

Full Stride Initiatives

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From the desk of Gina Greathouse...

In our prior issue, we shared that the Strides Ahead Foundation Corp. and its board have officially been dissolved, which has helped us streamline some of our internal processes. The core mission remains unchanged, and we hope it is demonstrated by the features and topics detailed in this issue. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly.

We are honored to be recognized by Site Selection Magazine for our efforts in regionalism. For a second straight year, we've secured a place in the annual Top Metros report. Please see more below. As we look toward summer, we anticipate a busy travel season for new business development and we look forward to hosting a variety of networking opportunities and educational events for our existing business community. As always, our Community and Small Business Development team is active in the community providing invaluable resources and opportunities for small business owners to succeed. Please read on for a full recap of the first quarter of calendar year 2025.



Gina Greathouse
*Executive Vice President for Economic
Development, Commerce Lexington*

Economic Development By the Numbers

Category	2025 Target	2025 Actual	2024 Actual
Prospects (new, existing, start-ups)	75	8	48
Total Active Projects	n/a	43	43
Project Announcements	30	11	37
Capital Investment	\$500M	\$27.2M	\$2.2B
Direct Jobs Created	1,000	278	898
Average Wage of Jobs Announced*	\$75,000	\$52,000	\$62,000
Consultant Interactions	125	21	124
Site Visits (prospects and existing business)	30	6	20
Existing Business Visits	125	23	85
Existing Business Visit Attempts	200	27	152

NOTE: Metrics based on activity in 9-county region. Commerce Lexington may not work directly with every project announced. *Wage is set to meet the Building a More Competitive Bluegrass goal of increasing the average earnings per job for the region to the national average.

General Announcements

Greater Lexington Shines in Site Selection Rankings: A Model for Regionalism and Growth

For the second consecutive year, Greater Lexington has secured a place in the annual Site Selection Magazine Top Metros report, ranking fifth per capita and tying for ninth overall among metropolitan areas with populations between 200,000 and one million in 2024. This achievement marks an improvement from the 2023 rankings, which saw the region at seventh per capita and tenth overall, with Greater Lexington successfully attracting 25 qualified projects. Notably, the rankings also underscore the accomplishments of micropolitans in the Greater Lexington Region, with Richmond-Berea and Frankfort leading the way in project numbers.

A key factor behind the success of the Top 10 Tier 2 metros is a strong commitment to regionalism, a principle that Greater Lexington continues to embrace through its Regional Competitiveness Plan. Since 2022, leaders from both the private and public sectors across the nine-county area have collaborated to implement action items outlined in the plan, aimed at enhancing the region's ability to attract jobs and talent while fostering a vibrant economic environment.

The longstanding efforts of the Bluegrass Alliance, a coalition of economic development professionals throughout the region, have also played a significant role in this achievement. By adopting a regional approach, Greater Lexington is well-positioned to attract a skilled workforce, secure business sites, expand housing options, and provide essential education and training resources.

For more information about regional economic development efforts, visit locateinlex.com



Email marketing for Site Consultants

Commerce Lexington sends out quarterly email marketing messages to top site consultants and we are happy to report our messages are being well received. Our most recent message focused on the food and beverage industry showcasing the logistical and workforce advantages of locating within the Greater Lexington Region. The email also highlighted available land in Winchester suitable for F&B operations as well a link to the industry profile sheet on [LocateinLexington.com](https://locateinlex.com). The open rate was 5%, which is well above the industry standard.

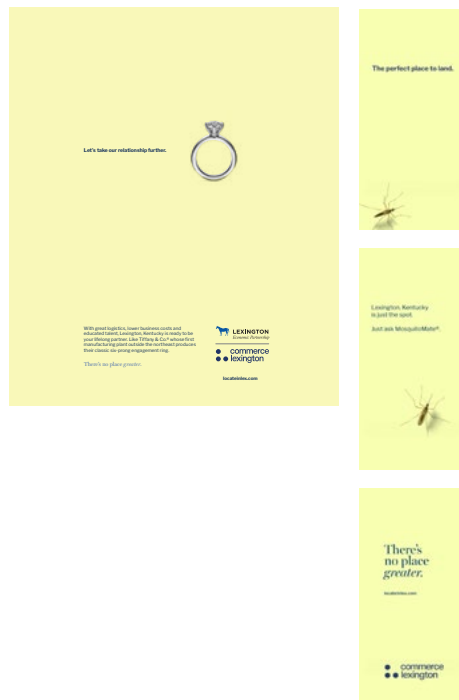
Lexington Based Businesses Awarded SBIR/STTR Program Support

Earlier this spring, Governor Beshear announced recipients of nearly \$750,000 in state matching grants. The grants are part of the commonwealth's nationally recognized Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) matching funds program that provide vital capital for promising early-stage technology companies by matching federal grants received by Kentucky-based businesses or those relocating to the state.

Two of the seven companies receiving grants are part of Greater Lexington's innovation and technology sector. Congratulations to WiLO Networks Inc. and Covert Defenses LLC.

New Digital Media Campaign and Consultant Outreach

In April of 2025, the Economic Development team launched a targeted Digital Marketing campaign to position Greater Lexington as a premier, sophisticated business hub by highlighting its competitive advantages and industry success stories. The campaign focuses on decision-makers such as C-suite executives, site selectors, and entrepreneurs, along with influential community members, to increase the region's visibility and credibility. Through strategic media efforts, including geofencing at key industry events, the campaign ensures Greater Lexington is recognized as a cost-effective, business-friendly location for companies seeking to relocate, expand, or start new ventures.



General Announcements

LFUCG Davis Bottom Community Center Grand Opening

Commerce Lexington was honored to attend LFUCG's ribbon cutting celebration at Davis Park Workforce Center, which provides a multitude of career and employer services for residents and Fayette County businesses. The Center is staffed to assist jobseekers with employability skills, such as resume writing, interview skills, essential employment skills, and job search assistance. Computers are available for individuals to search for jobs, hold virtual interviews, work on their resumes, and participate in online training. The Center features a community room for businesses and partner agencies to gather for meetings, job fairs, and resource events.



Mayor Gorton addresses the crowd at the ribbon cutting.

Commerce Lexington Collaborates with KY Cabinet for Economic Development

The Cabinet for Economic Development is conducting an industry and community spotlight initiative in 2025. This campaign highlights the unique capabilities of companies and businesses throughout the region and state. Commerce Lexington's Gina Greathouse and Cheryl Klever joined the cabinet's marketing team and visited Lexington-Fayette County's Kindeva Drug Delivery, a pharmaceutical manufacturing company; and Valvoline Global headquarters, a worldwide leader in automotive and industrial solutions, creating future-ready products and best-in-class services for partners around the globe. Follow the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development on LinkedIn and Facebook to see more about the companies that call Lexington Home.

Conferences & Networking

Commerce Lexington Presents Regional Plan to the Bluegrass Financial Leaders

In March, Commerce Lexington had the pleasure of presenting to the Bluegrass Financial Leaders, a prominent membership organization in Central Kentucky that brings together organization representatives focused on networking and education in the accounting and finance sectors. Gina Greathouse, Andi Johnson, and Betsy Dexter provided valuable insights into the Greater Lexington Regional Competitiveness Plan, emphasizing the business and financial services industry as a key target sector for growth and development.

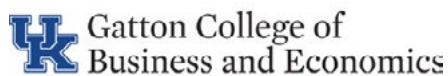


Gina Greathouse explain the regions target industry sectors.

Conferences & Networking

University of Kentucky Economic Outlook Conference

Commerce Lexington staff attended the 36th annual Economic Outlook Conference on Tuesday, February 11th, hosted by UK Gatton College of Business and Economics. Held virtually due to snowy conditions, the conference featured presentations by Dr. Michael Clark, director of the Center for Business and Economic Research, who discussed Kentucky's economy and what is likely to lie ahead in the coming year. Richard Gibbens, CEO of the Bluegrass REALTORS Association, shared a presentation on the current state of the housing market in Lexington along with key considerations for the future. Dr. Ken Troke, Richard W. and Janis H Furst Endowed Chair of Economics, looked at key trends and pricing determinants of bourbon, one of Kentucky's signature products.



Global Executive Forum

Members of Commerce Lexington's economic development and policy teams hosted a table at the sold-out World Trade Center Kentucky Global Executive Forum on February 18th at The Club at UK's Spindletop Hall. The event featured an insightful panel discussion on the topic of US-China trade including insights into the historical context and major milestones shaping US-China trade as well as strategies for navigating the complexities of the trade environment and fostering a more stable trading future.



From left to right: Frank Jemly III, President and CEO, Kentucky Association of Manufacturers; Sarah Whitten, SVP China and Transformational Exports Program (CTEP), EXIM Bank; Felipe Benguria, PhD, University of Kentucky Gatton College of Business and Economics and moderator John Peloza, Associate Dean, University of Kentucky Gatton College of Business and Economics.

5 Across Pitch Competition, Winter 2025

On February 26, Falon McFarland represented Commerce Lexington at the 5 Across event held at The Mane on Main. This sold-out pitch competition featured innovative startups and an energized crowd. DataRovers took home the win with their cutting-edge health systems AI software. Other competitors presented innovations including healthy food vending machines aimed at addressing food deserts; an app for membership and data management; and software designed to support customer reviews across multiple platforms. Congratulations to all the participants and thank you to Awesome Inc for a fantastic evening.



[DataRovers accepts their award for winning February competition.](#)

Bluegrass Alliance Meets in Georgetown

The Bluegrass Alliance, a partnership of economic development professionals working together to ease the process of relocating or expanding in the Greater Lexington Region, met in Georgetown at the Advanced Manufacturing Center at the end of March. Alliance members shared updates on expansions, relocations, available buildings and sites and Commerce Lexington provided an update on current advertising and marketing efforts that are supporting the Regional Competitiveness Plan.

Conferences & Networking

Lexington Forum Discusses Medical Cannabis in Kentucky

On March 6, Commerce Lexington's Cheryl Klever attended the Lexington Forum for an opportunity to hear from experts shaping the future of medical cannabis in Kentucky. The insightful discussion on medical cannabis in Kentucky featured guest speakers Rachel Roberts, Executive Director of Kentucky Cannabis Industry Alliance; Sam Flynn, Executive Director for the Kentucky Medical Cannabis Program and Special Advisor to the Governor; and Dr. Shanna Babalonis, Director of the University of Kentucky Cannabis Center. They discussed the latest developments in the state's medical cannabis program, its potential benefits, and the impact on patients and the community.



Dr. Shanna Babalonis, director of the UK Cannabis Center, Sam Flynn, executive director for the KY Medical Cannabis Program, and Rachel Roberts, executive director of KY Cannabis Industry Alliance address the Lexington Forum.

Signature Industries in the Bluegrass

On March 16th, a group of 44 bourbon industry professionals from across the US and around the world gathered in Lexington for a fun and educational event in advance of the 6th annual James B. Beam Institute's Annual Conference. With the intent of showcasing the lifestyle of central Kentucky and highlighting another vital signature industry, the group toured Mill Ridge Farm to meet mares and foals and took a drive through historic Keeneland Race Course to learn more about the sales and racing impact of central Kentucky's equine industry. The evening concluded with a bourbon tasting, a Kentucky Proud dinner at The Kentucky Castle, and a panel discussion with representatives from Bespoken Spirits, James E. Pepper, and Peggy Noe Stevens & Associates, moderated by Landon Borders, Director of the Estate Whiskey Alliance.



Panel discussion with Scott Savage, CEO Bespoken Spirits, Peggy Noe Stevens, Peggy Noe Stevens and Associates, and Amir Peay, Owner James E. Pepper, moderated by Landon Borders, Executive Director of the Estate Whiskey Alliance.

Conferences & Networking

Commerce Lexington Attends Area Development Workshop Forum

Niki Goldey, director of new business development, traveled to San Antonio, TX to attend the Area Development Workshop Forum from March 19-21. Attended by more than 150 people, the forum offered the opportunity to meet with and learn directly from site selection professionals on timely topics such as Navigating the North American Manufacturing Landscape: Investing in the US vs. Mexico, and Incentive Trends and Strategic Considerations.



Consultant Amy Gerber with Cushman Wakefield leads a discussion about the drivers and activity level around office projects.

Irish Consultant General Visits Lexington

In early April, Commerce Lexington's Gina Greathouse; Kevin Atkins, LFUCG Chief Development Officer; Kay Sargent, Executive Director of the Lexington Sister Cities Commission; and Terri Bradshaw, Executive Director of the KY Association for Economic Development, met for lunch with Frank Groome, Consul General of Ireland to the US Southeast. Based in Atlanta, Mr. Groome leads Ireland's team covering Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. In town to visit with officials from the University of Kentucky, Consul General Groome also toured Coolmore/Ashford Stud and Keeneland to better understand the community and local economy.



From left to right: Niamh Larson, University of Kentucky; Mark Pierson, President of the Atlanta Council on International Relations; Kevin Atkins, Chief Development Officer LFUCG; Frank Groome, Consul General of Ireland to the US Southeast; Gina Greathouse, Executive Vice President for Commerce Lexington; Terri Bradshaw, CEO of KAED; and Kay Sargeant, Executive Director of the Lexington Sister Cities Commission.

Talent & Workforce

“Look at Lex” talent attraction campaign is driving results

As part of our ongoing mission to elevate the Greater LEX region as a leading destination for top-tier talent, we are proud to share the latest performance update from our **Talent Attraction Marketing Campaign** — and the results speak for themselves.

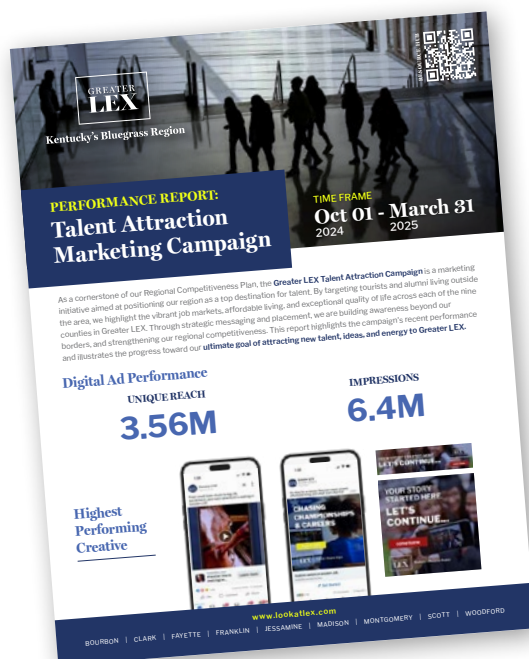
From October 2024 through March 2025, the campaign reached over **3.56 million unique individuals**, delivering **6.4 million ad impressions** across targeted digital channels. These efforts are designed to reach two key audiences: alumni with a connection to the region and tourists who have experienced its charm firsthand.

At the heart of this campaign is **LookAtLEX.com**, a dynamic, user-friendly website that showcases what makes Greater LEX such a compelling place to live and work. During this reporting period, the site welcomed over **30,000 new users**, with the most popular pages highlighting:

- **Live Here** (11,535 visits)
- **Find a Job** (6,587 visits)
- **Work Here** (6,043 visits)
- **Cost of Living** (3,576 visits)

Visitors from key metro areas — including Chicago, Atlanta, New York, and Nashville — engaged with the campaign in high numbers, showing strong interest in our region’s opportunities and lifestyle.

The success of this initiative is a testament to our region’s appeal and the power of strategic collaboration. Visit lookatlex.com/resourcehub for more information, including ways to engage with the campaign.



Community & Minority Business Development Network

Creating an Effective Business Plan Workshop Sets Groundwork for Success

On January 28, Commerce Lexington, in collaboration with the Kentucky Small Business Development Center (SBDC), hosted a business planning workshop led by Fausto Sarmiento, Lexington Center Director. The workshop provided sixteen participants with the groundwork of an effective business plan. Special guest Chase Fairchild of Bolt Marketing further enhanced the session by demonstrating how narrative storytelling can be used as a strategic tool in business planning. This event set the foundation of a great business plan as we establish business goals in 2025.



Workshop attendees learn strategic insights on developing successful business plans.

Minority Business Accelerator Members

Elaine Allen, LLC – Bishop Carter, Owner
Helping Hands, LLC – Chase Minniefield, Owner
Equity Solutions Group, LLC – Ray Daniels, Owner
Facilities Maintenance & Services Group, LLC – Frank Hall
Patriot Group, LLC – Lawrence Herring, Owner
Printcore, Inc – Ray Woods, President/CEO

Winter Money Smart Concludes

The winter session of Money Smart for Small Business concluded on March 10 after six weeks of financial literacy development in key areas such as organizational management, tax planning and reporting, cash flow management, financial management, and planning for a healthy business. Both experienced and aspiring business owners engaged in meaningful discussions, sharing insights and past experiences that have shaped their entrepreneurial journeys. Be on the lookout for the Fall session of Money Smart in October.



Money Smart participants receive certificates after completing coursework.

Growing Our Own Entrepreneur Workshop Series

The University of Kentucky, in partnership with Commerce Lexington, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, Kentucky Finance and Administration, The KY APEX Accelerator, and the Small Business Development Center Kentucky, proudly presents the Growing Our Own workshop series. Supported by the Office of Land-Grant Engagement, this initiative is designed to empower Kentucky-owned businesses. This free, comprehensive three-week program offers essential knowledge and resources to help participants succeed in the small business landscape. The hybrid workshop series will take place at Commerce Lexington (330 East Main Street) and will also be available via Zoom for those outside of the Lexington area.

edc.uky.edu/growing-our-own-workshop-series

Community & Minority Business Development Network

Construction Business Accelerator Kicks Off

On March 4, The Construction Business Accelerator, presented by Turner Construction and the University of Kentucky, kicked off their 2025 cohort with a welcome reception and kick-off session. More than 60 guests attended the event. Following the reception, the Cohort of 20 students was introduced to the Mock Bid Project and engaged with a distinguished panel of experts discussing The Anatomy of a Healthy Business. Panelists included Tyrone Tyra, Senior Vice President of Community & Minority Business Development at Commerce Lexington. The ten-week program will conclude with a graduation ceremony on May 13. Commerce Lexington is proud to be a community partner in this initiative.



Small business experts discuss the Anatomy of a Healthy Business at the Turner-UK Construction Business Accelerator Welcome Reception. Panelists (L to R): Tyrone Tyra, Shawn Rogers, Brad King, and Marilyn Clark.

Spring Opportunity Exchange Focuses on the State of Small Business Lending

On March 20, Commerce Lexington hosted the Spring Opportunity Exchange, presented by Equity Solutions Group. The event featured a panel of local banking leaders including Larry Forester, Forcht Bank; Marcus Miller, PNC Bank; Abdul Muhammad, WesBanco; and Terry L. Spears, Community Trust Bank. The panel shared valuable insights on the current landscape of small business lending. More than 40 small business owners and major employers attended and gained timely and relevant information to help navigate today's financing environment.



Tyrone Tyra addresses the group gathered for the Spring Opportunity Exchange.