

Leeds Grenville Economic Development Strategic Areas of Focus 2026-2029



The United Counties of Leeds and Grenville has been undertaking economic development activities since 2003. Various organizational changes have occurred and today, the current department has four full-time staff (Economic Development Manager, Economic Development Officer, Business Development Officer, Administrative and Communications Assistant).

Since 2022, Counties has had a contract agreement with the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for the delivery of the Small Business Enterprise Centre Program. The program is managed by the Economic Development Manager and facilitated by two contract staff (Small Business Development Officer, Small Business Program Support).

The Inaugural Regional Tourism Destination Strategy was created in 2022. To support the strategy, in 2024 funds previously allocated to the ONroute program were re-allocated to create a tourism contract position (Tourism Marketing Support). The strategy was further leveraged with a Rural Economic Development – RED grant which runs until March 31, 2027.

In preparation for the 2026-2029 strategic areas of focus, a literature review was completed drawing on the 2019 Business Retention and Expansion report, previous business survey reports, BDC reports, and other relevant documents. Additional outreach to the business community and support agencies was completed in partnership with the three Community Futures Development Corporations in the region on June 23rd and 25th. Three in-person and one-virtual session were facilitated by Lockhart Facilitation and the Queen's Executive Decision Centre.

Since March 2025, Canada / United States trade relations have been strained due to the introduction of trade tariffs. This has caused marketplace instability and unpredictability. Medium to large businesses are being cautious as the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) is up for re-negotiation in July 2026.

Counties Strategic Initiatives Framework under pillar one, section 1.6 – Encourage and Support Economic Development and Tourism would be updated in a concise version to reflect the more detailed Economic Development Strategic Areas of Focus below.

1. Provide leadership and capacity building that fosters collaboration amongst municipalities and business support agencies.

Tasks:

- a) Continue to host the Annual Economic Development Summit. This forum has strong attendance and brings value to participants and municipalities. It provides an opportunity to share best practices, success stories, and bring top-notch speakers to share their knowledge on municipal and business development as well as provide an environment for community leaders to network.
- b) Continue to provide leadership and the framework to the Leeds-Grenville-1000 Islands-Rideau Lakes Business Support Working Group (BSWG) composed of municipal representatives, Community Futures Development Corporations, Chambers, Business Improvement Associations and Employment Service Agencies along with staff from regional, provincial and federal agencies and ministries within the region. Continue facilitating collaboration on agreed upon regional projects.
- c) Continue to foster economic development and tourism focused relationships and partnerships with Ministries, Agencies, neighbouring Counties and municipalities.



2. Initiate and facilitate business development and investment attraction.

Tasks:

- a) Develop a renewed comprehensive business continuum approach that encompasses ideation through to business maturity, with goals of business retention, growth and expansion, addressing challenges and succession planning. Elements would include:
 - i. Continued business outreach and consultations.
 - ii. Delivery of the Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC) contract inclusive of all municipalities. Update programming to build grit and the skills needed to be successful in today's business environment.
 - iii. Create a youth entrepreneurship action plan in collaboration with lower-tier municipalities, school boards, and other business support agencies – BIAs, Chambers.
 - iv. Develop a business mentorship / coaching program to build stronger leadership and people skills.

- v. Promote the economic development website / portal that provides a centralized resource hub to ensure businesses are aware of and can easily access supports.
 - vi. Expand business-to-business engagements through programming that builds strategic partnerships and supports filling supply chain gaps.
 - vii. Support businesses in navigating funding opportunities.
- b) Continue implementation of the Regional Tourism Destination Strategy. Elements would include:
- i. Invest in digital tourism tools including a tourism website redevelopment and creation of a consumer eNewsletter.
 - ii. Undertake a regional tourism way-finding signage strategy and begin implementation.
 - iii. Transition the 1000 Islands Rideau Canal Waterways Adventures brochure launch into a regional tourism event to improve regional tourism destination stakeholder collaboration and partnership.
 - iv. Continue and expand collaborative tourism initiatives across municipalities and regions with a focus on joint marketing, product development and experiences.
 - v. Collaborate and leverage opportunities for the 200th Anniversary of the Rideau Canal that was built between 1826-1832.
 - vi. Research and consider resources to support current and future tourism initiatives.
- c) Continue to initiate and support new foreign and domestic investment attraction activities for industrial / business parks along with towns / villages. Build upon existing partnerships / relationships and consider current and new programs at regional, provincial and national levels to access potential investments.
- d) Implement digital platforms for property listings that align with Ontario East Economic Development Commission and Invest Ontario.
- e) Transition the regional business directory in coordination with a contact relationship management system that will service – SBEC Ministerial reporting, businesses communications (ie. eNewsletter), and lead generation and prospect tracking.



- f) Support municipalities with investment readiness focusing on regional infrastructure power requirements to ensure future growth opportunities.
- g) Investigate strategies that support top industries and emerging sectors.
- h) Continue responding to economic decisions impacting the region. (ie. Pandemic, Kemptville Campus and Rideau Canal - Parks Canada)

3. Strengthen talent attraction and workforce development.

Tasks:

- a) Continue to facilitate and partner with members of educational institutions, employment agencies and ministries on funding programs that supports in-demand skills and upskilling in various sectors to build a strong local workforce.
- b) Support youth employment strategies with businesses in the region.
- c) Promote employer connections with educational institutions to leverage internships and co-op programs.
- d) Promote and facilitate educational opportunities for entrepreneurs and businesses.
- e) Facilitate stronger collaboration amongst agencies providing settlement services.

4. Develop and implement marketing campaigns to drive awareness and attraction to the region and continue strong communications with businesses and community stakeholders.

Tasks:

- a) Transition the economic development website to new platform and conduct further research for a full redevelopment.
- b) Transition business eNewsletter into a new digital platform.
- c) Update as needed economic development promotional tools – photography, videography, promotional publications.
- d) Update and create Leeds Grenville profiles with Eastern Ontario Economic Development Commission, Invest Ontario and Invest Canada.
- e) Engage with Corporate Communications on Counties marketing plan.



The Counties Economic Development Office will support these strategic areas for focus, while adjusting activities based on economic trends, challenges and opportunities. These could include accessing new funding and programs (ie. Regional Economic Development through Immigration) to respond to provincial, national and global issues.