



*Great Falls*  
**DEVELOPMENT  
ALLIANCE**

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**MONTANA**  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CDFI

2026-2028  
**ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY**

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

*Adopted September 4, 2025*

The Great Falls Development Authority, Inc., dba Great Falls Development Alliance (GFDA), is a community economic development partnership and certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). We are organized as a Montana non-profit 501 (c) 3 charitable corporation. GFDA is a public/private partnership that serves the Great Falls Montana Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and the surrounding 13-county rural and tribal trade area of north central Montana. Our partnership includes Cascade County, Great Falls College MSU, Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine, University of Providence, Great Falls Public Schools, Great Falls International Airport Authority, Great Falls Montana Tourism, Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, NeighborWorks Great Falls, Great Falls Association of Realtors, Home Builders Association of Great Falls, Sweetgrass Development, Great Falls Business Improvement District, Cascade County Tavern Association, Weissman Hood Institute, North Central Building Trades, Cascade County state legislative delegation, and over 130 leading local businesses, institutions and community leaders who invest in our work. The City of Great Falls has invested significantly in GFDA's projects and loan capital.

As a CDFI, GFDA provides gap and bridge financing focused on the Great Falls trade area. In addition to lending, our core operations include business development (business startup, business retention/expansion, and business attraction) and business advising and training. GFDA operates a regional Small Business Development Center, a regional APEX Accelerator, a regional Montana Food & Ag Development Center, and a Brownfields Redevelopment Program. GFDA is a founding partner of the Downtown Development Partnership of Great Falls. GFDA is the developer of the Great Falls AgriTech Park, a rail-served heavy industrial park. GFDA manages High Plains Financial (HPF), a certified Community Development Corporation we formed to offer SBA 504 loans throughout Montana.

GFDA is accredited by the International Economic Development Council and has earned Candid/GuideStar's Platinum Seal of Transparency. GFDA is a certified Montana MicroBusiness Development Corporation, and an approved lender of the Montana Board of Investments and U.S. Small Business Administration. GFDA and HPF are proud to be Equal Opportunity Employers, Lenders, and Providers.

## MISSION

### **Grow diverse economic opportunities that enhance quality of life.**

We seek to transform Great Falls, Montana and the surrounding rural and tribal region into a thriving economy that raises the standard of living, particularly for underserved populations and economically distressed areas, and creates greater economic opportunity for people, entrepreneurs, and businesses.

## VISION FOR GREAT FALLS REGIONAL COMMUNITY

The Great Falls Region will be a proud, positive, and vibrant community which welcomes new people, new investments, and innovative opportunities while celebrating its authentic and diverse Montana culture. Our community will be a safe and inclusive place to raise families and will offer opportunities for individual growth and a quality of life which retains and grows our population.

## VISION FOR GREAT FALLS DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

Great Falls Development Alliance will be a change agent, catalyst, and facilitator in the Great Falls region, fostering collaboration and partnerships to support diverse economic opportunities, innovation, and growth. Our economic development organization will be a high-performing leader in attracting new investment and talent. Our work providing access to capital, consulting, training and resources for entrepreneurs, businesses, developers, and non-profits will transform Great Falls and the surrounding 13-county trade area into a thriving regional economy that raises the standard of living across the region.

## LONG-TERM GOALS

Our long-term goals address the three decades-long weaknesses of the Great Falls regional economy: low wage structure, overdependence on two primary sector industries, and lack of economic growth.

—————1—————

Close the  
gap between  
earnings and  
cost of living.

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—————2—————

Diversify  
the regional  
economy.

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—————3—————

Generate sustained  
growth that builds  
tax base and  
creates greater  
opportunity.

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## Long-Term Success Measures

GFDA uses the following economic indicators to track progress on our long-term goals:

- **Cost of Living in Great Falls MSA (Cascade County):** We participate in the Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER)'s Cost of Living Index.
- **Average Annual Wage, Total Wages, and Industry Diversification Data:** Chmura Economics' JobsEQ system
- **Population:** U.S. Census
- **County GDP:** U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

## VALUES

INTEGRITY	We hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards. We uphold the Codes of Ethics of the International Economic Development Council and the Montana Economic Developers Association.
TRANSPARENCY	We operate in an open manner while respecting our clients' confidentiality.
COLLABORATION	We value our partners and use community resources as effectively as possible.
FISCAL PRUDENCE	We operate as efficiently as possible to maximize return on investment.
PERFORMANCE DRIVEN	We strive to achieve meaningful, long-lasting results that benefit our investors and community.
COMMUNICATION	We widely communicate what we're doing and why we're doing it.
TENACITY	We do not give up on accomplishing our strategic priorities.
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	We are always working to improve our organization.
DIVERSITY	We celebrate diversity and continually strive to become more inclusive, both in our organization and in our regional community.

## CORE OPERATIONS

**Access to Capital** Gap and bridge financing provides access to capital that conventional lenders cannot or will not provide. We partner with banks and credit unions to finance entrepreneurial startups, business expansions, business attractions, commercial real estate and housing developments, and non-profit community services.

**Business Development** Business development identifies target companies; generates new leads; cultivates leads to convert them into deals; responds to requests for proposals and information; and develops relationships with partners, referral sources, and site selection consultants. We assist a wide variety of businesses, developers, non-profits, and public agencies with concierge services customized to help make things happen that otherwise would not. We also work on efforts to make our trade area more competitive in attracting investment, entrepreneurs, and workforce talent, and to improve quality of life.

**Business Advising** Business advising and training services help entrepreneurs to start new ventures and existing businesses to thrive and grow.

Our regional Small Business Development Center assists startups and existing businesses with a wide array of business skills delivered through one-on-one advising, group trainings, and entrepreneur cohorts.

Our regional APEX Accelerator assists existing businesses in earning government and industry certifications, getting started in government contracting, or expanding and diversifying government contracting.

Our regional Food & Ag Development Center assists startups and existing businesses to expand and diversify food and ag production and processing operations.

**Operations** Our operations group includes financial management, resources and administration. Our resource team members raise funds from local businesses, non-profits, public agencies, and community leaders to support our operations, and work with public agencies, foundations, banks and impact investment funds to secure grants and loan capital.

## ANNUAL EVENTS

We host four key annual events:

- **Entrepreneur Celebration** recognizes and thanks entrepreneurs in the region.
- **Ignite Great Falls** kicks off each calendar year with presentations by businesses, developers, and institutions that have planned investments for the coming year.
- **The Fire Within** celebrates female entrepreneurs with Aspire and Inspire Awards.
- **GFDA Annual Meeting** recognizes Ally Award winners who have gone above and beyond to support our work.

GFDA also hosts numerous special events, trainings, webinars, and task force, Board and Council meetings throughout the year.

# STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

GFDA strives to be one of the most effective economic development organizations in the country.

In 2003 we earned CDFI certification from the Community Development Financial Institution Fund of the U.S. Treasury. In 2025 we were one of the first CDFI's to earn recertification under the Fund's new certification standard.

In 2012 we became the first economic development organization in the Rocky Mountain West to earn accreditation from the International Economic Development Council, and we have maintained accreditation ever since.

In 2019 we earned Candid/GuideStar's Gold Seal of Transparency; in 2021 we earned the highest level Platinum Seal of Transparency and have maintained Platinum ever since.

Our staff team has earned industry-leading professional certifications in economic development, economic development finance, commercial finance, land use planning, corporate real estate, small business advising, government contracting, and more.

# STRATEGIC THINKING PRINCIPLES

Strategic thinking asks on a regular basis, "What actions are we pursuing to achieve our vision and mission?" GFDA is a strategic thinking organization that constantly assesses what is producing desired results, what has changed in the world, and how we can adapt to produce the greatest possible mission impact. Our Economic Development Strategy identifies key priorities that we will focus on achieving. It is not a workplan that encompasses everything our organization does.

In our strategic thinking, we utilize four principles:

- Inclusive** Enhance economic opportunity in all areas and populations in the 13-county Great Falls Montana trade area.
- Market-Driven** Pursue opportunities supported by industry market drivers.
- Asset-Based** Build on community assets and address weaknesses to make our region more competitive in attracting talent and investment.
- Collaborative** Achieve more by working together in partnerships and collaborations.

## MARKET-DRIVEN STRATEGY

Our Economic Development Strategy was developed using information gleaned from post-pandemic market assessments. GFDA has commissioned the following assessment reports conducted by industry-leading firms:

Economic Impact of COVID-19, Chmura Economics	DECEMBER 2020
Childcare Market Assessment, Camoin Associates	OCTOBER 2021
Market SWOT Salient Points, Barber Business Advisors	NOVEMBER 2021
Organization SWOT, Barber Business Advisors	DECEMBER 2021
Housing Market Assessment, The Concord Group	DECEMBER 2021
COVID Industry Impact, Chmura Economics	JANUARY 2022
Defense Industry Assessment, Barber Business Advisors	MARCH 2022
Transportation & Logistics Assessment, Barber Business Advisors	APRIL 2022
Target Industry Analysis, Barber Business Advisors	JUNE 2022
Bioscience Economic Development Strategy, Tripp Umbach	OCTOBER 2022
Veterinary Medicine School Feasibility, Tripp Umbach	DECEMBER 2023
GFDA Financial Growth Plan, Friedman Associates	DECEMBER 2023
Housing Market Demand Assessment, The Concord Group	APRIL 2024
Economic Impact of Population Growth, Chmura Economics	MAY 2024
Great Falls Region Freight Market Assessment, Moffatt & Nichol	AUGUST 2024
Great Falls Trade Area Energy Market Assessments, RMI	OCTOBER 2024
Downtown Great Falls Market Assessment & Strategy, Leland Consulting Group	OCTOBER 2024
Opportunities in Pulse Processing for the State of Montana, Agralytica	AUGUST 2025
Recreation and Entertainment Market Assessment, Hunden Partners	AUGUST 2025

These reports are available at [GrowGreatFallsMontana.org](https://GrowGreatFallsMontana.org).

Great Falls Montana Tourism has published three documents regarding the tourism industry, which can be viewed at [www.VisitGreatFallsMontana.org/plan](https://www.VisitGreatFallsMontana.org/plan):

Comprehensive Travel Market Research, Rudloff Solutions & Young Strategies	NOVEMBER 2023
Great Falls Montana Tourism Strategic Plan	JANUARY 2024
Travel Industry Growth Plan for Great Falls, Montana	JANUARY 2024

## WHAT'S NEW FOR THE 2026-2028 STRATEGY UPDATE?

Each year as we prepare to update our Economic Development Strategy, we assess market conditions, survey our investors, and hold strategic planning discussions involving our Board, Council, partners, investors, clients and staff.

This year, four key items drove strategy updates: large project announcements, findings of recently completed market assessments, our Board's decision in early 2025 to take on the responsibility of leading the region's defense mission advocacy efforts, and our ongoing desire to hone our work to focus on what has been producing the most mission impact.

**Large Project Announcements** Five large projects have been announced since June 2024, all of which require significant support from GFDA to come to fruition:

- Berkshire Hathaway Energy Montana's Projects
- Mitchell Development's *The Falls* Mixed Use Development
- Little Shell Tribe's Resort & Events Center
- Montana Renewables' MAX SAF Expansion
- TAC's Hyperscale Data Center Campus

**Findings of Recently Completed Market Assessments** Since the last update of our Strategy, market assessments for Downtown Great Falls, regional Energy Production, regional Freight Logistics, and regional Recreation & Entertainment have been completed. A statewide Pulse Processing market assessment has also been completed. Now it is time to put the findings of these assessments to work.

**Region's Defense Mission Advocacy Efforts** In early 2025 GFDA developed a plan to strengthen the region's defense advocacy efforts and agreed to be the lead organization for the defense advocacy effort.

**Hone Our Work to Produce Great Mission Impact** GFDA Board and Council discussions have emphasized the desire to focus on efforts that have proven to produce the greatest mission impact, doubling down on our most productive actions.

## STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

Our Economic Development Strategy has four areas of focus:



### PEOPLE

People are the heart of economic development. This area of focus addresses quality of life and the talented workforce local employers depend upon. Key quality of life factors in our Economic Development Strategy include housing and childcare. Workforce factors include talent attraction and workforce development.

### PLACE

Competitiveness of place is critical in retaining and attracting talent and attracting investment. Key competitive factors include the vibrancy of our downtown and commercial corridors; taking advantage of our rivers; availability of sites and spaces for businesses; freight logistics; and infrastructure.

### OPPORTUNITIES

Having great people and being a competitive place are not enough to succeed in transforming our economy. We must also aggressively pursue market-driven opportunities. Core work in business retention/expansions, attractions and startups serve all industry sectors in the region. We have identified five primary sector industries to target based on regional assets and market assessments: Food/Ag/Bio Processing, Health/Bioscience, Defense, Energy, and Tourism.

### TEAM

A strategic plan is meaningless without a team to put it into action. Key team priorities include capacity and strategic catalyst.

## PRIORITIES, ACTIONS, KEY PARTNERS, AND SUCCESS MEASURES

Under each area of focus you will find strategic priorities, key actions to accomplish these priorities, key partners, and success measures. Specific goals for success measures are detailed on a Strategy Dashboard set by the GFDA Board each fiscal year. Progress is tracked throughout the year.

# PEOPLE

## HOUSING

**Increase rental and homeownership production at all price levels to provide adequate housing to meet market demand and keep our housing market affordable.**

Two things make housing critical to our mission. First, availability of housing is cited as the number one factor by people looking to relocate to Great Falls to fill open jobs. Second, keeping up with housing demand is the most important thing we can do to keep Great Falls as affordable as possible. Our long-term goal is to close the gap between wage earnings and cost of living.

### **Actions**

- Pursue housing development with a focus on workforce rental, homeownership, and alternatives including student dorms, senior living, mobile home parks and campgrounds.
- Pursue development of affordable housing, emergency shelter, and transitional housing.
- Support the creation of new tools to improve the feasibility of more housing developments, including more flexible loan structures, special improvement districts, etc.

### **Key Partners**

- Great Falls Association of Realtors
- Home Builders Association of Great Falls
- NeighborWorks Great Falls

### **Success Measures**

- Production of housing units (houses, townhouses, apartments, etc.).

## TALENT ATTRACTION

**Attract workers to relocate to the Great Falls market to increase the labor force for local employers.**

There are thousands of open jobs in the Great Falls trade area. The availability of skilled, productive workers is the most important competitive factor cited by businesses of all sizes in all industries. Attracting talented workers to relocate here or to come back home is one way to help employers to fill these positions.

### **Actions**

- Expand and enhance LiveInGreatFalls talent attraction marketing efforts.
- Engage more employers in utilizing LiveInGreatFalls tools.
- Undertake public relations effort with Great Falls Montana Tourism to market the region to attract workforce talent and entrepreneurs.

### **Key Partners**

- Great Falls Montana Tourism
- Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce

### **Success Measures**

- Increased LiveInGreatFalls social media engagement and utilization.
- Increased employer utilization of LiveInGreatFalls tools.

## **CHILDCARE**

**Increase the availability of quality childcare to enable more parents and guardians to be employed.**

The availability of quality childcare is a key determinant of participation in the workforce.

### **Actions**

- Pursue expansion and start-up of quality childcare operations.
- Commission update to Great Falls childcare market demand assessment.

### **Key Partners**

- Family Connections
- Zero to Five

### **Success Measures**

- Increase childcare slots.
- Completion of updated market assessment.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**Support creation of workforce training programs targeted to skills most needed by local employers.**

Skilled workforce is critical in every industry. GFDA takes a largely supportive role in connecting employers, workforce training and education partners.

### **Actions**

- Work with employers and partners to pursue creation of industry-specific workforce education, training and apprenticeship programs.
- Support of Kids' Education Yes!

### **Key Partners**

- |                              |                            |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Central Montana Works      | • Kids' Education Yes!     |
| • Great Falls College MSU    | • Touro University         |
| • Great Falls Public Schools | • University of Providence |

### **Success Measures**

- Creation of new industry-specific workforce education, training and apprenticeship programs.

# PLACE

## **DOWNTOWN & COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS REVITALIZATION**

**Support revitalization of Downtown Great Falls and major commercial corridors.**

The built environment affects the attractiveness and the perception of economic health of a community, private investment, and workforce talent location decisions. Competitiveness of place has become an important factor even in industrial site location decisions. The retail and service sectors comprise the largest segment of our economy in Great Falls. The competitiveness of our service center is important to protect our market share amongst other service centers and on-line shopping. There is good momentum in revitalizing Downtown Great Falls and major commercial corridors. We want to keep this momentum moving forward.

### **Actions**

- Pursue new private investment in Downtown Great Falls and on major Great Falls commercial corridors.
- Support the Downtown Development Partnership of Great Falls.
- Commission Downtown Great Falls lighting plan.
- Commission catalyst sites redevelopment plans through a Brownfields area-wide assessment.
- Support the development of Mitchell Development's *The Falls* mixed use development.

### **Key Partners**

- Downtown Development Partnership of Great Falls
- City of Great Falls
- Cascade County
- Mitchell Development & Investment

### **Success Measures**

- New private investment in Downtown Great Falls and Great Falls major commercial corridors.
- Completion of Downtown Great Falls lighting plan.
- Completion of catalyst sites redevelopment plans.
- Development of Mitchell Development's *The Falls*.

## **URBAN RIVER ACTIVATION**

**Launch new effort to attract private investment and businesses to make greater use of urban rivers.**

One of the greatest assets of Great Falls is the Missouri River, but it is an underutilized asset. Other river communities have had more success in attracting investment to activate their rivers. With recent redevelopment success along the Great Falls urban riverfront, we think it is time to focus on greater activation of our river to improve the competitiveness of our community.

### **Actions**

- Create Great Falls River Activation Task Force to brainstorm ideas for river activation.
- Pursue new private investment on the urban riverfront including waterfront restaurants and entertainment.
- Pursue new and expanded business offerings to increase utilization of urban rivers for recreation and entertainment.
- Support the creation of iconic river-oriented “Instagramable” spots.

### **Key Partners**

- Great Falls Montana Tourism
- River’s Edge Trail Foundation
- Downtown Development Partnership of Great Falls
- City of Great Falls
- Cascade County
- NorthWestern Energy

### **Success Measures**

- New private investment on the urban riverfront including waterfront restaurants and entertainment.
- New and expanded business offerings to increase utilization of urban rivers for recreation and entertainment.

## **BUSINESS SITES & SPACES**

### **Increase availability of functional business sites and spaces.**

The availability of functional sites and spaces is a key factor in market competitiveness. The Great Falls trade area has limited availability of light industrial bays, which can be used for a wide variety of businesses, and of heavy industrial sites offering rail and municipal utilities.

### **Actions**

- Pursue development of light industrial bays.
- Secure TIF bond refinancing of Great Falls AgriTech Park and construct infrastructure serving lots 7, 8, 9 and 10.
- Acquire 42 acres for future AgriTech Park expansion.
- Create new lots in AgriTech Park as needed.

### **Key Partners**

- City of Great Falls
- Great Falls International Airport Authority

### **Success Measures**

- Development of new light industrial bays.
- Construction of infrastructure serving lots 7, 8, 9, and 10 in AgriTech Park.
- Acquisition of 42 acres for future AgriTech Park expansion.
- New construction and expansion of business facilities in the AgriTech Park.

## **FREIGHT LOGISTICS**

**Help make freight transportation costs more competitive and increase warehousing and logistics services available to local companies.**

GFDA's recent freight logistics market assessment shows a need for increased facilities and services to meet the needs of existing businesses and to make logistics expenses in our region more cost competitive.

### **Actions**

- Pursue development of rail and truck transloading and cross dock warehousing freight logistics facilities and services.
- Pursue development of food-grade warehousing and logistics facilities.

### **Success Measures**

- Construction of new and expanded transloading and cross dock warehousing facilities and increase in services logistics.
- Construction of new food-grade warehousing and logistics facilities.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Support efforts to ensure adequate infrastructure for local companies and investment, including increasing the capacity of regional natural gas and electric transmission.**

The availability and reliability of infrastructure, utilities, and energy are necessary to make business and real estate investment feasible and competitive.

### **Actions**

- Work with NorthWestern Energy, state leaders and energy developers to improve regional electric transmission and natural gas capacity.
- Support launch of Montana Energy Business Alliance to build statewide support for increased transmission capacity.
- Support construction of broadband, water, sewer, road, stormwater management and other infrastructure improvements needed to facilitate private investment.
- Support infrastructure funding through Montana Infrastructure Coalition.

### **Key Partners**

- City of Great Falls
- Cascade County
- Montana Department of Transportation
- Montana Infrastructure Coalition
- Montana Energy Business Alliance
- NorthWestern Energy
- Berkshire Hathway Energy Montana

### **Success Measures**

- Increased capacity of regional electric transmission and natural gas capacity.
- Investment in infrastructure needed for business and real estate development.

# OPPORTUNITIES

## BUSINESS ATTRACTION

**Attract new primary sector business investment to the Great Falls trade area.**

Companies are considered to be primary sector if a significant portion of their revenue is derived from outside the trade area. Primary sector businesses bring new money into the region's economy, build tax base, and can create higher wage career opportunities. Attracting primary sector business investment helps grow and diversify our economy.

### Actions

- Pursue primary sector business attraction for the entire trade area.
- Support development of TAC Hyperscale Data Center Campus.

### Key Partners

- Montana Department of Commerce
- TAC

### Success Measures

- Business attraction impact including company capital investment and added company annual payroll.
- Development of TAC Hyperscale Data Center Campus.

## BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

**Support the retention and expansion of primary sector businesses in the Great Falls trade area.**

The best way to grow a business is to take great care of existing customers, and the same goes with a regional economy. Studies have shown that most new jobs and investment also come from existing businesses or spin-offs from existing businesses. Helping existing business to thrive is the core of our economic development work, with particular emphasis on primary sector businesses that bring new dollars into our region.

### Actions

- Pursue business retention and expansion in Great Falls and in the rural and tribal communities of the trade area.

### Key Partners

- Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce
- Rural Chambers of Commerce
- Regional Tribal Leadership

### Success Measures

- Business expansion impact including company capital investment and added company annual payroll.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

**Support entrepreneurial startups, microbusinesses and fast-growing small businesses in the Great Falls trade area.**

Small business and innovation are the bedrocks of the American economy. Montana leads the nation in entrepreneurial startups per capita, but scores less well with fast-growing small business. Startups and microbusinesses are a big part of the economy of the Great Falls trade area, and side gigs generate additional household income. Business ownership is one of the greatest ways to create generational wealth. Spurring more entrepreneurial success helps grow and diversify our economy, creating greater economic opportunity.

### **Actions**

- Expand and enhance cohort entrepreneur programs, including master classes and/or boot camps for target industries.
- Increase trainings for existing businesses including succession planning.
- Host start-up pitch events to spur entrepreneurial activity.
- Work to increase entrepreneurial success in Great Falls and the rural and tribal communities of the of trade area.

### **Key Partners**

- Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce
- Rural Chambers of Commerce
- Regional Tribal Leadership

### **Success Measures**

- Business startup impact including company capital investment and company annual payroll.
- Increased mission impact generated by participants in cohort programs.
- Business startups, expansions and attractions sparked by start-up pitch events.

## TARGET INDUSTRIES

### Food/Ag/Bio Processing

**Expand and diversify processing operations that utilize agricultural production of region.**

Agriculture is a huge part of our trade area's economy. Food and ag processing have been manufacturing mainstays since the settlement of the region. However, an estimated 85% of what is grown in Montana leaves the state without any added value. Expanding and diversifying processing operations grows and diversifies our economy; creates tax base and higher wage production jobs; and provides new local markets for farmers and ranchers.

### **Actions**

- Pursue investment in Food/Ag/Bio Processing industries.
- Strengthen Great Falls - Lethbridge Food/Ag/Bio Processing cross-border partnership.

### **Key Partners**

- Montana Food & Ag Development Center Network
- Montana agricultural trade associations
- MSU College of Agriculture
- Montana Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Department of Agriculture

### **Success Measures**

- Business startup, expansion and attraction impact including company capital investment and added company annual payroll.

## Health/Bioscience

**Utilize Great Falls health and bioscience assets to expand high-wage health and bioscience industry.**

Healthcare services are important to retain and attract workforce and have been one of the biggest growth sectors of the American economy. Our healthcare providers offer world-class services that have attracted patients from outside the region and enabled Great Falls to become a regional hub for healthcare and education, with potential for further growth.

### **Actions**

- Support healthcare service providers and research institutions in region.
- Support expansion of Touro University in Great Falls.

### **Key Partners**

- Benefis Health System
- Great Falls Clinic
- Weissman Hood Institute
- Touro University

### **Success Measures**

- Touro University expansion.

## Defense

**Support Defense as an important primary sector economic base of our region.**

The Great Falls region is proud to be an integral part of our nation's defense and defense is a big part of our primary economy. However, the world is constantly changing and we can't take current or future defense missions for granted. In the winter of 2025, GFDA took on the responsibility of leading the public/private partnership effort to advocate for defense missions in the region. Our strategic planning consultants also recommended we explore the potential to leverage defense missions to attract private sector defense industry companies.

### **Actions**

- Work with U.S. Air Force and local, regional, and state leaders to prepare for Sentinel mission construction.
- Lead and strengthen Central Montana Defense Coalition to retain and attract defense missions.
- Coordinate energy and foreign direct investment efforts with Department of Defense to protect national defense.
- Commission defense industry market assessment.

### **Key Partners**

- Cascade County
- City of Great Falls
- Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce
- Great Falls International Airport Authority
- U.S. Air Force
- Montana Air National Guard

### **Success Measures**

- Stand-up of Central Montana Defense Coalition.
- Completion of defense industry market assessment.
- Construction of Sentinel mission.

## Energy

**Pursue opportunities to utilize the region's natural resources to produce more energy.**

The regional energy market assessment recently commissioned by GFDA found significant opportunities to increase energy production in the Great Falls trade area. Energy production increases supply options for local energy users, creates a stronger tax base, and creates higher wage career opportunities.

### Actions

- Pursue and facilitate energy investment in the region.
- Coordinate energy development with U.S. Air Force to avoid defense mission conflicts.
- Support Montana Renewables' SAF MAX expansion and local feedstock sourcing for refinery.
- Support Berkshire Hathaway Energy Montana projects in region.

### Key Partners

- Berkshire Hathaway Energy Montana
- U.S. Air Force
- Montana Renewables

### Success Measures

- Energy investment in the region.
- Development of Berkshire Hathaway Energy Montana projects in region.
- Montana Renewables expansion and increased utilization of local feedstock.

## Tourism, Recreation & Entertainment

**Expand and diversify tourism primary sector industry and increase indoor and outdoor recreation and entertainment offerings to make region more competitive to attract and retain workforce talent.**

Visitors bring new dollars into our region and support many of the businesses and experiences that make our market more competitive for talent retention and attraction. The market findings recently commissioned by GFDA show significant opportunities to increase visitation, as well as recreation and entertainment industries in the region.

### Actions

- Pursue investment in entertainment and recreation industries identified in market assessment.
- Create Business Development Officer position to focus on tourism, recreation and entertainment industries; river activation; and talent attraction.
- Pursue investment in new lodging facilities including unique experiential lodging in the trade area.
- Create Great Falls River Activation Task Force to explore options for increased recreation use of rivers.
- Support the Great Falls Low-Cost Airfare Initiative.
- Support development of the Little Shell Tribe's resort, event center, water park, and conference facility.

### Key Partners

- Great Falls Montana Tourism
- Great Falls International Airport Authority
- Central Montana Tourism
- Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce
- Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians

### Success Measures

- Investment in new and expanded entertainment and recreation businesses.
- Construction of new and expanded lodging facilities including unique experiential lodging.
- New river-related business offerings.
- Development of the Little Shell Tribe's Resort & Events Center.

# TEAM

## CAPACITY

**Increase GFDA's resources and operational capacity to produce more high-mission impact results and improve GFDA's sustainability.**

Successful implementation of this Economic Development Strategy requires significant increases in GFDA's resources to ensure we have the capacity to make things happen.

### Actions

- Secure new loan capital, particularly to support housing development.
- Increase local investment and generated revenue.
- Continue capital campaign to raise one-time funds needed to implement Economic Development Strategy.
- Assess feasibility of creating Community Impact Investment Fund.

### Success Measures

- New loan capital secured.
- Capital campaign funds raised.
- Completion of Community Impact Investment Fund assessment.

## STRATEGIC CATALYST

**Improve and expand coordination amongst investors and partners.**

GFDA leverages its capacity by working through collaboration and partnerships. Successful implementation of this Economic Development Strategy requires expansion and strengthening of collaborative efforts.

### Actions

- Improve Board, Council, Partner, and Investor awareness of GFDA services and impact.
- Strengthen ties with rural and tribal partners.
- Organize an annual aspirational tour of other communities.
- Host key-issue discussions related to GFDA strategic priorities.

### Key Partners

- Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians
- Blackfeet Nation
- Rural Chambers of Commerce
- Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce

### Success Measures

- Board, Council, Partner, and Investor increased awareness of GFDA services and impact.
- Increased engagement of rural and tribal partners.
- Annual aspirational tour held.
- Key-issue discussions held.

# UNTAME YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

Great Falls Development Alliance

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[www.GrowGreatFallsMontana.org](http://www.GrowGreatFallsMontana.org)

