

City of Chicago | Cook County | DuPage County | Kane County | Kendall County
Lake County | McHenry County | Will County



2025 Year in Review

WORLD
BUSINESS
CHICAGO 



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Letter from GCEP Leadership

Dear Partners & Friends,

If we could call the first year of the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP) an exploration of structured regionalism in the Chicagoland area, and the second year an expansion of it, then 2025 can only be characterized as a year of maturation and acceleration. Building upon the momentum and collaborative frameworks established in previous years, 2025 reinforced our commitment to elevating Chicagoland as a unified economic force on the global stage. This year marked several significant milestones that demonstrate the strength of our regional partnership:

Growing Our Capacity: GCEP expanded its team, enhancing our ability to serve the region's economic development priorities with greater depth and strategic focus. This investment in our organizational infrastructure reflects our commitment to sustainable, long-term, data-driven regional collaboration.

Global Market Engagement: GCEP members participated in a trade delegation to Japan, strengthening vital international relationships and creating opportunities for cross-border investment and trade. This mission underscored Chicagoland's position as a globally connected business hub and demonstrated our proactive approach to attracting international capital and fostering partnerships in key markets.

Celebrating Major Economic Wins: Throughout 2025, our region secured significant business investments and expansions, from companies like Abbott Labs and Osaka Soda, that validate our collective efforts. These victories span diverse sectors and reflect the breadth of Chicagoland's competitive advantages—from our world-class talent pool and strategic location to our innovation ecosystem and business-friendly environment.

As we've stepped into the roles of Chair and Vice Chair this year, we've been consistently inspired by the dedication of our member organizations and the genuine spirit of collaboration that defines GCEP. The willingness of economic development leaders across our counties to work together, share resources, and champion the region as a whole continues to set Chicagoland apart.

We find ourselves in a period of both tremendous opportunity and considerable uncertainty. While external forces—national policy shifts, global economic headwinds, and evolving market dynamics—remain beyond our control, what we can shape is the trajectory of business growth in Chicagoland. That's precisely where GCEP focuses its energy: on strategic, collaborative action that delivers results.

The pages that follow detail the work accomplished in 2025—work that positions Chicagoland not just to weather uncertainty, but to thrive in it. We invite you to review this progress and to continue standing with us as champions of this remarkable region. Together, we're building something enduring: a super region with unmatched assets, unified purpose, and unlimited potential.

Thank you for your partnership and your unwavering belief in Chicagoland's promise.

Sincerely,



Kevin Considine
Chair, Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership
President & CEO, Lake County Partners



Doug Pryor
Vice-Chair, Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership
President & CEO, Will County Center for Economic Development

Letter from WBC Leadership

Dear Partners and Colleagues,

At World Business Chicago, we believe the city of Chicago's future is inseparable from the strength of the entire Chicagoland region. That belief sits at the core of the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP), and it is why we are proud to support GCEP as a model for regional collaboration, shared growth, and global competitiveness.

In 2025, GCEP showed what is possible when we align around a common economic vision. From record-setting investment activity and global engagement to expanded research capacity and coordinated business development, this year marked an important step forward — not just in scale, but in maturity. The partnership evolved from coordination to a true platform for action.

This work directly advances the goals of Chicago 2050, World Business Chicago's long-term economic growth strategy. Chicago 2050 calls for a more competitive, inclusive, and resilient regional economy, driven by strong business attraction and retention, future-ready workforce development, innovation, and global engagement. GCEP's focus on priority industries such as advanced manufacturing, life sciences, food manufacturing, transportation and logistics, clean energy and climate tech, digital technology, and emerging fields like artificial intelligence and quantum aligns squarely with that vision. **See page 6 to download Chicago 2050.**

Equally important, GCEP reflects Chicago 2050's commitment to growth that benefits people and places across the region. The investments and expansions highlighted in this report, all throughout the Chicagoland area, reinforce a simple truth: when the region grows, Chicago grows, and when Chicago thrives, the region is stronger. That shared success shows up in jobs created, earnings generated, supply chains strengthened, and communities revitalized across Chicagoland.

Chicago is proud to partner with GCEP members to support international trade missions, convene global investors through platforms like SelectCHI, expand innovation and venture programming, and invest in the research and data infrastructure that underpins smart economic decision-making. World Business Chicago remains committed to showing up as a reliable, long-term partner in regional collaboration.

At a moment of economic uncertainty and rapid change, Chicagoland's greatest advantage is its ability to work together. GCEP proves that regionalism is not just a concept, but a competitive strategy, one that positions our region to lead nationally and globally.

Thank you for your leadership and partnership as we continue building Chicagoland's shared economic future — together.

Sincerely,



Phil Clement
President & CEO, World Business Chicago







Photo: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

Executive Summary

GREATER CHICAGOLAND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP: 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

The Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership has continued its mission of fostering regional collaboration and strategic economic development across the region. Building on the momentum established in year two, 2025 marked significant strides in the form of strengthened leadership, continued global recognition, expanded international engagement, and a sustained commitment to inclusive, informed business development and venture opportunities, solidifying Chicagoland's position as a premier destination for investment and innovation.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

In 2025, GCEP advanced its commitment by leveraging Chicagoland's core assets: its talented workforce, robust infrastructure, thriving innovation ecosystem, key industries, and strategic global positioning. Through strengthened regional collaboration, GCEP successfully attracted major investments, retained and created jobs, and expanded key industries, demonstrating the power of collective action.

Some of the most notable achievements of the year include:

- **13th Consecutive Year as Top Metro:** Site Selection Magazine once again named Chicagoland the number one metro in the U.S. for corporate relocation and investment, marking an unprecedented 13th consecutive year at the top. World Business Chicago reported 223 "pro-Chicagoland decisions" in 2025, comprising 170 expansions and 53 relocations or new market entries, resulting in the creation of over 19,600 jobs.
- **Leadership Transition:** GCEP named **Kevin Considine**, President & CEO of Lake County Partners, Chair of the GCEP Advisory Board, succeeding **Greg Bedalov**, President & CEO of Choose DuPage. **Doug Pryor**, President & CEO of the Will County Center for Economic Development, stepped into the role of Vice Chair, reinforcing the partnership's collaborative foundation.
- **SelectCHI 2025 Expansion:** The second annual SelectCHI event continued to grow, focusing on clean energy/climate tech and food & beverage manufacturing tracks, bringing together international businesses, diplomatic leaders, and industry site visits to demonstrate Chicagoland's position as a prime location for foreign direct investment.
- **Augmented Capacity:** Four new individuals joined WBC's GCEP team: **Kali Aloisi**, Regional Research Director; **Bridget Harney**, Regional Research Senior Manager; **Alex Iseri**, Director of Economic Development, Regional Opportunities; and **Tony Kempa**, Consultant, Regional Partnership.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

In its third year, GCEP efforts successfully built upon prior achievements:

- **Created or retained over 19,640 direct and indirect jobs in the region.**
- **Generated \$1.7 billion in total worker earnings in the region.**
- **Shared 131 GCEP project leads with GCEP partners in 2025.**
- **47 additional initiatives with GCEP partners, leading to 92 total collaborative opportunities.**

In addition, GCEP's research and data-driven approach provided valuable insights to guide investment decisions, with the World Business Chicago Research Center fulfilling over 150 regional research requests and expanding data-sharing initiatives to reduce inefficiencies and strengthen economic planning.

These achievements underscore the power of regional collaboration and strategic investment in driving Chicagoland's economic success. Through business attraction, data-driven insights, and public-private partnerships, GCEP has strengthened the region's global competitiveness while creating opportunities for both businesses and residents. In this annual report, we take a closer look at the key wins, strategic initiatives, and economic impact that shaped 2025, providing a deeper analysis of how GCEP continues to drive growth and innovation across Chicagoland.

CHICAGO 2050

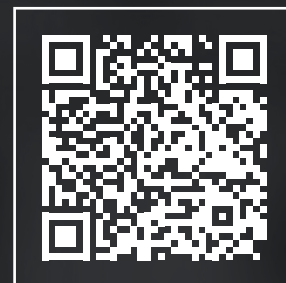
In 2025, World Business Chicago published Chicago 2050, our long-term economic growth strategy to strengthen the region's global competitiveness, resilience, and inclusivity over the next several years.

The strategy is grounded in the idea that Chicagoland's future success depends on regional collaboration across industries, talent, infrastructure, and innovation. Chicago 2050 directly reinforces the mission of the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP)—aligning the city and its regional partners around shared priorities, coordinated investment, and a unified approach to attracting businesses, capital, and talent to the entire Chicagoland region. The plan was developed in close collaboration with our regional partners: the plan's Steering Committee included **Kevin Considine**, Chair of the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership and President & CEO of Lake County Partners, as well as **Xochitl Flores**, Bureau Chief of the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development. **Erin Aleman**, Executive Director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, which helped develop GCEP's original framework, was also on the committee.

In the plan, we designate nine industry sectors – manufacturing, transportation and logistics, finance and insurance, professional services, life sciences, digital tech, quantum, clean energy, and vibrancy – as priorities for growth. We double down on three strategies – strengthening economic growth mechanisms like business attraction and retention, helping our economy future-proof itself for the future, and employing marketing and visibility to shift Chicagoland's narrative.



SCAN TO DOWNLOAD THE FULL REPORT



GCEP Events in 2025

Progress in the Greater Chicagoland region doesn't happen in isolation, it happens when leaders come together with purpose, vision, and shared commitment. At GCEP, we believe in the power of convening to accelerate economic growth, align priorities, and elevate the region's visibility on the global stage.

These convenings take many forms — some large, others more targeted — but all are critical to advancing our collective mission. In the past year, they've included moments like participation in a delegation to Japan with World Business Chicago and the City of Chicago. We welcomed trade officers and consular staff to a lunch focused on bringing FDI to Chicago. We brought together site selectors to discuss new opportunities for collaboration and growth. These moments, and many more, reflect the deep collaboration driving our region forward, and remind us that when we convene, we build momentum. Together.



Delegation to Japan in early 2025, stopping in major hubs like Tokyo and Osaka.



GCEP Networking Event



SelectCHI 2025

GCEP in Action

SelectCHI



SelectCHI 2025 built on SelectCHI 2024's momentum, reinforcing Chicagoland's position as a premier destination for international business investment. Hosted by World Business Chicago as a spin-off of the SelectUSA Investment Summit, this two-day conference brought together foreign investors, regional stakeholders, and industry leaders to explore business expansion opportunities across the region. For the second year, the event spotlighted two of Chicagoland's flagship sectors: Food & Beverage, and Clean Tech & Clean Energy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Expanded Global Participation:** SelectCHI 2025 welcomed 47 foreign investors from around the world, a significant increase from the 35 international businesses that attended in 2024. This growth reflects Chicagoland's rising profile as a competitive destination for foreign direct investment.
- **Diplomatic Engagement:** The conference hosted 25 representatives from international consulates and chambers of commerce, deepening the diplomatic and trade relationships essential to long-term economic partnership.
- **Robust Ecosystem Involvement:** Approximately 500 business and civic leaders participated across the two days, demonstrating the broad regional commitment to attracting and supporting international investment.
- **Diverse Programming:** Attendees engaged with 11 activations designed to showcase Chicagoland's strengths in innovation, workforce development, and industry infrastructure. Two dedicated tracks — Advanced Manufacturing and Food & Beverage Production — allowed investors to explore sector-specific opportunities in depth.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

SelectCHI 2025 was made possible through continued collaboration with the U.S. Commercial Service, the Illinois Office of Trade and Investment, and economic development organizations across the region. These partnerships ensure that international companies receive comprehensive support as they evaluate Chicagoland for expansion or relocation.

LOOKING AHEAD

The growth from SelectCHI 2024 to 2025 underscores the event's effectiveness as a platform for investment attraction, and WBC plans to build upon that growth again. On April 30 and May 1, 2026, WBC will invite food & beverage production and green tech & green energy companies from around the world to Chicagoland. By bringing together investors, diplomats, and regional stakeholders, SelectCHI strengthens the relationships that drive long-term economic development. These efforts align with GCEP's mission to unite the Chicagoland region, foster inclusive growth, and establish the area as a leading global business destination. With two successful years complete, SelectCHI is positioned to continue expanding its reach and impact in the years ahead.



PROOF POINTS FROM 2024 & 2025

The strategy is beginning to translate into tangible progress. Through SelectCHI 2024 and 2025, the region advanced conversations with international firms from Europe and Asia across sectors, including clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and food innovation. Several of these discussions progressed to active site exploration or deeper engagement with local partners early indicators that intentional convening accelerates trust and decision-making.

While international investment decisions often unfold over several years, early results are emerging. In 2025 alone, more than 25 foreign companies made pro-Chicagoland decisions, generating over 1,000 new jobs and approximately \$95 million in workers' earnings.

Momentum has also expanded through related global engagement. In 2025, Chicagoland welcomed the Transatlantic Business & Investment Conference, connecting European investors with U.S. economic development organizations across life sciences, food and agtech, and cleantech. That partnership—first introduced through SelectCHI—has since become a source of ongoing deal flow shared across the region.

Business Development Spotlight

Regional Wins That Matter





In 2025, GCEP held bi-monthly, in-person convenings to discuss regional strategy and progress towards defined KPIs, generously hosted by Wintrust Financial Corporation.

During a period of national uncertainty, Chicagoland continues to prove itself as a destination of choice for investment, expansion, and innovation. The Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership work has been instrumental in ensuring that the region not only retains key businesses but also attracts new investments that create jobs and drive economic growth.

GCEP'S REGIONAL IMPACT IN 2025

This year, GCEP expanded its role in business development and investment attraction, making significant strides toward its three-year regional goals:

- **223** tracked Pro-Chicagoland Decisions, which are major business expansions, relocations, or investments that fuel job creation and economic activity.
- **139** high-value business leads shared across county partners, increasing cross-regional collaboration.

ECONOMIC GROWTH BY THE NUMBERS

The business attraction and retention efforts led by GCEP in 2025 generated significant economic impact, resulting in:

- **19,640** total jobs created in the region (14,374 outside the city of Chicago.)
- **\$1.7 billion** in total worker earnings generated in the region (\$1.2 billion outside the city of Chicago.)

BEYOND DIRECT INVESTMENT

The broader economic impact of GCEP's efforts go beyond business attraction and retention: they are actively reshaping regional supply chains, professional service networks, and community economies:

- **Logistics & Supply Chain Expansion:** Increased business activity has driven higher demand for warehousing, transportation, and distribution services.
- **Professional Services Growth:** Legal, financial, and consulting firms are benefiting from the wave of business relocations and expansions.
- **Community Investment & Workforce Growth:** More workers mean higher demand for healthcare, retail, and hospitality services, ensuring broader economic benefits at the community level.

Endotronix

DUPAGE COUNTY | NAPERVILLE



Photo: Endotronix

RETENTION & EXPANSION

- **Company Name:** Endotronix
- **Industry:** MedTech
- **Job Impact:** 15 jobs retained, 42 direct & indirect jobs created



ABOUT THE COMPANY

Endotronix, a medical device company founded in 2007, moved and expanded their headquarters from the global healthcare startup incubator and accelerator MATTER (matter.health) to Naperville in 2022. An early investor, California-based Edwards Lifesciences exercised options to acquire Endotronix in July 2024. Soon after this acquisition, August of 2024, the FDA approved Endotronix's flagship product - the Cordella PA Sensor. The Cordella PA Sensor is an implant that facilitates the management of heart failure.

GCEP IMPACT

GCEP collaborated with the City of Naperville, the State of Illinois, and Choose DuPage to convince Edwards Lifesciences to keep Endotronix offices in Naperville after their acquisition in 2024. GCEP supported Choose DuPage's pitches to Edwards Lifesciences with research, participation in tours, and meetings with company leadership to successfully retain and expand Endotronix's presence and work in Naperville.

Plano Pharmaceuticals

LAKE COUNTY | ZION



RETENTION & EXPANSION

- **Company Name:** Plano Pharmaceuticals
- **Industry:** Pharmaceuticals
- **Job Impact:** 300 initial jobs, 2,023 direct & indirect jobs created

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Plano Pharmaceuticals Inc. is a U.S.-based generic pharmaceutical company that specializes in the development and marketing of generic injectable therapeutics for the North American market.

The company focuses on sterile, injectable products primarily designed for use in hospitals and healthcare facilities, with a strategic emphasis on addressing critical drug shortages and supply bottlenecks.



Freedman Seating

COOK COUNTY | CHICAGO



Photo: Busline

RETENTION & EXPANSION

- **Company Name:** Freedman Seating
- **Industry:** Manufacturing
- **Job Impact:** 50 initial jobs, 112 direct & indirect jobs created

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Freedman Seating Company, a family-owned Chicago manufacturer and industry leader in bus, rail, and commercial vehicle seating, has been proudly operating for over 130 years. Recently acquired by an Indiana-based firm, Freedman reaffirmed its commitment to Chicago by choosing to expand locally rather than relocate.

GCEP IMPACT

Freedman's decision to reinvest in Chicago, despite new ownership, underscores GCEP's role in fostering regional collaboration and the value of public-private partnerships in driving inclusive economic growth. This project exemplifies how Chicagoland companies can thrive while creating pathways to good jobs and revitalizing communities.



AFA Dispensing

MCHENRY COUNTY | WOODSTOCK



Photo: AFA Dispensing

RETENTION & EXPANSION

- **Company Name:** AFA Dispensing
- **Industry:** Advanced Manufacturing
- **Size:** 35 initial jobs, 75 direct & indirect jobs

ABOUT THE COMPANY

AFA Dispensing is a Netherlands-based manufacturer specializing in precision dispensing solutions for industrial and commercial applications. As part of its U.S. market entry strategy, the company sought a location that could support advanced manufacturing operations, provide access to a skilled workforce, and offer proximity to customers and suppliers across North America.

GCEP IMPACT

The Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership supported the project by working alongside the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation and the City of Woodstock to provide standardized, credible regional data critical to the company's site-selection decision. GCEP delivered labor force analysis, manufacturing workforce availability, commuting patterns, and regional supply chain insights that reduced uncertainty around workforce and operational scalability. GCEP's support helped accelerate AFA Dispensing's decision to locate and invest in the region.



AFA Dispensing

RJW Logistics

KENDALL COUNTY | PLAINFIELD

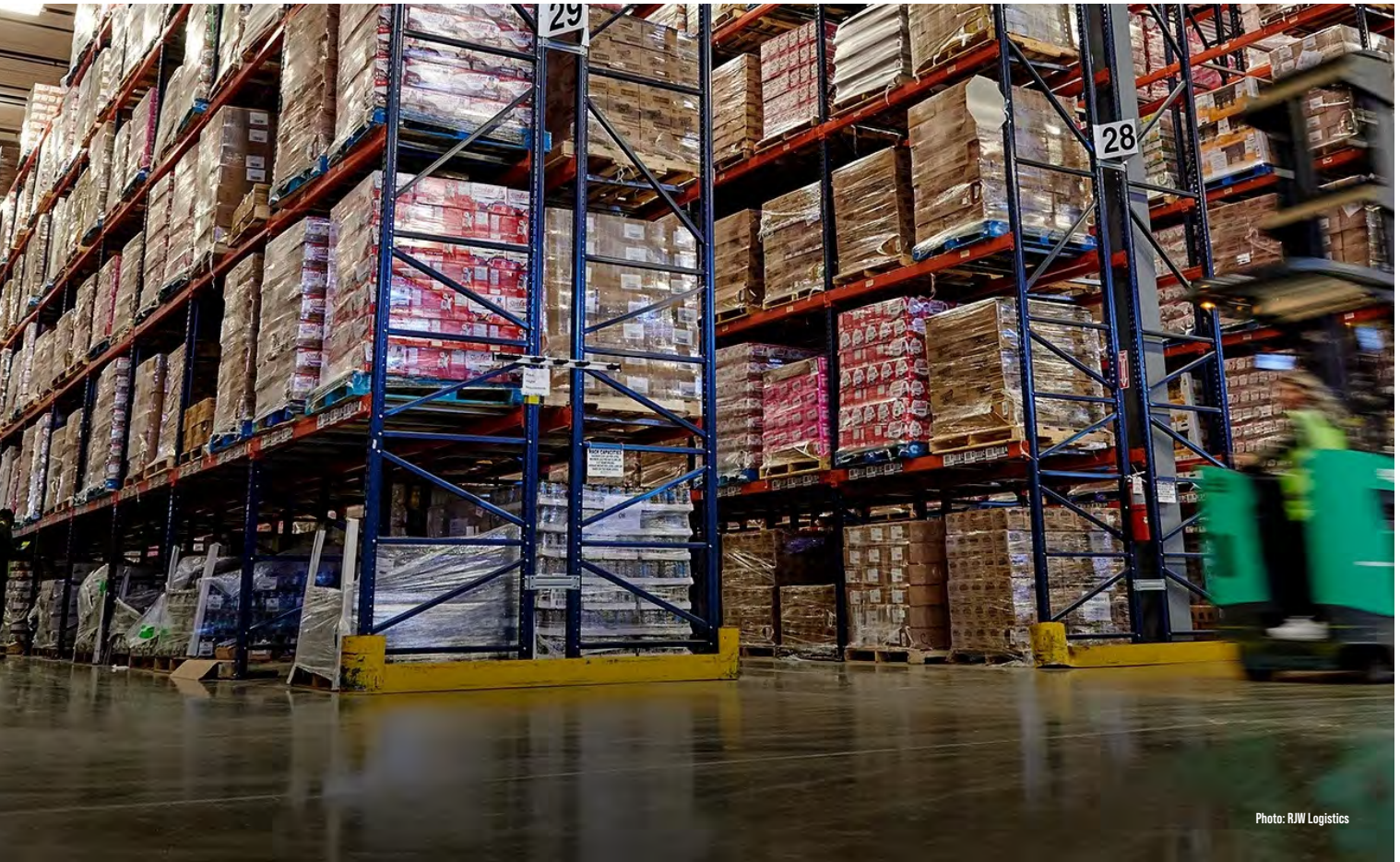


Photo: RJW Logistics

RETENTION & EXPANSION

- **Company Name:** RJW Logistics
- **Industry:** Transportation, Distribution and Logistics
- **Size:** 1,209,000 sq. ft.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

RJW Logistics was founded by Ron Williamson in 1981. The company evolved from a transportation broker into an asset-based third-party logistics provider specializing in retail logistics solutions for consumer packaged goods suppliers. Today, RJW operates approximately 9.9 million square feet of consolidation warehouse space across major U.S. transportation hubs including Chicago, Dallas, Eastern Pennsylvania, and Southern California, employing over 2,100 people.



The Fresh Factory

WILL COUNTY | BOLINGBROOK



RETENTION & EXPANSION

- **Company Name:** The Fresh Factory
- **Industry:** Manufacturing
- **Job Impact:** 330 jobs total, 167 retained jobs in Will & DuPage Counties

ABOUT THE COMPANY

The Fresh Factory, a manufacturer of fresh, clean label, plant-based foods, embarked on a strategic regional expansion and relocation. Primarily the relocation and expansion of its Carol Stream production operation to a larger site in Bolingbrook, retaining 102 regional jobs while adding another 102. The Downers Grove location, which houses the company's corporate office, will add 51 jobs in an expansion along with site improvements. The facilities are highly interconnected with raw materials and products moving between the sites daily.



Savor

KANE COUNTY | BATAVIA



Photo: Savor

RETENTION & EXPANSION

- **Company Name:** Savor
- **Industry:** Food Manufacturing
- **Job Impact:** 11 Jobs



savor

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Savor is a biotechnology company developing a process to produce fats and oils from carbon dioxide and hydrogen, essentially creating animal-free butter and other fats without agriculture. Founded by Kathleen Alexander, the company has received backing from Bill Gates's Breakthrough Energy Ventures and aims to dramatically reduce the environmental footprint of food production. Their technology works by combining CO₂ with hydrogen (produced via electrolysis) to synthesize fat molecules that are chemically identical to those found in traditional dairy and animal products.

GCEP IMPACT

Staff from multiple WBC departments opened their network to introduce Savor leadership to key ecosystem stakeholders and potential partners, and worked to support and platform at regional events.



Data that Drives Us

The WBC Research Center





The WBC Research Center tells the region’s data-driven economic narrative, including Chicagoland’s value proposition. The WBC Research Center leads data analysis for GCEP regional partners to better understand and improve the economy, including identifying growth drivers, opportunities, and risks. GCEP also leverages this access to real-time data throughout the region, removing overlapping inefficiencies in procuring and analyzing data.

Building on the Research Center’s 2024 accomplishments, key 2025 initiatives included:

NEW RESEARCH PROJECTS

The WBC Research Center continued to advance the region’s data-driven economic narrative in 2025 by expanding its portfolio of original research products. These efforts strengthened GCEP’s ability to communicate Chicagoland’s competitive advantages, anticipate emerging trends, and equip partners with actionable insights.

- **Future of Food Chicago Business Bulletin:** The Research Center released a new report, Future of Food, in October 2025. This robust report offered a data-driven view of the region’s growing strength in food innovation, manufacturing, and sustainability. The report’s release coincided with the Chicago Venture Summit: Future of Food, which convened more than 600 startup founders, investors, Fortune 500 executives, and industry leaders from across the globe, underscoring the region’s role as a national hub for agri-food innovation and investment.
- **Solar Landscape Report:** In partnership with the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development (BED) through the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership, the team authored a landscape assessment of the solar installation industry in Chicagoland, including its current state and projected growth. This report identifies local demand for talent, as well as risks and opportunities for recruiting or skilling workers to better align with industry demand and to support quality jobs for local workers.
- **Timely Policy and Economic Analysis:** Responding to increased demand for timely insights, the Research Center produced a series of blog posts and memos analyzing the economic impacts of current and emerging policy issues. Topics included the impact of federal tariff policy and public transit support at the state and local levels.
- **Ongoing Stakeholder Communications:** The Research Center developed new communication channels to enhance information-sharing across the GCEP network, reduce duplication of research efforts, and ensure regional leaders had consistent access to information throughout the year. This includes Daily News Roundups summarizing key regional, national, and global economic developments relevant to Chicagoland. The team also started distributing weekly digests to core GCEP partners to communicate data releases, research updates, and business development efforts.

THE TEAM

In 2025, the WBC Research Center expanded its team. **Bridget Harney**, Regional Research Senior Manager, started in May and **Kali Aloisi**, Regional Research Director, joined in September. This team is fully dedicated to regional research, collaborating with GCEP partners, and building economic development strategy across the Chicagoland region. With this expanded capacity, the WBC Research Team developed new research content, provided crucial updates to regional resources, and responded to a record number of research requests for information from GCEP partners and other regional stakeholders.

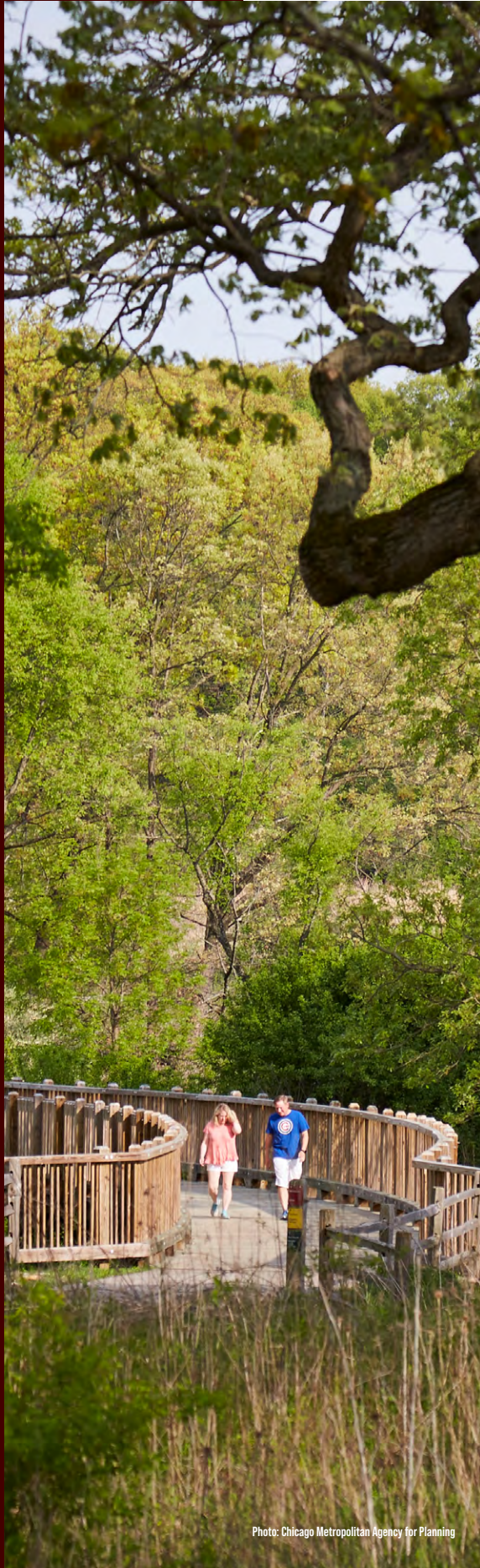


Photo: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Demand for data keeps growing. In 2025, the WBC Research Center completed 159 requests for information from county and regional partners, up from 108 in 2024 and 70 in 2023. Deliverables ranged from macroeconomic data to economic impact analyses, industry and supply chain analyses, and more, solidifying our commitment to fostering collaboration with a wide variety of regional stakeholders. Highlights by county include:

- **Chicagoland:** The team continues to inform business attraction and retention efforts for the city and region. For example, the team identified the region's top prospects for foreign direct investment, guiding decisions to travel to Japan, Germany, and Vietnam throughout 2025 and early 2026.
- **Cook:** The team partnered with the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development to support their M3 Chicago (Metro, Manufacturing, Momentum) initiative. M3 Chicago connects the region's manufacturing ecosystem to advance equitable and sustainable development. This fall, the team prepared and presented a Manufacturing State of the Economy which showcased current trends in the region's manufacturing sector.
- **Lake:** We helped Lake County Partners with various blog posts by providing data and fact-checking findings. These blog posts covered women in the manufacturing sector, the county's robust industrial real estate market, and economic growth in 2025.
- **DuPage:** We played a key role in Choose DuPage's Municipal Analytics Program (MAP). The team assisted fifteen municipalities access quality data and actionable insights through exclusive data reports and requests for information. Through regular and custom reports, the Research Center helps these municipalities attract businesses and inform economic and community development tactics.
- **Kane:** The team mapped patterns in the county's manufacturing workforce to highlight workforce availability. This included mapping commuting patterns, resident workers, and jobs for each of the county's zip codes.
- **Kendall:** In the fall, members of the team analyzed consumer spending and retail tax data in Kendall County to identify revenue growth, spending patterns, and other trends at the local level. The team then presented these findings to local chamber of commerce leaders ahead of the holiday shopping season.
- **McHenry:** Over the summer, the team presented at McHenry County Economic Development Corporation's investor meeting. This State of the Economy presentation highlighted recent insights into economic data, including identified trends, county economic strengths, and drivers of local economic growth.
- **Will:** Throughout the year, the WBC Research Center helped map the county's business community through various requests at the county and municipal level. This included identifying the small businesses community and the county's largest employers as well as estimating business sales volume and potential voids in the key retail sectors.



Prudential

Millennium
Park

Millennium
Park

Unlocking International Opportunity

Delegations



Foreign direct investment and international engagement are central to GCEP’s strategy to position Chicagoland as a unified, globally competitive region. International travel, through outbound delegations and hosting inbound partners, builds the trusted relationships that drive investment decisions, market entry, and long-term business growth. Paired with a coordinated FDI strategy, these engagements allow the region to align around priority industries, present a single value proposition to global companies, and convert global relationships into tangible, region-wide economic outcomes.

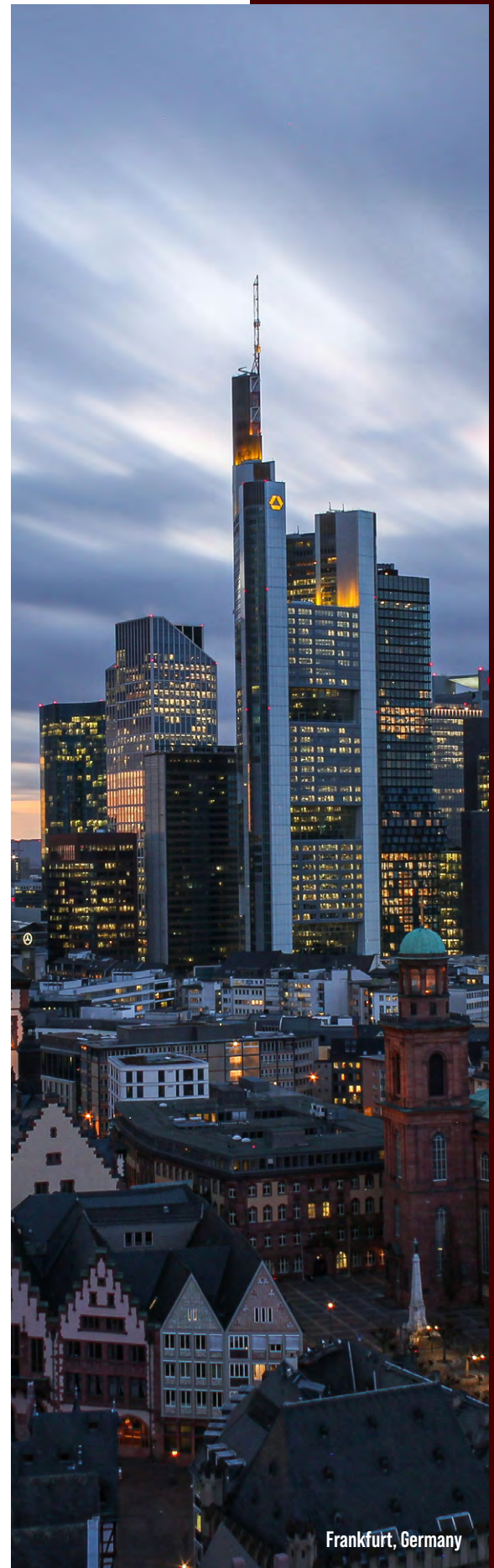
HANNOVER MESSE 2026

This spring, the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership will embark on its most ambitious international business development mission to date: a week-long delegation to Germany that will position the Chicagoland region at the forefront of transatlantic investment opportunities. From April 14–22, 2026, GCEP members and World Business Chicago staff will travel across Germany, with visits to Frankfurt, Mannheim, Karlsruhe, and Heidelberg, culminating in attendance at HANNOVER MESSE 2026, the world’s leading industrial technology trade fair.

This delegation represents a strategic expansion of GCEP’s global engagement efforts, building on the partnership’s successful track record of international business attraction through events like SelectCHI and previous delegations with partners including the Japan External Trade Organization. Germany stands as one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment in the United States, and the Chicagoland region has long been a preferred destination for German companies seeking to establish or expand their North American operations. This trip aims to deepen those ties while opening doors to new investment opportunities across GCEP’s priority sectors.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The delegation’s itinerary has been carefully designed in partnership with the German American Chamber of Commerce of the Midwest to maximize meaningful engagement with Germany’s leading economic development organizations, innovation hubs, and industry leaders. The trip will begin in Frankfurt, and then proceed south to Karlsruhe, Heidelberg, and Mannheim. The goal of these visits will be to engage with the German economic development ecosystem, including entrepreneurs, economic development professionals, and political leaders, with the goal of building stronger ties between our regional economies and pitching investment in Chicagoland to German companies.



Frankfurt, Germany



Hannover, Germany

ATTRACTING GERMAN INVESTMENT

After leaving Heidelberg, the delegation will attend Hannover Messe. The delegation's attendance at HANNOVER MESSE 2026 represents the centerpiece of this investment attraction effort. As the world's largest industrial technology exhibition, HANNOVER MESSE brings together thousands of companies and decision-makers from automation, energy, smart infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing. The event provides an unparalleled platform for GCEP to showcase Chicagoland's competitive advantages to companies actively considering North American expansion. Delegates will participate in B2B matchmaking sessions with German and international companies, attend meetings with local and regional economic development organizations, and participate in public forums designed to raise the profile of GCEP and Chicagoland as a destination for international investment.

The timing of this delegation is particularly strategic. German companies face increasing pressure to diversify their global operations, and the United States remains an attractive destination for manufacturing investment, research and development, and market expansion. Chicagoland's combination of world-class logistics infrastructure, deep talent pools, strong research institutions, and a diversified industrial base makes the region exceptionally well-positioned to capture this investment.

APPRECIATION FOR EXISTING GERMAN INVESTMENT

Beyond attracting new investment, this delegation serves an equally important purpose: demonstrating GCEP's commitment to the German companies that have already chosen to invest in Chicagoland. Germany represents one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment in the region, with companies across automotive supply chains, advanced manufacturing, chemicals, logistics, and professional services maintaining significant operations throughout the seven-county area.

By investing in face-to-face relationship building with German economic development partners and industry associations, GCEP signals to existing investors that the region values their presence and is committed to supporting their continued growth. These relationships create channels for addressing challenges, identifying expansion opportunities, and ensuring that German companies in Chicagoland have the resources and support they need to succeed.

LOOKING AHEAD

This delegation to Germany exemplifies the kind of strategic international engagement that has become a hallmark of GCEP's approach to economic development. By combining high-level relationship building, targeted investment attraction, and appreciation for existing partners, the trip will strengthen Chicagoland's position as a leading destination for German business and investment for years to come.

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT: CONVENING INTERNATIONAL LEADERS & INVESTORS

GCEP advances Chicagoland's global competitiveness by convening leaders, investors, and decision-makers whose priorities align, with the region's economic strengths.

This approach builds on successful international delegations, including a March 2025 mission to Japan led by World Business Chicago. The delegation convened senior executives from companies operating in sectors where Chicagoland holds a clear competitive advantage for roundtables, participated in Expo 2025, and celebrated our mutual, deep cultural and economic ties.

These missions demonstrate a deliberate strategy: meeting global decision-makers where they are, strengthening relationships with key economic partners, and positioning Chicagoland as a premier destination for international investment and collaboration.



Innovation Meets Investment

A New Regional Approach



Chicagoland continues to emerge as a center of technological innovation and economic opportunity, driven by a commitment to inclusive growth and shared prosperity. The Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership plays a critical role in strengthening the region’s innovation ecosystem and ensuring that its benefits reach communities across the region. A regional approach makes sense considering the data – for example, 27% of growth capital deals since 2023 involved companies outside the City of Chicago, and 59% of degrees granted in 2024 were by universities outside the city.

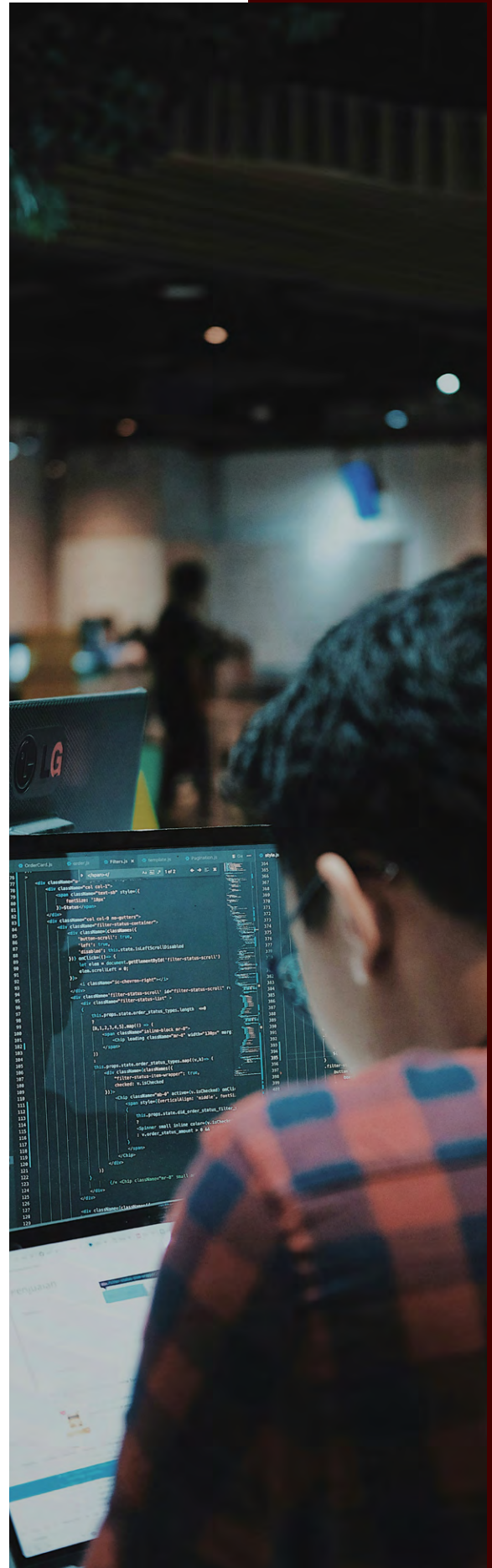
By strategically expanding the World Business Chicago Innovation & Venture programs throughout the region, GCEP has deepened the support available to entrepreneurs at every stage of development, from early-stage ideas to growing enterprises. These investments help local startups launch, scale, and access the capital, networks, and resources they need to succeed and create jobs. By fostering partnerships between startups and established businesses, these initiatives encourage collaboration, accelerate innovation, and support job creation throughout the region.

GCEP’s work also prioritizes attracting and retaining a strong STEM workforce, connecting talented individuals with emerging technology companies and startups that are shaping the region’s future. This focus helps ensure that Chicagoland remains competitive while providing meaningful career pathways for residents. Together, these efforts strengthen Chicagoland’s innovation economy and reinforce its position as a national leader in technology and entrepreneurship – one built on collaboration, opportunity, and long-term economic stability for all.

CHICAGOLAND AI LEADERSHIP SERIES WITH MICROSOFT

Recent regional collaborations illustrate the strength and depth of Chicagoland’s innovation ecosystem and the value of coordinated economic development across sectors. Through partnerships with organizations such as Microsoft, World Business Chicago, Innovation DuPage, the College of DuPage, and Choose DuPage, GCEP continues to support workforce development, entrepreneurship, and technology adoption throughout the region. WBC and Microsoft led a Chicago AI Leadership Series, offering hands-on training on AI applications.

These efforts reflect a broader regional approach to economic growth – one that aligns global corporations, higher education institutions, workforce organizations, and local innovation hubs to drive inclusive job creation and long-term competitiveness. Under the leadership of partners such as Choose DuPage and GCEP’s inaugural chair, Greg Bedalov, the partnership has played a central role in expanding World Business Chicago’s innovation and venture programs across the region. Together, these collaborations are strengthening Chicagoland’s position as a leading national and global center for industry, innovation, and talent.





CHICAGO VENTURE SUMMIT FUTURE OF FOOD 2025

Founded by now-Governor J.B. Pritzker in 2014, the Chicago Venture Summit series by WBC is the region's flagship startup and growth capital conference. The Chicago Venture Summit connects local entrepreneurs with regional and national investors, connects the region's startup ecosystem with Fortune 500s for new investment and partnership opportunities, and spotlights Chicagoland as a leading destination for innovation and investment.

Chicagoland continues to play a defining role in shaping the future of food in the United States, supported by a deeply integrated ecosystem that spans agriculture, advanced manufacturing, research and development, logistics, and technology. Building on a legacy rooted in the city's historic stockyards, the region has evolved into the nation's leading food manufacturing hub, generating \$11.8 billion annually and employing more than 72,000 workers. With nearly 40 percent of food manufacturing firms located outside Cook County, this growth reflects a truly regional economy — one that extends across counties, universities, innovation districts, and communities throughout Chicagoland.

The Chicago Venture Summit: Future of Food 2025, organized by World Business Chicago with support from Mayor Brandon Johnson, exemplified this regional strength and national leadership. Bringing together more than 500 founders, investors, corporate leaders, and public-sector partners from 375 organizations across 21 states and 16 countries, the summit highlighted Chicagoland's capacity to convene global talent around sectors where the region has a competitive advantage. Program highlights included the launch of the Future of Food Waste Forum, an initiative led by Nicor Gas to advance circular economy solutions that transform food waste into clean energy, fertilizer, and new jobs. Together, these efforts underscore the role of coordinated regional collaboration—central to GCEP's mission—in sustaining Chicagoland's leadership in food innovation, sustainability, and inclusive economic growth.

ATTRACTING & RETAINING STEM TALENT FOR CHICAGOLAND

With anchor partners the University of Illinois System and City Colleges of Chicago, ThinkChicago is WBC's flagship talent program focused on connecting diverse young people with innovative Chicagoland companies and startups. WBC and GCEP led three flagship events and experiences to connect local STEM talent with career pathways in our region's technology and innovation economy:

- **ThinkChicago Week 2025:** WBC actively recruited and engaged students across GCEP universities and community colleges (40+ unique colleges across Chicagoland and the Midwest) for a multi-day experience exploring career pathways with local companies and startups.
- **ThinkChicago Launchpad 2025:** Led by the region's community colleges, this annual flagship event, exclusive for community college students, ensured GCEP was deeply invested in inclusive and accessible pathways for all students who want to pursue careers in STEM. With strong student participation from several GCEP-based community colleges, the full-day activation included keynote speakers, career development tracks, resume workshops, and more.
- **ThinkChicago partners with GCEP higher education institutions:** WBC's ThinkChicago program scaled its partnership with Lake Forest College to complement its existing programming and increase engagement with Chicagoland companies and startups.



STARTUP & INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

We launched a focused engagement strategy to better connect and support startups across all GCEP counties, with the goal of strengthening regional collaboration within Chicagoland's broader technology and innovation ecosystem. This work reflects a clear understanding that economic growth is strongest when it is coordinated, data-driven, and inclusive of the entire region.

Guided by data from the WBC Research Center, we conducted regular quarterly reviews of growth-capital activity and engaged directly with startup CEOs located throughout the seven GCEP counties. This approach ensured that regional entrepreneurs were not only visible, but actively supported as part of Chicagoland's innovation economy. The strategy included several key elements:

- 1. First, startups located in GCEP counties were provided expanded access to World Business Chicago's flagship innovation and venture programs, ensuring that entrepreneurs across the region could benefit from the same high-quality resources and opportunities available within the city of Chicago.**
- 2. Second, WBC pursued proactive, hands-on outreach to startup CEOs throughout the GCEP region, offering tailored guidance, mentorship, and connections to investors, corporate partners, and industry experts. This direct engagement helped build stronger relationships and aligned support with the specific needs of growing companies.**
- 3. Finally, WBC expanded its innovation and venture programming into GCEP counties through locally based workshops, networking opportunities, and mentorship programs. These efforts were designed to reflect the distinct strengths and challenges of different communities while strengthening their connection to the larger regional ecosystem.**

By extending the reach of WBC's programs and services, GCEP has helped create clearer regional pathways for startups to access capital, partnerships, and critical resources, contributing to a more integrated, resilient, and competitive innovation economy across Chicagoland.

The GCEP Team

COUNTY	PARTNER	GCEP POINT OF CONTACT
Cook	Cook County Bureau of Economic Development	Xochitl Flores, <i>Bureau Chief</i>
DuPage	Choose DuPage	Greg Bedalov, <i>President & CEO</i>
Kane	Kane County Economic Development Corporation	John Greuling, <i>Founding Board Member</i>
Kendall	Kendall County Economic Development Department	Christina Burns, <i>County Administrator</i>
Lake	Lake County Partners	Kevin Considine, <i>President & CEO</i>
McHenry	McHenry County Economic Development Corporation	Mark Piekos, <i>Executive Director</i>
Will	Will County Center for Economic Development	Doug Pryor, <i>President & CEO</i>

WORLD BUSINESS CHICAGO

Phil Clement, <i>President & CEO</i>	Tony Kempa, <i>Consultant, Regional Partnership</i>
Kali Aloisi, <i>Regional Research Director</i>	Hannah Loftus, <i>Vice President, Research</i>
Bridget Harney, <i>Regional Research Senior Manager</i>	Karla Orozco, <i>Vice President, Business Development</i>
Alex Iseri, <i>Director of Economic Development, Regional Opportunities</i>	

GCEP Statement of Collaboration

We acknowledge that our northeastern Illinois region – including Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties as well as the city of Chicago – is interconnected and interdependent. We believe that the region can achieve more to strengthen jobs and capital investment by working together than any one community can on its own. We know that the region’s extensive assets offer significant opportunities to provide shared prosperity across different and diverse communities. And we recognize that joint action can ensure robust, equitable economic growth by building a globally competitive ecosystem that works for everyone, with world-class transportation infrastructure, economic sectors, talent, and innovation. Wishing to enter a new era of regional cooperation, we join together to make the following commitments, with the goal of facilitating activities that better take advantage of our shared opportunities and complement our unique interests:

- As a forum for local government leadership, we will engage corporate, civic, and institutional partners to leverage our combined strengths and implement approved joint plans for the benefit of the region.
- We will enlist federal and state governments to play key roles as partners and funders of regional initiatives in coordination with existing agencies and activities.
- We will improve our inter-jurisdictional and inter-agency communication to share all information as is necessary and prudent to create efficient and effective opportunities for collaboration.
- We will develop methods and resources for deliberate action that advances the region, with an emphasis on the needs of marginalized communities and the potential to enhance our global economic competitiveness.
- We will set the highest standards of professional conduct, trust, and integrity for ourselves, our staffs, and our partners to maximize regional benefits for public expenditures.
- We will evaluate both the overall economic progress of the entire region as well as individual communities as we measure success.



Just the Facts

Economic Climate

#1 IN CORPORATE RELOCATION:

Chicagoland led the nation in 2025 for the 13th year in a row with the highest number of corporate relocations and expansions.

#1 U.S. PORT BY TRADE VALUE:

O'Hare International Airport ranks as the largest U.S. port in the world in 2025, handling \$423B in trade year to date—marking a 28% increase from last year.

FORTUNE 500 MAGNET:

Chicagoland ranks #2 in the U.S. for the number of Fortune 500 headquarters—30 major firms call the region home.

AMERICA'S MOST DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY:

No single sector accounts for more than 13% of Chicagoland's GDP, providing resilience across market cycles and access to a broad base of customers.

A GLOBAL-SCALE ECONOMY:

At a projected \$955 billion in Q1 2026, Chicagoland's Gross Regional Product ranks between the world's 21st and 22nd largest economies—behind Switzerland and ahead of Taiwan, Belgium, and Argentina.

TALENT PIPELINE:

With over 151K post-secondary graduates annually, Chicagoland ranks as the 3rd largest talent producer in the U.S.

EDUCATED & SKILLED WORKFORCE:

Over 3.2M Chicagoland residents hold an associate's degree or higher, and 35% hold a college degree—outpacing the national average of 31%.

RESEARCH POWERHOUSE:

Home to four R1 research universities and two national labs (Argonne and Fermilab), Chicagoland leads on innovation in clean energy, quantum computing, AI, and life sciences.

EMERGING SECTOR GROWTH (2024–2025):

Professional Services: \$141B | Manufacturing: \$99B | Finance and Insurance: \$79B

LABOR FORCE STRENGTH:

With approximately 5M workers, Chicagoland's labor force is larger than that of 41 U.S. states.

TOP PRIVATE EMPLOYER:

Amazon is Chicagoland's largest private-sector employer by headcount.

BUSINESS DENSITY:

250K businesses operate in the Chicagoland metro—4th highest among U.S. regions.

GROWTH CAPITAL MOMENTUM:

Chicagoland companies raised \$5.8 billion in growth capital in 2025. Notable VC deals included Pathos (\$365M, Series D), Paragon Biosciences (\$295M), Kin (\$250M, Series E), and Ocient (\$132M, Series B2).

PRO-CHICAGOLAND MOMENTUM:

223 major businesses expanded in or relocated to the region in 2025: 170 expansions and 53 new market entrants/relocations. 84 are investments in the city of Chicago (including 10 on the South or West Sides), with 139 in the surrounding region.

CHICAGOLAND IS SECOND TO NONE

CHICAGOLAND IS THE NATION'S TOP METRO FOR
CORPORATE RELOCATION & EXPANSION.



DIVERSITY OF
INDUSTRIES



AFFORDABILITY



CENTRAL
LOCATION



SCALABILITY



WATER
SECURITY



RESILIENCE

Chicagoland has the momentum, the scale, and the economic fundamentals that matter. Connect with World Business Chicago to see why global brands are investing here — and why your business should be next.



