TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 Letter from David Sidney, Executive Director
5 Our Vision
6 Our Shared Values
7 Rockford Region Scorecard
9 815 Choose Civility Article
11 Ready to Learn Article
13 Living The Brand Article
15 Great Neighborhoods Article
17 Our Community Scorecard Article
19 About Us
20 14 Impact Statements
21 Transform Rockford Team
Letter From The Executive Director

Dear Stakeholders & Community Members,

I want us all to take a moment and reflect for a minute. Think back to the year 2013. What do you remember from that year? I remember our city being labeled as “Most Miserable Cities in the U.S.” by Forbes. But I also remember seeing the community come together and ultimately join in a call to action to improve the living and working conditions in our region. If you were at the Coronado Theater on November 14, 2013 during Transform Rockford’s first community meeting, I hope you remember the deep conversations that were held but also remember the feeling of hope moving forward.

Fast forward five years later (yes, five years!) Transform Rockford is still here today. The community is rallying together and continuing on the journey to become a “Top 25 community by 2025.” Change is happening, transformation is becoming more visible and our residents and stakeholders are feeling it.

As always, the community is at the forefront of our facilitating transformational initiatives and in keeping with the community’s vision, our shared values are at the center of everything we do (Inclusion, Caring, Respect, Transparency, Trustworthiness, Unity, Ideation, Responsibility and Interconnectedness). I encourage you to re-familiarize yourself with the 14 impact statements you helped to craft. These spokes range from education to healthy lifestyles to safety; economy and jobs; leadership and youth; unity, pride and culture; arts and recreation; families & neighborhoods and more. Currently, our community has 25 project teams implementing strategies defined within each spoke.

Contained in this annual report are stories of success around some of the key areas of the plan, from efforts to align around kindergarten readiness and to ensure all students are ready to learn, to the impact our 815 Choose Civility effort has had on our local teenagers, to efforts around strengthening and building our neighborhoods and lastly to being proud of where we live and encouraging everyone to see our community with new eyes.

We also have some exciting new changes taking place in 2019. Be on the look out for a new Transform Rockford website, an engaging scorecard & metrics tool, community events and more!

On behalf of Transform Rockford steering committee, staff, strategic support groups and volunteers, we want to say thank you! Strategies are being implemented and change is happening and that is thanks to your efforts as individuals and through organizations you represent! But the work is not done. It takes time and a unified village approach. We want to thank all of you for joining and sustaining the journey to transform our community!

Very Truly,

David Sidney
Transform Rockford Executive Director
We are a top 25 community where our people are engaged, inspired and are leading successful and fulfilled lives.

Our community is recognized as one of the very best regions in which to live. Our residents are thriving and enjoying a superior quality of life.

We have transformed our community by embracing our diversity, fostering a crime-free culture, and delivering an excellent education to all children.

We have an agile, innovative and strong economy built on the renaissance of North American manufacturing, logistics, agribusiness and our adjacency to urban centers, such as Chicago. Our infrastructure is robust, our workforce is sought after, and our vibrant neighborhoods and cultural and recreational amenities draw people to locate in our region.
Our Shared Values

We, as community members of the Rockford Region, desire to achieve our vision for transformational change and will uphold the following shared values as the foundation for a civil and cultivating environment.

**Interconnectedness**
Won’t compromise any jurisdiction’s or organization’s identity or decision authority, but rather look to partner and integrate shared values, goals and philosophies.

**Respect**
Embrace the knowledge and experiences of others by being attentive, listening well and celebrating diversity as a strength and source of shared learning.

**Inclusion**
Cultivate and support an environment that fully engages our community’s differences and diversity to ensure that individuals and organizations are heard, valued and supported.

**Unity**
Place the greater good of all parts of our region and its transformation ahead of self or organizational interests.

**Caring**
Show concern for the welfare of each person and foster a community culture that thinks and acts as one interactive and interdependent region.

**Transparency**
Foster an open process for maximum participant input and access to all information to enhance understanding and community ownership.

**Ideation**
Balance our brainstorming and decision-making process with all points of view and measurable information.

**Trustworthiness**
Strive for integrity and reliable communication. Become committed to the highest levels of honesty and truthfulness.

**Responsibility**
Pursue excellence and accountability of self and others by not shifting blame or taking improper credit. Participate to the fullest of our ability.
Rockford Region Scorecard

Rockford Region Scorecard showing community performance in nine key areas of the transformation plan.

**Neighborhoods**
Informs us about the quality and affordability of housing in our neighborhoods.

**Economy**
Informs us of the standard of living of people in our region and the ability of the economy to create prosperity for all.

**Education**
Informs us of our region’s ability to deliver quality education and the evolution of educational attainments in the community.

**Employment**
Informs us of the availability and quality of jobs, local residents’ job skills and participation in the labor force.

**Economy**
Informs us of our region’s available talent and skills to support future growth.

**EQUITY**
Informs us of differences in income and educational attainment between socioeconomic groups in the community.

**Diversity**
Informs us of the community’s diverse populations by race, ethnicity, nationality, and age.

**Wellness**
Informs us of our residents’ lifestyles and access to services which support good physical and behavioral health.

**Safety**
Informs us of how safe our neighborhoods are and the greater community’s involvement in safety efforts.
Promoting Positive Attitudes, Genuine Relationships & Diversity Through 815 Choose Civility

Our children are watching. What behaviors are we modeling for them? And for that matter, what behaviors are our elected officials, teachers, business leaders and other public role models demonstrating?

In its quest to create a strategic plan for our region’s self-improvement, one Transform Rockford project team is focusing on a key social skill that’s largely missing in today’s public forum: Civility. Teaching our young people – indeed, all of our neighbors – how to respect others is the ultimate intention of the 815 Choose Civility project team.

The message is starting to sink in. The past two autumns, 815 Choose Civility has convened summits with local high schoolers, drawing about 200 of them together with public role models.

“We’re sharing what civility is, how government works, the importance of news literacy, and how all of that formulates how we respond, how we react,” says Kathryn Pearce, co-lead. “Then, we try to provide them with resources and information for them to learn and live that out.”

Students walked away with an impression of why civility matters, and how they can employ it in their own lives. Post-event surveys show a variety of initial impressions from these young citizens:

- “I learned that people can be more open than they seem, and that all I have to do is take an initiative.”
- “Only say things on social media that you would say to someone’s face.”
- “Being honest, open and respectful helps to solve problems.”
- “It takes engagement and connections to really act civil with one another.”
- “[I learned] how to be civil when you are in a heated conversation; strategies to remain civil, even though you don’t want to be.”

Since the launch of 815 Choose Civility in late 2016, the campaign has made itself visible in many public venues, starting with a simple campaign encouraging thoughtful behavior. During each event, people are encouraged to sign on to the 815 Choose Civility pledge: “I pledge to conduct myself in a way that is honest, respectful, considerate and kind, even toward those with whom I disagree.”
What “civility” really constitutes depends upon whom you ask. “It’s more than being polite and courteous, and respectful,” Pearce says. “It’s about developing relationships.”

“It’s more than being polite and courteous, and respectful,” Pearce says. “It’s about developing relationships.”

Patrick O’Keefe has been invested in the Civility in the Public Square subgroup, which is targeting elected and appointed officials as well as other public figures.

“We believe it’s important to lead by example in demonstrating civil engagement,” says O’Keefe. “And, it’s also imperative to make progress in leading by not only seeking various points of view but working with those who might oppose ours, in order to make progress as a leader.”

The team also plans to host facilitated discussions this spring with all candidates running for elected office.

And then there’s the 815 Choose Civility diversity team, which is encouraging relationships among a vast pool of people. Project member Ellyn Ahmer believes the true key to civility is building a true community of people from various ancestries, religions, political ideals and perspectives.

“We need to learn how to talk about issues we know we disagree on, and talk about them in a way that we understand one another and aren’t trying to change anyone’s mind,” Ahmer says. “So, we’re proposing to our group that we have a gathering and do that. Our idea is to make it a relaxed social event in my home. Then, we can know each other better in the true spirit of respect, meaning to look again.”

Project members agree it’s hard to pinpoint specific progress metrics, but they believe rising voter registration and turnout provide some indication. Rising after-school clubs and civility-related student activities reflect progress, too. But how do you measure true success?

“My sense is that we would have a community that doesn’t back away from disagreement, is able to navigate disagreement in a respectful way, where we come out with a greater understanding of our diverse positions,” says Ahmer.

Pearce believes it’s important to start by acknowledging our similarities, and then employing them as we work through our differences.

Because civility can have many meanings, 815 Choose Civility’s three subgroups are looking at the issue on multiple fronts: education, the public square and diversity.

The education group has been developing curriculum. It’s already launched pilots in fifth grade and middle school, and it’s working on additional programs for this coming fall. There’s also talk of developing civility clubs in area schools. Adult programs are on the horizon.

At its core, this curriculum is focused on one area: relationship-building.

“We’re targeting each age population and really being intentional about cultivating relationships to be more meaningful,” says Pearce. “When we have a connection and acceptance of individuals, especially when there are differences, we’re much more inclined to step back, pause, and be more invested in the relationship.”

Project members agree it’s hard to pinpoint specific progress metrics, but they believe rising voter registration and turnout provide some indication. Rising after-school clubs and civility-related student activities reflect progress, too. But how do you measure true success?

“My sense is that we would have a community that doesn’t back away from disagreement, is able to navigate disagreement in a respectful way, where we come out with a greater understanding of our diverse positions,” says Ahmer.
Working Collaboratively to Ensure All Students Are Ready to Learn

The Collective Impact approach outlines five conditions for transformational improvement:
1. Identify a common agenda
2. Establish shared measurements
3. Develop continuous communication
4. Encourage mutually reinforcing activities
5. Provide backbone support

When it comes to improving our region’s educational outcomes, teams from Transform Rockford and Alignment Rockford are setting a clear path forward using a collective impact strategy.

There’s already wide agreement that if Rockford is to be a Top 25 community by 2025, it has to have an education system that’s recognized for its excellent outcomes.

And, there’s general consensus on why education is a worthwhile target: 83 percent of local third-graders can’t read at grade level, according to the state board of education.

Indeed, they’re missing several milestones that are key indicators of future success.

There’s now a growing realization that, if our education systems are to succeed, and if our children are to succeed, and they’re the future of our region, then youngsters must be equipped for success long before they step foot in a classroom.

For a myriad of reasons, some preschoolers lack the basic needs and skills that will make them successful in kindergarten and beyond.

“They’re focusing on things like: I don’t know where I’m staying tonight. I’m hungry. There was domestic violence that occurred in the home, and now I’m in a temporary housing facility,” says Anisha Grimmett, executive director of Alignment Rockford, the backbone organization for this initiative.

Plenty of programs are already addressing non-school based barriers to education. But there’s never been a good measure (actual data) showing where help is most needed, or where it’s being applied well. Or if agencies are actually working in tandem. That’s about to change.

This past November, Alignment Rockford and Transform Rockford teamed up with Chicago’s Erikson Institute in an effort to capture data about the preparedness of our region’s kindergartens. The ultimate goal: identify what’s working, what’s not, and how to align resources accordingly.

“’We have our perception of which kids are more vulnerable (west-side versus east-side) and we think, therefore, everyone must rush to develop programs to serve those children and their families,” says Grimmett. “We need data to validate and ensure that it’s the most effective and impactful approach.”

Replicating work they’ve done in Kankakee, East St. Louis, and Skokie/Morton Grove, Ill., Erikson helped kindergarten teachers in Rockford schools customize a five-point assessment of their pupils this winter.
The study is paid for by Rockford Public Schools and grant funding, and it’s being applied in both public and private schools.

Based on the internationally recognized Early Development Instrument (EDI), Erikson’s survey measures a student’s physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, communication skills, and language and cognitive development.

Questions may cover topics like: Can the child hold a pencil (well-being)? Can the child follow routine (social)? Can the child clean up a mess (emotional)? Can the child count and recognize numbers (cognitive)?

“We may look at the data and say, ‘The kids in this neighborhood, even though they’re living in high poverty, they’re really strong in emotional competence. What’s going on?’” says the Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson, co-lead on the Ready to Learn project. “We see there’s a great tutoring program in the community. How do we replicate that in other neighborhoods that have the same issues but not the same strengths? So, it can help us to know what are the places we really need to work on.” The data will be publicly revealed and explained in town hall forums this summer.

Johnson believes plenty of surprises lie ahead, but that’s the idea: Find out what we don’t know and use it to bring informed, creative solutions that can be applied sustainably. This is, after all, a long-term, systemic change that requires long-term strategies.

“Data can help drive planning processes, it can help drive grants, it can help drive us to know where we need to be intervening,” says Johnson.

If it’s to be successful, Erikson’s work will have to be backed up by group of willing community leaders – the collective part of “collective impact.” Johnson and his co-lead, Heidi Dettman of Rockford Public Schools, have already amassed a “pilot team” of more than 50 energized stakeholders.

“It doesn’t feel hopeless,” says Johnson. “It feels like we can do things if we put our minds to it. I remember someone saying, ‘If we decide to do something, we can do it.’ There’s now a sense of, let’s do it.”

Both Johnson and Grimmett find there’s now a greater willingness to cast away barriers and work through disagreements for a greater purpose.

“Erikson has said they’ve never seen a community that’s so ready – really ready – and willing to work collaboratively as a whole,” says Grimmett. “We’ve been able to do about a year’s worth of work in about three months, which shows our community is aligned and ready, and willing to work to collaborate for the good of our future.”
The world outside Rockford is catching on to a new narrative about our hometown: “Rockford is making a comeback!”

Amazingly, so are some locals.

Still clinging to the days when our high crime rates, high unemployment and low self-esteem led Forbes magazine to call us a “miserable city,” some people in the Rockford region are still waking up to the rapid pace of business growth and the rising sense of optimism and enthusiasm spreading through town.

Since Transform Rockford’s launch in late 2013, there’s been a steady coalescing around a common goal: Making Rockford – and its surrounding region – a top community by 2025. That there’s now a “sense of place” about Rockford, and its downtown, is as much about visible results as it is about a change in mindset.

“I think the city we live in today is much more lovable than it was 10 or 15, or 20 years ago,” says John Groh, president and CEO of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. “I think we have a cleaner, more vibrant, active central city, and that is important to any community.”

Groh hasn’t forgotten how downtown looked in 1999, when he was fresh out of school and working there. Today, once-vacant storefronts are filled with active, homegrown businesses. Market-rate apartments upstairs draw the sorts of people who enjoy living, working and playing in the River District. People visit City Market on Friday evenings, the UW Sports Factory for weekend tournaments, the Prairie Street Brewhouse for social events. Downtown is now a tourist destination unto itself.

“I think there’s a broader awareness of the strengths of downtown, and the appeal of downtown Rockford, than there’s ever been in my lifetime,” says the 42-year-old Groh.

The scars of Rockford’s past are now merely part of its brand. “In the stories we tell about Rockford, if we hide everything that challenges us and only focus on what’s good, we wouldn’t be authentic,” says Groh. “Visitors are savvy, and they know when you’re being truthful and when you’re not.”

Rockford’s growing sense of place is also becoming an important tool for business attraction and retention. The story told by Nathan Bryant, president and CEO of Rockford Area Economic Development Council, is not just about a comeback.

“This community has a pedigree of solving big challenges,” he says. “That’s our narrative: We don’t care what that challenge is, we’re going to solve it.”

“And there’s this art/food/outdoorsy scene that’s beginning to bud. We find that really exciting.”

He points to recent successes in workforce development as a prime example. When AAR committed to building a new maintenance facility at Chicago Rockford International Airport, our community college stepped up its aviation maintenance program. When Woodward and fellow manufacturers needed a rising crop of engineers, they teamed up with Rock Valley College and Northern Illinois University to develop a pipeline of homegrown talent.
Now, RVC is transforming a vacant factory into an advanced career training center. Throughout the region, construction is out-pacing the Chicago market, says Bryant.

“It’s important for us to own the fact that we are winning,” he adds. “But equally as important is for us to get out and tell our story.”

Bryant believes the most powerful form of advertising isn’t anything RAEDC can do. It’s the stories each individual shares when telling outsiders about their hometown.

“We need to, internally, have a mindset that things are good here,” he says. “And they are. We need to have that feeling about what we’re doing and we have to start believing in it. That’s started to happen, and it’s being demonstrated by little, incremental steps.”

It was the accumulation of positive stories that encouraged Rockford native Jessica Gissal and Justin Collett to relocate their family from a condo in downtown Chicago.

“Hearing that this is becoming more family-focused and rejuvenated, and that there was an influx of young energy in the community, was a major draw for us,” Gissal says. “And then, looking at real estate and homes in the area, it was very affordable.”

Since moving here in January 2018, the couple have found themselves enjoying many Rockford amenities, especially as they take their two small children biking on trails and around downtown.

It’s a lifestyle not so unfamiliar to Gissal, 36, who once lived in Madison, Wis., and Chicago, but it’s one she never could have imagined growing up in Rockford.

“People aren’t ashamed to say they’re from Rockford anymore, like they were 10 or 15 years ago” says Gissal. “You can tell there’s a lot of pride in the town, and we’ve seen it in the year we’ve been back here.”

Texas native Collette, 43, loves his adopted hometown.

“I don’t know any different, and the only thing I know of Rockford is that it’s a smaller town, it’s easy to get around, it has all the amenities and all the services you could possibly want, and there’s this art/food/outdoorsy scene,” he says. “The seeds have been planted and now they’re starting to bud. I find that really exciting.” Word is getting out.

This past spring, Reader’s Digest named Rockford one of the “15 Best Places to Move to in the U.S. (Before They Get Too Crowded).” Their top acknowledgment? The same qualities locals love about where they live.
Your neighborhood and your home have a story to tell. But for too long, we’ve buried that story. Architect Gary W. Anderson knows the dangers of ignoring a neighborhood’s identity. When he moved into Rockford’s Haight Village neighborhood 40 years ago, he entered a community that had been largely ignored for decades, despite its rich history. A generation of homeowners who remembered better times were steadily passing the torch to a new generation.

Anderson and his neighbors banded together, and for four decades now they’ve fought to restore and preserve the charming character of Haight Village. It’s now a place where neighbors know each other and work together to solve common issues.

In saving Haight Village, Anderson and his neighbors demonstrated an important paradigm shift, one that’s spreading out among Rockford’s 140 neighborhoods.

“When you try to identify what makes up our neighborhoods and why a sense of place is so important – and why people want to live there for a long period of time – there’s a comfort level,” says Anderson. “Knowing that sense of community is gigantic. It’s one thing to know your next-door neighbor, but to know everybody on your block or to know people two blocks away? That creates a value and importance to us; it helps to create a sense of security and safety.”

In its mission to implement a strategic plan for the region’s self-improvement, Transform Rockford and its Great Neighborhoods project are empowering the city’s neighborhoods to play up their unique Sense of Place, in part by instilling pride in where we live.

The Great Neighborhoods team has spent the past year engaging with 40 active neighborhood groups around Rockford, building community and sharing best practices. Some groups maintain regular meetings at a neighbor’s house. Others are only associated online, where they can maintain a constant dialogue about local issues.

“This is a marathon, not a dash,” he says. “We’re building this for the next generation, so we can leave them a legacy.”

The team, led by Patrick O’Keefe, Zach Miller, Cyndie Hall and Anderson, has so far helped 15 neighborhoods through a process of asset mapping – literally, listing out all of the positive attributes and attractions within a geographic region. Then, the team meets with neighbors for feedback, input and ideas swapping – always with a focus on the positive.

Anderson is often surprised by what he hears. Some neighborhoods list downtown as an asset, even when it’s two miles away. Others value camaraderie.

“We had one group saying, ‘We love our alleys,’” says Anderson. “Alleys? What do you mean? ‘We take a walk and look at our neighbors’ backyards, and we enjoy the beautiful gardens.’ And then one person said, ‘And we also have the opportunity for fence food.’ What’s fence food? When you have leftovers and you just want to share it with your neighbors.”
Participants are surprisingly engrossed, says Anderson, as they share best practices – like neighborhood business cards – and commend the go-getters among them. The team has shared many of its findings in a resource guide, available online at greatneighborhoods.info.

“Karen Hoffman probably won her aldermanic seat because she is so highly engaged with neighbors,” says O’Keefe. “If somebody new has moved in or somebody’s got a problem, or somebody’s violating an ordinance, her neighbors are calling her. And then she personally goes over and talks to people.” The Great Neighborhoods project team is working on building capacity to help all neighborhoods better organize and market themselves.

“We’re selling the neighborhood, encouraging people to go investigate for themselves,” says Anderson. “It’s not just about the house but where you’re going to live. I think it’s really interesting why people live in a place. Some have actually stalked the neighborhood and staked out that they want to be there.”

Community pride is just the beginning. This spring, as Erikson Institute completes its study of area kindergartens, Great Neighborhoods is assisting with neighborhood engagement.

At the same time, Great Neighborhoods is helping once-disconnected groups to align toward a shared purpose, as it’s doing now with some of the city’s housing coalitions.

“We’ve always done things in our silos, and I think we haven’t been effective,” says Anderson. “We’ve had a philosophy that we’ll just do one over here, then one over here, but there’s been no collective impact.”

As it continues its work, Great Neighborhoods has the ability to bring Transform Rockford to every doorstep of the city, says Anderson. That’s because the project touches on six major spokes: Family & Neighborhoods; Planning; Economy; Communication; Living the Brand; and Unity, Pride & Culture.

Anderson says he’s pleased by the swelling of grassroots support and the growing excitement among area neighborhoods. And, as he’s witnessed in Haight Village, he’s excited to help others lay the groundwork for a new generation of neighborhood leaders.

“This is a marathon, not a dash,” he says. “We’re building this for the next generation, so we can leave them a legacy.”

Transform Rockford and its Great Neighborhoods project are empowering the city’s neighborhoods by conducting asset mapping.
So, you want to be a Top 25 community by 2025? How do you know when you’ve reached your goal?

It’s a puzzle the Scorecard team has been trying to assemble for the past 18 months. Meeting biweekly, the team has been crafting a digital measuring stick that will enable project teams to gauge what’s working and what’s not.

Displayed in a colorful wheel-shaped diagram, this scorecard is centered around five top-level indicators: Renew, Reframe, Recreate, Revitalize, Resource. Each indicator is broken into smaller themes roughly aligned to the 14 Transform Rockford spokes and various projects. It’s also displayed in a longer-form scorecard that further breaks down data.

When the scorecard is released this spring on TransformRockford.org, it will be a publicly available, highly visual gauge of where our efforts are making the greatest impact – and where additional resources may be needed.

“The reason we need this is because there’s been a lot of discussion about measurables, but nothing has been definitively said that this is what we’re measuring,” says Jeff Stewart, project co-lead and an IT management consultant by trade.

Because there’s no standard bearer to determine what qualifies as Top 25, Stewart and his team had to set a few parameters.

First, the team needed a way to compare Rockford against other communities. But against whom do you compare yourself?

The team started with communities of similar sizes and situations to Rockford – like Peoria, Illinois – and then they found cities to which Rockford could aspire – places like Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Madison, Wisconsin, where revitalization has already happened and best practices can be learned.

“This is a stuff we’re evaluating and there are third-party references from reputable data providers to create immutability.

By first reviewing the federal government’s 383 Metropolitan Statistical Areas, the Scorecard team focused on 101 communities with populations between 100,000 and 500,000 people. They also needed more than 12.5 percent share of manufacturing jobs.

From there, any data set or metric had to be aligned to a spoke strategy of Transform Rockford. It also had to demonstrate either a leading indicator (a metric that changes before the general trend) or lagging indicator (a metric that changes after a general trend).

Of course, to make sure the comparison is fully fair and accurate, it had to be geographically consistent, for a true apples-to-apples comparison. But that was just part of the picture.
“We needed a set of questions or standards for determining if this is a quality, acceptable parameter from this data source,” says Stewart. “How do we filter this stuff and then align it?”

The team outlined their criteria in a lengthy dictionary, lining up a series of values to ensure that everything would be accurate and consistent: Data sets must be re-viewable, re-creatable, irrefutable, easily available and consistently applied.

“It’s constructed this way, so that we can say to somebody, ‘this is the drill-in to the nitty-gritty. We’re not just making this up,’” says Stewart. “This is stuff we’re evaluating and there are third-party references from reputable data providers to create immutability. So, I don’t want to argue about the data. I want to argue about what the data tells us.” And if Rockford is truly transforming, the data will demonstrate community improvement over time.

“We need a frame of reference to know that we’re getting better,” says Stewart. “We can say, ‘How’s that compare to Tulsa, Oklahoma?’ I have no idea, let’s go look. Then we can say we were better than Tulsa before, and we’re getting better than we were before, but we’re losing our rank. We’re doing worse than before, relative to our peers.”

Behind the scenes, the interconnected data sets are a web of spreadsheets and links. But in a visual application, they provide a quick reference of how Rockford compares with 100 regions.

The ultimate objective is for Rockford to rank in the first quartile, represented by green; lower quartiles are represented by yellow, orange and red, respectively.

Stewart shows off a working prototype. “In the case of the Renew value, we have Education in orange, Safety in red, Wellness in yellow,” he says. “You combine those and average them, and you get orange for Renewal.” Thus, third quartile.

In building this heat map, Stewart and his team referred to examples from the likes of Boston; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Austin, Texas; and Rochester, New York. Stewart was amazed to find those scorecards were built by well-funded organizations and professional data teams.

Not so in Rockford. This is Stewart’s volunteer side project, a labor of love.

“For the very meager staff of Transform Rockford, this is an extraordinary effort,” says Stewart. “The handful of staff are marshaling several hundred very active people, who in turn are relying on several thousand people participating in the effort. That in itself makes us totally unique.”

A scorecard heat map will live on TransformRockford.org this spring, where individuals can access information on our region’s rank compared to other cities.
About Us

Transform Rockford is a community driven, grassroots movement with the goal of rallying and guiding our residents to see the Rockford Region in a new light. It’s taking our community members ideas and dreams of dramatically improving the social and economic well-being of our region, and plugging it into a tangible Community Transformation Plan where residents can get inspired, get engaged and be proud of where they live. And ultimately, it’s facilitating and implementing the plan to help our region hit a goal of becoming a “Top 25 community by 2025!”
Community Transformation Plan

14 Impact Statements

Learn more details on the 14 impact statements guiding the transformation of our region at www.transformrockford.org
Transform Rockford Team

Transform Rockford Steering Committee

Robert Holzwarth
Chair
Holmstrom & Kennedy

Christie Jarrett
Vice Chair
Stenstrom

Bill Gorski
Treasurer
Community Member

LoRayne Logan
Secretary
Workplace Staff and Search

Ben Bernsten
Goodwill Industries of Northern Illinois

Nathan Boelkins
Collins Aerospace

Tom Gendron
Emeritus
Woodward

Doug Jensen
Rock Valley College

Jim Keeling
Hinshaw & Culbertson

Paul Logli
United Way

Peter Provenzano
SupplyCore

Daniel Saavedra
Saavedra Gehlhausen Architects

David Schertz
Community Member

Transform Rockford Staff

David Sidney
Executive Director

Jason Holcomb
Project Development Manager

Katryna Kirby
Strategy & Communications Manager

Diane Zammuto
Operations Coordinator

Transform Rockford Strategic Support Leads

Alignment Support
Jeff Fahrenwald
SupplyCore

Mike Schablaskie
Community Member

Engagement Support
Martesha Brown
Midland States Bank

Lauren Zerey
SupplyCore

Project Support
David Byrnes
Midway Village

Bill Gissal
Community Member

Scorecard & Metrics
Jeff Stewart
Asteruis Media LLC

Tom Austin
Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES)

Transforming our region from within.