

Partnering to build a robust and inclusive regional economy

As established in northeastern Illinois' comprehensive plan, [ON TO 2050](#), greater collaboration is urgently needed to accelerate inclusive economic growth in the region. Over the past year, CMAP has convened major economic development organizations (EDOs) from across the region to coordinate on common challenges and opportunities responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two new efforts are building on this foundation:

Strategic direction: To inform collective efforts among EDOs, CMAP has launched a project with a national strategic planning firm, TIP Strategies, to conduct an in-depth assessment of the region's competitive position and market opportunities. The project will draw on the firm's technical expertise, broad stakeholder engagement, and direct business intelligence across industries and geographies to inform strategic priorities.

Expected outcome: Findings will provide a data- and industry-driven playbook for targeting and aligning resources for economic growth that supports a more sustainable and resilient region post-COVID-19.

Framework and action plan: With support from the Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust, CMAP is also partnering with the Brookings Institution to organize a broader set of private, civic, and public sector stakeholders around ways that regional collaboration could improve competitiveness and inclusion. This project emphasizes concrete functions and areas of value-add that could achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness at a regional scale.

Expected outcome: The project will produce a draft framework and action plan for collaborative economic development efforts, with tangible, short- and long-term actions we are willing to take together.

These projects recognize that past initiatives to support regional economic development have seen mixed success and limited sustainability. To ensure momentum, a regional approach needs to focus pragmatically on areas of discrete value-add, with clearly articulated outcomes and a process for tracking success. Renewed efforts must also build on evidence that a more equitable economy is a more innovative and resilient economy. Both projects have been structured to convene greater business leadership and championship on these issues as well as make equity and inclusion a central measure of the region's success. Together, they will define immediate steps to improve our economic competitiveness and performance, deploy resources, and pursue joint program delivery where appropriate.