2026 COMPREHENSIVE STATE & FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES

The Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance convenes the region's largest coalition of business and community leaders to advance pro-business public policy. Our 2026 public policy priorities were shaped through a comprehensive, collaborative engagement process involving more than 200 representatives from 28 communities across eight counties. Business leaders, community partners, and public officials shared insights on issues ranging from talent development and taxation to housing, energy, transportation, and global competitiveness.

The result is The Collective Voice legislative agenda, representing more than 1,200 investors and partners committed to strengthening the economic vitality of our region. This coalition spans businesses and labor organizations, educational institutions, nonprofits, and economic development partners. More than 55 percent of participating voices come from small businesses, the primary drivers of local job creation and innovation. Together, we ensure that when local businesses speak, their ideas help shape policy decisions at every level of government.

We advocate for policies that support business growth, educate policymakers and stakeholders on the needs of employers, and communicate the challenges and opportunities shaping our region's future. In 2026, our advocacy will focus on talent development, workforce and population growth, economic competitiveness, global engagement, and housing availability.

INVEST IN TALENT DEVELOPMENT & WORKFORCE POPULATION GROWTH

FEATURED

- **Champion investment and expanded access to proven education, work-based learning, training, and talent development programs such as the Last-Dollar Scholarship, community college job training, public and private higher education industry partnerships, including emerging opportunities in aviation and aerospace, and local apprenticeships that connect Iowans to high-demand careers and strengthen the region's talent pipeline.**

FEATURED

- **Champion policies that grow Iowa's workforce by simplifying and expanding employment- and education-based visas, ensuring application processes and fees remain affordable for employers and workers, and creating a clear, legal pathway to citizenship for individuals brought to the U.S. as children.**
- Modernize employment verification (e-verify) systems to streamline compliance for employers acting in good faith and ensure a consistent federal approach.
- Expand access to affordable, high-quality child care through public-private partnerships that strengthen the child care workforce, improve wages and benefits, and expand Child Care Assistance (CCA) for working families.
- Increase funding and eligibility for Pell Grants and Iowa Tuition Grants to expand access to post-secondary and short-term, job-focused training in high-demand careers.
- Support policies that welcome and retain diverse populations in Iowa, allowing businesses to attract and keep talent and grow the state's tax base.
- Ensure predictable, timely financial aid processes so more students can pursue high-demand credentials and degrees.
- Expand English language learning and credential recognition programs that help immigrants enter the workforce and encourage employers to build cross-language skills.

INVEST IN TALENT DEVELOPMENT & WORKFORCE POPULATION GROWTH

- Modernize and improve education funding formulas to better serve all districts and allow local flexibility in resource allocation.
- Support second-chance employment programs that prepare offenders for successful reentry through expanded diploma pathways, apprenticeships, and correctional workforce training.
- Address workforce shortages in aviation, logistics, and transportation by reexamining regulatory barriers, supporting pilot and technician training, and lowering financial barriers to entry.
- Prepare Iowans for a technology-driven economy through digital skills training, AI literacy, and partnerships that connect education to emerging industry needs.
- Increase access to mental health and workplace well-being services for employers, schools, and communities, including funding for law enforcement crisis training and staffing.

INCENTIVIZE BUSINESS GROWTH & ECONOMIC INVESTMENT

FEATURED

- **Champion balanced tax policies that reduce the disproportionate burden on businesses while maintaining local governments' ability to provide essential services, infrastructure, and amenities that drive talent retention and attraction.**

- Ensure federal tax changes hold businesses harmless from any revenue volatility, uncertainty and confusion.
- Champion government efficiency efforts that strengthen a pro-growth business climate, streamline regulatory processes, and align workforce programs with employer needs.
- Support the implementation of new economic development incentives to address rising costs, meet new market demands, and support small business competitiveness.
- Promote resilient, cost-effective supply chains through investment in infrastructure, logistics, and manufacturing systems that enhance reliability and reduce costs.
- Champion affordable, transparent, and flexible healthcare and insurance systems that reduce burdens on small businesses while maintaining quality and fairness.
- Expand access to capital for startups and minority-owned businesses to foster entrepreneurship and inclusive economic growth.
- Preserve local authority for governments and businesses to address community-specific needs and opportunities.
- Support investment in modern infrastructure including water, energy, broadband, and EV systems to ensure reliability, affordability, and capacity for business growth.
- Support policies that welcome and retain diverse populations in Iowa, allowing businesses to attract and keep talent and grow the state's tax base.

ENHANCE COMMUNITY ATTRACTION & LIVABILITY EFFORTS

FEATURED

- **Champion increased funding and targeted reforms to expand affordable and workforce housing, revitalize existing neighborhoods, and streamline programs such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and disaster recovery funding to lower costs, improve housing stock, and accelerate project delivery.**
- Promote public-private partnerships that leverage investments in community vitality and placemaking projects, including programs like Destination Iowa, Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE), Revitalize Iowa's Sound Economy (RISE), and arts and cultural grants to strengthen Iowa's appeal to residents and visitors.
- Support passage of Surface Transportation Reauthorization to ensure stable, long-term federal and state funding that supports efficient, multimodal transportation networks in both rural and urban areas.
- Support policies and investments that improve Iowa's recreational water quality through strengthened conservation, climate resilience, and sustainable water management, and implement of the Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund as intended.
- Sustain and expand funding for the Iowa Flood Center to improve flood mitigation, protection, and forecasting.
- Champion continued broadband expansion and digital infrastructure development through coordinated state and federal investment to meet business, education, and technology needs including support for AI readiness, autonomous systems, and cybersecurity.
- Advance passenger rail connectivity from Chicago to Iowa City, Des Moines, and Omaha to strengthen regional mobility and economic development.

LEVERAGE IOWA'S INNOVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

FEATURED

- **Champion efforts to expand export markets, attract international investment, and strengthen supply chain resilience so Iowa's small businesses, manufacturers, and farmers can thrive in a global economy.**

- Sustain and grow federal research investments in automation, smart technologies, semiconductors, and cybersecurity to drive innovation, strengthen digital infrastructure, and equip higher education institutions to prepare Iowa's workforce for future jobs.
- Leverage technology and innovation in manufacturing, biosciences, and education to advance Industry 4.0 and position Iowa as a leader in applied research and production.
- Champion renewable and alternative energy policies including ethanol, nuclear, hydrogen, solar, and wind that promote energy reliability, attract new business investment, and support sustainable growth in attracting new business and workers.
- Support agricultural and Farm Bill policies that strengthen Iowa's agricultural supply chain, open reliable markets, and promote practices that build long-term resilience in rural and urban economies.
- Advance cybersecurity and AI-readiness initiatives that leverage university and industry research to address emerging cyber risks while harnessing artificial intelligence to improve security, productivity, and innovation.