

CLARKSVILLE/JOHNSON COUNTY STRATEGIC PLANNING INITIATIVE



UofA DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System

Community, Professional & Economic Development

Strengthening Arkansas Communities



CLARKSVILLE/JOHNSON COUNTY STRATEGIC PLANNING INITIATIVE

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by

Community, Professional & Economic Development Unit

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FOREWORD

The City of Clarksville requested the Community, Professional and Economic Development (CPED) unit of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture assist the city in developing a strategic plan to improve the lives of Clarksville/Johnson County residents. CPED is pleased to release this report which summarizes the findings of our study. For additional detail about the findings reported in this document, we encourage the reader to read the following reports:

- Clarksville and Johnson County Baseline Information.
- Clarksville Benchmark Cities Report.
- Findings from Stakeholder Interviews, Focus Groups and Surveys.
 - Clarksville/Johnson County Retiree Focus Group Findings.
- Clarksville/Johnson County Economic Opportunities.

It is hoped that these documents will serve as planning tools for local officials, community leaders and economic development professionals to develop policies and programs that improve the quality of life for Clarksville/Johnson County residents.

This publication provides findings of our study with action items derived from input from community members, knowledge of successful activities in benchmark communities and secondary data and action items. We encourage leaders and decision makers to use this publication along with their knowledge of the local geography, culture, and political environment to establish priorities and develop policies and programs that enhance the well-being of Clarksville/Johnson County residents.



The CPED team conducted this study in four phases which were: 1) Collecting baseline information on Clarksville/Johnson County and the benchmark cities; 2) Conducting community surveys, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and a Chalk & Talk; 3) Identifying economic opportunities, 4) Suggesting strategies and action items to move Clarksville forward.

During this process we have shared information and obtained feedback from the Clarksville Economic Development Advisory Committee.

We hope you find this publication useful as you plan for the future of your communities and Johnson County.

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COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Clarksville/Johnson County has many strong leaders who have worked in the past and continue to work to improve the quality of life for city and county residents. This leadership, working together and combined with the many assets in the county have the potential to make Clarksville/Johnson County an even better place to live and work.

Unlike many rural communities in Arkansas which saw declining populations during the past decade, Johnson County's population grew nearly 1 percent during this time. However, Johnson County experienced a slight decline in employment from 2010 to 2019 when the state and U.S. economies were growing. Although many rural communities in Arkansas experienced similar declining employment during this period, this trend will need to be reversed if Clarksville/Johnson County wants to grow and improve the quality of life for its residents. Efforts to increase household income, strengthen infrastructure and enhance the workforce will also support future economic growth and well-being of residents.

Clarksville/Johnson County has many assets on which to build to grow the local economy so that all community members benefit from this growth. These assets will be described in more detail in this report, but some of these assets include forward-thinking community leaders and engaged residents; solar, broadband, and other utilities infrastructure; access to multiple modes of transportation; a diverse economic base and abundant natural resources.

The first section of this report identifies business sectors that could be targeted for economic growth, including suggested strategies for growth and actions to achieve strategies. The second section identifies underlying strategies for Clarksville/Johnson County to provide the foundation for community and economic development.



TARGETED BUSINESS SECTORS

Johnson County has many physical and intangible assets on which to build and grow its economy. Most importantly these are the skills, knowledge and resourcefulness of people living in the county. Particularly important are the local leaders who are providing the vision, leadership and who will develop the blueprint for economic development. It will be the people of Johnson County who will envision how to utilize local resources to produce goods and services demanded by local, national and international markets.

Physical assets include the built and naturally occurring infrastructure available to residents, businesses and visitors. Some of the built infrastructure which provide some competitive advantages for Clarksville and Johnson County include the transportation, communications, energy, education, health care, industrial land and building infrastructure.

The five suggested business sectors that have the greatest potential for growth are:

- Amenity based, including tourism, retiree attraction and the creative economy.
- Warehousing and transportation.
- Agriculture and forestry.
- Manufacturing, including primary and fabricated metal and forestry products; and
- Retail and service businesses.

The overarching strategies are to utilize and enhance the skills and knowledge of workers to add value to commodities to produce unique products and increase productivity.

Amenity Based Businesses

Johnson County has the lakes, river and mountains that provide the potential to increase tourism, retiree attraction and creative economy businesses. There is potential to enhance and build from these resources to benefit the Clarksville/Johnson County community.

Target: Tourism

While the number of travel and tourism visitors to the county increased at a fast rate between 2012 and 2016, since 2016 there has been a downward trend in the number of visitor days and total spending by visitors. Another indicator of the potential

for growth in the tourism industry is that spending per visitor is below the state average and has remained relatively constant since the early 1990s. There are several things the community can do to increase tourism and capture more tourism dollars in the county. Some action items include:

- Develop an inventory of current and potential tourist attractions in the county.
- Identify market(s) of people wanting to visit/partake of attractions in county.
- Make necessary investments to build or enhance attractions.
- Connect with the Arkansas River Valley TRI-Peaks Tourism Association to include Johnson County tourist attractions as part of the regional marketing effort.
- Develop marketing strategies to target the identified market(s).
- Identify goods and services desired by targeted market segment(s) and determine if those goods and services are available in Johnson County.
- Encourage and support expansion of current businesses that provide goods and services demanded by market segment, but not available in Johnson County.

Target: Retiree Attraction

Johnson County has an outdoor recreational environment and the University of the Ozarks that provides cultural events. This combination of outdoor recreational opportunities and cultural events are attractive to many retirees. During the 1970s and 1990s many retirees moved to Johnson County from outside the area. However, since 2000 the net in-migration of people 60 years of age and older (retirees) has dwindled dramatically.

Some suggested action items to promote and grow this industry are:

- Form a retirement-relocation task force.
- Develop a mission statement.
- Undertake a community assessment of attractive features desired by retirees and those features that need to be provided for retirees:
 - Conduct a focus group of retirees who moved to Johnson County to retiree to ascertain:
 - What attracted them to Johnson County?
 - Did their relocation meet expectations?

¹Analysis of information provided in Arkansas Department of Tourism and Arkansas Tourism Economic Impact annual reports, 1992-2019.

- What is needed to improve their quality of life and keep them in Johnson County?
- Develop an inventory of affordable housing and determine if additional housing is needed.
- Develop an inventory of health care providers and services and identify additional health care services needed for retirees.
- Conduct market research to understand the retiree market and match community attractive features with specific group(s) of retirees.
- Develop a marketing strategy to target the market segment desiring the lifestyle and amenities offered by Johnson County.
- Develop goals and objectives to enable evaluation of progress.
- Develop an Ambassador Program with trained ambassadors to help attract retirees and introduce them to the community.
- Develop an ongoing evaluation process to determine successes and needed program changes.

Example

Visit Mountain Home to view the amenities and visit with community leaders to learn how this community has been successful in attracting retirees. Mountain Home has been nationally recognized as one of the best retirement communities in the nation. Rand McNally rated Mountain Home as one of the best places to retire. AARP's Sun Belt Retirement ranked the area as one of the top places to retire in the United States. Where to Retire Magazine named the area "an undiscovered haven."

Target: Creative Economy

Understanding Johnson County's creative ecosystem is essential to developing and strengthening the creative economy. The creative ecosystem consists of for-profit and nonprofit creative industries, artists and artist workforce, educators, entrepreneurs, vendors, policy makers and funders that produce and distribute creative and artistic-based goods and services. One definition of the creative economy is that it consists of economic activity that depends on individuals and organizations using their creativity to drive jobs, revenue, community resources, and cultural engagement.

Creative economy practices are required to develop and support the creative economy and include activities or methods used in policy, research, programmatic, academic, or funding

spaces that are designed to amplify and advance the inclusive creative economy in local communities.

While there is no one definition of the creative economy, the Americans for the Arts organization defines the creative economy as being made of up of the five following elements:

- The Creative Industries
- The Creatives
- The Talent Developers
- The Participants
- The Resource Managers



The Americans for the Arts organization has also identified the following action items which will help identify the County's assets, gaps in service, and possible assumptions about who is doing what in your community. The organization also suggests that the community map each of the five creative economy elements. Identify the key players of the creative economy in each of the five categories as listed below.

- Establish relationships with key players in each category.
- Engage key players of each category in conversation to learn about their goals, challenges, and their visions for the community.
- Identify and promote success stories.
- Bring creative players together to solve community issues.

Visit their website for additional details on how to undertake each action item: <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/private-sector-network/tools-resources/creative-economy-toolkit>.

Transportation and Warehousing

Johnson County has a competitive advantage in the transportation and warehousing industries given its access to multiple transportation modes (highway, rail, river) and being in a central location between north and south and east and west to different areas of the United States. In addition, these industries are well developed in the county and have the labor force with the experience and skills to grow these industries. However, employment in these two industries combined decreased nearly 3 percent in Johnson County from 2010 to 2019 compared to growth in these two industries in Arkansas and the U.S. during this time-period. Therefore, it will require a targeted effort to grow these industries in the county to capture some of the projected annual growth in the U.S. of 1.1 percent from 2020 to 2030.



Recent supply chain difficulties suggest that there will be a greater demand for warehouse space to reduce the time lag in obtaining needed parts for the manufacturing sector. This combined with the growth of e-commerce which requires more space for storing, packaging and dispatching products leads some experts to suggest that warehousing and transportation will be among the fastest growing industries in the world. Some action items include:

- Inventory existing capacity to expand warehouse facilities and transportation services.
- Contact company officials that manage local warehouses and transportation companies to determine their plans to expand operations and what assistance, if any, is needed.
- Identify and contact other companies likely to require additional warehouse facilities and transportation services.
- Determine if the Clarksville/Johnson County can provide the support needed to expand the warehouse and transportation industries with local resources.

Agriculture and Forestry

The production and processing of agriculture and forestry commodities has been a major industry supporting the Johnson County economy. While agriculture and forestry are expected to continue to be a major employer of Johnson County residents, opportunities for growth of this sector may lie in the opportunity to produce agriculture and forest products and more high value crops like fruits and vegetables in addition to the commodities currently produced. Unique agriculture products could include specialty beef products, open range poultry, medicinal herbs and spices, etc. Custom made specialty furniture could be produced from lumber harvested in the County. Some action items include:

- Identify entrepreneurs in Johnson County who are currently producing agriculture and forestry products for niche markets.
- Engage these entrepreneurs as to their goals, challenges and opportunities for growth.
- Identify additional niche markets for agriculture and forest products that could be produced from locally grown commodities.
- Share niche market opportunities with producers and potential entrepreneurs.
- Identify and share information on technical, business development and financial assistance available with entrepreneurs wanting to produce products for niche markets.

Manufacturing

Although the manufacturing sector has been losing jobs since 1998, it remains the most important component of the economic base of Johnson County in terms of the number of jobs it provides for residents. The manufacturing industry in the county while still strong is also diverse, meaning there are many different types of manufacturing industries. Although poultry processing is the largest manufacturing industry in the county, accounting for approximately one-third of total manufacturing employment, the other two-thirds of manufacturing jobs are in a diverse array of industries including motor, generator and vehicle production, metal and machine shops, apparel, and others. The diversity of the manufacturing sector mitigates the effect of a downturn in any one manufacturing industry and positions the local economy for growth in a variety of industries.

It will be difficult to retain and even less likely to grow many of the traditional manufacturing industries. Manufacturing will be more likely to grow if the focus is on increasing productivity and adding value to products to satisfy customer demands.

This suggests a need to continually discover new techniques and processes to produce products that, when combined with services, provide the consumer with something more than just the commodity. Utilization of information technology, micro-electronics and new organizational practices is key to retaining and growing the manufacturing industry.

Target: Metal Products

Most of the people employed in the metal products industries in Johnson County are employed in fabricated metal industries such as iron and steel pipe and tube manufacturing, prefabricated metal buildings, and numerous other small, fabricated metal manufacturing businesses. This suggests a skilled metalworking workforce that is an asset which could be used to grow this industry. The Employment Projections program of the U.S. of Labor Statistics projects that employment in the fabricated metal industry to grow 3.8 percent from 2020 to 2030. Although this industry is not large, there are many small businesses producing fabricated metal products and these small businesses could contribute to economic growth in Johnson County and enhance the diversity of the manufacturing sector.

Target: Forestry

Growth of the wood products industry is expected to be slow during the next decade. While Johnson County needs to maintain and grow their wood products manufacturing industry which is composed primarily of engineered wood products and wood containers and pallets, there is potential for expansion of this industry by providing unique products for growing local, regional, and national niche markets.

Retail and Service Industry

It is critical for Johnson County to capture the retail and service sector purchases of residents and visitors to Johnson County. Currently a large share of consumer purchases by Johnson County residents are made outside Johnson County. The retail trade gap, the difference between the demand for goods by residents and local sales of these goods, is greatest for grocery stores, general merchandise stores, automobile dealers, restaurants and drinking places, building material and supply dealer, and miscellaneous store retailers. This suggests that not only is Clarksville not capturing local resident spending for goods and services, but that the community could also capture more dollars from travelers and tourists.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has resulted in consumers purchasing more goods and services online. Small town retailers



have had to develop a stronger on-line presence and market their goods and services. They also must compete with the large online stores that provide a large selection of goods and services at low-cost. Therefore, local retailers will need to compete with these large online retailers by providing quality goods and services, outstanding customer service, unique products, and convenience.

Target: Residents

It is suggested that local leaders determine where regional residents are shopping, for what products and services, and why they are shopping outside Johnson County. This information could be used to (1) inform the public of the availability of local goods and services, (2) inform the business community of potential markets for their goods and services, and (3) encourage the business community to enhance and expand their goods and services to meet local demand. Capturing more dollars that currently leak out of Johnson County would increase the size of the regional economy and benefit local entrepreneurs.

The following is a list of downtown business that are most likely to succeed after the COVID-19 Pandemic and larger market share taken by online retailers. This list is provided by Redevelopment Resources which has worked with small communities to develop their downtown districts.

- Pet supplies
- Specialty Organics/Grocery
- Personal Care
- Wine, Beer, Liquor
- Clothing Boutiques
- Home Health Aids/Pharmacy
- Experiential Retail
- Ice Cream

²Source: Esri 2017 Retail Marketplace Profile (10-mile radius), ESRI.

Some action items to grow the retail and service sector to capture more dollars from residents include:

- Identify potential for expanding the retail and service sector:
 - Identify trade area.
 - Use secondary data to compute the trade gap by type of business:
 - Compute the demand for goods and services using the population, household income and spending patterns in the trade area.
 - Compare the demand for goods and service with retail and service business sales in the trade area.
- Conduct a consumer shopping survey to determine where residents shop for different goods and services and why they shop in and out of the trade area. This provides information to local businesses on how they could capture more of the retail and service business and can be used to develop strategies to get people to purchase more of their goods and services from local businesses.
- Conduct focus groups to further probe the reasons why people do not purchase more of their goods and services from local businesses.
- Conduct a business survey to ascertain the perceptions of local business owners regarding local business trends and their willingness to adapt to the demands of residents.
- Develop strategies to capture more retail and service sales from residents. Information from the above four action items can be used to develop strategies to capture additional retail and service sales.

Example

Buy local programs have been used by some rural communities to make residents aware of the availability of goods and services in local shops and establish incentives to encourage local shopping. Some activities have included: 1) Making residents aware of local goods and services available using websites, social media and local events to raise awareness; 2) Providing information on the local benefits of buying locally, including the additional jobs and income and local tax revenue for schools, streets, parks and recreation facilities and programs; 3) Encouraging businesses to adapt to needs of residents and develop loyalty and service unmatched by outside competitors.

Target: Travelers and Tourists

To benefit from an expansion of the travel and tourism industry, Johnson County must provide more and enhanced goods and services to capture visitor spending. New and

enhanced lodging and dining establishments are needed as are general retail establishments and specialty stores that provide goods demanded by tourists to Johnson County.

Some action items to grow the retail and service sector to capture more dollars from travelers and tourists include:

- Identify spending patterns of travelers and targeted tourist markets.
- Develop an inventory of goods and services available for travelers and tourists.
- Identify gaps between goods and services demanded by travelers and tourists and those supplied locally.
- Develop strategies to capture more retail and service sales from travelers and tourists.
- Information from the above three action items can be used to develop strategies to capture additional retail and service sales.

Summary

Clarksville/Johnson County should continue to build on its current major economic drivers to promote future economic development utilizing human, natural resource, and manufacturing industry assets. This includes the amenity, natural resource, supporting, and manufacturing industries. However, the focus needs to be on producing more high value products and services from these resources. This is a shift from producing commodities for a mass market to producing products and services demanded by local, national and international markets. Clarksville/Johnson County needs to grow their own businesses utilizing local human and natural resources and not rely solely or primarily on recruiting traditional manufacturing firms to provide employment opportunities for residents.

This requires a commitment to improve the education and skills of residents and to provide a creative and entrepreneurial environment to foster new businesses and new ways of doing business. It also requires investments to maintain and enhance the natural environment, which is critical to the development and growth of the tourism and retirement industries. As Clarksville/Johnson County grows its economic base, efforts will be needed to expand and enhance retail and service sectors to meet increased demand and encourage relocation to Johnson County.

Development of infrastructure, amenities, an effective organizational structure, community engagement and communication and marketing strategies as discussed in the follow section will further enhance the economic vitality, resilience, and quality of life in Clarksville/Johnson County.

UNDERLYING STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Overview of Focus Areas and Strategies

This section draws from primary and secondary information collected for this study to identify focus areas and strategies that will help Clarksville/Johnson County provide the foundation for its community and economic development efforts.

Based on these data, recommended areas of focus include: (1) New and Existing Businesses, (2) Workforce, (3) Infrastructure, (4) Inclusive Culture, and (5) Communication, Marketing and Branding.

The following is a summary of the suggested strategies and action items for each strategy.

FOCUS AREA 1: NEW AND EXISTING BUSINESSES

STRATEGY 1: Identify and recruit businesses (restaurants, retail, entertainment) that are a good fit for Clarksville.

- Identify opportunities and strategies for growing the retail and service sectors as described in the Retail and Service Industry section on pages 7 and 8 of this report.
- Place measure on ballot for voters to decide whether to allow alcohol production and sales.
 - Provide voters with information on how licenses to produce or sell alcohol could be obtained and where the businesses could be located.
 - Provide voters with information on the additional revenue that would likely be generated for city and county governments from the sale of alcoholic beverages.

STRATEGY 2: Review city codes and those of surrounding cities to determine changes needed.

- Establish a committee with representation from business owners, city council and code enforcement to review existing codes and ordinances:
- Ensure all regulations are clearly communicated, accessible, and equally enforced across applicable businesses and sectors.
- Identify and address barriers to renovating and repurposing vacant buildings downtown.

STRATEGY 3: Offer tax incentives, grants, or other financial support to new and existing businesses.

- Determine target areas of interest (i.e., new business start-ups and early-stage development, retail, local agriculture and food systems).
- Set and communicate incentive guidelines.
- Identify funding mechanisms.

STRATEGY 4: Create culture of entrepreneurship and innovation.

- Continue conversations with local business owners, such as the business retention and expansion interviews conducted as part of this study, to identify what's working well and what barriers or challenges business owners are encountering that is hindering growth and innovation. Based on this, identify and work with appropriate stakeholders in the community, region, and state to address these issues.
- Partner with University of the Ozarks, K-12 school, and local businesses and organizations to launch events and programs that showcase and encourage innovation and entrepreneurial thinking.
- Look for people with entrepreneurial and innovative mindset when hiring employees or appointing people to local boards and committees. Ask candidates to provide examples of "out-of-the-box" approaches to problem solving.
- Create regular opportunities to encourage networking and mentoring among entrepreneurs and resources providers.
- Explore opportunities and partnerships to provide customized assistance to a full range of entrepreneurs and establishment of more sophisticated forms of capital (equity capital, angel networks, venture capital) to meet the needs of a wide range of entrepreneurs.

STRATEGY 5: Develop a program to regularly interview business owners to identify and address challenges.

- Recruit and organize leadership team/task force.
- Identify types and number of businesses to be visited each year.
- Develop surveys and/or interview guides to be used.
- Conduct site visits.
- Compile and review results.
- Identify red-flag warnings that need to be immediately addressed and respond.
- Analyze data from all interviews.
- Prepare a written report highlighting areas of strength as well as specific areas of concern.
- Communicate results with local leaders, industry groups, and others who may play a role in addressing issues.



STRATEGY 6: Cut red tape and simplify processes for starting a new business.

- Meet with business owners who have recently started a business to identify obstacles, understand constraints and seek out opportunities for improvement.
- Establish a liaison or point of contact responsible for greeting new businesses and helping them navigate the various processes required of them. This person would coordinate across all city departments and divisions involved in the process.
- Create a “one stop shop” location or concierge service in a centralized location with consistent, accessible hours to

assist new and expanding businesses with permitting and other necessary approval processes.

- Offer ways for new and expanding businesses to receive expedited or immediate approval of the submission process or quick responses on needed adjustments.
- Ensure all approval processes are communicated and offered consistently and, likewise, ensure that all new entities received the same treatment and services to prevent perception of favoritism.

STRATEGY 7: Identify challenges and opportunities unique to minority-owned small businesses.

- Conduct regularly scheduled meetings with minority business owners and potential entrepreneurs to develop good communication channels and assess minority business owners’ concerns and desires for assistance.
- Conduct a training program for minority business owners and potential entrepreneurs on the basics of starting and growing a business in Clarksville/Johnson County.

FOCUS AREA 2: WORKFORCE

STRATEGY 1: Develop a partnership with businesses/industry and educational institutions to identify current and future workforce needs and align training opportunities to meet these needs.

- Identify current workforce needs.
- Identify unemployed residents, including those not in labor force, and the skills needed to be part of the workforce.
- Connect residents with regional adult education programs, ESL, citizenship support and other services to provide residents with the hard and soft skills needed to fill current employment opportunities.
- Identify gaps in the existing career pipeline and create additional training opportunities and opportunities for internships and apprenticeships.
- Develop a workforce website that provides resources and information about the labor market for employers and workers.
- Conduct an annual job fair.
- Continue to support and enhance **Leadership Johnson County** to develop future leaders.

STRATEGY 2: Recruit skilled workers and young families to relocate to Clarksville.

- Form a committee to recruit skilled workers to live and work in Clarksville/Johnson County.
- Develop a directory and contact information of people who left Clarksville/Johnson County for school and work.
- Identify other target audiences that are likely wanting to live in a rural area.
- Use social media to communicate with target audiences about employment opportunities and quality of life in Clarksville/Johnson County.
- Follow up with direct contacts to those expressing some interest in relocating to Clarksville/Johnson County.

STRATEGY 3: Address barriers that are keeping community members from participating in the workforce.

- Use the workforce partnership to identify barriers for residents wanting to enter the workforce.
- Identify the gap between the supply and demand for childcare services in the county.
- Provide subsidized childcare for those qualifying and utilizing public facilities where possible.
- Address other barriers to workforce participation.

FOCUS AREA 3: INFRASTRUCTURE

STRATEGY 1: Develop strategies to provide affordable housing, including extended-care facilities.

- Determine housing available that is affordable for different household income groups in the county and identify housing gaps.
- Convene a meeting(s) of stakeholders, including building contractors, bank executives, business leaders, and city and county officials to develop strategies to address the current and future needs for additional housing.

STRATEGY 2: Develop strategies to provide additional transportation options.

- Conduct a survey of students and the elderly to ascertain the demand for additional transportation services.
- Organize a meeting with current and potential transportation providers to discuss survey results and identify strategies to meet the transportation needs, including any public/private partnerships that may be feasible.

STRATEGY 3: Determine residents' preference for allowing alcohol sales in Johnson County.

- Place measure on ballot for voters to decide whether to allow alcohol production and sales.

STRATEGY 4: Develop and implement policies to improve accessibility of buildings and other community spaces.

- Conduct a meeting with business owners and stakeholders to determine what is required to make these buildings accessible.
- Develop cost effective strategies to improve community spaces and building accessibility.

FOCUS AREA 4: INCLUSIVE CULTURE

STRATEGY 1: Partner with the University of the Ozarks to organize more opportunities for students to tour Clarksville and connect with local organizations/business as part of student orientation.

- Advertise community events to college students and make them aware of engagement opportunities.
- Develop program/partnership with local businesses aimed at offering discounts for students (e.g., Bear Bucks).
- Offer networking or after-hours events for businesses, city, and community leaders to connect with students.
- Work with local businesses and organizations to identify spaces for students to study and socialize.
- Establish a recognition program for businesses that partner with the University of the Ozarks or are student friendly.
- Connect students with jobs or internships at various local businesses.
- Work with University officials to identify students who want to stay in Clarksville after graduation and explore ways to support them.
- Create young professional groups and explore other ways to attract/retain young professionals.

STRATEGY 2: Foster communication, trust, interaction and participation across all segments of the population to help create a more inclusive environment.

- Intentionally work with churches, faith-based organizations, advocacy groups, and others that represent different population segments to ensure they are aware of community resources and invited to participate in community activities and events. Implement outreach interventions, such as establishing relationships with multi-lingual volunteers to interact with the various groups and forming alliances with disability advocacy groups.
 - Facilitate learning opportunities for non-native residents:
 - Identify existing adult education, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, citizenship support and immigration resources and connect Karen, Hispanic and other immigrant residents to those resources.
- Provide training and/or develop educational materials about laws, regulations, and resources related to living in Clarksville/Johnson County. Refer to the Phase II Executive Summary Report for additional details regarding training topics of interest identified through Karen and Hispanic focus groups.
- Host family-friendly multi-cultural activities and events that allow community members to share their traditions with each other. In addition to activities that mark traditional American traditional holidays, celebrate other events such as National Hispanic Heritage Month to celebrate how people from different backgrounds have contribute to Clarksville/Johnson County.
- As community leaders, tap into opportunities to listen and learn more about different segments of the community. Visit businesses you might not normally shop in. Attend activities hosted by different segments of the population. Develop strategies to reach community members and engage them in issues that are important to them.
- Appoint individuals from minority groups to boards and leadership roles.

FOCUS AREA 5: COMMUNICATION, MARKETING AND BRANDING

STRATEGY 1: Create unified brand highlighting city's infrastructure, quality of life and other assets to promote Clarksville to businesses, families, workers, and tourists.

- Work with University of the Ozarks Strategic Communications minor faculty and students and/or private sector experts to develop a community logo, tagline, and other brand messaging. Messaging should:
 - Directly support community and economic development priorities and goals set by community leaders as a result of this study.
 - Be customized to the different target audiences that are relevant to those priorities and goals. Communication tactics and marketing tools used should also be tailored to each target audience.
 - Leverage Clarksville/Johnson County's assets related to those priorities and goals. In addition to those summarized above, the Phase II Executive Summary Report provides additional examples of these.



STRATEGY 2: Promote volunteerism and engagement opportunities.

- Publicize the results of this study and provide opportunities for residents, organizations, and other community members

to become involved in implementation. This might include inviting residents to participate in a series of community meetings or launch event to discuss findings and recommendations outlined in the final Economic Development Study. Engage participants in a feedback/prioritization process, invite them to identify topic areas of interest, and offer opportunities for participants to regularly work on a specific topic via working groups. Brand this implementation process and encourage participants to spread the word. Use partners identified under Focus Area 4 (Inclusive Culture), Strategy 2 to reach all segments of the community.

- Assess the various skills, talents and passions that exist among the diverse members of the Clarksville/Johnson County community and offer volunteer opportunities that align with these interests. Not only will this process help build relationships, but it will also help sustain efforts over time as people are more likely to invest their time and talent in something they care about and/or help build.
- Identify community champions and potential leaders. Dedicated champions are essential in leading and promoting efforts, recruiting volunteers, raising funds, celebrating wins, and helping shift the mindset. Recruit champions from various age groups and populations to reflect the diversity of the community to encourage diverse involvement.
- Recognize and celebrate community members who are involved in efforts to strengthen the community throughout the year. Activities and events that recognize contributions of community members, celebrate major accomplishments and milestones, and allow people to socialize and have fun together are important in creating an environment in which people want to be involved.

STRATEGY 3: Strengthen communication, collaboration and cooperation and partnerships between institutions, city and county government, businesses and organizations.

- Convene members from past and current economic development groups to determine how to work more effectively together:
 - Identify overlapping goals and priorities as well as those that are different to better understand each entity.
 - Establish consensus on ways entities can work together on shared goals and priorities, with clear delineation of roles in related activities.
 - Establish rule of engagement for continued collaboration and partnership, such as regularly scheduled meetings, designated liaisons or an overarching council structure to keep communication lines open.
 - Develop a communications plan to articulate to the public and key stakeholders the roles and responsibilities of each entity and highlight ways they are working together as well as ways individual efforts fit in with and complement overall economic development strategies.
- Establish a council or working group with representatives of city and county government, University of the Ozarks Administration, K-12 education, nonprofits and other entities with interest in key community and economic development priorities and goals:
 - Meets regularly to assess progress toward shared goals and identify opportunities for future collaboration and complimentary activities.
 - Develop a communications plan to articulate to the public and key stakeholders how entities are working together to support the overall Clarksville/Johnson County community.

The remainder of this report provides additional detail about each of these focus areas and strategies. For more information and context, see the supplemental reports containing results from the different phases of this study.

Focus Area 1: New and Existing Businesses

Vibrant communities require strong community support and modern infrastructure to support business growth that provides good jobs and income to residents. Clarksville’s investments in infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and other utilities, its small-town feel, and diversity of the population were frequently cited as strengths that foster a business-friendly atmosphere. Many stakeholders noted that the city does not adequately promote these attributes enough to the internal community or external world.

Regarding support for existing business, stakeholders noted that the city should look inward and invest more time and resources into existing businesses rather than seeking large business from outside places. When asked about ways to support new businesses, many respondents pointed towards the need to improve the quality of life and promote the green infrastructure, scenery, and outdoor activities to attract new businesses. Lastly, Clarksville should heavily invest in cultivating a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. Maintaining this type of culture would help both existing businesses grow and to attract new talent to the area.

Seven key strategies have been identified as most important in supporting Clarksville/Johnson County’s existing businesses and creating an environment the fosters new business development.

Strategy 1: Identify and recruit businesses that are a good fit for Clarksville.

A common response from focus group and survey participants was the desire for more retail and service businesses in Clarksville. Participants most often mentioned the desire for more restaurants, retail and entertainment businesses. Also, many participants expressed a desire for the community to become wet so they could purchase alcohol locally, and capture dollars that now flow out-of-county. As reported previously, a retail marketplace profile obtained from ESRI identified a retail trade gap for grocery and general merchandise stores, automobile dealers, restaurants and drinking places, building material and supply dealers, and miscellaneous store retailers.

However, a trade gap and a desire for more retail and service sector businesses does not necessarily suggest that it would be profitable to establish new businesses in the community. Businesses in small markets may not be able to provide the selection

of goods and services available in larger markets and may not be able to compete on prices. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the purchase of goods online and home delivery services.

Although businesses in small communities may not be able to compete on price and selection, but they may be capable of competing by providing services and providing experiences desired by customers, developing loyalty, and providing unique products that fill the void of large online retailers. Some action items include:

- Identify opportunities and strategies for growing the retail and service sectors as described in the Retail and Service Industry section on page 7 of this report.
- Place measure on ballot for voters to decide whether to allow alcohol production and sales.
 - Provide voters with information on how licenses to produce or sell alcohol could be obtained and where the businesses could be located.
 - Provide voters with information on the additional revenue that would likely be generated for city and county governments from the sale of alcoholic beverages.

Example

Van Buren County voters recently passed a ballot measure allowing businesses to apply for licenses to produce and sell alcoholic beverages in the county. Fairfield Bay community leaders took the initiative to develop resource materials and recruit volunteers to educate the public on the pros and cons of having the county go wet. More information on their process for getting the measure on the ballot can be obtained from the Fairfield Bay



Chamber of Commerce <https://www.ffbchamber.com/>. The Public Policy Center of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture can assist communities develop an educational fact sheet, including the pros and cons, of going wet. Their website is: <https://www.uacx.uada.edu/business-communities/public-policy-center/default.aspx>.

Strategy 2: Review city codes and those of surrounding cities to determine changes needed.

Governments impose various sorts of regulations on businesses. In general, regulations are created to ensure public safety and welfare, protect industry and create a level playing field in the startup and operation of businesses, and generate revenue to offset the cost of regulations. At the same time, regulations can be time-consuming and expensive for businesses and serve as barriers to innovation and business development and growth.

City codes and ordinances were cited by multiple stakeholders as too restrictive and responsible for hindering downtown growth and development. The most common issues that surfaced related to physical infrastructure, such as signage restrictions and sidewalk requirements. Other stakeholders were frustrated by the numerous buildings located in Clarksville's downtown that were not up to code or vacant. These stakeholders discussed the negative impact these vacant buildings have on the economic growth and overall perception of downtown. Lack of communication and unequal enforcement of codes and ordinances were also commonly mentioned as a barrier among business owners. Suggested action items to implement this strategy are:

- Establish a committee with representation from business owners, city council and code enforcement to review existing codes and ordinances:
 - Reach out to existing business to understand challenges related to compliance.
 - Compare current codes and ordinances to those of surrounding communities to determine whether Clarksville regulation are more burdensome than surrounding communities.
 - Make recommendations to consolidate and/or simplify codes and ordinances to eliminate redundancies and contradictions that deter business development and investment.
- Ensure all regulations are clearly communicated, accessible and equally enforced across applicable businesses and sectors.
- Identify and address barriers to renovating and repurposing vacant buildings downtown.

Example

Benchmark cities included in this study shared examples of how they addressed similar issues. Paragould emphasized the need for community input on any new ordinances or changes to existing ordinances.

Arkadelphia changed its sign ordinance to address most of the variances that have been requested over the last 5 years. Some of the most common signage variances requests involved sizing in relation to the façade of the building. This had the outcome of reducing red tape for business and making the signage policy easier to understand. Arkadelphia is also pursuing efforts to consolidate and simplify Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to eliminate redundancies and contradictions that deter investment.

The City of Morrilton removed barriers to remodeling buildings to encourage new business operations. Morrilton city leadership prioritized making renovations easier and more affordable, especially for historic buildings. They removed the historic commission, which had reportedly increased costs for remodeling older buildings.

Strategy 3: Offer tax incentives, grants, or other financial support to new and existing businesses.

A pro-business climate provides several incentives for new and existing businesses. Often, these incentives encourage economic development, business expansion and job creation, and provide financial support through an array of financial assistance and tax credit programs. Helping businesses in this way furthers the community's goals of achieving long-term economic growth and employment opportunities for its citizens. Potential action items Clarksville can pursue to address this strategy include:

- Determine target areas of interest (i.e., new business start-ups and early-stage development, retail, local agriculture and food systems)
- Set and communicate incentive guidelines
- Identify funding mechanisms

Examples

There are numerous examples of how cities in Arkansas provide financial support for business development. For instance, Paragould has a permanent quarter-cent sales tax which can be used toward incentives, including infrastructure assistance, training assistance or land purchase. The specifics of the incentives are negotiated with companies on a case-by-case basis.

Arkadelphia uses funds from a county sales tax for incentives to draw in new companies. The amount of the incentive depends on the number of jobs and the pay scale, with a total annual budget of about \$800,000. Arkadelphia also supports economic development through a recently passed ½ cent economic development sales tax.

Newport's economic development office is funded by a ½ percent sales tax that raises about \$850,000 per year for economic development. Fifty percent of the tax is dedicated to capital improvements (incentives for industry, infrastructure, grants to community organizations, etc.) and 50 percent is dedicated to economic development office operations (office facilities, wages, marketing, etc.). Incentive programs target job creation, façade improvements and community capacity building that addresses economic development priorities.



Newport's job creation incentives are geared towards any business that derives 80 percent or more of its revenue from outside Jackson County. The incentive is in the form of a forgivable loan and based on three factors: average hourly wage, average annual wage, and amount of investment in the project by the company. The average wages determine the amount of incentive given to the company. The amount of investment determines the percentage of the incentive paid to the company up front. The formula used to determine the loan amount aims to ensure that the incentive does not exceed revenue recouped by the city and county over a five-year period through taxes and fees generated by the project. Business expansions and new businesses are eligible to apply for funding.

ReNewport is a façade renovation incentive in the form of a 50/50 matching grant. Any business in the city limits can apply for funding to improve the exterior of their business in a way

that enhances appearance, safety, or accessibility. Funding is commonly used for improvements such as signage, paint, roof work, parking lots and landscaping. Once approved for a grant, the business must complete and pay for the work and submit paid receipts to the Newport Economic Development Commission (NEDC). NEDC will then reimburse the business 50 percent of the cost up to a maximum of \$2,500. Although the 50/50 match would result in a \$5,000 project, the average project size is closer to \$10,000 so NEDC's investment typically funds 25 percent.

Community grants are given to organizations for projects that align with NEDC's core strategic objectives: Community Development, Downtown Development, Industrial Development, Marketing, Organizational/Staff Development, Retail/Small Business Development, Site Development, Tourism Development and Workforce Development.

Strategy 4: Create culture of entrepreneurship and innovation.

Cultivating a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation can enhance Clarksville/Johnson County's ability to strengthen existing businesses and attract new ones to the area. While business development is often identified as occurring at the individual or firm level, creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem in which entrepreneurs can thrive as a means of promoting local economic development is a community-level issue that involves a mix of stakeholders from the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

While the specific needs of individual entrepreneurs may vary at different times, common needs include access to capital, access to high-speed broadband and other core infrastructure, technical assistance, networking opportunities and a supportive community that values the role of entrepreneurs. Recent investments in broadband and green infrastructure demonstrate an understanding of the importance of local government playing a key role in supporting the Clarksville/Johnson County entrepreneurial ecosystem. Additional actions that could be taken include:

- Continue conversations with local business owners, such as the business retention and expansion interviews conducted as part of this study, to identify what's working well and what barriers or challenges business owners are encountering that is hindering growth and innovation. Based on this, identify and work with appropriate stakeholders in the community, region, and state to address these issues. See Strategy 5 below,

which provide additional information about these types of programs.

- Partner with University of the Ozarks, K-12 schools, and local businesses and organizations to launch events and programs that showcase and encourage innovation and entrepreneurial thinking.
- Look for people with an entrepreneurial and innovative mindset when hiring employees or appointing people to local boards and committees. Ask candidates to provide examples of “out-of-the-box” approaches to problem solving.
- Create regular opportunities to encourage networking and mentoring among entrepreneurs and resources providers.
- Explore opportunities and partnerships to provide customized assistance to a full range of entrepreneurs and establishment of more sophisticated forms of capital (equity capital, angel networks, venture capital) to meet the needs of a wide range of entrepreneurs.

Examples

Some benchmark cities have dedicated programs for general entrepreneurial support. Many of these are led by local institutions of higher education if they have them. For example, Arkadelphia’s Henderson State University hosts an Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center (ASBTDC), which helps businesses with basics like business plan development and financials. Arkansas State University-Mountain Home recently received funding to help launch its own ASBTDC. These centers help new businesses work through planning and technical issues.

Few benchmark cities target minority communities for business development. None reported a specific economic development or entrepreneurial program targeting minority residents. However, the Batesville Chamber of Commerce works with the ESL director of the school district to place bilingual student interns in the chamber offices. Some cities face obstacles with funding and staffing a dedicated team of entrepreneurship support of any kind. Some plan to move towards a volunteer-based system to cut costs.

Strategy 5: Develop a program to regularly interview business owners to identify and address challenges.

The health of existing businesses can serve as a key barometers of a community’s economic health. Regular interviews and communication with business owners can help the community

respond factors negatively impacting an individual business concerns but also surface systemic issues affecting the broader existing business community as well as new business prospects. It can also strengthen the relationship between business owner and city leaders.

Business, Retention and Expansion (BRE) efforts involving interviews with business owners began emerging in the 1960s and evolved into organized and more formal program models in the 1980s. The approach continues to be used by local governments today using trained volunteers or paid staff. Nationwide, entities such as Business Retention and Expansion International (BREI), Cooperative Extension, and state economic development agencies provide training and technical assistance for communities seeking to establish a BRE program. Common steps involved in launching a program include:

- Recruit and organize leadership team/task force.
- Identify types and number of businesses to be visited each year.
- Develop surveys and/or interview guides to be used
- Conduct site visits.
- Compile and review results.
- Identify red-flag warnings that need to be immediately addressed and respond.
- Analyze data from all interviews.
- Prepare a written report highlighting areas of strength as well as specific areas of concern.
- Communicate results with local leaders, industry groups, and others who may play a role in addressing issues.

Strategy 6: Cut red tape and simplify processes for starting a new business.

Entrepreneurs often need to acquire permits, licenses, and other approvals from local governments before they start many different types of businesses. New businesses and startups may need approvals related to zoning, building renovations, health and safety, fire codes, waste disposal, signage, parking, and other items. Of the business owners surveyed, the majority mentioned their desire to see the city grow and likewise help businesses grow by cutting the red tape. Additionally, there was growing confusion regarding where to access information about new business support. Actions to support this strategy could include:

- Meet with business owners who have recently started a business to identify obstacles, understand constraints

and seek out opportunities for improvement.

- Establish a liaison or point of contact responsible for greeting new businesses and helping them navigate the various processes required of them. This person would coordinate across all city departments and divisions involved in the process.
- Create a “one stop shop” location or concierge service in a centralized location with consistent, accessible hours to assist new and expanding businesses with permitting and other necessary approval processes.
- Offer ways for new and expanding businesses to receive expedited or immediate approval of the submission process or quick responses on needed adjustments.
- Ensure all approval processes are communicated and offered consistently and, likewise, ensure that all new entities received the same treatment and services to prevent perception of favoritism.

Strategy 7: Identify challenges and opportunities unique to minority-owned small businesses.

Minority business owners and potential entrepreneurs have unique barriers to overcome in starting and growing their businesses due to their unfamiliarity with the local culture, institutions, and government regulations. They often do not know where and how to access local resources and obtain the necessary licenses and capital to start their business.

Two focus groups were conducted with minorities as part of this study. One with Latinx and one with Karen participants. The Latinx focus group identified the need for more access to city and county governments to better understand the process and requirements for starting a business. They also expressed a need for assistance in identifying expansion opportunities and understanding the basics of starting a business in Clarksville/Johnson County.

The Karen focus group participants expressed a need for a better understanding of city infrastructure, ordinances, and codes, but also general assistance in starting and growing a business in Clarksville/Johnson County.

A study of Hispanic business owners and potential entrepreneurs in Arkansas by the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture in 2010 revealed some of the most important barriers to starting a business in Arkansas. The major barriers included access to capital, understanding regulations and taxes, how to promote their business and finding a desired location for their business. Some action items to address these concerns include:

- Conduct regularly scheduled meetings with minority business owners and potential entrepreneurs to develop good communication channels and assess minority business owners’ concerns and desires for assistance.
- Conduct a training program for minority business owners and potential entrepreneurs on the basics of starting and growing a business in Clarksville/Johnson County.



Focus Area 2: Workforce

It is often said that people are a community's greatest asset and that returns to investments in education are high. The education attainment of Johnson County's population 25 years of age and older was lower than the region, state, and national averages in 2019. Average earnings per job in Johnson County was also substantially below the state and national averages. In addition the share of the population participating in the labor force was considerably below the state and national averages. A highly skilled workforce is needed for Clarksville/Johnson County to remain competitive in the global economy.

This suggests a need to invest in Clarksville/Johnson County residents from pre-K through higher education as well as invest in vocational and nontraditional education pathways. There is an immediate need to provide the workforce skills needed by existing industries in Johnson County. The focus groups and forums identified a particular need to assist second generation and aging immigrants obtain the skills and find employment opportunities. There is also a need to develop a skilled workforce for the future employment opportunities and attract skilled workers to fill vacant positions and grow local businesses.

Johnson County high schools, the University of the Ozarks, Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, and University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton will need to play a key role by providing the educational and training programs to enhance the skills of workers to meet the needs and increase the productivity of current and future industries in Johnson County. Local leaders should emphasize the importance of education to the community's economic future and take steps to connect residents of Clarksville/Johnson County to these programs. Strategies and some action items to strengthen workforce development efforts in Clarksville/Johnson County are provided below.

Strategy 1: Develop a partnership with businesses/industry and educational institutions to identify current and future workforce needs and align training opportunities to meet these needs.

Providing the skills and employment opportunities for county residents is a high priority if a goal is to improve the well-being these residents. Some action items include:

- Identify current workforce needs.
- Identify unemployed residents, including those not in

labor force, and the skills needed to be part of the workforce.

- Connect residents with regional adult education programs, ESL, citizenship support and other services to provide residents with the hard and soft skills needed to fill current employment opportunities.
- Identify gaps in the existing career pipeline and create additional training opportunities and opportunities for internships and apprenticeships.
- Develop a workforce website that provides resources and information about the labor market for employers and workers.
- Conduct an annual job fair.
- Continue to support and enhance **Leadership Johnson County** to develop future leaders.

Examples

Benchmark cities emphasized the importance of constant communication and cooperation among local businesses, city leadership, public schools, and any institutions of higher education in developing their workforce. The communication between these entities was reported as critical for meeting current and future workforce needs.

In Batesville, all public schools have instructional programs that teach workforce basics. They also collaborate with the community college and Lyon College to tailor programs for specific employment needs.

Paragould's Black River Technical College (BRTC) is targeting programs to specific local workforce needs through its Career and Technical Center curriculum for high school students. Students from participating high schools can graduate with their high school diploma and a BRTC certificate in allied health, welding, industrial electricity/electronics, machine tool technology or auto collision repair. The technical college plays an important role in keeping the lines of communication open

³The findings of the constraints faced by Hispanic business owners and potential entrepreneurs are reported in the publication "Survey Overview: Entrepreneurial Development Targeting Rural Hispanic Immigrants." Cooperative Extension Service. University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, MP495. <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/publications/pdf/mp495.pdf>

⁴Phase I Report: Clarksville and Johnson County Baseline Information, report provided to Clarksville, April 2021.

⁵Rural Profile of Arkansas 2021, University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, January 2021.

between educational intuitions, businesses, and leadership because it hosts the Greene County Industrial Training Center. This training center acts as a convener of local businesses, industries and educational providers that is focused on improving the workforce and opportunities for the entire county. Paragould also reports higher than average 3rd grade reading and 5th grade math assessments for their public schools. Raising these scores has been a focus for several years and is part of a strategy to improve the local workforce readiness.

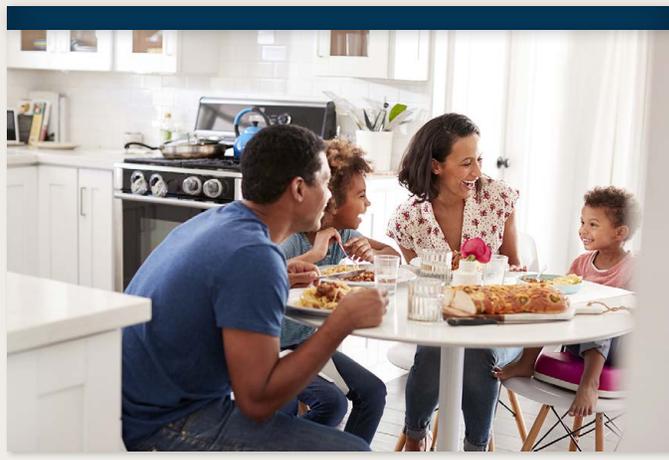
Arkadelphia's public schools are home to award winning extracurricular programs in band, football and quiz bowl, giving their public education system a well-rounded image. The local higher education institutions in Arkadelphia have also seen growth in student population in the past few years.

Mountain Home's high school is a career academy model school where all students are placed in one of three academies. Each academy links to a career path at Arkansas State University Mountain Home (ASUMH) designed to meet the needs of local businesses. High school students in the area can also begin taking up to four classes a year for free at ASUMH beginning in their junior year. Additionally, a privately funded Promise Scholarship funds the first two years of college for high school graduates in Mountain Home. The high school partners with the regional hospital for a "White Coat" medical program where students can become a Certified Nursing Assistant before they graduate. Students who complete the program are also eligible for a sign-on bonus with the hospital.

Siloam Springs fostered a partnership between the high school and businesses like Simmons Foods to offer the Career Academy of Siloam Springs (CASS) program. This program is designed to help high school graduates enter the workforce with skills to meet current needs of businesses in the community. The community is also considering opening vocational and technical classes to adults.

The University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton (UACCM) has a workforce development center that allows high school students to earn college credit and offers non-credit educational and training opportunities for local businesses wanting to improve the skills and efficiency of their employees. UACCM has programs that provide certificates of proficiency (4 months), technical certificates (9 months), and 2-year associate degrees in for people wanting to enhance their workforce skills. Green Bay Packaging, the largest employer in the area,

also has its own workforce training center. Morrilton voters passed a school millage in 2015 that funded improvements for the South Conway County School District, including safe rooms for all campuses, a multi-purpose arena at the high school, and other improvements. "This type of visible public-school improvement is reported to have created momentum and a mindset change in the community, with community members realizing the importance of making investments in their youth if they want to have a talented and productive workforce."



Strategy 2: Recruit skilled workers and young families to relocate to Clarksville.

People from Johnson County who went away for school and jobs are often those most likely wanting to return to the county to raise their families. They are looking for a safe and friendly environment with good schools and often have the skills desired to enhance and grow the local economy.

Many other families are also looking to live in a rural environment with a good quality of life that has a modern infrastructure, including fast and reliable internet service. Some action items include:

- Form a committee to recruit skilled workers to live and work in Clarksville/Johnson County.
- Develop a directory and contact information of people who left Clarksville/Johnson County for school and work.
- Identify other target audiences that are likely wanting to live in a rural area.
- Use social media to communicate with target audiences about employment opportunities and quality of life in Clarksville/Johnson County.
- Follow up with direct contacts to those expressing some interest in relocating to Clarksville/Johnson County.

Strategy 3: Address barriers that are keeping community members from participating in the workforce.

Johnson County has a very low labor force participation rate meaning that a large share of the working age population is not looking for work. It is important for community leaders to understand and alleviate the barriers to entering the workforce.

It was suggested by some that perhaps Johnson County has a higher share of elderly and a larger share of the population on public assistance. However, Johnson County has a similar share of its population who are 65 years of age and older compared with most other counties in Arkansas. Also, the share of the population receiving public assistance is also similar to most rural counties in Arkansas.

Another suggestion was a lack of affordable child-care facilities, which require one spouse to stay home to care for their children. This barrier to entering the workforce has been recognized as a national issue and can be addressed. There may be other barriers to entering the workforce such as a mismatch between residents' skills and those required by businesses in the county. Some action items include:

- Use the workforce partnership to identify barriers for residents wanting to enter the workforce.
- Identify the gap between the supply and demand for childcare services in the county.
- Provide subsidized childcare for those qualifying and utilizing public facilities where possible.
- Address other barriers to workforce participation.

Examples

To help increase the labor force participation rates many of the benchmark cities offer childcare opportunities at locations designed to improve convenience for parents by placing centers on public school campuses or local college campuses. Public school districts in Batesville have incorporated childcare into their campus, with before and after school care, and a pre-school on site. Similarly, Paragould public school districts offer pre-k education programs and Mountain Home recently began an on-site pre-k program on their kindergarten campus. Mountain Home's program is offered at a discounted rate in conjunction with afterschool care. The City of Morrilton also has a day care option through the local college in addition to several private childcare facilities.

Affordability of childcare can be a challenge, and several benchmark cities have adopted programs to address this issue. Paragould and Arkadelphia reported financial assistance programs within the area for child-care. Mountain Home stands out in offering a completely free all-day summer camp for the entire month of June.

Arkadelphia also prioritizes childcare opportunities for children with special needs. Through a partnership with Washington Baptist University, Pediatrics Plus is now offering childcare services for children with special needs in Arkadelphia.

Focus Area 3: Infrastructure

People will choose to live and grow their businesses in areas where they can enjoy a good quality of life. Excellent schools, roads, housing, transportation, utilities and easy access to quality health care are essential for a growing and dynamic Johnson County. A well-maintained infrastructure reduces the cost of doing business, helps businesses compete in the global economy, and is an asset that will help develop tourism and attract retirees and creative people to Johnson County.

Clarksville Connected Utilities (CCU) provides high-quality utilities to businesses and the public and is one of the attractive features of the community. CCU is developing high-speed 3G internet capacity for public agencies, businesses, and residents of Clarksville. In addition, Clarksville is the first city in Arkansas to use solar power to power the entire city.

However, stakeholders and residents participating in focus groups, forums and surveys suggested that there is a need for affordable housing, including more extended care living facilities, transportation for college students and seniors, and improved health care for seniors.

Strategy 1: Develop strategies to provide affordable housing, including extended care facilities.

Some action items to identify the need and strategies for providing more affordable housing include:

- Determine housing available that is affordable for different household income groups in the county and identify housing gaps.
- Convene a meeting(s) of stakeholders, including building contractors, bank executives, business leaders, and city and county officials to develop strategies to address the current and future needs for additional housing.

Strategy 2: Develop strategies to provide additional transportation options.

Participants of the focus groups and forums indicated a need for more transportation options for the elderly, students and

those unable to drive. Suggested possible transportation services included ride sharing, taxis, and public transit. Some action items include:

- Conduct a survey of students and the elderly to ascertain the demand for additional transportation services.
- Organize a meeting with current and potential transportation providers to discuss survey results and identify strategies to meet the transportation needs, including any public/private partnerships that may be feasible.



Strategy 3: Develop and Implement policies to improve accessibility of buildings and other community spaces.

It was noted that many buildings in Clarksville were not easily accessible for the handicapped. Making these buildings easily accessible would encourage people to purchase local goods and services thus benefitting local businesses. Some action items include:

- Conduct a meeting with business owners and stakeholders to determine what is required to make these buildings accessible.
- Develop cost effective strategies to improve community spaces and building accessibility.



Focus Area 4: Inclusive Culture

The population of Johnson County is becoming more diverse as the share of the non-white and Hispanic populations are growing. Stakeholders surveyed and interviewed as part of this study frequently cited this diversity as an asset. In addition to sizable populations of Karen and Hispanic residents in the Clarksville/Johnson County area, the city is home to the University of the Ozarks, which brings a diverse array of international students to the area each year.

According to the Community Survey, 59 percent of respondents believe Clarksville/Johnson County is “moderately” inclusive of all races, ethnicities, religions, and cultures while 11 percent said the community is “not at all” inclusive. A welcoming and inclusive community is a community where its citizens and members feel safe, respected, and comfortable being themselves and expressing all aspects of their identities. It is a place where each person shares a sense of belonging with other members of the community. While stakeholders reported valuing the diversity across Clarksville residents, many highlighted the need and opportunities for the city leaders to be more intentional about cultivating an inclusive environment that fosters belonging and encourages more interaction among residents.

Strategy 1: Partner with businesses and organizations to provide spaces where University of the Ozarks students can study and interact with others in the community.

Individual and group interviews with University of the Ozarks students highlighted different ways students interact and engage with the community and explored various obstacles they face while living in Clarksville/Johnson County. Students enjoy the area’s natural amenities and associated activities as well as local church and religious services. Many shared how they specifically enjoy visiting and supporting family-owned businesses and would like to have additional opportunities to do so. Based on these discussions, potential actions to pursue could include:

- Partner with the University of the Ozarks to organize more opportunities for students to tour Clarksville and connect with local organizations/business as part of student orientation.
- Advertise community events to college students and make them aware of engagement opportunities.

- Develop program/partnership with local businesses aimed at offering discounts for students (e.g., Bear Bucks)
- Offer networking or after-hours events for businesses, city, and community leaders to connect with students.
- Work with local businesses and organizations to identify spaces for students to study and socialize.
- Establish a recognition program for businesses that partner with the University of the Ozarks or are student friendly.
- Connect students with jobs or internships at various local businesses.
- Work with University officials to identify students who want to stay in Clarksville after graduation and explore ways to support them.
- Create young professional groups and explore other ways to attract/retain young professionals.

Strategy 2: Foster communication, trust, interaction and participation across all segments of the population to help create a more inclusive environment.

Providing opportunities for people from different backgrounds to interact with each other is essential for building trust and acceptance. Recognizing that different segments of the population rely on different methods of communication to receive information and interact with each other is important as well. Focus groups with Karen and Hispanic residents and University of the Ozarks students revealed a desire to engage more fully within the community, but language barriers, lack of knowledge about cultural norms, and concerns about racism were cited as obstacles to this. Intentional efforts to engage with people. Recommended actions to address this strategy include:

- Intentionally work with churches, faith-based organizations, advocacy groups, and others that represent different population segments to ensure they are aware of community resources and invited to participate in community activities and events. Implement outreach interventions, such as establishing relationships with multi-lingual volunteers to interact with the various groups and forming alliances with disability advocacy groups. Consider not only what languages people speak and understand, but how they

exchange new information and which information sources they trust. Be aware of myths and stereotypes.

- Facilitate learning opportunities for non-native residents:
- Identify existing adult education, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, citizenship support and immigration resources and connect Karen, Hispanic and other immigrant residents to those resources.
- Provide training and/or develop educational materials about laws, regulations, and resources related to living in Clarksville/Johnson County. Refer to the Phase II Executive Summary Report for additional details regarding training topics of interest identified through Karen and Hispanic focus groups.
- Host family-friendly multi-cultural activities and events that allow community members to share their traditions with each other. In addition to activities that mark traditional American traditional holidays, celebrate other events such as National Hispanic Heritage Month

to celebrate how people from different backgrounds contribute to Clarksville/Johnson County.

- As community leaders, tap into opportunities to listen and learn more about different segments of the community. Visit businesses you might not normally shop in. Attend activities hosted by different segments of the population. Develop strategies to reach community members and engage them in issues that are important to them.
- Appoint individuals from minority groups to boards and leadership roles.

Example

Arkadelphia passed an ordinance in 2011 to establish a Racial and Cultural Diversity Committee committed to “dismantling racism and reducing prejudice within the city through modeling, education and policy development.” The committee consists of 11 members selected to represent the racial and cultural diversity of the city. The committee meets monthly.





Focus Area 5: Communication, Marketing and Branding

Clarksville/Johnson County possesses a variety of assets. While many of these assets were commonly identified among stakeholders interviewed and residents surveyed, many felt that the city does not adequately promote its assets within the community or to the external world. Community marketing and communication is essential to successful economic development. Effective communication and marketing strategies, both internally and externally, enhance a community's ability to attract and retain businesses, families, and workers. The identification and promotion of key assets is integral when creating a brand aimed at persuading people to visit or relocate.

It is equally important to develop strong mechanisms for communication, collaboration, and engagement within a community. Such efforts help to bolster community pride and optimism about the future, facilitate more inclusive participation in society, and build community trust in local leadership.

Strategy 1: Create unified brand highlighting city's infrastructure, quality of life and other assets to promote Clarksville to businesses, families, workers, and tourists.

Branding conveys a community's beliefs about itself and how it strives to be recognized by community members as well as the outside world. Study participants identified several assets that make Clarksville/Johnson County a desirable place to live, work, and visit. An abundance of natural beauty and amenities that lend themselves to ample outdoor recreation opportunities were cited in nearly every data collection effort utilized in the study. Moreover, the location right off I-40, paired with the recreation areas make Clarksville/Johnson County an easy and desirable place to visit.

Clarksville's infrastructure stands out as another major asset amplified across participant groups. While nearly all utilities were identified as strengths by one or more groups, broadband and solar developments have had a positive impact on the economy and set Clarksville/Johnson County apart from other communities. They were also identified as assets that play

an important role in attracting businesses, young families, and remote workers.

The small town feel of the community and friendly people were also frequently cited as strengths, as was diversity within the community. This diversity is partly driven by the University of the Ozarks, which is home to a large population of international students. First and second generation Hispanic and Karen populations living in Clarksville/Johnson County also contribute to this diversity.

While these assets and strengths were easily identifiable across participants groups, 40 percent of respondents in the Community Survey indicated that Clarksville/Johnson County does "not at all" possess a strong brand/identity while 15 percent "don't know." Conversely, 32 percent of respondents think Clarksville/Johnson County "moderately" possesses a strong brand/identity. Additionally, 78 percent of businesses surveyed believe that they could benefit from a comprehensive Clarksville/Johnson County marketing and branding effort. Actions to support this strategy could include:

- Work with University of the Ozarks Strategic Communications minor faculty and students and/or private sector experts to develop a community logo, tagline, and other brand messaging. Messaging should:
 - Directly support community and economic development priorities and goals set by community leaders as a result of this study.
 - Be customized to the different target audiences that are relevant to those priorities and goals. Communication tactics and marketing tools used should also be tailored to each target audience.
 - Leverage Clarksville/Johnson County's assets related to those priorities and goals. In addition to those summarized above, the Phase II Executive Summary Report provides additional examples of these.

Examples

Most benchmark cities reported tourism as a major part of their economy, and some have focused on the importance of branding. One city has recently hired a company to perform a branding study of the area. Many cities express the need for people living outside the area to know what the city “is about”.

Batesville reported a strong dependency on tourism that is bolstered by chamber partnerships. The city relies on social media to promote their brand and attract visitors. The city branded itself as the Christmas Light Capital of Arkansas, and reports that this effort has garnered support from community members and local businesses, resulting in a quarter of a million visitors each holiday season. This unique destination has drawn tourists from across Arkansas and other states.

Mountain Home promotes tourism through marketing efforts and chamber promotions. Although they advertise online and through radio, many visitors find out about the area through word of mouth. Many visitors have been visiting for generations. The City is currently investing in a branding study that is bringing a lot of community leaders and representatives together at the same table. This group includes community members ranging from local institutions like hospitals, schools, and resorts.

Morrilton also reported the importance of tourism to their economy, especially as the “gateway to Petit Jean Mountain”. The city is looking to take more advantage of the hundreds of thousands of people who drive through every year towards Petit Jean and to find ways to bring them downtown. Morrilton is looking to implement downtown amenities like a stage and areas for farmers markets.

Several benchmark cities prioritize marketing efforts, including signage, to promote downtown activities. Batesville has a dedicated marketing and media director that will continue to promote both Batesville and Independence County, with an emphasis on having the city and county work together. In Batesville, advertising and promotion tax revenue from hotels and restaurants fund downtown promotion efforts including wayfinding signage. The wayfinding signage initiative was a successful program, and helps locate main street, the local college, community center, hospital and downtown. Batesville also has a historic district that protects the facades.

Several benchmark cities also reported that their cities benefit from surrounding municipalities in terms of what they can include in marketing and branding materials. Many cities “claim” assets that are not technically within the city limits, especially if it is within a close drive. These assets include colleges, retail shopping, hospitals, and other amenities.

Strategy 2: Promote volunteerism and engagement opportunities.

Retirees, students, and other stakeholders participating in this study indicated a desire to become more involved in the community but were unaware of opportunities to do so. The participatory nature of this study set the stage for this with a wide variety of engagement activities that allowed residents, business owners, youth, minority populations and others to provide input on the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities.

Actions to support this strategy include:

- Publicize the results of this study and provide opportunities for residents, organizations, and other community members to become involved in implementation. This might include inviting residents to participate in a series of community meetings or launch event to discuss findings and recommendations outlined in the final Economic Development Study. Engage participants in a feedback/prioritization process, invite them to identify topic areas of interest, and offer opportunities for participants to regular work on a specific topic via working groups. Brand this implementation process and encourage participants to spread the word. Use partners identified under Focus Area 4 (Inclusive Culture), Strategy 2 to reach all segments of the community.
- Assess the various skills, talents and passions that exist among the diverse members of the Clarksville/Johnson County community and offer volunteer opportunities that align with these interests. Not only will this process help build relationships, but it will also help sustain efforts over time as people are more likely to invest their time and talent in something they care about and/or help build.
- Identify community champions and potential leaders. Dedicated champions are essential in leading and promoting efforts, recruiting volunteers, raising funds, celebrating wins, and helping shift the mindset. Recruit champions from various age groups and populations



to reflect the diversity of the community to encourage diverse involvement.

- Recognize and celebrate community members who are involved in efforts to strengthen the community throughout the year. Activities and events that recognize contributions of community members, celebrate major accomplishments and milestones, and allow people to socialize and have fun together are important in creating an environment in which people want to be involved.

Examples

Community leaders in several benchmark cities described successful community engagement strategies. Several cities built economic development support by increasing visibility of investments and programs and opening communication between leadership and constituents.

Batesville City leaders report that investments in beautification projects encouraged millions in private investments, including extensive remodeling of an existing restaurant, downtown loft apartments, and a historic theater. City leaders estimate that, after the beautification program, downtown storefronts went from 75 percent to 95 percent occupancy. Morrilton also emphasized the importance of visible investments, even for minor projects. The visibility of these projects and investments were promoted aggressively through daily social media communications, regular radio talks, and council meetings. Providing visibility to city investments resulted in increased private investments in new business projects.

Arkadelphia used various media to get the message out about what they do, why they do it, and the successes of local

projects. Social media, email blasts and press releases were the primary means of communication with the community. The feedback was very positive when residents were educated about what the economic development organization is doing to improve quality of life in the area.

Strategy 3: Strengthen communication, collaboration and partnerships between institutions, city and county government, businesses, and organizations.

Stakeholders expressed confusion, and sometimes even frustration, at a perceived lack of coordination among different entities in Clarksville/Johnson County that are doing similar work, particularly among different groups involved in economic and business development. Some attributed this to competitiveness and politics. In addition, stakeholders felt that there is a disconnect between the City and the University of the Ozarks and that they aren't working together for the greater good of the community. Activities to strengthen communication, collaboration and partnerships could include:

- Convene members from past and current economic development groups to determine how to work more effectively together:
 - Identify overlapping goals and priorities as well as those that are different to better understand each entity.
 - Establish consensus on ways entities can work together on shared goals and priorities, with clear delineation of roles in related activities.
 - Establish rule of engagement for continued collaboration and partnership, such as regularly scheduled meetings, designated liaisons or an overarching council structure to keep communication lines open.
 - Develop a communications plan to articulate to the public and key stakeholders the roles and responsibilities of each entity and highlight ways they are working together as well as ways individual efforts fit in with and complement overall economic development strategies.
- Establish a council or working group with representatives of city and county government, University of the Ozarks Administration, K-12 education, nonprofits and other entities with interest in key community and economic development priorities and goals:
 - Meets regularly to assess progress toward shared goals and identify opportunities for future collaboration and complimentary activities.

- Develop a communications plan to articulate to the public and key stakeholders how entities are working together to support the overall Clarksville/Johnson County community.

Examples

Several benchmark cities combine or coordinate economic development efforts among various entities. Whether through shared governance or collaborative implementation of economic development strategies at a regional level, these cities reported benefits from that coordination in terms of improved communication and efficiency.

The Batesville Area Economic Development Alliance was created in 2016 to provide a single uniform county-wide organizational structure with both public and private governance and oversight. This organization includes the Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce, the Independence County Economic Development, Inc. and Batesville-Independence County Industrial Development, Inc.

Paragould leaders report strong coordination between the city, chamber of commerce, and Main Street program. The Economic Development Corporation of Paragould was founded in 2003 with the Director of Economic Development and CEA also leading the Paragould Regional Chamber of Commerce. Main Street Paragould, a separate nonprofit, works closely with the chamber to identify and implement shared goals.

The Arkadelphia Regional Economic Development Alliance brings together multiple economic development entities across the county to implement comprehensive economic development strategies laid out in the Clark County Strategic Plan. This strategic plan was created with input from 500 residents over 15 months. This Alliance includes nearby chambers of commerce (Amity, Arkadelphia, and Gurdon), the Clark County Industrial Council, and the Economic Development Corporation of Clark County, which also serves as the governing board for the Alliance. The Clark County Industrial Council owns land in the area and takes the lead on industrial development decisions while the chambers of commerce focus more on tourism promotion.

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating

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