

A woman with long blonde hair and glasses is looking at a laptop screen. She is in a meeting room with other people in the background. The image is dimly lit and has a brownish tint.

**Washington Economic Development Group  
(WEDG)**

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**April 2022**

***Business Plan***



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## INTRODUCTION-CURRENT SITUATION

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Every strategic business plan must start with a concise review of the current situation. 2021 was a very active year for WEDG. WEDG was actively involved in multiple efforts directly related to assisting local businesses. Strategic areas such as workforce, housing and child care development were focal points for both efforts to analyze these issues and, also for action planning. Multiple meetings with employers during 2021 helped to both define the issues and also, quantify the scope of the challenge. It is clear that these three interrelated issues are, and will continue to be, the biggest challenges facing Washington County employers and their ability to grow. A recent survey of WEDG leaders and stakeholders clearly showed that existing business assistance including workforce, housing and child care are the top priorities for WEDG. WEDG has learned in their communications with existing businesses that they are all working hard on addressing their unique workforce challenges. WEDG will continue to be supportive to these efforts.

2021 was also a very good year for business expansion and growth in Washington County. Three major buildings/sites (Crane, Syngenta and Liqui Gro) were sold, and each has the potential to spur business expansion and quality job growth. These developments have positive ramifications but, they have also depleted the available building inventory in the County.

Networking and building strong relationships with WEDG investors, local WEDG partners/members and key officials in the Corridor region, was a point of emphasis in 2021. Outreach and direct assistance to all communities in Washington County will continue strong because of the foundations laid in 2021. Based on the leadership survey referenced above, WEDG is best known for being a reliable source of timely, relevant information for communities and businesses and to a lesser extent, as a proactive force focused on creating positive economic results. When it comes to distribution of information, WEDG plays a valuable “**connector**” role for area businesses and local officials. However, WEDG has a unique opportunity to be a “catalyst” to address challenges facing the Washington County. A **catalyst is defined as an entity that provokes or speeds significant change or action**. WEDG’s role as a catalyst will be a guiding principle throughout the strategic business plan that

follows. That key principle and additional guiding principles for the plan are identified (“Key Guiding Principles”) below.

## KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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**WEDG** will be a catalyst on strategies and actions identified in this plan.

**WEDG** will maintain and expand their current investors throughout Washington County and maintain working relationships with all Washington County communities.

**WEDG** will maintain an organization that provides transparency and accountability to investors and will regularly report to investors on overall results.

**WEDG** will implement a business plan that maintains the focus on Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) and building a growing economy and strong workforce development and, continue to focus on improving the supply and capacity of housing and child care that will support economic and workforce growth and retention.

**WEDG** will continue to develop their organizational structure with the ability to grow and /or adjust to meet changing priorities.

## **THE WEDG MISSION**

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**The mission of WEDG is to create and promote an environment for sustained economic development in Washington County.**

# OUTCOMES

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As mentioned above, the WEDG strategic business plan must be focused on results. So, you should ask the question: What do I want the outcomes to be for the efforts of WEDG in economic development for Washington County? The following outcomes are derived from the key strategic issues that have been identified and discussed. Strategies and actions in the plan will be built around these outcomes. The WEDG Board, in reviewing the draft Plan, voted on their **Top Three Priority Outcomes** and those 3 are noted below.

1. **WEDG leaders will review progress on outcomes detailed in this plan at least twice each year and will immediately** analyze the need for organizational and staff support that is necessary to effectively carry out the priority functions established in the business plan. The need for additional staffing resources, if determined to be necessary, will be focused on specific identified gaps in services/support defined in the action plan.
2. WEDG will continue efforts to retain and expand existing businesses (BRE) by conducting visits with all employers with 5 or more employees. An action checklist will be prepared after each visit to guide follow-up. The priority will be on facilitating expansion projects that will create and retain jobs and broadening networking, communication and education to more companies. Specific expansion and/or retention projects will be initiated each year as a result of follow-up. **\*\* Established as 1 of 3 Top WEDG Priorities.**
3. WEDG will maintain a supportive role in a long-term effort to address the specific workforce needs of Washington County employers. WEDG will perform a supportive role in delivering career information to schools/students, parents and educators. WEDG will support the initiative, in partnership with workforce allies, to quantify workforce needs by occupations and skill set areas.
4. WEDG will continue to take a leadership role in coordinating the activities of the Washington County Housing Initiative Group with a focus on establishing key goals based on demand projections (over 10 years) in the 2019 County Housing Study. The group will discuss and implement an update of the 3-year-old study and revise goals based on updated information. **\*\*Established as 1 of 3 Top WEDG Priorities**
5. WEDG will coordinate the formation of a Washington County Child Care Strategy Group composed of local stakeholders to develop an overall strategy and action plan to grow capacity in the county to meet demand as detailed in the First Children's Finance study. The goal would be a plan that is developed, coordinated, and monitored by the Strategy Group and implemented by local and area-wide child care and workforce stakeholders. **\*\*Established as 1 of 3 Top WEDG Priorities**
6. WEDG will be an active partner with Washington County communities. WEDG will continue to work with community leadership to establish local priorities for WEDG assistance with

emphasis on WEDG priorities such as, existing business retention and expansion and workforce, housing, and child care development. WEDG will have an Action Checklist for each community. At least annually, WEDG will present to local leadership in each community the WEDG plan of action and accomplishments.



# STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

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## OUTCOMES, STRATEGIES and TACTICS

**Outcome 1.** WEDG leaders will review progress on outcomes detailed in this plan at least twice each year and will immediately analyze the need for organizational and staff support that is necessary to effectively carry out the priority functions established in the business plan. The need for additional staffing resources, if determined to be necessary, will be focused on specific identified gaps in services/support defined in the action plan.

**Strategy 1.** The WEDG Board should establish a task force to review and analyze support services, including staffing, necessary to effectively and efficiently carry out the strategic action plan and, identify proposed funding resources that would be necessary to address any changes. The Board will formally review progress on the plan every 6 months and make adjustments, if necessary.

**Strategic Action 1.1-** The task force will work with the Executive Director to identify activities in the plan that could potentially require additional support based on current estimates of work load. The task force will prepare a summary report for continued discussions.

**Strategic Action 1.2-** Based on discussions, draft potential job description/scope of work that would address support “gap”, including funding required to support recommendations.

**Strategic Action 1.3-** Make staffing recommendation to Board and implement.

**Strategic Action 1.4-** Utilizing the most current available metrics, the WEDG Board will integrate in the agenda, a review of progress on outcomes every 6 months at the WEDG Board meeting. The Board will identify tactics to include, delete or revise in the plan based on the review.

**Outcome 2.** WEDG will continue efforts to retain and expand existing businesses (BRE) by conducting visits with all employers with 5 or more employees. An action checklist will be prepared after each visit to guide follow-up. The priority will be on facilitating expansion projects that will create and retain jobs and broadening networking, communication and education to more companies. Specific expansion and/or retention projects will be initiated each year as a result of follow-up.

***Strategy 2. Build a strong business expansion and retention effort based on a systematic business contact program and a focus on preparedness for growth opportunities by maintaining current location data and addressing identified “barriers to growth” issues.***

**Strategic Action 2.1-** Organize a process to schedule business visits with all employers with 5 or more employees (focus on manufacturing and service companies). Develop list of companies and organize by employee size. Form Business Visit Team to work with WEDG staff to develop 12- month, 18 month and 24 month visit objectives based on company employee size and establish visit team training, if necessary. Prepare action checklist after each initial business visit. Utilize EDC Forge to track retention and expansion projects.

**Strategic Action 2.2-** Prepare and distribute a report which summarizes key highlights/trends identified in business visits. Report should summarize important “barriers to growth” issues and what actions are taking place.

**Strategic Action 2.3-** Continue to provide timely, relevant information updates on programs and upcoming events and upcoming networking events.

**Strategic Action 2.4-** Maintain current available building, site and community profile information for Washington County on LOIS. Explore the development of a speculative industrial building project in Washington County.

**Outcome 3. WEDG will maintain a supportive role in a long-term effort to address the specific workforce needs of Washington County employers. WEDG will perform a supportive role in delivering career information to schools/students, parents and educators. WEDG will support the initiative, in partnership with workforce allies, to quantify workforce needs by occupations and skill set areas.**

**Strategy 3. WEDG will participate in the formation of a Workforce Working Group with representatives from IWD, Kirkwood and school districts that will focus on improving distribution of career information to schools/students/parents, quantifying specific skill gaps and providing regular, timely information to businesses.**

**Strategic Action 3.1-** WEDG will meet with leadership of school districts in the county and discuss joint efforts to provide a career information pipeline to schools. Ideas such as Career Days/Fairs, externships etc. should be explored. Support the Working Group to implement.

**Strategic Action 3.2-** WEDG will work with Kirkwood and the Working Group to determine the most efficient and timely method to develop current information on the skills gap among Washington County businesses. This information can be utilized by the Working Group in a

wide variety of ways including, but not limited to: for tech training providers and career information efforts.

**Outcome 4.** WEDG will continue to take a leadership role in coordinating the activities of the Washington County Housing Initiative Group with a focus on establishing key goals based on demand projections (over 10 years) in the 2019 County Housing Study. The group will discuss and implement an update of the 3-year-old study and revise goals based on updated information.

**Strategy 4.** WEDG will coordinate with the Housing Initiatives Group to create a county-wide Housing Success Metrics Chart based on the 2019 Housing Study. These metrics will serve as the baseline to determine priorities throughout the county. Metrics are available by community and housing type.

**Strategic Action 4.1-** Housing Initiatives Group will discuss the need to update the Housing Study and if determined to be important, will develop a scope of work and seek cost estimates to update the 2019 Housing Study.

**Strategic Action 4.2-** Revise Housing Success Metrics Chart based on updated Study or, if not updated, discuss revisions based on local input and progress. Revise priorities based on new data, local input and coordinate actions to address priorities

**Outcome 5.** WEDG will coordinate the formation of a Washington County Child Care Strategy Group composed of local stakeholders to develop an overall strategy and action plan to grow capacity in the county to meet demand as detailed in the First Children's Finance study. The goal would be a plan that is developed, coordinated, and monitored by the Strategy Group and implemented by local and area-wide child care and workforce stakeholders.

**Strategy 5.** WEDG will work with local partners in the county to identify key participants for the Strategy Group who are committed to a long-term approach to build child care capacity in Washington County and developing a strategy to accomplish growth goals.

**Strategic Action 5.1-** The Strategy Group will review the First Children's study to develop aggressive and achievable capacity growth goals to form the basis for a collaborative strategy.

**Strategic Action 5.2-** The Strategy Group will identify key priority projects and the resources and industry contacts that could be helpful in carrying out the strategy. The Group will meet regularly to monitor progress on the action/strategy.

**Outcome 6. WEDG will be an active partner with Washington County communities. WEDG will continue to work with community leadership to establish local priorities for WEDG assistance with emphasis on WEDG priorities such as, existing business retention and expansion and workforce, housing, and child care development. WEDG will have an Action Checklist for each community. At least annually, WEDG will present to local leadership the WEDG plan of action and accomplishments.**

**Strategy 6. WEDG will meet regularly with each local community and establish key organizational points of contact, which may include city councils and /or city administrators/clerks, local development/betterment or chamber of commerce organization to develop and/or update Action Checklist (e.g. WEDG- Riverside Action Checklist).**

**Strategic Action 6.1-** WEDG will work with each local contact to prioritize projects/initiatives that may have the greatest strategic impact on the local economy and refine the Action Checklist.

**Strategic Action 6.2-** Annually, WEDG will present their Plan of Action- accomplishments over the past year and initiatives being planned to each local partner. Invitations will be made via local partner to all allies and stakeholders.

## Business Plan Check List

### 1. Focused Organization

- Develop Task Force
- Task force reviews activities and staff needs
- Prepare job descriptions
- Staffing recommendations
- Integrate business plan activities into agenda. Constantly review.

### 2. Business Retention and Expansion

- Organize process to schedule business visits
- Build list of companies to visit
- Form Business Visit Team
- Visit Team training
- Keep EDC Forge current
- Prepare action check list
- Prepare a report
- Continue to provide updates
- Keep LOIS current
- Explore speculative building project

### **3. Workforce**

- Support workforce activities
- Meet with education leadership to provide career information
- Form a Workforce Working Group
- Identify skills gaps

### **4. Housing**

- Create Housing Success Metrics Chart
- Determine if update is needed of 2019 Housing Study
- Revise Metrics Chart if updates study is completed

### **5. Childcare**

- Coordinate formation of Washington County Child Care Strategy Group
- Identify key participants
- Review First Children's Study
- Identify key priority projects
- Monitor Progress

## 6. Communities

- Meet with each community regularly
- Create key points of contact
- Create Action Checklist
- Prioritize projects/initiatives in each community
- Present Plan of Action in each community each year

**Thanks to the WEDG Board and staff for their time and efforts in directing the content of the business plan. The WEDG Business Plan was facilitated and written by Smart Solutions Group.**