

The background is a painting of a landscape. On the left, there's a rocky outcrop with a few trees. In the center, a large, white, stylized 'nwa' logo is superimposed over the scene. The logo is bold and lowercase. Below the logo, there are more trees and a body of water. The sky is a mix of blue and pinkish hues, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall style is painterly and artistic.

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Annual Report
2021 - 2022



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July 14, 2022

Members of the Northwest Arkansas Council,

Looking back on the last two years, Northwest Arkansas, like the rest of the world, faced unprecedented challenges. Even now, we’re still trying to determine the full breadth of the pandemic’s impact on the community. In these extraordinary times, Northwest Arkansas residents demonstrated incredible strength and resilience.

Everywhere I go, when I meet with family, friends and colleagues, they all talk about the exciting things happening in Northwest Arkansas.

From celebrating the 10-year anniversary of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and an international Cyclocross competition to innovative technology such as drones and driverless cars revolutionizing supply chain, this type of success does not happen by chance. It’s happening because of the exceptional vision and collaborative spirit of leaders across the region. It’s the reason why Northwest Arkansas ranks among the best places to live in the country.

As we move into the next year, I want to thank you. Your dedication and support as members of the Northwest Arkansas Council continues to drive the region’s success. But there’s more work to do.

This year, the Northwest Arkansas Council is releasing a new regional strategy that will strengthen organizational efforts in key areas such as workforce housing, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, workforce development, talent attraction and retention, and diversity, equity and inclusion. These initiatives present a unique set of challenges, but success will drive future economic growth in the region.

Building on the enormous progress we have made, I look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the next five years. It is a great privilege to lead this remarkable organization, and I couldn’t be more grateful to the Northwest Arkansas Council team for its leadership and dedication.

Sincerely,



Marshall Saviers
PRESIDING CO-CHAIR
NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COUNCIL

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Rankings & Accolades

Year after year, Northwest Arkansas continues to be recognized by national publications as one of the most desirable places in the country to live, work and play.



Bentonville Most Underrated Travel Destinations

THE HUFFINGTON POST


LINKEDIN
#1
Cities for
Career Growth

#14
Country's Newest
Tech Hubs

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT 2022

#7
Best Places
to Live

#8
Cheapest Places
to Live

#18
Fastest-Growing
Places

#83
Best Places
to Retire

MILKEN
INSTITUTE

#8
Best-Performing
Large Cities

WALL STREET
JOURNAL

#3
Best Job Market for
Small Cities in the U.S.

HEARTLAND
FORWARD

#21
Most Dynamic Metros

CHICAGO
TRIBUNE

#9
Cities Where Your
Dollar Goes Furthest

VIRTUAL
CAPITALIST

#6
Fastest Growing
Cities in America

GOODHIRE

#7
Most Affordable Places
to Live and Work

FORGING OUR OWN TRAILS

SOUTHERN LIVING

Eureka Springs

#5
SOUTH'S BEST MOUNTAIN TOWNS

Bentonville

#10
SOUTH'S BEST CITIES ON THE RISE

Fayetteville

#17
SOUTH'S BEST COLLEGE TOWNS

MOUNTAIN BIKE ACTION MAGAZINE RANKS BENTONVILLE

#1

Best Places in North America to Ride Mountain Bikes

SIX NORTHWEST ARKANSAS CITIES
RANK AMONG PEOPLEFORBIKES'
BEST PLACES FOR BIKES

Bella Vista

Bentonville

Fayetteville

Rogers

Siloam Springs

Springdale

FORTUNE 500

#1

Walmart
(holding top spot for 10 years)

#81


Tyson

#311


(up 4 spots)

All three rank among Fortune's Most Admired Companies

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS AT AN INFLECTION POINT

A Strategy For Generating Growth, Attracting Talent And Preserving Quality Of Life



Northwest Arkansas has reached an inflection point, and the time to act is now. The region should continue to press forward with economic growth and talent attraction for the benefit of all its residents, but stakeholders and policymakers must act boldly to preserve its quality of life and affordable cost of living.

Over the past decade, Northwest Arkansas developed a successful growth model and economic development track record, which has skyrocketed the region into national rankings for job growth, population growth, talent attraction and quality of life. But the fruits of that success created new challenges as rapidly rising housing prices threaten to undermine the region’s affordable quality of life. Indicative of this, the region experienced the second largest year-over-year increase in its median home price between May 2021 and May 2022 – 28.8%, an increase of nearly \$75,000.

An intentional strategy is required to address these challenges while preserving and enhancing all the things residents love about Northwest Arkansas. The overarching goal of this strategy is to create an economic development future that is both vibrant and equitable, and that builds on the unique character and quality of life that has shaped the region’s economic development success. The strategy is designed to address the region’s deepening housing affordability challenge, prioritize investments in key economic development initiatives and infrastructure, and ensure that opportunity remains inclusive and equitable. It aims to bolster the region’s ongoing economic development initiatives; talent development, attraction, and retention strategies; and efforts to grow its innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem with these new challenges in mind.

This five-year strategy was prepared for the Northwest Arkansas Council by Richard Florida and the Creative Class Group based on quantitative and qualitative research, including a review of data on the region’s economic and demographic growth and the key opportunities and challenges, conversations among Council leadership, staff, members, key stakeholders and community focus groups.

READ FULL STRATEGY
HERE



The strategy outlined below is designed to address the challenges of the current inflection point, foster growth and ensure the region remains a vibrant and inclusive place where the ambitious can craft a fulfilling life.

GOAL #1

DEVELOP, ATTRACT AND RETAIN DIVERSE TALENT

- Launch a robust regional talent retention program
- Expand the region’s talent development system
- Better align education and career goals
- Focus on inclusiveness in talent initiatives

GOAL #2

BOLSTER THE REGION’S INNOVATION ECONOMY AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

- Build on university research and technology transfer initiatives
- Expand Startup Northwest Arkansas
- Focus on competitive industry clusters
- Leverage collaboration and partnerships with other regions
- Support inclusive strategies for small business and entrepreneurial ecosystems

GOAL #3

ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF GROWTH

- Make housing affordability a key economic development priority
- Expand transit options and prepare for the future of mobility
- Expand the region’s airport connectivity
- Expand and leverage regional health care investments
- Promote cooperation and coordination to increase recycling efforts

GOAL #4

MAINTAIN THE CHARACTER OF THE REGION AND ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE

- Support arts, music and culture as economic development priorities
- Promote the region’s brand and image
- Advance policy and civic engagement in support of the region’s economic development priorities

GOAL #5

EXPAND THE WORK OF THE NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COUNCIL

- Expand the Council’s convening capacity
- Expand the network of regional stakeholders

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Workforce Housing



Duke McLarty was hired as the center’s first executive director after a nationwide search.

ABOUT DUKE MCLARTY

Duke McLarty joined as executive director of the workforce housing center in December 2021 after serving as the director of government affairs and community relations for AIR Communities, a real estate investment trust focused on the ownership and management of apartment communities in the U.S. In his role at AIR, Duke developed and implemented legislative and government affairs and community engagement strategies for one of the country’s largest owners and operators of apartments in 17 states and more than 40 cities.

Prior to joining AIR Communities in 2018, Duke worked in several roles within the Federal Housing Administration of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, focusing on large-scale urban renewal development and multifamily development.

WORKFORCE HOUSING CENTER

The workforce housing center launched in 2021 to address housing affordability in Northwest Arkansas.

Over the past decade, Northwest Arkansas’ unprecedented growth has pushed homeownership out of reach for many of the community’s essential workers. Because the pace of home construction has not kept up with population growth, home prices and rent have increased exponentially.

Teachers, firefighters, health care workers, manufacturing workers and other residents face increasing obstacles in finding housing at affordable rates. These barriers often prevent people from living in and contributing to the richness of the communities where they work.

Any savings on housing costs by choosing to live outside city centers can be offset by higher transportation costs and increased commute time, making it difficult for people to become engaged in their communities.

The goal of the center is to strengthen the bonds in communities by creating well-designed housing options and mixed-income neighborhoods for the region’s workers and their families. The center will promote housing development in proximity to employment centers, lifestyle amenities and essential services.

After months of community outreach and collaboration, the center released a strategic plan in spring 2022 encompassing two broad focus areas:

- 💡 EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY
- 🏠 RESOURCE DEPLOYMENT

EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

1. **Regional Housing Leadership.** Leading and coordinating communication and policy efforts.
2. **Local Housing Policy.** Advocating for model housing policies that remove barriers and incentivize development.
3. **Capacity Development.** Education and outreach to increase developer engagement.

RESOURCE DEPLOYMENT

The center will explore how a housing fund can be used as a complementary financial tool for developers. Through land acquisition and stewardship, the center could accept land donations in targeted areas and broker partnerships among donors and public and private entities to develop or preserve housing.

As long as Northwest Arkansas remains one of the best places to live and work in the nation, its population will continue to grow. We must continue to prepare for smart, coordinated, planned and strategic growth to ensure everyone has an opportunity to thrive.





Workforce Development

The Northwest Arkansas Council makes big investments in the local workforce with education and training opportunities.

As more and more companies invest and expand in Northwest Arkansas, it's becoming increasingly difficult for companies to recruit the workers they need. To keep up with the growth, it is imperative to increase the supply of appropriately skilled labor.

The Council collaborates with parents, educators, businesses, community leaders and state officials to develop new programs, facilities and partnerships that will help people acquire the skills needed to fill open and future positions.

APPRENTICESHIPS

An apprenticeship is an employer-driven model that combines on-the-job learning with related classroom instruction to increase an apprentice's skill level and wages.

Since the program's inception, nearly 2,000 have participated in apprenticeships across 30 organizations in Northwest Arkansas, from careers in skilled trades to information technology (IT) fields.

The Northwest Arkansas Council partnered with the Arkansas Center for Data Sciences to train more tech talent through an IT apprenticeship program. Over the past two years, local employers hired over 150 IT apprentices. These employers range from startups to large corporations, including Walmart, J.B. Hunt, Arvest Bank and B-Unlimited.



UPSKILL NWA

Upskill NWA launched in 2021 with support from Excellerate Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation to provide individuals with tuition and wraparound services to earn degrees and professional credentials for high-demand jobs in health care. The program provides tuition funding, childcare and transportation to help workers transition from low-paying jobs into high-demand, higher-paying careers. More than 100 individuals enrolled in the first semester of the program.

CAREER EDUCATION

The Northwest Arkansas Council works with local school districts to provide opportunities for students to develop skills to evaluate potential career paths.

A recent program in partnership with local school districts, the Arkansas Office of Skills Development and secondary career centers offers K-12 students free training opportunities in certified nursing assistant, construction, NCCER/ OSHA and manufacturing.

Northwest Arkansas school districts are scaling up offerings for the 2022-2023 school year through curriculum in aviation, computer science, construction technologies, culinary arts/ hospitality, industrial maintenance technology, medical professions/ EMT, robotics and unmanned aerial systems.

What's ahead?

CAREER AND TRAINING AWARENESS

The Council will scale up communications efforts to expand awareness to connect job-seekers with career opportunities and training and development. The CareersNWA website will relaunch this summer to enhance user experience and provide more resources for students, job-seekers, educators and employers.

CAREER-FOCUSED EVENTS

Build My Future NWA Construction and Industry Showcase
Nearly 900 students from every school district in Northwest Arkansas attended the inaugural Build My Future NWA in April 2022. The event provided hands-on engagement and learning with employers offering careers in construction and skilled trades.

Employer partners included: Crossland Construction, Flintco Construction, Kinco Construction, Multi-Craft Contractors, Nabholz Construction and the Northwest Arkansas Home Builders Association

Talent Attraction

Life Works Here is a regional branding strategy and awareness campaign designed to better tell the story of Northwest Arkansas. Top companies are competing for talent across the country, and those workers are looking not only for a good job, but also for a greater quality of life. The campaign highlights the region's incredible career opportunities and lifestyle amenities to attract creatives, STEM and tech professionals.

LIFE WORKS HERE

War Eagle
40 American Towns You Haven't Heard of but Should Visit

TOWN & COUNTRY



INCENTIVE

The first phase of the campaign was an incentive program offering \$10,000 (in cash or Bitcoin) and a bike for remote workers to move to Northwest Arkansas. The effort was designed to attract STEAM talent to the region and build up a talent pipeline for the future. More than 66,000 people applied for the 100 available slots. The incentive created incredible media buzz with over 500 online, TV and print stories in outlets such as ABC Nightline, Bloomberg, Forbes, Fox Business, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and USA Today.

The New York Times

Want to Move to Our Town?
Here's \$10,000 and a Free Bike.

With offers of cash, housing and a budding talent pool, smaller cities and states hope to get in on the ground floor of a new era for remote workers.



66,000+ APPLICATIONS



100 RECIPIENTS



89 FAMILY MEMBERS IN TOW

MEET AN NWA STARTER



JENNIFER HILL BOOKER
OWNER/EXECUTIVE CHEF, YOUR RESIDENT GOURMET, LLC
Relocated from Lilburn, Georgia



Opening Bauhaus Biergarten restaurant in Downtown Springdale

Chef Booker learned her culinary techniques at Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Paris, France, graduating at the top of her class. She is a James Beard Impact Fellow, has written multiple books and regularly makes appearances on national TV.



KIM BRYDEN
CEO, CUREATE
Relocated from Washington, D.C.



Startup founder and food supply chain innovator.

Since relocating, Kim's startup, Cureate, has partnered with FORGE, the oldest revolving community loan fund in Arkansas, and graduated 18 women-owned and minority-owned local food and beverage businesses through her program.



KRISTIN MANN
INDEPENDENT FILM PRODUCER
Relocated from Austin, Texas



Putting Bentonville on the Big Screen

Since relocating, Kristin has recruited her parents and sibling to the area. But that is the tip of the iceberg, Variety recently announced her next film - a rom-com she's producing that will be filmed in Bentonville and star both Meg Ryan and David Duchovny.



NORTHWEST ARKANSAS TALENT NETWORK

The Northwest Arkansas Talent Network connects people interested in relocating to the area to featured job openings and recruiters and companies seeking to fill roles. The network allows its more than 500 members to access featured jobs from more than 80 local companies. More talent is being added daily, and the Council hopes to expand the number of companies involved.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

A national advertising campaign launched in 2021 in select cities across the United States, including Atlanta, Austin, Dallas, Denver, Minneapolis and Seattle. The campaign consists of TV spots, billboards, display and digital advertising. The campaign is raising awareness of Northwest Arkansas as one of the top places to live and work in the United States. National media outlets have published hundreds of stories about the region’s effort to attract workers.

The Washington Post

Move here, get paid: Small communities use incentives to beckon workers

WSJ | VIDEO

Remote Workers Wanted: Small Cities Offer Cash to Those Who Relocate

The changing dynamics of labor in the pandemic era

USA TODAY

Move here, get paid: Small towns offer up to \$20K just to get you to live there, work remotely

CNBC

Arkansas is offering remote tech workers \$10,000 in bitcoin to move there



nwa Arts & Culture



In its first three years, Creative Arkansas Community Hub and Exchange (CACHE) mobilized the Northwest Arkansas arts community by standing up more than 40 initiatives and hosting hundreds of events. In addition, CACHE granted nearly \$3 million to over 400 local artists and organizations with support from 20 local and national funders.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Creative Exchange Fund

214 By CACHE, a new hub in Springdale, launched the Creative Exchange Fund, a programming initiative designed to activate 214 as a community-led destination. Over 50 creatives were hired to produce, curate, perform, rehearse and bring life and creative vitality to the 214 campus.

Northwest Arkansas Municipal Arts Alliance

The Northwest Arkansas Municipal Arts Alliance (MAA) is an initiative that convenes municipal leaders to shape a coordinated policy agenda. In May 2022, CACHE convened the cities of Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers, Springdale and Siloam Springs for a kick-off session that will host a year of learning around music ecosystems, public-private partnerships and creative community development.

Year of Learning & Outreach

In 2022, CACHE announced the Year of Learning & Outreach (YOLO) with Art of Fundraising week, a series of workshops tailored to small to mid-sized arts and culture nonprofits with little to no fundraising staff. Over 150 representatives attended the series. CACHE continues to provide YOLO opportunities, including two artists in conversation sessions, and will hold a communications-focused week of learning in July 2022.

Groundwaves (AR)

Now in its second season, 214 by CACHE is hosting Groundwaves (AR), a hip hop open mic and mentorship series led by West Coast rapper Murs. CACHE also helped Tulsa launch an Oklahoma series, which has seen collaboration and exchange among artists from Arkansas and Tulsa.

CACHE Studios

CACHE Studios, the creative hub in Bentonville, hosted events across multiple disciplines including dance, music and family-friendly theatre to foster a strong neighborhood identity and vibe around creativity, play, spontaneity and community. Phase 2 of the building is currently in development and will focus around areas of research and development for the dance and local artist community.



ARTS AND CULTURE IN NWA

FORMAT

The inaugural FORMAT (For Music + Art + Technology) festival will be held at the Sugar Creek Air Strip in Bentonville in September 2022. This multidisciplinary experience will feature over 80 live music acts with two dozen visual, performance and institutional artists from around the world. The festival aims to encourage discovery, spark curiosity and build community. FORMAT is presented in partnership with OZ, Crystal Bridges and the Momentary.

Interform

Springdale-based nonprofit Interform received a \$2.2 million grant from the Walton Family Foundation to help make Northwest Arkansas a hub for apparel production and design. Interform offers free apprenticeships in apparel production, professional development in areas such as modeling and marketing and a four-month paid residency program for designers. Northwest Arkansas Fashion Week merged with Arkansas Arts and Fashion Forum in 2021 to form Interform. Interform hosted NWA Fashion Week in 2022 featuring designers from its residency program.

10-Year Anniversary of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art opened its doors on Nov. 11, 2011. For over a decade, Crystal Bridges has offered a place to enjoy a unique blend of art, nature and architecture on 120 acres of beautiful Ozark forest. In 10 years, it's welcomed 5.6 million visitors and over 4 million have enjoyed the beauty of the trails around the museum.

This summer, Crystal Bridges opened *We the People: The Radical Notion of Democracy*, placing a rare, original print of the U.S. Constitution (one of 11 copies) in conversation with works of art that provide diverse perspectives on the nation's founding principles.

Alice Walton recently transitioned her board chair leadership role to Olivia Walton, who will lead the museum into its next decade, including its upcoming expansion. More than 100,000 square feet will be added and allow the museum to showcase its growing collection and welcome more visitors to experience the power of art in an inclusive environment.

CULINARY NEWS

Two chefs and one restaurant from Northwest Arkansas were semifinalists in the James Beard Foundation's 2022 Restaurant and Chef Awards:

- Rafael Rios | Best Chef, South
- Matthew McClure | Best Chef, South
- The Preacher's Son | Outstanding Hospitality

Southern Living named Fayetteville's Little Bread Company No. 17 in the South's Best Bakeries.

Natural State Beer Company won gold at the 2021 Great American Beer Festival.

Ozark Beer Company ranks No. 24 among the Top 30 Breweries in the Southwest by RAVE.

Onyx Coffee Lab's co-owner Andrea Allen won second place in the 2021 World Barista Championship. Erika Liftee, also of Onyx, represented the U.S. in the World Brewer's Cup competition, earning third place.

Fayetteville's Vault among America's Best Bourbon Bars in the South by the Bourbon Review.

Walton Arts Center and Walmart AMP

Walton Arts Center and the Walmart AMP returned to full performances in the 2021-22 season. The Walmart AMP hosted 27 performances including sold-out performances by Phish, Avett Brothers, Alanis Morissette, Pitbull, Machine Gun Kelly, Thomas Rhett and Jonas Brothers. During the 2022-23 season, 42 tours and artists have included the Walmart AMP as a stop on their route, including Jimmy Buffett, Backstreet Boys, Tim McGraw and Halsey. More than 18,000 saw Hamilton during its sold-out, two-week run at the Walton Arts Center. WAC presented a total 70 productions during the 2021-22 season, held the only U.S. performances of A Chorus Line, and hosted Artosphere: Arkansas' Arts+Nature Festival with the Artosphere Festival Orchestra.

In 2022, Walton Arts Center celebrates 30 years of bringing world-class performing arts to Northwest Arkansas. It announced its most awarded Procter & Gamble Broadway season to date. The six shows have a combined 26 Tonys including two Best Musical winners (*Moulin Rouge! The Musical* and *Hadestown*) and one Best Revival of a Musical winner (*Chicago*).



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Health Care

The Northwest Arkansas Council's Health Care Transformation Division is committed to building Northwest Arkansas into a premier health care destination through increased access to care, more availability of high-level specialty care and integrating wellness of mind and body as an integral component of health care. Members of the division include Arkansas Children's Northwest, Cleveland Clinic, Community Clinic, Mercy, Northwest Health, University of Arkansas, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Northwest, Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks, Washington Regional Medical Center and Whole Health Institute.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Build Back Better Regional Challenge

A proposal led by UAMS is in the running to receive about \$50 million in federal funding for a health care workforce and technology initiative in Northwest Arkansas. The effort is among 60 finalists from around the nation announced in December 2021 by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Each finalist receives about \$500,000 in federal grant money as part of the first phase of a \$1 billion competition known as the Build Back Better Regional Challenge. The regional effort in partnership with the Northwest Arkansas Council's Health Care Transformation Division will focus on health sector jobs creation and e-health technology advancement.

Our Healthy Alliance

Our Healthy Alliance is a combined effort of local community groups, Benton County, the Northwest Arkansas Council and UAMS to reduce health disparities and improve health literacy in the region. Through community outreach, media engagement and a public awareness campaign, Our Healthy Alliance seeks to unlock a lasting mutual respect between Northwest Arkansas leaders and community members they serve. A new online hub is being developed in English, Marshallese and Spanish.

COVID-19

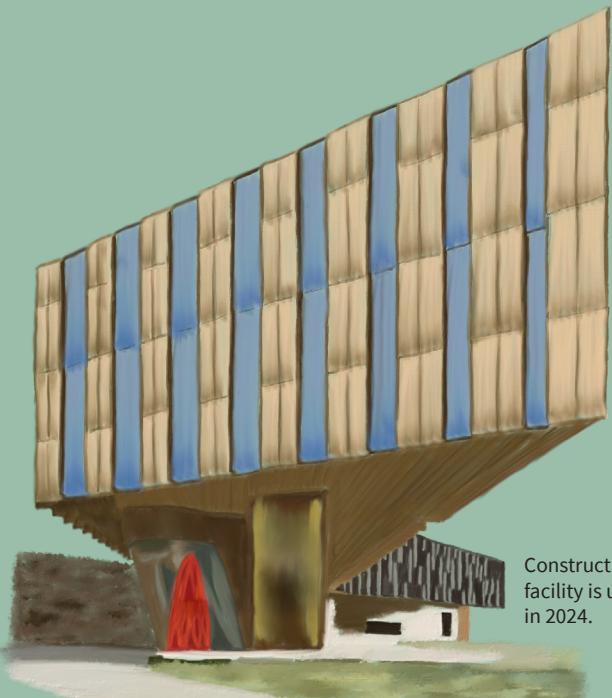
While COVID-19 is no longer the division's primary focus, the virus continues to impact the region. Since vaccines became available in early 2021, the Northwest Arkansas Council held hundreds of vaccination events across the region, giving nearly 70,000 doses in partnership with dozens of community organizations and volunteers. The "Safe and Strong" multimedia campaign concluded in April 2022 after two years of public service messaging. The Council will provide ad hoc support and host vaccine clinics throughout Northwest Arkansas as long as there is demand.

Washington Regional/Cleveland Clinic Partnership

In April 2022, the Alice L. Walton Foundation and Washington Regional Medical System announced a regional health system to improve health outcomes across Northwest Arkansas and beyond. The announcement follows the news of a joint initiative through the Alice L. Walton Foundation and Cleveland Clinic to identify ways to provide access to Cleveland Clinic's renowned specialty care services in Northwest Arkansas. The initiative was formed after a study highlighted that area residents frequently leave the region in order to receive specialty care. Through these two initiatives, the Alice L. Walton Foundation and Washington Regional Medical System intend to work with Cleveland Clinic to support the growth of health care services in the region.

The Alice L. Walton School of Medicine announced the next steps in its development, including a new name reflecting its founder's commitment and plans for a state-of-the-art medical education facility to be built in Bentonville. Founded in 2021, the School of Medicine will offer a four-year, medical degree-granting program that integrates conventional medicine with holistic principles and self-care practices. Taught by leading medical practitioners and scientific minds, the first-of-its-kind medical school will help students rise to the health challenges of the 21st century with a focus on mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health and will include an attached clinic for clinical training in these concepts. The School of Medicine seeks to be a national medical school with the goal of welcoming its inaugural class in 2025.

ALICE L. WALTON SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



What's ahead?

- Ongoing partnerships with Whole Health Institute and Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield will map out value-based care in Northwest Arkansas.
- A mental health working group with health care providers, law enforcement and first responders will create an inventory of local providers and help to identify how to close the gap on needs and supply of mental health services.
- A mass casualty incident command center will allow first responders and providers to create dedicated touch points to relay real-time communications with the division to help direct supplies and people where they may best serve in a time of crisis.
- A community paramedicine working group is exploring the possibility of providing at-home health care services to reduce ER admissions, help decrease the 30-day hospital readmission post-discharge rate and to offer mental health assessments.
- Washington Regional and UAMS Northwest are executing a plan to establish up to 92 graduate medical education positions by 2030.

Construction of the Whole Health Institute facility is underway with the goal of opening in 2024.



Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classifies the University of Arkansas among fewer than **4%** of colleges and universities in America that have the highest level of research activity.

U.S. News & World report ranks the University of Arkansas among its top American public research universities.

The University of Arkansas Sam M. Walton College of Business undergraduate supply chain management program was ranked **#1** in North America by Gartner.

U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT

Arkansas' top three public high schools are in Northwest Arkansas:

- #1** HAAS HALL ACADEMY
- #2** FOUNDERS CLASSICAL ACADEMY
- #3** BENTONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL
- #5** ROGERS NEW TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL
- #7** FAYETTEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL
- #8** BENTONVILLE WEST HIGH SCHOOL

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

Institute for Integrative & Innovative Research

In April 2022, the University of Arkansas celebrated the groundbreaking of the Institute for Integrative & Innovative Research (I³R). Thanks to a \$194.7 million grant from the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation, I³R will advance research and economic development throughout the region. The institute will establish partnerships with the private sector to encourage collaboration and innovation in the local business and startup community. With an anticipated completion date in June 2024, the building is set to become a model for public research and partnerships for economic development.

Market Center of the Ozarks

A new food hub will offer resources to farmers, food entrepreneurs and Northwest Arkansas residents. The hub, named Market Center of the Ozarks, will be a 45,000-square-foot facility in downtown Springdale that provides crop aggregation capabilities, commercial kitchens and community spaces for learning. The Walton Family Foundation supports the development of the facility as part of Northwest Arkansas Food Systems, an initiative focused on improving access to local food.

AcreTrader

In March 2022, AcreTrader announced that it has expanded its \$40 million Series B funding to over \$60 million following an investment from venture capital firm Drive Capital. The funding round follows AcreTrader's oversubscribed Series B round announced earlier this year to fund the company's continued growth. AcreTrader plans to use the capital raised to finalize a land mapping and analytics platform that provides farmers, landowners and investors with insights and information on the value of land. The funding also enables the company to continue to scale its diverse team of top-tier talent.

University of Arkansas Windgate Art and Design District

The University of Arkansas will expand its Windgate Art and Design District to create more community space and bring together art, design and education in Northwest Arkansas. A \$30 million partial challenge grant from the Windgate Foundation builds on a previous \$40 million gift to create the district in 2017, which also established the site for the Windgate Studio and Design Center facility. The center will open to the public in fall 2022.

nwa Entrepreneurship

Northwest Arkansas supports one of the nation's fastest-growing economies, anchored by three Fortune 500 companies, hundreds of corporate subsidiary offices, the University of Arkansas and a burgeoning startup and innovation ecosystem.

Over the past several years, Arkansas leaders made significant investments to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship in the region, including:

- New technology-focused workforce development programs.
- Establishing the Institute for Integrative and Innovative Research (I³R) at the University of Arkansas to help take research from the lab to the marketplace.
- Attracting entrepreneurs to relocate to the region through incentive programs.
- Developing training programs for angel investors to support local startups.
- Establishing accelerator programs to offer entrepreneurs mentorship, funding and access to clients.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

412 Angels

412 Angels is an angel investing program to educate new investors and support early-stage startups in the corridor connecting Tulsa and Northwest Arkansas. Tulsa-based Atento Capital will partner with the Northwest Arkansas Council, the George Kaiser Family Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation with the goal of increasing the number of angel investors contributing to the success and growth of startups in the region. The launch of 412 Angels marks another significant step in the momentum of Tulsa and Northwest Arkansas' collective quest to build one of the most competitive tech economies in the country with strengths in e-commerce, supply chain, energy tech and transportation.

Plug and Play

Plug and Play announced a \$25.5 million venture capital fund to support startups in the supply chain industry. The fund will support the local startup community and bring global leaders from the supply chain venture capital ecosystem to Northwest Arkansas. The investment focus will include warehouse automation, e-commerce logistics, last-mile delivery, sustainability in the supply chain, blockchain for supply chain, computer vision, artificial intelligence and manufacturing technology. Plug and Play is supported locally by ArcBest, Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Crowley, Georgia-Pacific, J.B. Hunt, Northwest Arkansas Council, Tyson Foods, Walmart and the Walton Family Foundation.

Heartland Forward and Builders + Backers Idea Accelerator

Heartland Forward and Builders + Backers announced an idea accelerator to help Northwest Arkansas entrepreneurs get their ideas off the sidelines and into action. A cohort of 10 Northwest Arkansas entrepreneurs will be selected to receive \$5,000 grants and participate in the accelerator to help spur economic development. It's part of an effort announced in 2021 to work with 1,000 entrepreneurs across the U.S.



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Over the past several years, the Northwest Arkansas community has advanced efforts to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive region. The Northwest Arkansas Council's EngageNWA serves as a connector for leaders in business, government and the community on matters that help create a more inclusive region. EngageNWA was founded on the principle that diverse communities perform better economically, and in the increasingly global economy, regions that embrace these challenges will thrive. Engaging this diversity – across all levels, sectors and communities – is how the region secures its place as one of the nation's best places to live and work.

Champions for DEI include the region's leading businesses, nonprofits, foundations and institutions of higher education.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



Northwest Arkansas Leadership Pledge

More than 229 organizations signed the Leadership Pledge launched in the summer of 2020 to address systemic racism and promote a more equitable and inclusive Northwest Arkansas.

DiversityNWA

The Council refreshed the Northwest Arkansas Diversity Resource Guide adding over 155 new listings of diverse-owned and led businesses and organizations across six cities in the region. Learn more at diversitynwa.com

Looking Ahead

Based on a comprehensive internal assessment conducted over the past year, efforts are underway to develop a strategic plan to incorporate DEI into all aspects of the Council's work.

AWARDS AND HONORS

The Northwest Arkansas Council is honored to have received two important awards over the last year:

- 2021 - LatinXNA Community Trailblazer Award presented by SERVE2PERFORM
- 2022 - Showing Up for Racial Justice Award presented by Black Action Collective

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

TRUE Northwest Arkansas

The Walmart Foundation and Walton Family Foundation are supporting efforts to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive region. Grants to the University of Arkansas Foundation will allow the IDEALS Institute to provide 100 nonprofits with professional development, technical assistance and relationship-building opportunities. IDEALS will implement these efforts as the lead of TRUE Northwest Arkansas, a community-based initiative launched in 2018 to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in Benton and Washington counties.

LGBTQ+ Advancement Fund

Arkansas Community Foundation awarded 21 grants from the Arkansas LGBTQ+ Advancement Fund to support organizations with programs, activities or projects that directly support LGBTQ+ Arkansans. The fund is made possible through philanthropic support from the Alice L. Walton Foundation, Olivia and Tom Walton through the Walton Family Foundation and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Grants from the fund support organizations working to improve the quality of life for LGBTQ+ Arkansans by providing legal, health, education, advocacy or other high-demand services/programs.





Infrastructure & Policy

The Northwest Arkansas Council collaborates with regional partners to advance infrastructure priorities and support economic competitiveness, development and population growth in the region. Key priorities include air travel, highways, public safety, public transportation and mobility options, recycling and waste disposal, and water quality.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Bella Vista Bypass

After working with the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission to help secure a \$25 million federal grant, the Bella Vista Bypass in Missouri and Arkansas was completed and the new section of interstate highway opened in October 2021.

Infrastructure Work Group

The Council re-established its infrastructure work group in early 2022 to help local governments and businesses tap into federal money available as a result of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The group is coordinating with federal grant requests to support projects across Benton and Washington counties. The work group conducted a survey to learn more about residents’ infrastructure priorities. Thousands of Northwest Arkansas residents who responded to the survey gave their highest priority to protecting the quality of the region’s lakes and streams. The more than 4,000 respondents also gave importance to building more highways and increasing the region’s recycling while reducing waste.

Northwest Arkansas Public Safety Consortium

The Northwest Arkansas Council established a public safety consortium in 2021 convening county and city leaders who work in law enforcement, fire protection and emergency management to discuss issues impacting multiple agencies and across community boundaries.



ARKANSAS STAKES CLAIM TO BE GLOBAL LEADER IN NEXT GENERATION TRANSPORTATION BY 2030

Arkansas officials, business leaders and entrepreneurs made a bold claim to be a global leader in next-generation transportation, including flying cars, driverless vehicles and drones. This claim follows Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson’s announcement to create the Arkansas Council on Future Mobility, an advisory board committed to attracting businesses, startups, innovators and creators. In June 2022, more than 250 global technology and mobility executives gathered in Bentonville at the UP.Summit. The focus of the summit was the future of transportation using technology advances with a focus on cleaner, faster, and lower-cost mobility options over ground, sea, air and in space.



Drones

Walmart took to the skies when the retailer announced it would operationalize drone delivery in four stores in Northwest Arkansas in collaboration with Zipline and DroneUp. The retailer has successfully completed hundreds of drone deliveries to select customers in Northwest Arkansas and plans to expand operations in the future.



Driverless Vehicles

Walmart and autonomous vehicle company, Gatik, pioneered the use of autonomous refrigerated box trucks in retail operations. Together, the companies have driven more than 200,000 autonomous miles in the state and achieved a worldwide first last year when they removed the safety operator from the driver’s seat.



Electric Vehicles

Electric vehicle technology company Canoo announced it has selected Arkansas as the location for its headquarters, R&D center and production facility. Canoo will be manufacturing small package delivery vehicles and is expecting to bring over 500 jobs to Benton and Washington counties.



What’s Ahead?

The Northwest Arkansas Council is leading an effort called Drive Electric NWA, an upcoming event focused on highlighting electric cars, trucks and bicycles.



NWA Recycles is a joint effort by the Northwest Arkansas Council and the Benton County and Boston Mountain solid waste districts to better coordinate and improve recycling services.

The initiative was started in 2021 with support from Walmart to foster a circular NWA economy – one that reuses more materials and products instead of sending them down a straight line from sale to landfill. A circular economy can sustain new jobs, save limited landfill space, conserve natural resources and bring other benefits.

NWARecycles.org launched as an online hub for information about curbside recycling, drop-off centers and other aspects of recycling across more than two dozen cities in Benton, Washington and Madison counties. The website includes reports on local recycling systems, information on why recycling is worthwhile and a blog with the latest local recycling news and events.



RECYCLING INSPIRATION

The Northwest Arkansas Council organized and led a group of 14 regional leaders to the Twin Cities region of Minnesota to observe and learn from that area's impressive recycling operations. The group visited materials recovery facilities, which process various recyclables, as well as a tribal composting operation, a mattress recycling nonprofit and learned about the excellent recycling that occurs at the University of Minnesota.



FIRST ANNUAL REGIONAL RECYCLING REPORT

NWA Recycles released its first region-wide recycling report in May 2022, covering collections by more than a dozen of the biggest public and nonprofit recycling programs around Northwest Arkansas. The region tallied more than 41,000 tons of cardboard, glass, bottles and cans, electronics and other items collected for recycling in 2021.

This data will help set future community recycling goals and help manufacturers that would use these materials know whether they'd have access to enough volume to use the materials produced in the region, and they'll know where to get it.

This report, which will be produced annually, and the process of collecting the data for it revealed ways to improve future reports, such as pushing communities to collect more detailed information about individual materials and contamination rates.



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CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

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Photography for this report was provided by Heartland Forward, Interform, Plug and Play Tech Center, Walton Arts Center and Walton Family Foundation.

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UCI CYCLOCROSS

More than 14,000 people from across the globe descended on Fayetteville in January 2022 for the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) Cyclocross World Championships. This was the first time this event has been held on U.S. soil since 2013. The organization will return in October for its World Cup event at Centennial Park.

University of Arkansas athletes were at the top of their game this past year. In Coach Pittman’s second season on The Hill, the Hogs beat Penn State to win the Outback Bowl and finish the season 9-4. The bowl victory was the first for the program since 2016 and first-ever bowl win over a team from the Big 10 in program history. Arkansas finished the season ranked for the first time in a decade.

Led by head coach Eric Musselman, the Razorback men’s basketball team closed its regular season with 13 wins, earned a No. 4 seed for the NCAA Tournament and then won three games in March Madness – including an upset of top-seeded Gonzaga in the Sweet 16. After an exciting run through the NCAA Tournament, Arkansas’ time in the Big Dance came to an end with a 78-69 loss to No. 2 seeded Duke in the Elite 8.

Omahogs! For the 11th time in school history, the Razorbacks men’s baseball team made an appearance at the College World Series in Omaha.

The Arkansas women’s track and field program earned the Terry Crawford Women’s Division I Program of the Year award in 2022 based on team results during the NCAA cross country, indoor and outdoor track and field championships.



HEARTLAND SUMMIT

After a four-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Heartland Summit reconvened in 2022. More than 350 decision-makers and influencers assembled in Bentonville to discuss strategies to grow local and regional economies in the heartland. The summit featured numerous panel discussions and breakout sessions on topics such as education, energy, health care, transportation and the adventure economy. The summit is the flagship event of Bentonville-based “think and do tank” Heartland Forward.



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Report design & illustrations by Amy Kelley Bell. Photography by Dan Holtmeyer.