



grow
NE  A

A Message from the Board Chair and CEO



Across our ten parishes, we are witnessing a level of investment, collaboration, and shared vision unlike anything our region has seen in generations. Grow NELA was founded less than two years ago with a simple but powerful mission: to drive economic growth across Northeast Louisiana by attracting and retaining business investment and creating new, better jobs for our people.

Since that time, the region and this organization have accomplished a great deal. The announcement of Meta's decision to locate the largest data center in history in Richland Parish marked a defining moment, not just for that single community, but for our entire region. The ripple effects of that investment were immediately felt by local residents, local business owners, and residents seeking higher-paying jobs.

The creation of Grow NELA and the arrival of Meta are deeply connected. Both reflect a region that is taking seriously the opportunity before it and intentionally working together with purpose, strategy, and optimism to shape a vibrant economic future. Grow NELA has quickly established itself as a trusted regional partner, bringing together public and private leaders around shared goals and a foundation for long-term prosperity.

The development of this strategic plan represents the next step in that journey. It is Grow NELA's first strategic roadmap. In it, we capture and build upon the progress of our first twenty months and chart a clear, coordinated path forward. This plan outlines the priorities, partnerships, and investments that will ensure the benefits of today's growth extend to every parish and every community in Northeast Louisiana.

Our vision is simple yet bold: we envision a Northeast Louisiana where strong businesses, good jobs, and thriving communities create generational prosperity. We aim for a future where wages rise, families stay, and new talent and investment continue to choose our region as their home.

Achieving this vision is only possible if we work together. The future prosperity of our region depends on the continued partnership, engagement, and support of leaders, employers, and residents across the region. Together, we can build on this historic momentum and write the next great chapter in Northeast Louisiana's story. We are proud to share this first-ever Grow NELA Strategic Plan and even more proud to stand alongside the communities, businesses, and people who are making the future of Northeast Louisiana brighter than ever.

With gratitude and excitement,



Chap Breard
Chair, Grow NELA
Board of Directors



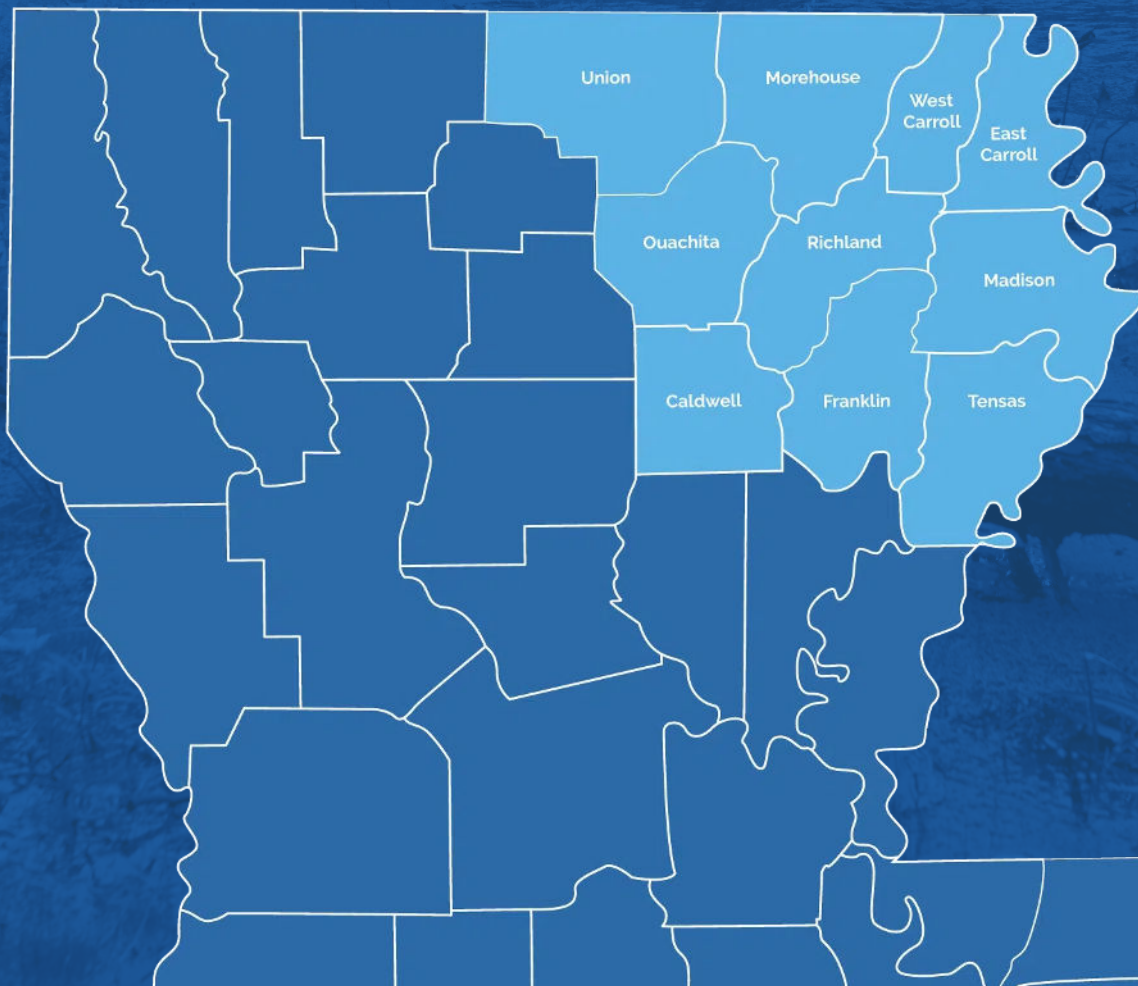
Rob Cleveland
President and CEO,
Grow NELA

Executive Summary

Northeast Louisiana is entering a defining moment of growth and transformation.

With the arrival of Meta's data center, new waves of public- and private-sector investment, and unprecedented regional collaboration, the region stands at the forefront of opportunity. Formed less than two years ago to unite ten parishes around a shared vision for prosperity, Grow NELA has quickly become the connector and catalyst for this progress.

This first-ever strategic plan for Grow NELA and the region represents both a milestone and a roadmap for what comes next. It was developed through a rigorous combination of economic and workforce data analysis, extensive stakeholder engagement, and alignment with Louisiana Economic Development's (LED) statewide framework, Positioning Louisiana to Win. Together, these efforts ensure that the plan is both locally grounded and strategically aligned, translating statewide priorities into targeted regional action.



Identifying Target Industries

To chart a focused path forward, Grow NELA conducted an extensive asset-mapping analysis to determine the industries in which Northeast Louisiana is uniquely positioned to compete and grow. This process evaluated employment, wage, and growth trends across sectors; assessed site and infrastructure readiness; and incorporated on-the-ground insight from business leaders, utility partners, educators, and local officials.

The result is a portfolio of target industries that align with the region's strengths and magnify its future potential:



CONSTRUCTION, ENGINEERING, AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Capturing near-term growth tied to Meta's investment and related industrial expansion.



MANUFACTURING AND ADVANCED MATERIALS

Leveraging the region's legacy in forestry, food processing, and metals to pursue higher-value, technology-enabled production.



LOGISTICS, TRANSPORTATION, AND DISTRIBUTION

Positioning Northeast Louisiana as a Gulf South hub through multimodal connectivity and available industrial land.



DIGITAL AND PRECISION AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Fusing the region's agricultural heritage with data, automation, and innovation to drive long-term rural prosperity.

In addition to these four target industry sectors, Energy and Infrastructure were identified as crucial enablers to future growth, underscoring Grow NELA's commitment to ensuring that power, broadband, and core infrastructure underpin all other growth and investment efforts.

Each of these industries reflects an intersection of existing assets, emerging trends, and statewide priorities, providing a balanced mix of immediate opportunity and long-term diversification for the region's economy.

Strategic Priority Areas

Building on these industries, the plan identifies five strategic priorities to guide Grow NELA's work:

01

BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION (BRE)

Strengthen the foundation of the region's economy by supporting existing employers through proactive engagement, shared business intelligence, and regional coordination.

02

TARGET INDUSTRY ATTRACTION

Leverage data, storytelling, and relationship-building to recruit investment in the region's strongest sectors and demonstrate project execution readiness.

03

SITE READINESS AND SURROUNDING LAND USE

Prepare, prioritize, and market competitive sites, ensuring infrastructure alignment and sustainable growth.

04

REGIONAL MARKETING AND BRANDING

Establish a unified message and identity for Northeast Louisiana that builds pride internally and visibility externally.

05

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE (ENABLER)

Strengthen Grow NELA's internal systems, funding, and performance tools to sustain credibility and long-term impact.

This plan marks an exciting new chapter for Grow NELA and the region it serves as the organization continues to steward the growth and ripple effects of the Meta project. This strategy provides a framework for leveraging that momentum into broader, more diversified prosperity.

By identifying the industries in which Northeast Louisiana is best positioned to succeed and outlining clear priorities, strategies, and metrics for action, this plan serves as both a roadmap for

the organization and a blueprint for the region's next phase of economic leadership. It is designed to help Grow NELA mature as an institution, coordinate across partners, and guide investments that elevate competitiveness, resilience, and quality of life across its ten parishes.

With this first strategic plan, Grow NELA stands ready to lead Northeast Louisiana into a new era of connected, collaborative, and sustainable economic growth.

Introduction

Northeast Louisiana stands at a pivotal inflection point. Across the region, a powerful wave of momentum is transforming possibility into progress driven by new investments, unprecedented collaboration, and a bold reimagining of what the future can hold. For the first time in generations, this region is capturing statewide and national attention. Its deep agricultural roots, expanding industrial base, and uniquely connected communities are now at the center of a new era of growth and innovation.

Now is the moment to channel that attention into action, capturing new opportunities and laying the foundation for the long-term prosperity of its parishes and people – and Grow NELA is leading the charge.

Created to unify the region and accelerate economic development across 10 parishes, Grow NELA has quickly emerged as a catalyst for progress. Through its leadership, the region is attracting new businesses, strengthening existing industries, and aligning public- and private-sector partners around shared priorities. What began as an ambitious vision is now a powerful movement – one that is ready to shape the region's future with purpose, clarity, and confidence.

As Grow NELA deepens its organizational roots, the time is right to take a deliberate look ahead and to define the region's priorities, align efforts, and chart a clear path forward.

With the momentum from recent, large-scale investments, Northeast Louisiana stands ready to define what comes next and to shape a

prosperous, connected, and resilient future. Developed through rigorous data analysis and deep stakeholder engagement, this plan reflects both the realities and the ambitions of the region. It weaves together insights from leaders across business, government, education, and community sectors, ensuring that it speaks not just to strategy, but to shared vision and collective action.

Drawing from current and historical data about the region and its ten parishes, the planning team analyzed key economic and demographic trends to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth. Equally important, the plan was shaped by extensive input from the Grow NELA team and key stakeholders representing communities, businesses, and institutions across the region. Their insights and experiences ensured that the plan not only reflects sound analysis, but also the shared priorities and vision of those working every day to advance Northeast Louisiana's economic future.

This strategic plan lays out the priorities, investments, and focus areas that will guide Grow NELA as it continues to mature as an organization and expand its regional impact. It serves as not just a roadmap, but a rallying point - identifying where its team can most effectively concentrate its resources to drive growth, collaboration, and long-term prosperity. In the near term, Grow NELA will play a vital role in supporting the construction and economic ripple effects of the Meta data center project, ensuring that local businesses, workers, and communities are positioned to benefit. The plan also provides a long-term framework for sustained progress, strengthening the region's competitiveness and economic diversity, fostering innovation, and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents across the region. The future is being written now—and Northeast Louisiana is ready to lead it.

Positioning Louisiana to Win

The Grow NELA strategic plan builds upon the state's newly launched economic development framework, Positioning Louisiana to Win, and brings it to life through the lens of Northeast Louisiana's distinctive strengths, needs, and aspirations. Louisiana Economic Development's (LED) plan establishes a clear, forward-looking framework focused on building stronger regional economies, cultivating a skilled and evolving workforce, and improving the conditions that make Louisiana competitive for business investment. In that same spirit, the Grow NELA strategic plan embraces collaboration that recognizes the individuality of each parish while aligning regional assets, workforce priorities, and economic goals to advance sustainable growth across the region.

The statewide framework provides both direction and momentum for regional economic development. By grounding our efforts in LED's vision, Grow NELA positions itself as a proactive partner in advancing shared goals. Our work to enhance site readiness, expand industry partnerships, strengthen workforce training, and support existing business growth mirrors LED's priorities while responding to the unique conditions of the region. This alignment ensures that local investments and programs reinforce statewide outcomes and create measurable value across Louisiana's economy.

Importantly, this alignment is not about uniformity but about strategic coherence. While not every priority or initiative outlined in the state plan perfectly fits the realities of Northeast Louisiana, the LED plan offers a strong and practical framework for direction. It encourages each region to identify where alignment will yield the greatest impact.

Grow NELA's plan leverages this flexibility and translates state-level goals into actionable regional strategies that reflect our unique assets, workforce, and community strengths.

By highlighting alignment with LED's strategic plan, Grow NELA ensures that its regional initiatives are both locally relevant, aligned to the state's objectives, and responsive to the dynamics of the national economy. This approach strengthens our ability to attract investment, leverage partnerships, and demonstrate results that matter to residents, employers, and policymakers alike. Together, these efforts move Louisiana toward a more connected, resilient, and competitive economy where Northeast Louisiana contributes meaningfully to the state's overall trajectory of growth and opportunity.

Strategic Plan Development

Louisiana's new statewide strategic plan established a clear and comprehensive foundation for economic development across the state. That same spirit of rigor and respect for local perspective guided the development of the Grow NELA strategic plan. In-depth research on Northeast Louisiana's economic, workforce, community, and cultural assets constructed an important picture of the region's strengths and challenges. This included a comprehensive review of target industries, infrastructure capacity, and site readiness, as well as analysis of labor market dynamics, population and housing trends, and educational and training assets. Each component of the plan was developed with an eye toward aligning regional priorities with the broader direction set forth by LED while reflecting the distinct needs and opportunities of Grow NELA's ten-parish region.

Equally important to the strategic planning process was the intentional stakeholder engagement that shaped this process from start to finish. Guided by a commitment to collaboration and a plan that reflects the region's opportunities and needs, the planning team engaged regional leaders, industry representatives, educators, workforce and utility partners, and local officials through interviews and broader group discussions. In addition, the Grow NELA team participated in a strategic planning retreat to utilize the information gathered to pinpoint goals, strategies, and aligned metrics. This process ensured that this plan was not only grounded in data but also in lived experience and shared regional priorities. The insights gathered through these conversations directly informed the plan's strategies, ensuring alignment with the state's vision while anchoring the work in the realities of Northeast Louisiana's economy. The result is a forward-looking, actionable roadmap built with intentionality, designed for impact, and reflective of the community spirit and resilience that define the region of Northeast Louisiana.



Mission and Vision

A strong mission and vision provide focus and direction for Grow NELA's work. The mission defines why Grow NELA exists—its core purpose and the role it plays in driving economic growth and collaboration across Northeast Louisiana. The vision looks ahead, describing where Grow NELA aspires to go and the future it seeks to help create for the region. Together, these statements serve as a touchstone for decision-making, partnership, and progress as the organization continues to grow and evolve.





Mission Statement

Grow NELA drives economic growth across Northeast Louisiana by attracting and retaining business investment and recruiting new and better jobs.

Vision Statement

We envision a Northeast Louisiana where strong businesses, good jobs, and thriving communities create generational prosperity. We aim for a future where wages rise, families stay, and new talent and investment continue to choose our region as their home.

Target Industries

To position Northeast Louisiana for sustainable economic growth, Grow NELA conducted an extensive asset-mapping analysis to identify the industries best suited to drive regional prosperity.

This process combined rigorous data analysis with local insight, examining employment, wages, growth trends, and workforce pipelines, while also drawing on input from the Grow NELA team and key stakeholders across the ten-parish region. Using Lightcast's Q2 2025 dataset, the assessment benchmarked Northeast Louisiana's competitiveness relative to both peer and aspirational markets, identifying where the region's assets align with Louisiana Economic Development's (LED's) statewide priorities under Positioning Louisiana to Win.

The result is a balanced portfolio of industries that capture immediate opportunities linked to the Meta project while laying the foundation for long-term diversification and resilience.

TARGET INDUSTRIES



Construction, Engineering, and Professional Services

(NAICS 23; 236–238; 54; 5413, 5416)

Construction and professional services represent Northeast Louisiana's most immediate and visible opportunity for growth, particularly as Meta's historic investment drives unprecedented levels of activity across the region. Together, these industries currently employ more than 6,600 workers with average annual wages of roughly \$56,000, and support thousands more in related technical and professional roles. This sector includes Construction (NAICS 23) industries such as Building Construction (236), Heavy and Civil Engineering (237), and Specialty Trade Contractors (238), alongside key components of Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (NAICS 54) such as Architectural, Engineering, and Related Services (5413) and Management and Technical Consulting Services (5416).

Beyond the surge in local contracting and construction demand, this sector presents a unique opportunity for Northeast Louisiana to position itself as a hub for regional or national construction and engineering firms serving the broader Southeast. As companies mobilize for Meta, or evaluate new opportunities based on the national attention the project has brought to the region, Grow NELA can help make the case for establishing regional headquarters, professional service offices, or back-office operations related to the construction and engineering fields within the region. Lower operating costs, a location proximate to major metropolitan areas and population hubs, and professional workforce with matched skills for back-office and professional services positions make the area an appealing base for organizations seeking to solidify or expand their Southeast presence.

LED PRIORITY SECTOR ALIGNMENT:

- **Professional, Technical, and Scientific Services:** LED Priority Sector
- **Energy and Process Industries:** via engineering and infrastructure support functions



TARGET INDUSTRIES



Manufacturing and Advanced Materials

(NAICS 31–33; 311, 321, 322, 332, 333, 325)

Manufacturing has long been a cornerstone of Northeast Louisiana's economy and remains one of its most promising paths to higher-wage, career-track employment. This broad sector includes Wood Product Manufacturing (321), Paper Manufacturing (322), Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing (332), Machinery Manufacturing (333), Chemical Manufacturing (325), and Food Manufacturing (311). Collectively, these industries employ more than 8,300 workers and contribute over \$1.5 billion to regional output, with average annual wages exceeding \$78,000.

Manufacturing's strength lies in its ability to blend tradition with innovation. The region's legacy in forestry, food processing, and metals provides a strong base for diversification into advanced materials, precision machining, and clean-tech production. National reshoring and supply chain diversification trends present new opportunities for cost-competitive regions like Northeast Louisiana. By modernizing plants, upskilling workers, and marketing available industrial sites, Grow NELA can position the region as a competitive hub for high-value production within the Gulf South.

LED PRIORITY SECTOR ALIGNMENT:

- **Energy and Process Industries:** through advanced manufacturing and materials production
- **Agribusiness:** through food and forestry-based manufacturing
- **Technology:** through adoption of automation and advanced manufacturing processes





Logistics, Transportation, and Distribution

(NAICS 48–49; 484, 486, 488, 493, 482)

Logistics represents one of the most significant long-term opportunities for Northeast Louisiana. With its central location within the Southeast U.S., proximity to major markets, and robust multimodal infrastructure, the region is well-positioned to expand its role in the movement of goods and materials. This sector includes Truck Transportation (484), Pipeline Transportation (486), Support Activities for Transportation (488), Warehousing and Storage (493), and Rail Transportation (482).

Northeast Louisiana's logistical strengths are anchored by a comprehensive network of highways, rail, and river access. The region is bisected by Interstate 20, a major east–west freight corridor connecting Dallas–Fort Worth and Atlanta, and supported by U.S. Highways 65, 165, and 167, which provide direct north–south connectivity to Baton Rouge, Little Rock, and beyond. The CPKC and Union Pacific (UP) rail lines run through the region, linking to major ports and intermodal facilities, while the Port of Columbia, Port of Lake Providence, Greater Ouachita Port, and Port of Madison Parish provide direct access to the Mississippi River system, enabling efficient movement of agricultural commodities, timber, and manufactured goods to global markets.

While the logistics sector currently employs a smaller share of the regional workforce than construction or manufacturing, it offers high scalability and cross-sector impact. Stakeholders consistently identified logistics as a bridge industry—connecting agricultural producers, forestry operations, and advanced manufacturers to national and international markets. The region's availability of large, affordable tracts of land with minimal storm risk, combined with underutilized industrial sites and strong highway access, gives it a unique advantage for site selectors seeking distribution and light-industrial locations.

Investments in site readiness, intermodal connectivity, and logistics workforce training will be essential to unlocking this potential. Upgrading regional roads, expanding rail spurs and port capacity, and ensuring sufficient power and broadband infrastructure will strengthen the region's competitive standing. With coordinated investment and promotion, Northeast Louisiana can emerge as a premier logistics and distribution hub for the Gulf South—linking the movement of goods, people, and energy that power regional prosperity.

LED PRIORITY SECTOR ALIGNMENT:

- **Logistics:** LED Priority Sector
- **Agribusiness:** supporting supply chains and commodity movement



Digital and Precision Agriculture and Forestry

(NAICS 11; 111–113; 54; 5415, 5417)

Agriculture has always been at the heart of Northeast Louisiana's economy—but looking to the future, the region's agricultural strength will increasingly lie in technology-driven, data-informed practices. This evolving cluster integrates Crop Production (NAICS 111), Animal Production and Aquaculture (NAICS 112), and Forestry and Logging (NAICS 113) with high-tech activities such as Computer Systems Design and Related Services (NAICS 5415) and Scientific Research and Development Services (NAICS 5417) to advance digital and precision agriculture.

While agriculture across Northeast Louisiana has deep and diverse roots, crop production remains the dominant sector, far exceeding animal production in both acreage and employment. The region's expansive croplands, particularly those dedicated to soybeans, corn, and cotton, provide a powerful platform for scaling precision crop technologies such as AI-enabled data analytics, drone-based crop monitoring, robotics, and smart irrigation systems. These tools are transforming traditional farming into a high-tech enterprise that can improve yields, reduce input costs, and create higher-skill, higher-wage jobs across the agricultural value chain.

At the same time, forestry represents a parallel and complementary opportunity. Approximately 40% of the land area across Northeast Louisiana's parishes is forested, supporting a well-established Forestry and Logging (NAICS 113) base. However, the region's real competitive advantage lies not just in timber production but in its ability to capture value through processing and manufacturing, including Wood Product Manufacturing (NAICS 321) and Paper Manufacturing (NAICS 322). This combination of raw material production and downstream manufacturing positions Northeast Louisiana to expand into advanced wood and bio-based products, modern mill operations, and sustainable forestry management practices, all of which have strong growth potential.

With its high density of agricultural producers, deep forestry resources, and strong educational institutions such as the University of Louisiana Monroe and the region's community and technical colleges, Northeast Louisiana is well positioned to lead the state in ag-tech innovation and forestry modernization. The key will be ensuring equitable access to technology, broadband, and training so that modernization benefits producers and processors of all sizes, linking the region's heritage with innovation in ways that drive sustainable, compounding growth and long-term rural prosperity.

LED PRIORITY SECTOR ALIGNMENT:

- **Agribusiness:** LED Priority Sector
- **Technology:** through ag-tech, data, and automation applications

TARGET INDUSTRIES



Enabling Sectors: Energy and Infrastructure

(NAICS 22; 2211, 2213; 23; 237)

While not primary target industries, Energy (NAICS 22) and Infrastructure (NAICS 23; 237) serve as essential enablers of all others. This includes Electric Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution (2211) and Water and Sewer Systems (2213), both of which are critical to ensuring site readiness and supporting business attraction. Investments in renewable generation, modernized transmission, and core infrastructure such as roads, bridges, broadband, and transportation networks will strengthen the foundation upon which every other sector depends.

Enhanced energy reliability and expanded transmission capacity not only help meet the needs of current residents and employers but also determine the region's competitiveness when marketing sites to prospective industries. Companies assessing new locations increasingly prioritize access to resilient power, available infrastructure, and connectivity. By advancing large-scale infrastructure improvements, Northeast Louisiana can both support existing communities and also position itself as a top-tier destination for industrial, logistics, and manufacturing investment, linking today's infrastructure development to tomorrow's economic opportunity.

LED PRIORITY SECTOR ALIGNMENT:

- **Energy and Process Industries:** LED Priority Sector

Together, these industries represent a balanced mix of immediate opportunity and long-term diversification for Northeast Louisiana. Construction and its related professional services functions capture the near-term momentum generated by Meta and other large-scale projects; manufacturing and logistics reinforce the region's role in production and distribution across the Gulf South; and digital and precision agriculture and forestry position Northeast Louisiana at the forefront of innovation in their most deeply rooted sectors. Supported by investments in energy and infrastructure, these industries collectively provide the framework for sustainable, inclusive growth. The strategic priorities that follow build upon this foundation, outlining the key focus areas, initiatives, and partnerships that will enable Grow NELA to strengthen its competitiveness, elevate regional prosperity, and deliver lasting impact for the people and communities it serves.

Strategic Priority Areas

In addition to identifying areas of focus that leverage Northeast Louisiana's existing strengths and emerging opportunities, this plan also charts a path for Grow NELA itself as an organization. In its early years, Grow NELA has operated much like a start-up: nimble, fast-moving, and driven by an entrepreneurial spirit. As the organization matures, it is now entering a new phase: one of institutionalization, stability, and sustained impact. The focus ahead is on deepening trust across the region and expanding Grow NELA's reputation and brand visibility statewide and beyond.

To achieve this, Grow NELA will prioritize a focused set of strategies that balance external impact with internal strength. The top priority areas include Business Retention and Expansion, Target Industry Attraction, Site Readiness and Surrounding Land Use, and Regional Marketing and Branding, supported by Organizational Excellence as an enabling foundation for all.

01 | Business Retention and Expansion (BRE)

Supporting the growth and success of existing businesses is one of the most effective strategies for sustaining regional prosperity. While much attention is often placed on attracting new companies, research consistently shows that roughly 60 to 80 percent of new jobs are created by businesses already operating within a community (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2023). By helping these employers expand, adapt, and remain competitive, regions like Northeast Louisiana can strengthen their economic foundation and build resilience against market shifts.

In Northeast Louisiana, local businesses, from family-owned manufacturers and professional service firms to agricultural producers and logistics providers, form the backbone of the regional economy. A proactive Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program ensures these companies have the support, resources, and connections needed to thrive. Through ongoing engagement, BRE efforts can identify opportunities for growth, address challenges before they lead to job losses, and foster collaboration across industries.

Equally important, a strong track record of supporting existing employers enhances the region's competitiveness in business attraction. When prospective investors see that local governments, utilities, and economic development organizations are responsive and committed to their business community, it builds confidence in the region's long-term stability and bolsters the region's overall competitiveness. In this way, BRE is not only about retaining what exists, but also focused on laying the groundwork for future investment and shared prosperity.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Develop a formalized BRE program that tracks and supports existing businesses across target industries, identifying at-risk firms and expansion-ready employers across the ten-parish region
- Invest in a regional business intelligence system to catalog company needs, workforce gaps, and investment opportunities
- Strengthen relationships with chambers, utility providers, and local governments to ensure rapid response to expansion opportunities or business challenges
- Establish an annual business visit program that spans all ten parishes and a pulse survey to capture employer sentiment and inform policy advocacy

METRICS:

- Number of BRE visits per year
- Increase in regional per capita personal income (PCPI)

LED ALIGNMENT:

- Thriving Regions
- Growth and Innovation

02 | Target Industry Attraction

The goal of every regional economic development organization is to strengthen and sustain the local economy by creating quality jobs, supporting investment, and improving the overall standard of living. Achieving this requires a careful balance between diversification and focus, building a resilient economy across multiple sectors while concentrating resources on the industries that best align with regional strengths and future opportunities.

For Northeast Louisiana, this means identifying the sectors where the region's workforce, infrastructure, and resources can most effectively attract investment and drive long-term growth through the identification of target industries. Now that these industries have been identified, the next step is to focus on how to attract and grow them within the region. Each was intentionally selected because there are tangible assets and opportunities tied to it, though achieving that potential will require intentional outreach, targeted marketing, and coordinated investment in sites, workforce, and infrastructure to support sustainable growth.

This focus also reinforces another key strategic priority: regional marketing and branding. By clearly defining what Northeast Louisiana stands for and where it competes best, Grow NELA can promote a unified, data-driven message that resonates both within and beyond the region. Together, these efforts will not only attract new employers but also build a stronger, more visible identity for Northeast Louisiana as a place of innovation, productivity, and opportunity.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Develop a three-year proactive recruitment plan focused on attracting companies within Grow NELA's four target industries (manufacturing, logistics, digital agriculture, and professional services)
- Build direct relationships with national site selectors and industry consultants, hosting one to two high-impact engagement events per year in partnership with LED and private-sector allies
- Utilize Meta's presence to highlight the region's readiness, workforce potential, and success in large-scale project execution, serving as an informal case study to be used for business attraction efforts
- Connect with higher education and workforce partners to align talent pipelines with attraction targets

METRICS:

- Number of site selectors and industry consultants who participate in yearly engagement events
- Growth of the gross regional product (GRP) overall
- Increase in regional per capita personal income (PCPI)
- Percentage growth in the four target industries

LED ALIGNMENT:

- Ease of Doing Business
- Growth and Innovation
- High Wage Employment

03 | Site Readiness and Surrounding Land Use

Competitive, development-ready sites are the currency of economic development. Across Northeast Louisiana, there is a unique abundance of available land and large, well-positioned sites, an advantage that sets the area apart from many in the state and the region. The arrival of Meta's new data center has drawn statewide and national attention to the region's potential, signaling to investors and site selectors that Northeast Louisiana is open for business. Building on this momentum, Grow NELA aims to intentionally leverage these assets by moving from broad site identification to strategic prioritization and targeted investment to bolster the competitiveness of its available sites.

By preparing and marketing a portfolio of shovel-ready, infrastructure-served sites, the region can strengthen its competitiveness across Louisiana, the Southeast, and the nation. Investments in utilities, transportation access, permitting, and coordinated land use planning will not only accelerate project timelines but also ensure that growth occurs in ways that complement surrounding communities and preserve long-term development options.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Rank and prioritize current identified sites based on market potential, infrastructure readiness, and proximity to transportation corridors, focusing investment on the top five to ten near-term development opportunities
- Secure and deploy funding for site preparation, engineering, and renderings, leveraging federal programs, LED's Site Development Fund, and private capital where possible
- Taking a parish-by-parish approach, identify and pursue the development of sites with diverse profiles across the region
- Market shovel-ready and certified sites through a coordinated regional platform that leverages new and innovative marketing tactics, including digital mapping, "site trading cards," and updated cost and infrastructure data

METRICS:

- Number of certified sites across the region

LED ALIGNMENT:

- Thriving Regions

04 | Regional Marketing and Branding

As Grow NELA continues to build its reputation, clear and consistent messaging is essential to shaping both external perceptions and internal pride. Historically in the economic development space, Northeast Louisiana has been a region of many strong, independent communities, each with its own story and strengths. Now, united under the Grow NELA umbrella, the region has an opportunity to define for itself who it is, what it stands for, and what makes it distinct in the eyes of businesses, investors, and residents alike.

Regional marketing and branding will serve as the connective tissue that links all other elements of the strategic plan, but especially target industry attraction. By clearly articulating the region's competitive advantages, from its strong agricultural and manufacturing base to its growing workforce, affordability, and quality of life, Grow NELA can craft a narrative that is both memorable and compelling. This kind of focused storytelling builds the stickiness that matters most with site selectors, industry partners, and decision-makers, and ultimately helps Northeast Louisiana stand out in a crowded national marketplace.

Beyond business attraction, a strong regional brand will also support talent retention and recruitment. By promoting a clear and confident message about opportunity, community, and belonging, Grow NELA can help keep local talent rooted while also encouraging homegrown professionals to return from larger metro areas. Together, these efforts will not only make Northeast Louisiana more competitive across the state, region, and country, but will also build unity, pride, and a shared sense of purpose among the people who call it home.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Develop a regional marketing and branding strategy that defines Grow NELA's value proposition and elevates its identity across Louisiana and the Southeast
- Create a marketing toolkit that can be used by parishes, chambers, and partners, including data one-pagers, pitch decks, and visuals, that tell a cohesive regional story
- Target external audiences such as companies, site selectors, and investors in key markets (Atlanta, Dallas–Fort Worth, Houston, etc.) through paid campaigns, digital outreach, and public relations
- Leverage Meta's impact story to illustrate rural revitalization and regional transformation

METRICS:

- Increase in earned media mentions, website visits, and social media reach year-over-year
- Number of direct inquiries or referrals from target markets (Atlanta, DFW, Houston, etc.) following marketing outreach

LED ALIGNMENT:

- Thriving Regions
- Ease of Doing Business

05 | Enabling Priority: Organizational Excellence

As Grow NELA continues to expand its impact, strengthening its own organizational foundation will be essential to sustain momentum and credibility. With major investments underway and unprecedented attention on the region, the organization must demonstrate not only vision, but reliability and discipline. Building strong internal systems and processes ensures that Grow NELA can deliver on its promises to its investors, regional partners, and the communities it serves.

For a young organization leading one of the most significant economic opportunities the region has ever seen, internal excellence is not a distraction from external progress, it's the necessary foundation that makes it possible. By developing clear financial controls, operational procedures, and performance systems, Grow NELA will be able to scale its efforts efficiently, respond quickly to new opportunities, and manage complex, multi-stakeholder initiatives more adeptly. These structures will also strengthen the organization's ability to communicate results, track impact, and make data-driven decisions that earn continued trust and investment.

Equally important, a culture of collaboration, accountability, and shared purpose will help unify the region behind Grow NELA's mission. When partners see an organization that models the same professionalism and alignment it seeks to inspire across Northeast Louisiana, they are more likely to invest time, funding, and energy in the work. In this way, internal excellence becomes both the engine and the example for regional excellence, creating the stability and credibility necessary for long-term success.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Diversify funding streams through public, private, and philanthropic partnerships to reduce reliance on a single revenue source
- Invest in professional development, data management tools, and performance tracking systems to support staff efficiency and accountability
- Grow the regional investor network by creating clear tiers of participation, engagement opportunities, and measurable benefits for private, public, and philanthropic partners to tie their contributions to regional impact and organizational success
- Build and maintain a culture of transparency and collaboration that reinforces trust among regional partners

METRICS:

- Percentage of total budget derived from multiple sources (e.g., public, private, and philanthropic) with no single source representing more than 50% of revenue
- Percentage of existing investors who renew annual commitments or participate in engagement activities

LED ALIGNMENT:

- Thriving Regions - strengthening local economic development ecosystems
- High Wage Employment - by building institutional capacity to deliver regional results

Conclusion

Northeast Louisiana is entering a defining chapter in its economic development story – one marked by a renewed belief in the region’s potential. With transformational investments underway and a strong foundation of assets to build on, the region is positioned to turn current opportunities into long-term prosperity.

This strategic plan presents a roadmap for achieving that vision. Grounded in data, shaped by engagement with local stakeholders, and aligned with Louisiana’s statewide economic development strategy, the plan identifies the priorities, projects, and investments that will drive growth and sustainability across the 10 parishes of Northeast Louisiana.

At the heart of this work is Grow NELA, a dynamic force that is bringing the region together, aligning efforts, and leading with vision and purpose. Its role as a connector, convener, and catalyst becomes even more critical in championing large-scale projects, supporting local businesses, or coordinating across public and private sectors. Grow NELA is uniquely positioned to guide Northeast Louisiana into its next era of economic leadership.

The road ahead will require continued collaboration, bold thinking, and a shared commitment to action. But the path is clear – and the momentum is real. With this plan as a guide and Grow NELA at the helm, Northeast Louisiana is not just preparing for the future. It is shaping it.





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