



**GREATER  
FORT WAYNE INC.**  
METRO CHAMBER ALLIANCE



ASSOCIATION OF  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
EXECUTIVES

# 2025 ACCE Chamber of the Year Application

Greater Fort Wayne Inc. Metro Chamber Alliance



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# Section Two: Contact Information

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Staff Size (FTEs):

**20**



Board Size:

**57**

# Section Two: Organizational Excellence and Resource Alignment

## Section Two: Part One

### QUESTION ONE

Does your chamber comply with annual federal, state, and local income tax filing requirements?

YES

### QUESTION TWO

Is your chamber audited annually? If so, in what month?

YES

APRIL

### QUESTION THREE

Is your chamber's annual budget approved by your board? If so, in what month?

YES

DECEMBER

### QUESTION FOUR








Does your chamber have a strategic plan? If so, please include a copy.

YES

DOWNLOAD PLAN

# Section Two: Organizational Excellence and Resource Alignment

## Section Two: Part Two

 <p>Audit Management Letter</p> <p><a href="#">DOWNLOAD</a></p>	 <p>Current Annual Budget</p> <p><a href="#">DOWNLOAD</a></p>	 <p>Statement of Financial Position*</p> <p><a href="#">DOWNLOAD</a></p>	<p>990 Tax Forms</p> <p><a href="#">2021</a></p> <p><a href="#">2022</a></p> <p><a href="#">2023</a></p>
 <p>Employee Handbook</p> <p><a href="#">DOWNLOAD</a></p>	 <p>Member Recruitment Plan</p> <p><a href="#">DOWNLOAD</a></p>	 <p>Member Retention Plan</p> <p><a href="#">DOWNLOAD</a></p>	 <p>Marketing Plan</p> <p><a href="#">DOWNLOAD</a></p>

\* Includes Statement of Activities and Budget to Actual

# Section Two: Organizational Excellence and Resource Alignment

## Section Two: Part Three



### How does your most recent strategic plan or business plan align with the biggest challenge(s) your community faces?

Workforce development, recruitment, and retention are at the heart of Greater Fort Wayne Inc.'s strategic vision and plan, making it a cornerstone of our leadership in the community. According to GFW Inc.'s 2024 Allen County Business Survey, workforce development, recruitment, and retention were among the biggest challenges facing our business community.

To address workforce challenges, we continue to expand our [Onboard Fort Wayne Continuum](#) with additional pillars and programs. This comprehensive 4-pillar initiative connects high school seniors through Best in Class, college interns through the Intern Experience, new professionals through Newcomer Socials, and executive leaders and their families through C-Suite Socials. Launched three years ago, the initiative has continued to evolve to meet the needs of our business community. We're helping organizations retain the talent they have worked hard to recruit – whether it is newcomers to our community or young people who grew up here.

We champion efforts such as the [Welcoming Fort Wayne Plan](#) with Amani Family Services, fostering inclusivity for immigrants and refugees. Our support of programs such as Grow Allen and JA Career

Ignite unite educators and industry leaders, preparing students to excel in high-demand careers critical to our community's success. GFW Inc.'s [MadeByMe](#) program introduces high school students to skilled trades and advanced manufacturing careers, addressing immediate and future workforce needs in key industries through work-based learning and educator externships.

With an aging leadership core in Allen County, GFW Inc. inspires future leaders through programs like [Leadership Fort Wayne](#). We support entrepreneurs and small businesses with initiatives like [Small Business Exclusives](#) to ensure their growth. At the state level, we advocate for policies that keep Allen County a business-friendly community.

By aligning our efforts with the community's needs, GFW Inc. is helping to build a robust, future-ready workforce that supports local businesses and the broader economy.

## What is your strategy to ensure your Chamber has an inclusive culture and your leadership and staff make-up is reflective of the business community you serve?

GFW Inc. is deeply committed to advancing an inclusive culture that reflects the diverse community we serve. This mission-driven focus on inclusion is woven into our values, staff composition, and strategic priorities.

We believe inclusion is essential to building a thriving, innovative business community. GFW Inc. embraces its responsibility to lead by example, creating an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute. Inclusion is not only a core value but a guiding force across every level of our work.

While there is work to be done, our team composition reflects our commitment to diversity and inclusion, ensuring GFW Inc. mirrors the community's business landscape. Through intentional recruitment and retention of talent from varied backgrounds, we've built a team that brings diverse perspectives and fresh thinking. We strive to ensure every team member feels a true sense of belonging and connection.

Our inclusive programs and events—such as Leadership Fort Wayne, [Women's Network](#), Allen County Leaders Luncheon, and more—reflect our community's diversity and create a sense of belonging for all. With a fully ADA-compliant website

launching in June, we're modeling inclusive practices and sparking vital conversations on workplace diversity and inclusion.

The leadership structure of GFW Inc. is a testament to our inclusive values, with a male CEO and three female chief executives leading the organization. Additionally, the board of directors includes 30% women and features members from diverse backgrounds, fully representing the community. This diversity ensures that decision-making and strategic direction are informed by a broad range of experiences and insights.

GFW Inc. promotes inclusive practices by encouraging diverse talent pipelines, promoting diversity and inclusion policies, and providing accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

By advocating for inclusive hiring, workplace accommodation, and Universal Design, we ensure the business ecosystem reflects the full diversity of our community.

► [DOWNLOAD GREATER FORT WAYNE INC.'S DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT](#)

**Trends show a larger percentage of non-dues and non-traditional revenue streams represented in the overall fiscal health of chambers. Explain how your Chamber is funded and how you are evolving toward this movement.**

GFW Inc. has been intentional in aligning funding with growing trends in available revenue streams. **Non-dues revenue now accounts for 64% of our total revenue**, reflecting a diverse and evolving funding strategy. Of the total funding received by Greater Fort Wayne Inc., 36% is generated through annual dues. The remaining revenue comes from sponsorships, fee-for-service contracts, programming and events, and additional support received from our Visionary Investors.

Our larger investors made it clear that they prefer to support the mission and vision as a whole, rather than being asked to cover individual event costs or sponsorships. To meet their needs, we meet with each investor annually to develop customized sponsorship packages that align with their business objectives, while sustaining their investment in the vision for our community. Sponsorships now account for 14% of our funding. To expand opportunities for smaller businesses, we've introduced sponsorship levels that accommodate a wide range of budgets, ensuring they can participate meaningfully within their financial means.

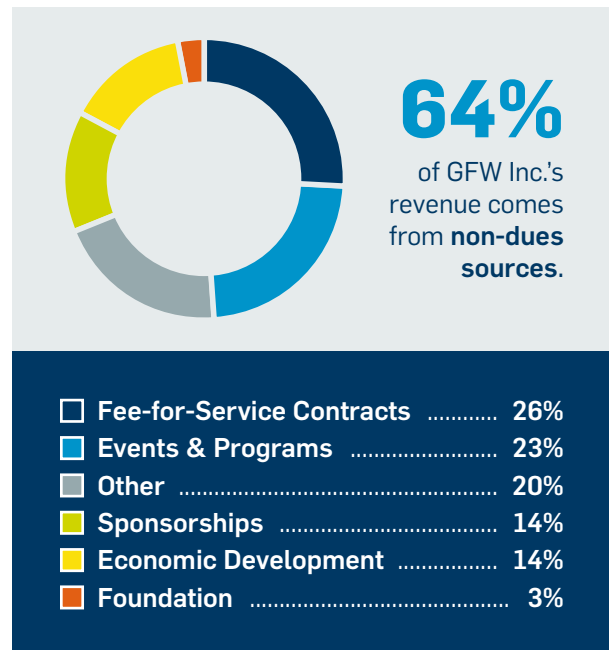
Additionally, GFW Inc. has diversified its revenue streams by establishing fee-for-service contracts with local government entities and organizations, which contribute 26% of our total revenue. These partnerships allow us to leverage our expertise while providing valuable services to the community.

Event-based revenue has also been a growing opportunity for our Chamber. Our annual Economic

Development Summit, for example, has become a cornerstone event after only three years, attracting business and community leaders, as well as professionals, generating significant financial impact.

Another emerging source of non-dues revenue is Member Celebrations. We support members with ribbon-cuttings, groundbreaking, and other milestone events. These celebrations contributed an additional \$16,500 in 2024, showcasing the value that members see in celebrating their achievements.

Through these efforts, GFW Inc. is evolving to ensure long-term fiscal health and mission-driven impact.



\* 'Other' includes grants, Member Celebrations, and other smaller revenue sources.

## How does your Chamber exemplify Chamber of the Year?

Greater Fort Wayne Inc. exemplifies the qualities of a high-performing, modern chamber of commerce through our achievements during the past decade. By embracing catalytic leadership, fostering inclusivity, and implementing innovative workforce engagement programs, we have made a lasting impact on Fort Wayne and Allen County.

### Catalytic Leadership and Economic Development

Our Allen County Together plan unites leaders, businesses, and residents around a shared vision for long-term growth. This strategic approach has led to record-breaking results: more than 14,000 new jobs and \$6.4 billion in private investment across the county over the past ten years.

### Inclusivity and Engagement

We advance equity by tackling systemic barriers, promoting diverse voices, supporting partners like Amani Family Services, expanding access, and designing an ADA-compliant website to ensure Fort Wayne and Allen County are truly inclusive places to live, work, and thrive.

### Innovative Workforce Development

Our forward-thinking programs focus on talent retention and next-generation engagement:

- The **Best in Class Summit** connects top high school students with local leaders and projects shaping our future, inspiring them to envision their post-secondary life here.
- The **Intern Experience Program** builds professional networks and connections for emerging talent.

- The **MadeByMe Coalition** promotes skilled trades through classroom visits, career fairs, and educator externships.
- **Leadership Fort Wayne** equips leaders with the skills and knowledge to shape our community's future.

### Exceeding Ambitious Goals

Driven by adaptability and a commitment to excellence, we consistently exceed goals and serve as trusted leaders. This impact is widely recognized with 86% of investors and 70% of non-investors agreeing that we are leading positive change (2024 Allen County Business Survey).

In 2024, we set a new standard, achieving record-breaking milestones that drove Fort Wayne and Allen County forward. These accomplishments reflect our unwavering commitment to leadership, innovation, inclusion, and impact, all qualities that define an ACCE Chamber of the Year.

### 2024 IMPACT STATISTICS

**1,350+** Active Chamber Members

**200+** New Investors in 2024

**37** Ribbon-Cutting & Groundbreaking Events

**6,000+** Event Registrations

**15,000+** E-Newsletter Subscribers

**40,000+** Followers on Social Media

**300,000+** GFW Inc. Website Views



### Section Three: Program Synopsis

# Onboard Fort Wayne

## Greater Fort Wayne Inc.'s Talent Attraction Continuum

### Impact Area Addressed:

- Building a better equipped workforce
- Business Impact

[DOWNLOAD SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

### Program / Initiative Summary

The [Onboard Fort Wayne Continuum](#) includes two key programs—Best in Class and the Fort Wayne Intern Experience—designed to attract and retain talent in Fort Wayne and Allen County. These initiatives connect high school seniors, college interns, and skilled trades apprentices with local amenities, leaders, and the economic growth shaping their futures.

Best in Class offers high-achieving seniors insight into the professional landscape of Fort Wayne, while the Intern Experience enriches summer experiences through networking and community engagement for college students.

Aligned with the Horizon Initiative's focus on belonging and gathering, both programs inspire young, emerging talent to build lasting careers in Fort Wayne and Allen County after graduation.

### Identification of Needs

The Best in Class and Intern Experience programs are designed to engage top-performing high school seniors and college interns and apprentices working in Fort Wayne and Allen County during the summer. These individuals represent the future workforce of Allen County. According to the 2024 Allen County Business Survey, recruiting and retaining talent remains a top challenge for local businesses. These programs directly respond to that need by

encouraging a sense of connection to the community for young and emerging talent.

By showcasing local career opportunities, economic development, and community assets, the programs bridge the gap between education and long-term career success. Participants gain valuable exposure to local industries, leaders, and the potential for meaningful careers in Fort Wayne and Allen County.

To measure effectiveness, pre- and post-program surveys and evaluations are conducted, tracking participants' awareness of and interest in remaining in the region after graduation. These tools provide critical data to refine programming and ensure alignment with both community needs and employer goals. Additionally, input from employers and educators further informs program development. This continuous feedback loop allows the programs to adapt and evolve, ensuring they remain effective tools for local workforce development and talent retention.

## Program Objectives

From new professionals and executives to emerging leaders, Onboard Fort Wayne is designed to promote meaningful connections and a lasting sense of belonging within our community. The program offers a warm welcome to individuals who are new to the region or stepping into leadership roles, helping them build both personal and professional networks from the start.

As part of the broader Onboard Continuum, GFW Inc. recognized the opportunity to expand programming that supports the recruitment and retention of emerging professionals, ensuring a strong and sustainable talent pipeline for Fort Wayne and Allen County.



*Attendees at the 2024 Best in Class Summit*

Through initiatives like **Best in Class** and **Intern Experience**, students explore community amenities, learn about economic development projects and trends shaping our future, connect with local leaders and professionals, and engage in Fort Wayne's culture. These experiences help develop a genuine sense of belonging, increasing the likelihood they will return to Fort Wayne after graduation to live and work.



*Intern ice-breaker activity at the Fort Wayne Zoo*

By prioritizing inclusion, engagement, and long-term connection, Onboard Fort Wayne directly addresses workforce needs while enriching the lives of participants. More than just a welcome, it is a strategic investment in Fort Wayne and Allen County's future with an invitation to belong, contribute, and thrive.

## Methodology

To achieve their goals, Best in Class and the Intern Experience use a multi-faceted approach to connect young talent to Fort Wayne and Allen County. Best in Class identifies high school seniors nominated for academic excellence, leadership, and community involvement. These students attend the Best in Class Summit, where they explore the county's economic landscape and engage with local industry leaders, helping them envision a future in the area.

The Intern Experience engages college interns and apprentices through five community-based events between May and July. These events offer opportunities to build connections with peers, professionals, and local businesses in relaxed, engaging settings. GFW Inc. also partners with community organizations to host a summer intern conference focused on professional development.

Program budgets cover venue rentals, refreshments, materials, and staffing, supported through sponsorships, in-kind contributions, and GFW Inc.'s organizational funding. This model ensures sustainability and strong community involvement.

As part of the broader Onboard Fort Wayne Continuum, these programs are intentionally connected. Best in Class participants are invited to return as interns, and those who stay in the region are welcomed into Newcomers socials—fostering lasting community ties and a strong sense of belonging.

*"The event made me proud to live in a city that genuinely cares about our students, the future of our city, and the community as a whole."*

**Best in Class Summit Attendee**

## Communications

Our communication strategy for Onboard Fort Wayne focuses on engaging key audiences: high school administrators, students, local employers, and the broader community.

A variety of marketing and communication channels ensure visibility:

**Website:** Program details and regular updates are posted on the Best in Class and Intern Experience pages.

**Social Media:** Posts highlight program successes, student testimonials, and community impact.

**Emails:** Targeted outreach to school administrators, businesses, and interns shares program details and deadlines.

**Press Releases:** Media coverage helps promote program growth and success.

Our communications are clear, targeted, and designed to encourage action, whether it is for Best in Class nominations or intern applications. We ensure that all materials emphasize workforce development and community engagement.

Additionally, GFW Inc. partners with local businesses and organizations to promote the Intern Experience program. This includes collaborating with the local HR Association and GFW Inc. members. In 2025, GFW Inc. will pilot a program to visit college classrooms, encouraging students to consider internships in Allen County. These visits will help students understand the opportunities and amenities available, highlighting the benefits of interning and working in the region.

Supporting materials including flyers, brochures, and press releases have contributed to increased program awareness and participation.

## Program Evaluation

The impact and effectiveness of the Best in Class and Intern Experience programs are evaluated through a comprehensive approach that includes pre- and post-program surveys, participant and employer feedback, and measurable program outcomes. This evaluation framework ensures both continuous improvement and alignment with workforce development goals in Fort Wayne and Allen County.



*Newcomer Social attendees during an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of Parkview Field*

### Program Outcomes:

For Best in Class, students nominated for their leadership and academic achievement attend a summit that introduces them to Allen County's economic landscape and job market. Post-program surveys show participants gain a deeper understanding of the area's quality-of-life offerings, and many express a stronger intention to stay in Allen County after graduation. These insights help inform adjustments to program content and delivery for future cohorts.

**100+**

Attendees of the 2024 Best in Class Summit, representing 99% of area high schools.

The Intern Experience features five community-based events between May and July, plus a professional development conference. End-of-summer surveys reveal that a significant percentage of interns could envision themselves returning to Allen County after graduation. Employers also report high levels of satisfaction with intern preparedness and engagement, reinforcing the program's practical impact.

### ▶ [WATCH OUR 2024 INTERN EXPERIENCE PROMOTIONAL VIDEO](#)

Additionally, both programs are supported by strong communications strategies. Metrics such as website traffic, social media engagement, and event participation reflect growing interest. Testimonials from students and employers further highlight the personal and professional value of the experience, with many students stating they now view Allen County as a viable long-term home.

The evaluation process also includes collaboration with employers and educators to gather follow-up feedback after participants complete the programs.

This continuous feedback loop ensures the programs remain responsive, impactful, and aligned with the needs of both emerging talent and local employers—ultimately contributing to the success of the broader Onboard Fort Wayne Continuum and the Horizon Initiative's goal of fostering belonging and connection.

**500+**

Collective attendees of the Intern Experience in 2024.



From Left to Right: Gov. Eric Holcomb(former), Ben Townsend (Google), Mayor Sharon Tucker (City of Fort Wayne), Senator Todd Young, Joe Kava (Google), Utauka Allen (Google), David Rodenberg (IEDC), John Urbahns (GFW Inc.)

### Section Three: Program Synopsis

# Breaking Records. Building the Future.

## How Greater Fort Wayne Inc. Led Allen County’s Efforts for Google’s Fastest Data Center Launch in the World

### Impact Area Addressed:

- Economic Development
- Public Policy

[DOWNLOAD SUPPORTING DOCUMENT](#)

### Program / Initiative Summary

In 2024, Greater Fort Wayne Inc. (GFW Inc.), Allen County’s lead economic development organization, played a central role in securing Google’s initial \$2 billion investment in Fort Wayne which supports Phases 1 and 2 of the data center project, with 200 permanent on-site jobs and 1,000 skilled trades construction jobs over 10 years. GFW Inc. led partner coordination and streamlined approvals, earning praise from Google as its fastest and most seamless experience in any data center project globally.

Showcasing catalytic leadership, GFW Inc. led complex negotiations as the project developer, securing 900 acres across 53 parcels in just 90 days.

As Google’s largest and most advanced site, the data center will power AI solutions worldwide.

### Identification of Needs

GFW Inc. drives economic growth by aligning major projects with the ACT Plan—a 10-year strategy to grow jobs, wages, and the economy. A key goal of the ACT Plan is to promote inclusive growth by creating quality jobs in southeast Fort Wayne, a historically underserved area.

► [DOWNLOAD THE ALLEN COUNTY TOGETHER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN](#)

As part of the discovery process for the ACT Plan, GFW Inc. partnered with a consulting firm, holding 20 roundtables and dozens of interviews with over 200 local stakeholders, including business leaders, officials, educators, developers, and community advocates. More than 1,400 data points were collected, along with an analysis of employment gaps, education levels, and investment patterns.

Additionally, Fort Wayne and Allen County's comprehensive All In Allen plan aligned land use with ACT's economic goals.

The \$2 billion Google data center investment directly supports ACT Plan goals by producing high-wage, tech-driven jobs and major infrastructure investment in southeast Fort Wayne, while providing 1,000 skilled trades jobs during site construction over the next decade.

GFW Inc. also worked to facilitate Google's partnership with Ivy Tech to launch the Skilled Trades and Readiness (STAR) program—offering paid training and direct career pathways to local residents, ensuring long-term community impact from this transformational project.



2024 STAR Program Graduates

## Program Objectives

The goal of GFW Inc.'s economic development efforts is to grow Allen County's economy by attracting strategic investment, creating high-quality jobs, and increasing wages for residents. This vision drives GFW Inc.'s work across key areas such as business recruitment, site development, and workforce readiness.

The Google data center project delivers on these objectives by bringing a record-breaking investment to a key growth corridor in Allen County. While creating long-term, high-wage job opportunities, the project develops a complex and previously underutilized site with advanced infrastructure and technology that positions us for future innovation and expansion.

As a direct result of GFW Inc.'s collaboration with public and private partners, this project not only enhances the county's competitive edge but also supports inclusive economic development for local residents. With built-in talent development initiatives and workforce programs, the project creates new pathways to long-term, in-demand careers and provides skilled trades jobs for the next decade.

By aligning with the ACT Plan's targeted strategies and the All In Allen land use plan, the Google project reflects GFW Inc.'s mission to build a nationally recognized economy that is future-ready and accessible to all. It exemplifies how bold, strategic efforts can deliver long-term value for the entire community.

## Methodology

To fulfill the ACT Plan's goals, GFW Inc. coordinated a fast-tracked, collaborative effort to secure Google's initial \$2 billion investment. A process that typically takes two years was accomplished in just six months.

GFW Inc. brought together key partners, including the Cities of Fort Wayne and New Haven, Allen County, AEP, City Utilities, and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, to align resources and speed up approvals. The organization also created an LLC to serve as the project developer, which was a first for GFW Inc.

The site was complex and included parcels from Fort Wayne, New Haven, and unincorporated Allen County. Google expressed a desire for the entire site to fall within Fort Wayne's city limits, requiring extensive coordination between multiple government entities. GFW Inc.'s established relationships allowed it to lead critical conversations and guide negotiations.

Within 90 days, GFW Inc. secured agreements for 900 acres across 53 parcels, arranged a land transfer between cities, and worked with the county to vacate a roadway. A special joint meeting of planning commissions was held to keep the project on schedule. GFW Inc. also helped connect Google with Ivy Tech to launch the STAR program, preparing local residents for future job opportunities.

## Communication

GFW Inc. developed and executed a strategic communications plan in partnership with Google to support the successful rollout of the \$2 billion data center project, initially referred to as Project Zodiac. Due to confidentiality, early communication was limited to key internal stakeholders. Once the project was publicly announced, our strategy shifted to broad public engagement.

## Communications Vehicles included:

- A joint press release with Google, reaching the general public, stakeholders, and media. The key message was that Google selected Allen County to build its largest and most advanced data center, reinforcing the region's economic momentum.
- Inclusion in the Greater Fort Wayne Inc. Investment Guide, targeting investors, businesses, and economic partners, with a call to support local growth.
- Social media and [news coverage](#) promoting the groundbreaking ceremony and celebrating community collaboration, targeting the general public and local business community.
- Drone footage and coverage of the site in our 10-Year Anniversary video, designed to inspire regional pride and highlight transformational projects.
- A featured presentation at the 2024 Economic Development Summit, targeting elected officials, partners, and investors.



*Panel featuring local partners involved in Project Zodiac at the 2024 GFW Inc. Economic Development Summit*

The communications strategy was developed collaboratively with Google, following traditional planning steps: identifying objectives, defining key audiences, crafting tailored messages, selecting appropriate channels, and timing each phase for maximum impact.



*Google Data Center Campus, September 2024*

## Program Evaluation

Greater Fort Wayne Inc.'s coordination on the Google data center project played a key role in delivering a record-setting year for Allen County's economic development. The Google project, announced in early 2024, built directly on the momentum already established in the county and marked a transformational leap forward, allowing Allen County to achieve a historic year in job creation, private investment, and growth.

The \$2 billion Google investment, the largest single project in county history, reinforced Allen County's competitiveness on the national stage. It supported key objectives outlined in the ACT Plan, including attracting high-wage jobs, increasing investment in southeast Fort Wayne, and driving inclusive growth. GFW Inc.'s unique role as developer accelerated land acquisition, infrastructure coordination, and public-private collaboration, setting a new standard for project execution.

Beyond economic impact, the partnership with Ivy Tech and Google to launch the Skilled Trades and Readiness program began creating tangible pathways to opportunity for residents, particularly in underserved areas. This proactive approach to workforce development ensures long-term community benefit.

The City of Fort Wayne gains tax revenue from the campus, creating resources to invest in southeast Fort Wayne and a portion of the proceeds from land sale helped launch the Connected Neighborhoods Initiative, supporting neighborhoods across the city.

This project also strengthened relationships with elected officials, utility partners, and local stakeholders, reinforcing GFW Inc.'s value to its membership and community. The successful execution of such a high-profile project significantly enhanced investor confidence and community pride.

As the data center continues to take shape, early outcomes point to substantial long-term economic impact, job creation, and infrastructure improvements that align with GFW Inc.'s mission to grow jobs, wages, and population. The project serves as a case study in how strategic, catalytic leadership and bold vision can deliver lasting, inclusive economic success.



**GREATER  
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METRO CHAMBER ALLIANCE

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