



# Mercer County: Better Together

*Success through collaboration.*

**#MCBT**

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## **Accomplishments of Countywide Efforts Set Stage for Action**

*Mercer County, IL – May 21st* – Input from hundreds of county residents and stakeholders resulted in the creation of the Mercer County: Better Together (MCBT) organization. A true countywide community and economic development entity, MCBT partners with communities across the county to accomplish priority work identified by these residents and stakeholders. Resident and stakeholder feedback also led to the development of Mercer County's first countywide strategic plan. The plan outlines priority work identified by resident feedback in ten topic areas: *Business, County & Community Leadership, Education, Festivals & Events, Health, Historical Assets, Infrastructure, Natural Resources, Public Services and Recreation*. The plan also provides a backbone for any future collaborative funding applications by demonstrating the collaborative needs of communities across the county. Completion of a countywide strategic plan allows Mercer County to be competitive in the collaborative funding world.

Funding for the planning process and some startup funding for the MCBT organization was provided by local municipalities, businesses, individuals and grants from the Looser-Flake Charitable Foundation.

Kelly Thompson, grant administrator for the Looser-Flake Charitable Foundation, said, "The Foundation trustees believe that by supporting the people of Mercer County to identify and work toward their own priorities, the Foundation will be better able to carry out the legacy of Dorothy Looser-Flake and Roberta Looser, who cared deeply about Mercer County and the economic, cultural, and educational opportunities available there. The trustees have been very happy to see the great community participation in Mercer County: Better Together and can't wait to see the progress that comes from so many caring and creative people working together."

MCBT serves as a central organization in the county; the backbone for collaborative efforts countywide. Research conducted by MCBT demonstrated that a central organization to identify collaborative needs, organize collaborative efforts and execute the countywide strategic plan is key for future development in Mercer County.

Since September 2016, MCBT has added value in Mercer County by accomplishing the following –

- Providing elected officials a toolkit of data and project resources vital in funding applications.
- Inclusion into the Bi-State Regional Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which permits federal and state funding eligibility for projects associated with MCBT.
- Educating residents on current projects and best practices in each topic area identified in the countywide strategic plan through *Action Planning Sessions*.
- Connecting public services countywide to identify and collaboratively work toward funding a new credentialing system, which tracks match money required for federal funding opportunities.
- Connecting elected officials and community leaders to free training and information sessions.
- Participating in the Western Illinois Entrepreneurial Support Network (ESN) as a champion to identify and nominate Mercer County businesses and entrepreneurs for recognition.
- Involving Mercer County businesses and entrepreneurs in the "6 County Fast Pitch" program, which connects participants to free business development resources and support.
- Executing the first *Community Heart & Soul* planning process ever conducted on a countywide scale.

MCBT board member and North Henderson Village President Carol Rogers has seen her community benefit from the work of MCBT. “MCBT has been an asset, connecting North Henderson with other Mercer County communities. I now know who other community leaders are and I can reach out to them with questions that I have as village president.” Rogers has served as Village President of North Henderson since 2017.

Moving forward, MCBT will continue to implement the countywide strategic plan and facilitate collaborative efforts countywide around issues of importance to multiple sectors and communities. Next steps include development of task forces focusing on business retention and expansion, business development and tourism. Also planned for late 2018 is the first Mercer County-Community Summit, which will bring county and community leadership together to develop a countywide advocacy agenda to be presented to the state legislature.

If you would like more information on the Mercer County: Better Together organization or the countywide planning process, please contact Executive Director Kyle McEwen using the contact information below.

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