effectiveness, provide recommendations for improvement
- Support of emerging programs (REDCO Resource Partner Enhancement Program and Revitalize Rochester Fund)
- Thoughtfully use marijuana revenue for direct investment into historically marginalized communities
- Note that we cannot only to continue to create new programming, but also need to review and sunset practices and policies that have exacerbated inequities and that have not worked to close disparities
- Post job opportunities with a variety of candidate sources, including local community-based organizations working with underrepresented, diverse job candidates
- Support partnerships with local colleges and universities like ROC 2025's Campus Roc, especially among those with diverse students like the UR's Simon School, which was named the most diverse MBA program among the top 50 business schools
- Strengthen the connection between K-12 students of color and employers to increase Career & Technical Education opportunities and Career Development and Occupational Studies offerings
- Improve job postings by focusing on skills and competencies, rather than naming specific academic degrees that minimize transferable skills or non-traditional forms of training
- Train recruiters and hiring managers on unconscious bias and the value of diversity
- Take advantage of diverse networks inside companies to get referrals of qualified, diverse job candidates
- Hide job candidates' identifying information through a blind hiring process, to mitigate unconscious bias
- Incentivize and inform employers on adopting more inclusive practices and equitable policies to create the conditions that foster and sustain diverse workplaces

- Recruit graduates from Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities to the region to increase diversity in our workforce, attract future leaders, and increase the strength of our talent pool
- Explore YWCA's mission, which includes elimination of racism and has related programs

Housing

- Expand and support Community Land trusts
- Enact a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase law, modeled on the Tenant Interim Lease program in New York City
- Enact legislation, like NYS S1762A, to allow the creation of a public bank that can be used to support affordable housing efforts as well as credit unions that produce mortgages for low-income homebuyers
- Support state-level legislation to reduce or prohibit exclusionary zoning as well as incent inclusionary zoning and/or requirements
- Explore options for mortgage guarantees and zero percent interest rates for borrowers from historically marginalized communities responding to historical injustice
- Study the effects of serial and forced displacement
- Encourage developers to create more workforce housing that is accessible to training and employment opportunities
- Affordable housing projects including Jefferson Wollensack project (Urban League of Rochester Economic Development Corp) and Pueblo Nuevo I and II (Ibero American development Corporation) were able to move forward despite the limitations
- Alta Vista at St. Joseph's Park is under design near the bus station and proposed changes to the Inner Loop North for mixed income rental housing and commercial space
- Rochester Housing Authority has sought NYS HCR etc. funding for Federal Street/ Scattered Site Affordable housing Project
- Create local funding to subsidize lower rents to 30% of AMI; Streamline local approval process
- Increase local funding for identification of potential multifamily housing outside poverty areas; provide predevelopment expenses for affordable housing
- Create a fund to reduce the cost of affordable homeownership options within the city
- Increase local funds to leverage investment in affordable housing in higher income neighborhoods

Entrepreneurship and Business Development

- State should create a process through the Department of Financial Services that requires larger financial institutions to work with customers that have repaid obligations with CDFIs or credit unions to provide lending at competitive rates
- State outreach and services for MWBEs designed to meet in their current physical locations and where they are in the business development cycle

- Conduct an internal audit of existing support services to determine shortcomings that are preventing services from reaching eligible businesses
- Create a local city/county MWBE certification program that the State will accept into its MWBE certification program
- Re-examine vendor payment policies to assure small MWBE subcontractors, who often lack the capital reserves to cover weeks of operating expenses, are promptly paid and able to pay their workers
- Enact a more holistic “best value” bid scoring system, including the bidder’s previous contract performance and success in meeting supplier diversity goals as part of their scoring, replacing simple lowest-bidder selection
- Access to Capital - i.e. venture capital or Opportunity Zones
- Create a local annual MWBE Business Development Fair in partnership with the City of Rochester, Rochester City School District and Monroe County for “one stop access” to contracting opportunities

Jobs

- Civil service is an antiquated system manipulated to provide BIPOC with inadequate access to good-paying, secure government jobs
- Provide clear guidance about in-demand career opportunities and develop strategies regarding the emerging industries (i.e., the green economy) in the region and clear on-ramps for marginalized communities
- Department of Labor should reexamine its oversight of workforce development boards to encourage innovative strategies to reach underserved populations
- Create incentives for businesses that relocate to urban centers closer to historically excluded populations
- Make the Civil Service test free for all and rebrand Civil Service by making it more enticing to the public
- Expand Civil Service-related Explorer programs in high schools
- As a pilot test, New York State should authorize the local Civil Service Commission to proctor, score exams and validate credits, and establish a list of qualified candidates
- Expand credit given for a degree, work experience, volunteer work, minority status, bilingual ability, etc.
- Advocate for change of the “rule of three” within the civil service system
- Expand Ban the Box policy and end drug screening for marijuana
- Embrace Open Hiring[®] where appropriate and remove any requirements for experience and skills beyond the minimum necessary to directly perform the job, to make these jobs accessible to individuals from a wider range of backgrounds. The state should also provide funding for the Center for Open Hiring in Rochester
- Expand living wage policy
- Advocate for passage of a state-level pay transparency law

- Both public and private organizations should review their promotion and advancement policies to insure they contribute to equity within the organization and are building a sense of trust and inclusion in employees of color
- Study the cost associated with training to employment and compare the difference to the cost of unemployment

Environmental Justice

- Raise awareness of environmental justice issues through education and understand the implications from the perspective of impacted communities using community partners
- Monitor and assess the impact of previously funded FLREDC projects on Environmental Justice communities and toward improving the quality of life of citizens residing in Environmental Justice areas
- Provide resources for public transportation in the environmental review process under the New State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR)
- Create and implement strategies for meaningful community engagement by those affected by new projects, allowing refinement of recommendations by the community, including the creation and uses of an Environmental Impact Fund
- Prioritize infrastructure projects serving rural Environmental Justice areas
- Prioritize projects adding green space, as they have been shown to aid economic development, improve mental and physical health of residents, and support climate resiliency.
- Creation of an Environmental Impact Fund (with matching investment from philanthropic institutions in the region) that will allow more flexible funding for economic development projects in Environmental Justice areas
- Consider adding remediation and clean-up costs as allowable expenses for state funding when locating an economic development project in an Environmental Justice area.
- Develop criteria for CFA applications that will incentivize projects positively impacting quality of life for those residing in Environmental Justice areas, whether through workforce development, remediation, or increased access to green space.
- Generate metrics for evaluating project applications that include impact on affected communities, feasibility, readiness, and public support.

Part III: Participation

Nine Counties Heard. Nine Counties Served.

Without question, the success of the region leads back to the FLREDC work teams. This dynamic group of elected representatives, government officials, business and labor leaders, private sector experts, non-profit executives, higher education leaders, and members of the public display unparalleled collaboration to identify, implement, and provide continuous improvement to projects that move the Finger Lakes Forward.

Special thanks to key regional organizations and groups that also convene stakeholders in our region to address strategic industries or initiatives and collaborate directly with FLREDC to achieve our collective goals.

a. Work Groups

KEY REGIONAL PARTNERS

Arts in the Loop
Common Ground Health
Destination Finger Lakes
Excell Partners, Inc.
Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council
Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance
Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council
Genesee Transportation Council
Greater Rochester Enterprise
Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce
Ibero American Action League
NextCorps
Pathstone Development Corporation
ROC the Riverway Advisory Board
ROC2025
RocCity Coalition
Rochester Area Colleges (RAC)
Rochester Area Community Foundation
Rochester Downtown Development Corporation
Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI)
Urban League of Rochester

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 Commodity Resource Corporation
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 Love Beets
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 Foodlink
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 Kreher Farms
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NYS Assembly Member
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United Way of Greater Rochester
Jeanie Harris
Generations Child Care
Jeff Hoffman & Nancy Kaplan
Rochester Childfirst Network
Brigit Hurley
The Children's Agenda
Alex Kaplan
Children's Institute
Leslie Knox
Parent
David Kolczynski
Care-a-Lot Childcare
Lee Koslow
Rochester Works!
Lynn Lubecki
The Children's Institute
Ebony Majette
The Office of Congressman Joseph Morelle
Mary Louise Musler
Early Childhood Education Quality Council
Pete Nabozny
The Children's Agenda
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Child Care Council, Inc.
Denise Read
Monroe County Dept. Of Human Services
Michelle Shafer
ESL Federal Credit Union Charitable Foundation
Jennifer Skoog Harvey
Chief of Staff, NYS Assembly member Harry B. Bronson

Todd Waite
Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation
Ann Marie White
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Alison Wilcox
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Rochester Area Colleges (RAC) Group

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Christopher Rapp
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Tyrone Reaves
TruForm Manufacturing
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AE Gifts & Clothing
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Victor Crossfit
Amy DiPrima
Victor Chamber of Commerce
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Michele Liddle
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Thirsty Turtle
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Gourmet Goodies

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Visit Rochester
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Finger Lakes Visitor Connection
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New York State Brewers Association
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Melissa Fleischut
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New York State Tourism Industry Association
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b. Public Outreach and Engagement

Giving stakeholders a voice in the programs, initiatives, and policies that impact the Finger Lakes Region is our priority. Seeking sector, geographic, racial, and socio-economic diversity and inclusivity are essential to informing our work.

With an ambitious timeframe and need for collaboration from a safe distance, FLREDC rallied businesses, organizations, and individuals to engage with their communities, peers, and neighbors about the economic effects of COVID-19. These work groups used virtual and traditional tools to engage the community and provide the information and recommendations needed to determine how to move our regional and statewide COVID recovery forward.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC INPUT SESSIONS

In keeping with FLREDC’s commitment to public engagement, on August 13, the council held a virtual public input session attended by nearly 200 participants from throughout the region.

FLREDC co-chairs Bob Duffy and Denise Battles hosted the session and spoke to participants about the importance of shared input and working together on the region's economic recovery.

FLREDC dedicated most of the meeting to hear from attendees, who shared their thoughts on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our regional economy. The issues we should focus on as our economic recovery picks up steam throughout the coming months. The session generated significant feedback that helped inform this report, from thoughts on challenges we face to ideas on short-term and long-term growth opportunities.

SURVEYS

Many work groups emailed surveys to quickly sense their communities' specific issues and received an enthusiastic response. Some examples include:

- Visit Rochester, Genesee County Chamber of Commerce Tourism Office, Visit Finger Lakes (Ontario County), Seneca Lake Wine Trail surveyed its membership.
- The Child Care Sector collected input via email after extensive outreach by the Child Care Council, the United Way of Greater Rochester, Common Ground Health, and Children's Institute.
- NextCorps surveyed software and IT sector workers in the Rochester area on the economic impact of COVID-19 on their organizations. They asked for recommendations for how the region can bolster the software and IT sector in the near-to-long term.
- Monroe County, the County's Department of Planning and Development, the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce, and GRE received approximately 125 responses to a COVID-19 Economic Impact survey designed to capture the needs and concerns of Monroe County businesses related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These responses informed reopening initiatives and support, including retaining and hiring workers, policies for remote and in-office staff, childcare needs, personal protective equipment needs, and other issues of concern for businesses.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND VIRTUAL TOWN HALLS

Social media helped some work groups encourage broader participation, while video conferencing technology helped them solicit feedback from impacted communities:

- The Nonprofit sector, for example, used virtual meetings, email, and social media to engage 204 community organizations (266 individuals) from the nine-county FLREDC area. The outreach targeted a broad range of providers, including faith-based and neighborhood-led groups. It focused on the needs of smaller providers not represented in high-level discussions and nonprofit providers led by and staffed by people of color and serve minority and marginalized groups.

- Assembly Member Harry Bronson and United Way of Greater Rochester held several virtual working sessions. On August 31, 2020, the first session engaged 16 private foundations, funders, and capacity builders out of 21 organizations invited. On September 3, 2020, the second session had over 200 attendees representing 190 unique organizations from six sectors and nine counties. Sectors included: Arts & Culture (15%), Disability Services (9%), Faith-based Organizations (3%), Resident-Led Neighborhood Organizations (1%), Health and Human Services (includes legal, financial, aging, children & youth, mental health & substance abuse) (45%), and Residential Services (youth and adult-serving) (3%). 23% of organizations self-reported in the 'other' sectors category, including Advocacy, Capacity Building, Emergency Services, Environmental, Government, Leadership Development, Libraries, and Workforce Development. Attendees represented Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Orleans, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties.
- United Way of Greater Rochester created a Child Care Task Force in April 2020 to quickly gather information on child care issues that surfaced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The task force expanded its circle to include more representatives from the nine-county region to include different geographic perspectives and collect additional input. The task force held two meetings in September 2020 and gathered feedback outside of the meeting via email.
- United Way of Greater Rochester and the Office of Assemblyman Harry Bronson co-hosted a Virtual Town Hall on June 4, 2021. Approximately 100 attendees gave input to inform the Nonprofit sector recommendation updates.

PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

The Healthcare work group gathered information from regional providers and statewide associations, including the Rochester area hospital and health systems, county medical societies, and other regional health providers.

Donned in a mask for safety, a Retail and Service work group member spends her afternoons chatting with small business owners and listens to their concerns and success. Their stories, along with dozens of responses to an email survey circulated, informed her report.

MINING EXISTING PLANNING EFFORTS FOR DATA AND RESOURCES

The K–12 work group accessed the input available as part of each school's required Re-opening Plan. Each school district held at least three public input sessions in August to gather feedback from parents and community members regarding school reopening plans, changes to instructional modality, and the impact of COVID-19 on the school district's planning. The K–12 group also reviewed the data from the FLREDC Virtual Public Input Session on August 13.

Colleges and universities formed committees, task forces, and other teams consisting of leadership, faculty, staff, and students to begin planning for an on-campus fall semester in Spring

2020. They focused on teaching and learning, student engagement and success, campus operations, and employee relations. Planning teams met regularly to provide information, updates, and recommendations with an opportunity for input and questions from students, parents, faculty, staff, and community partners.

Community partners made significant contributions to the reopening plans of colleges and universities. Throughout this global pandemic, the Monroe County Department of Public Health provided invaluable support in response to this public health crisis. In addition, UPMC and provided valuable education and support to inform planning and policies.

The Healthcare work group, for example, derived guidance from Common Ground Health's My Health Story Survey, which received input from nearly 7,000 Finger Lakes Residents in 2018. These respondents included almost 500 Latinos and 1,000 African Americans, 1,300 persons over the age of 65, and 1,200 people with annual household incomes of less than \$25,000.

ROC the Future's report, Digital-Divide-in-Rochester (Updated August 2020), provided information on the digital divide's impact in the Rochester area based on examining census data.

ADDITIONAL REPORTED ACTIVITIES

The agriculture and food sector answered the intensified need for free food for many residents during the pandemic. **Nourish NY** provided a lifeline to farmers struggling to find markets for their food and for disadvantaged people who are food insecure in the region. **Foodlink** expanded its grab-and-go meals program to include 14 Rochester City School District schools. **Real Eats** has donated 50,000 meals. **Wegmans, Constellation Brands,** and other community stakeholders have contributed millions of dollars to help feed the less fortunate.

Public and private stakeholders in Genesee County formed an economic recovery task force that served as a business resource. It provided the latest information on public health metrics, business operating conditions, capital access and programs for business, jobs and unemployment data impact, federal and state stimulus and developments, and other topics essential to persevering through the pandemic.

Victor Local Development Corporation (VLDC) surveyed local businesses about their needs as part of the application process for a Community Development Block Grant application. VLDC referred to those survey responses to support retail updates for this progress report.

The Center for Regional Economic Advancement at Cornell University hosted its annual Grow-NY symposium for the Agriculture and Food Sector. The world-class researchers and thought leaders, and business leaders from Fortune 500 companies discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the industry in New York and beyond. Over 1,000 startups considering moving to the Finger Lakes Region to grow their businesses participated in the symposium's competition program.

Rochester Area Community Foundation convened a virtual meeting of diverse leaders to discuss Economic Justice in the Finger Lakes Region on June 10, 2020. This conversation produced a

wealth of discussion, insights, and recommendations to address historic systemic inequities and current disparities to help FLREDC formulate its next steps.

Part Four: Previously Funded CFA Projects

Since 2011, awards from the annual Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) process to the Finger Lakes Region totals over \$721 million for 950 projects. These projects represent \$2.7 billion in total investment, leveraging \$721 million in state support by a ratio of more than 7 to 1. These projects support economic development priorities and job creation across our nine-county region. For a complete, searchable listing, visit the FLREDC [website](#). **[Project lists complete this section]**

Economic Justice Sources & Citations

Starting on page ##

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