

STRONG ECONOMIES, RESILIENT COUNTIES

The Role of Counties in Economic Development



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HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO

Forging Partnerships for Economic Development



The largest county in the Cincinnati metropolitan area, Hamilton County has an educated labor force and a strong business climate. Thirty-three (33) percent of county residents 25 years old and over hold at least a bachelor's degree, which is well above Ohio's state average of 24.7 percent. The ten Fortune 500 companies headquartered in greater Cincinnati attest to this high concentration of skilled professionals. Of this group, American Financial Group insurance, Kroger and Macy's are among Hamilton County's largest employers. Major industrial firms operating within the county include Ford, General Electric, Ethicon Endo-Surgery and Procter & Gamble.

Hamilton County's economic development strategy centers on a network of partners. The county contracts with the Hamilton County Development Co., Inc. (HCDC), a non-profit economic development agency, designated via a section in the Ohio Revised Code (307.07) to staff the county economic development office. The HCDC has a diverse set of activities that nurture the local economy through collaborations with local communities and with businesses. Hamilton County annually allocates more than \$700,000 in line-item funding to the HCDC to assist in its small business development and retention efforts. HCDC and the county work with other entities. For example, the region's electricity company, Duke Energy assists economic developers by providing site evaluations for emerging projects, investing around \$25,000 on each site to assess utility needs. The county also works with the Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority on the county land bank.

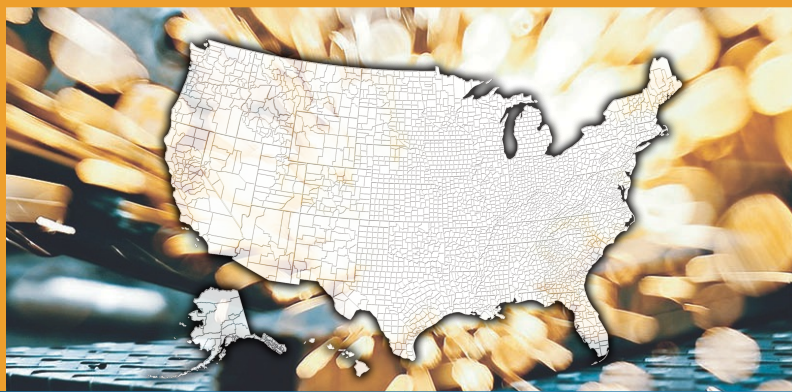
Hamilton County Business Center (HCBC)

The HCDC opened its business incubator, the Hamilton County Business Center (HCBC) in 1989 after a General Motors plant closure. Originally focused on teaching entrepreneurial skills to unemployed autoworkers, the business center now offers guidance, networking opportunities, flexible and affordable workspace and resources for aspiring start-ups. By 2012, the business center helped almost 300 successful startups through coaching and creating connections, programs and flexible work environments. In FY 2013 alone, HCBC housed 47 tenants who employed 201 individuals with a total annual payroll of \$10.4 million, bringing in excess of \$17.2 million in revenues.

- Population, 2013: 804,520
- County Board size: 3
- County Administrator

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The Business Loan Program

Since 1983, the HCDC has helped small and medium sized businesses grow by offering small business loans and a variety of financing options. In FY2013, the HCDC partnered with 16 commercial lenders to provide businesses access to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) 504 loan program and other long-term, fixed rate financing tools. In FY2013, HCDC crossed the \$1 billion milestone in loans issued, equating to about 10,000 new jobs created from nearly 1,200 projects since 1983.

Hamilton County Land Reutilization Corporation (HCLRC)

The Hamilton County Land Reutilization Corporation (HCLRC) is the county's land bank, working to assist property redevelopment. The county is undergoing a long term trend of declining population, with about 13 percent less in population in comparison with the 1970 population level. This change can be seen in the number of foreclosure filings that increased from 2,447 in 1999 to 6,556 in 2010. The abandoned and foreclosed properties devalue neighborhoods and stymie residential and commercial redevelopment efforts in Cincinnati's urban core. Originally chartered by the Hamilton County Treasurer's Office in 2011, the HCLRC acquires foreclosed and forfeited properties within 14 designated target neighborhoods and intermediates property sales to redevelopers. By stepping in to acquire and if necessary, demolish property, HCLRC incurs overhead expenses that private developers would otherwise face. The goal is to lower the risk and cost for private development within the designated neighborhoods. Shortly after establishing the land bank, Hamilton County contracted The Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority to manage HCLRC. Hamilton County funds HCLRC by transferring 5 percent of its annual tax collections to the Port Authority, whose experience in land acquisition enables the land bank to operate at a low cost.

Hamilton County works with a network of partners from small business development to land redevelopment projects. Concentrating county funds towards a few specialized partners has ensured substantive results. These strategic partnerships afford Hamilton County a specialized role within a highly competitive region.