



Regional Prosperity Strategy

2026-2030

RPI, INC. | Columbus, GA





Columbus Ahead is the regional strategy for **2026–2030**. A bold roadmap designed to drive economic momentum, cultivate talent, and build a thriving community. Designed over the last year with input from more than **100 organizations**, we've committed to nine major goals to move our region forward.





How we got here

Phase 1

Organizational workshops
Jan-Feb 2025

Phase 2

Stakeholder engagement
Jun-Sept 2025

Community assessment
Jun-Sept 2025

Strategy development
Oct-Dec 2025

Launch
January 2026



JOB

VIBRANT ECONOMY

GOAL

Rank in the **top half** of Georgia metros for job growth.

2026-30 TARGET

7%

2026-30 TARGET

6,500 Jobs

JOB

VIBRANT ECONOMY

GOAL

Rank among the **top five**
Georgia metros for prime-age*
workforce growth

**Age 25-54*

2026-30 TARGET

10%

2026-30 TARGET

12,500 ppl



JOB

VIBRANT ECONOMY

GOAL

**Strengthen Columbus's
entrepreneurial ecosystem by
improving access to capital**

2026-30 TARGET

\$10M

2026-30 TARGET

10% of MSA



JOB

VIBRANT ECONOMY

GOAL

Attract 15 million visitors

2026-30 TARGET

15M

2026-30 TARGET

50% Growth



TALENT PROSPEROUS PEOPLE

GOAL

Rank among the **top five Georgia metros for growth of residents with postsecondary education**

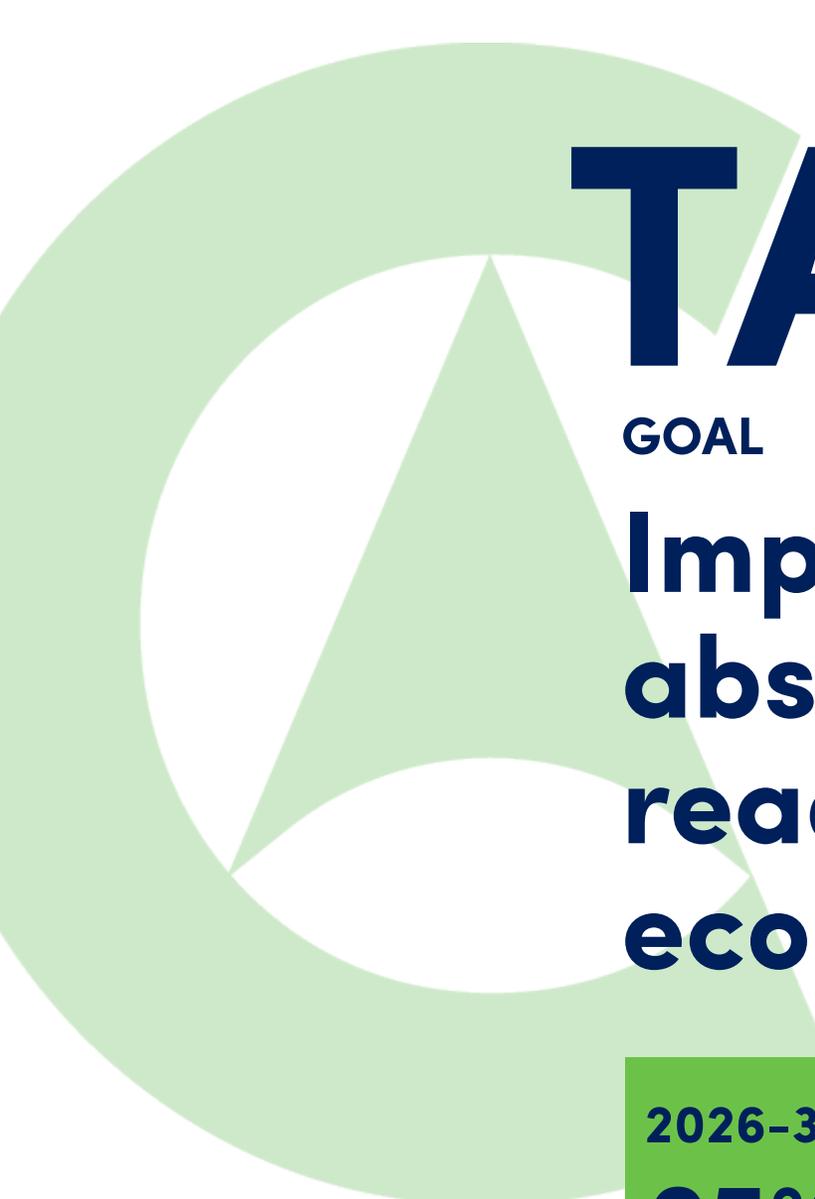
Age 25+, all types of credentials

2026-30 TARGET

21%

2026-30 TARGET

17,500 ppl



TALENT PROSPEROUS PEOPLE

GOAL

**Improve student chronic
absenteeism and grade-level
readiness by 20% in the most
economically disadvantaged areas**

2026-30 TARGET

65% Kindergarten
ready-MCSD

2026-30 TARGET

20% Increase



PLACE THRIVING COMMUNITY

GOAL

**Reduce crime rates to
below the national
average**

2026-30 TARGET

50% Reduction in
violent crime

2026-30 TARGET

20% Reduction in
property crime



PLACE **THRIVING COMMUNITY**

GOAL

**Enhance connectivity by
developing the most extensive
trail network of any
community in Georgia**

2026-30 TARGET

27.5 miles

New trail completed

2026-30 TARGET

61 miles

Total trail available



PLACE **THRIVING COMMUNITY**

GOAL

**Enhance civic pride
and community
engagement**

2026-30 TARGET

45,000 *Media placements (with
50% national publication
placements)*

2026-30 TARGET

80% *Positive sentiment
across all media
mentions*



IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS





Steering Committee

Charles Auer, *Ft. Benning*

Billy Blanchard, *Covey Equity*

Betsy Covington, *Community Foundation
of the Chattahoochee Valley*

Shaun Culligan, *City of Phenix City*

Jeremy Cummings, *Columbus Water Works*

Mike Dempsey, *Ft. Benning*

Melissa Gauntt, *East AL Chamber
of Commerce*

Pace Halter, *W.C. Bradley Real Estate*

Hon. Skip Henderson, *Columbus
Consolidated Government*

Ken Henson

Pam Hodge, *Columbus Consolidated Government*

Selvin Hollingsworth, *Development
Authority of Columbus*

Doug Jenkins, *Georgia Power*

Wes Kelley, *Brasfield & Gorrie*

Missy Kendrick, *Choose Columbus*

Tricia Konan, *Goodwill Industries
of the Southern Rivers*

Katie Kreig, *Bradley-Turner Foundation*

Justin Kreig, *Historic Columbus*

Dr. David Lewis, *Muscogee County
School District*

Ben MacMinn, *StartUP Columbus*

Fred Maglione, *Boys & Girls Clubs of the
Chattahoochee Valley*

Marquette McKnight, *Media, Marketing & More*

Steve Morse, *Uptown Columbus*

Ben Moser, *United Way of the
Chattahoochee Valley*

Rainer Mullin, *Mildred Miller Fort Foundation*

Julio Portillo, *MidTown Inc*

Dr. Stuart Rayfield, *Columbus State University*

Dr. Dionne Rosser-Mims, *Troy University*

Heath Schondelmayer, *Synovus*

Crystal Shahid, *Truist Bank*

Jansen Tidmore, *Columbus Chamber
of Commerce*

Martha Ann Todd, *Columbus Technical College*

Brad Turner

John Turner

Ashley Weitena, *Visit Columbus*

Chris Woodruff, *Cotton Companies*

Jimmy Yancey

Becca Zajac, *Dragonfly Trails*



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