

Mid-Iowa News

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Local leaders contribute to regional economic development plan

By: Bob Zientara/The Tribune

Officials from Story and six other counties have completed a 160-page plan describing how they will join forces to remain competitive in the global economy.

In a June 23 meeting at Marshalltown, U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, joined leaders from the counties in celebrating completion of the strategic plan, which explains how the tasks will be carried out.

Fifteen Story County residents contributed to the [Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan](#).

They represent Iowa State University, local governments and municipal economic development entities in Ames, Story City and Nevada.

Joining with local residents in the process were other government and economic development leaders from Marshall, Jasper, Polk, Marion, Poweshiek and Mahaska counties.

The plan

The plan calls for economic and government leaders to:

- * Think and act from a regional perspective.
- * Find key industries in the region (including sustainable energy) and develop ways to produce trained workers to staff them.
- * Build infrastructure to serve both industries and workers.
- * Encourage and honor entrepreneurs and develop entrepreneurship curriculum in regional schools.

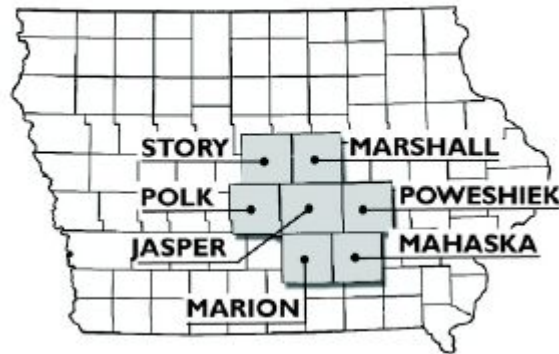
The plan took seven months to develop and was paid for with a first-of-its-kind, \$250,000 "regional innovation grant" from the U.S. Department of Labor.

Started in part to help the area rebound from the loss of Maytag appliances in Newton, the study grew to include ways to "integrate regional workforce and economic development efforts," according to Elisabeth Buck, state director of Iowa Workforce Development.

Regional Innovation Grant leaders from Story County:

- * John Brighton, former vice provost for research, Iowa State University.

Counties involved:



- * Robert Brown, ISU professor for sustainable environmental technologies.
- * Dan Culhane, president/CEO, Ames Chamber of Commerce.
- * Liesl Eathington, ISU scientist, Department of Economics.
- * Gearold Gull, mayor of Nevada.
- * Ron Hallenbeck, Ames Economic Development Commission.
- * Tony Hogan, Story City Economic Development Corporation.
- * Mark Jackson, city administrator, Story City.
- * Manjit Misra, ISU professor, seed sciences.
- * Amy Mogren, Ames Economic Development Commission.
- * Rich Olive, state senator, Story City.
- * Lars Peterson, ISU Small Business Development Center.
- * Mark Reinig, ISU College of Engineering.
- * John Roberts, ISU Center for Industrial Research and Service.
- * LaVon Schiltz, executive director, Nevada Economic Development Corp.

Ames, Story County play key roles in economic plan

Because he had a conflict in his schedule, Ames Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Officer Dan Culhane asked finance and administration manager Amy Mogren to attend one of the formative meetings of the group that developed the seven-county Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan.

Mogren, who also works with the Ames Economic Development Commission, was so impressed by what she found that "I offered to continue (representing Ames at the meetings) if Dan wanted me to.

"Our workforce needs work," she said. "We hear it every year when we go out on our executive calls. Skilled workers are dwindling and everybody feels it.

"If we can do something regionally (to increase and better train the workforce), so much the better," she said.

Mogren said she was most impressed by the "uniqueness" of the experts in business, government and Iowa State University who gathered to work on the project, and that the project's funding came from a first-in-the-nation grant from the federal government.

She said she looked forward to more businesses and governments in Mid-Iowa tapping more into the resources ISU can offer.

Mike Espeset, president of Story Construction, said that he volunteered to serve on the board of directors that will work with representatives of the other six counties, and was looking forward to learning more about the process.

Mark Reinig, of the ISU College of Engineering, said that his interest in the process was partly motivated by the

desire to see Mid-Iowa counties cooperate to their mutual benefit.

"There are many regional councils of government in Iowa, but there hasn't been one in this area for 20 years," Reinig said. "There are so many opportunities for synergy in this region: the job market, the supply chain, workplace management."

With the university providing assistance and the business community helping to define the agenda, Reinig said the cooperative effort will give governments a much better idea on how and where to help develop economic prosperity.

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