Fort Belknap Indian Community

2026-2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

2026-2030 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

REVISED OCTOBER 2025

FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY | 656 Agency Main Street Fort Belknap, Montana 59526

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update

Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC), Montana, Planning Department has completed the 2026-2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is a 5-year strategy-driven plan for regional development. It is the result of our regionally owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resilient in our reservation region.

Our strategic goals are:

- Healthy Community & Improved Quality of Life
- Economic Development on the Reservation, Education, Training & Capacity Building for Economic Development and Explore International Exchanges
- Improve Tribal Operations, Planning & Fiscal Management

Please review the CEDS document at the FBIC's official website ftbelknap.org under the Forms/Documents tab, at PLANNING section, to view and/or download the FBIC 2026-2030 CEDS Updated 11-20-2025 pdf document. Send all comments to Dawn BearCub at dbearcub@ftbelknap.org. The 30-day public comment period will be open until November 20, 2025. Once all comments are received, the document will be finalized by FBIC Tribal Council and submitted to the Economic Development Administration (EDA). We thank you in advance for your comments.

I. Introduction

Fort Belknap History

The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, located in north central Montana, is the homeland of the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre people. Established in 1888, the reservation is what remains of the vast ancestral territory of the Blackfeet and Assiniboine Nations. The Gros Ventre, as members of the Blackfeet confederacy, and the Assiniboine Nation signed the Fort Laramie treaties of 1851 and 1855 with the United States Government establishing their respective territories within the continental United States. The Fort Belknap Reservation is part of what remains of these two nations ancestral territory that included all of central and eastern Montana and portions of western North Dakota.

As part of the treaties and agreement between the U.S. Government and Indian tribes, the concepts of dependency-to-self-determination and tribal sovereignty have been a long-standing tradition. Today, the two tribes are united as one Fort Belknap Indian Community Tribal government. Together, the tribes have formed and maintained a community that has deep respect for its land, it's culture, and its heritage.[1]

Assiniboine History

The Assiniboine are people of the northern Great Plains of North America who call themselves Nakoda or Nakota. To the Chippewa, they are known as AS'see'nee pai-tue (those who cook with stones). In Canada they are called the Stoney, while in the United States they are known as the Assiniboine. Through years of separation, differences in dialect and custom have developed between the two branches. But they still remember their common origins, and consider themselves a single people.

Origins, location, and language. Pierre Jean Desmet, a French Jesuit missionary of the early 19th centuries stated that the Assiniboine were once members of the Yanktonai band of Dakota (Sioux). The oral tradition of the Assiniboine, however, refutes that claim. According to oral history in all Assiniboine tribal bands, their origins are Algoquain. Scholars of Assiniboine descent have been involved in research in the area since the mid-1970's.

Tribal oral history states that the Assiniboine originated in the Lake of the Woods and the Lake Winnipeg area of Canada, and became allied with the Cree. IN 1744, a division was noted, and "the people" divided again. Some bands moved west into the valleys of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Rivers in Canada, while others moved south into the Missouri Valley. The bands inhabited an area from the White Earth, Minnesota, region west to the Sweet Grass Hills of Montana. They also lived and roamed north of the U.S.-Canadian border to a line running east and west from Hudson Bay to the Rocky Mountains.

Thirty-three bands of Assiniboine have been identified. According to Edwin T. Denig, the Assiniboine returned to the Missouri region between 1800 and 1837, numbering about 1,200.

The Assiniboine language is a dialect of Dakota, a subdivision of the Siouian family. In many respects, it could be considered a simple language. A mini-analysis was conducted by Ken Ryan,

[1] https://ftbelknap.org/history

an Assiniboine from the Fort Peck Reservation, utilizing the International Phonetic Alphabet. he developed a phonetic Assiniboine alphabet, and found that there are 26 phonemes, 20 consonants, and 6 vowels in the language.

The Assiniboine were typically large game hunters, dependent on the buffalo for a considerable part of their diet. They used buffalo hides for clothing and receptacles, and lived in hide tipis. By about 1750 the Assiniboine hunting grounds embraces all the Canadian prairies. Both the Canadian and U.S. branches occasionally slaughtered entire herds by driving them into compounds. The meat was roasted on spits, or boiled in hide bags by means of hot stones. The Assiniboine also made pemmican, which they traded or ate themselves. The dog was the only aboriginal domestic animal, and was generally used to carry packs and pull travois, although the pups were sometimes eaten for religious purposes.

Most Assiniboine attached great importance to visions, and these took precedence in religious life. The elements of ceremonies and rites were performed individually or in groups. They included offerings, prayers, and the solemn unfolding of a pack containing sacred objects, and the singing of sacred songs. Tremendous importance was attached to the songs, which were repeated according to their mystic number. The Assiniboine considered sweating necessary purification before participation in any major ceremony. Their favorite incense for major ceremonies was made from sweet grass. Tobacco was, as a rule, reserved for ceremonies and other solemn occasions. The pipes were handed and passed according to definite tribal traditions.

The Assiniboine believed in great power- The Creator. They lived their religion every day. Therefore, they made sacrifices, fasts, and prayers to this unknown power, which they knew form actual phenomena had existence. mythological stories were told mainly for amusement. Most of them, however, contained a moral or ambiguous meaning and were interesting and imaginative.[2]

Gros Ventre History

The Gros Ventre Tribe of Montana is a tribe of the Northern Plains Indigenous group, located in North central Montana. They live on the Fort Belknap Reservation, which is shared with the Assiniboine tribe. The Gros Ventre live primarily in the south end of the reservation, near the Little Rocky Mountains.

The Gros Ventre, as far as anyone can tell, were once closely affiliated with the Algonquin speaking Arapaho and Cheyenne. It is said that all three tribes together were among the last to migrate into Montana. After they migrated to Montana, the Arapaho moved southwards to the Wyoming and Colorado area. The Cheyenne who migrated with the Gros Ventre and Arapaho also migrated on. Some went to the Oklahoma area, and some stayed in the Tongue River valley. Each tribe was separate by the time of the signing of the Treaty of Fort Laramie.

The earliest known contact of Gros Ventres with whites was around 1754. This contact placed them between the north and south forks of the Saskatchewan River. Exposure to small pox

[2] Source *The Encyclopedia of the American Indians, Volume 1, 1975

reduced their numbers during this time. Around 1793, in response to attacks by well-armed Cree and Assiniboine, Gros Ventres burned two Hudson Bay Company trading posts. These trading posts were providing guns to the Cree and Assiniboine tribes in what is now present day Canada. In 1826, the Gros Ventre made contact with the German explorer and naturalist, Prince Maximilian. Along with the naturalist painter, Karl Bodmer, they painted portraits and recorded their meeting with the Gros Ventre, near the Missouri River in Montana.

The Gros Ventre, after their migratory break from the Arapaho, were next closely associated with the Blackfeet. It is from this point that most of what is known about the Gros Ventre is found. After joining up with the Blackfeet, the Gros Ventre roamed north central Montana and southern Canada.

In 1855, Isaac Stevens, Governor of the Washington Territory, concluded a treaty[3] to provide peace between the United States and the Blackfeet, Flathead and Nez Perce Tribes. The Gros Ventre signed the treaty as part of the Blackfeet Nation, whose territory became common hunting grounds for all signatories, including the Assiniboine. In 1868, the United States government established a trading post called Fort Browning near the mouth of Peoples Creek on the Milk River. This trading post was originally built for the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine, but because it was built on a favorite hunting ground of the Sioux, it was abandoned in 1871. After the abandonment of Fort Browning, the government built another post. It was called Fort Belknap, and it was established on the south side of the Milk River, about one mile southwest of the present town site of Chinook, Montana. Fort Belknap was a substation post, the last half of the structure being a trading post. A block house stood to the left of the stockade gate. At the right was a warehouse and an issue building, where the tribe received their rations and annuity goods.

In 1876, the fort was discontinued and the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine receiving annuities at the post were instructed to go to the agency at Fort Peck and Wolf Point. The Assiniboine did not object to going to Wolf Point and readily went about moving; but the Gros Ventre refused to go. If they did, they would come into contact with the Sioux, with whom they could not ride together in peace. They forfeited their annuities rather than move to Fort Peck. In 1878, the Fort Belknap Agency was re-established, and the Gros Ventre, and remaining Assiniboine were again allowed to receive supplies at Fort Belknap. It was at this site that the Fort Belknap reservation was established, in 1888. By an act of Congress on May 1, 1888, (Stat., L., XXV, 113), the Blackfeet, Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribes ceded 17,500,000 acres of their joint reservation and agreed to live upon three smaller reservations. These are now known as the Blackfeet, Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Reservations. Fort Belknap was named for William W. Belknap, who was Secretary of War.

In 1884, Gold was discovered in the Little Rocky Mountains. Pressure from miners and mining companies forced the tribes to cede sections of the mountains in 1885. Jesuits came to Fort Belknap in 1862 to convert the Gros Ventre people to Catholicism. In 1887, St. Paul's Mission was established at the foot of the Little Rocky Mountains, near Hays. Much of the traditional ceremonies were lost through the course of time following the establishment of the mission.

[3] Stat., L., XI, 657

However, the two sacred pipes, The Feathered Pipe and The Flat Pipe remain central to the traditional spiritual beliefs of the Gros Ventre people.

Excerpts are from "The Gros Ventre of Montana, Part I Social Life" by the Catholic University of America Press, All Rights Reserved.[4]

Purpose of the CEDS

The Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) is a federally recognized tribe established reservation in 1889 and governed by the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council (FBICC), to support the health, safety and well-being of all Fort Belknap enrolled members on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in North Central Montana, counties of Blaine and Phillips.

The FBICC 2025 strategic planning session brought together leaders, a wide-range of the tribal government's departments (health, education, justice, public works, transportation, etc.), tribal enterprises, tribal businesses, tribal community members, and partner organizations to analyze the needs, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats of the reservation and discuss plans and priorities for economic development success and to update our 5-year Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The benefits of FBIC CEDS - engage tribal sovereignty, development, secure funding, analyze economic conditions, collaboration, economic resilience, and tribal values. The CEDS is a blueprint for a community-driven plan for Assiniboine and Grose Ventre tribes address challenges, to foster economic growth and improve the quality of life on our reservation and in our communities. The tribe's planning department is designated to support economic development for and on the reservation and administers the EDA Tribal Partnership Planning grant, 2025-28.

The Planning department is committed to support the FBIC CEDS for the 5-Year 2027-3031 period with continued updates, development and implementation focusing on two EDA investment priorities: Critical Infrastructure and Economic Recovery and Resilience, and further planning and new strategies under the direction of the FBIC Strategy Committee for growing our tribal economy.

[4] https://open.library.ubc.ca/media/stream/pdf/52387/1.0391972/4

The FBICC provides strategic direction to the FBIC CEDS Strategy Committee by chairing and co-chairing monthly subcommittee meetings that facilitates strategy recommendations, based on the analysis of significant economic development issues or opportunities, current economic conditions and unanticipated challenges as they relate to not only sovereign and tribal communities, but to the regional economics as a whole. The Strategy Committee supports new and improved infrastructure, housing, small business and workforce. They want to make a positive and noticeable difference on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Current Committee is comprised of the following:

Fort Belknap Indian Community Tribal Council & FBIC CEDS Strategy Committee List 2025				
Council Executive Officers				
Name	Title	District	Term	Committee Chair & Economic Development Interest
Jeffery "Jeff" Stiffarm	President	All Reservation	11/21-11/25	Executive Committee, Vice Chair: Central Administration, District Offices, Personnel, Enrollment, Maintenance, Recording, Public Relations; Enterprises Island Mountain, ITMA, PMU, Tribal Construction, Casino, Housing, FBIC Insurance Finance Committee, Vice Chair: Finance, Procurement, Credit, Investment Board
Judith King	Vice President	All Reservation	11/21-11/25	Executive Committee, Chair: Central Administration, District Offices, Personnel, Enrollment, Maintenance, Recording, Public Relations; Enterprises Island Mountain, ITMA, PMU, Tribal Construction, Casino, Housing, FBIC Insurance Finance Committee, Chair: Finance, Procurement, Credit, Investment Board
Rainie Walls	Secretary/Treasurer	All Council	11/21-11/25	None

Table 1. FBIC Tribal Council – Executive Officers[5]

Fort Belknap Indian Community Tribal Council List 2025				
Council Members				
Name	Title	District	Term	Committee Chair & Economic Development Interest
John Allen	Councilman	River Assiniboine	11/23-11/25	Natural Resources, Chair: THPO, EPA, Fire Management, Extension, Language Preservation, Climate Change, Irrigation, Water Resources, Hemp Program Health Programs, Vice Chair: Behavioral Health, CDC, CHR, Com. Based Block Grant, Central Billing, Diabetes Coord., Diabetes Prev., Emergency Prep, Environmental Health, Family Planning/Domestic Violence, Medical Transportation, Medical Eligibility, Micro Grant, Elderly Medical Transportation, Native Connections, Nutrition, Partnership for Success, PCA, PHN, Pubic Health Emerg. Prep., SOAR, Sanitation,

[5] https://ftbelknap.org

				Security, Tobacco Prev., Tribal Health Admin., THIP, WIC, Suicide
Blake Stiffarm	Councilman	Gros Ventre	11/23-11/25	Land Committee, Chair: Land Natural Resources, Vice Chair: THPO, EPA, Fire Management, Extension, Language Preservation, Climate Change, Irrigation, Water Resources, Hemp Program
Stephen "Shelly" Fox, Jr.	Councilman	Gros Ventre	11/23-11/25	Planning Committee, Chair: Planning, 477 Employment & Training, Tiwahe Veterans – AD HOC Co-Chair
Randall Werk, Sr.	Councilman	Gros Ventre	11/23-11/25	Public Safety, Chair: LES-Police, Fish & Game, Buffalo, Roads Maintenance, Transportation Planning-Construction-Transit, Disaster-Emergency Services, Office of Prosecutors, Criminal Investigation, Volunteer Fire Human Services, Vice Chair: Senior Centers, Commodity, Child Support Enforcement, Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Services
Cecelia Shortman	Councilwoman	Gros Ventre	11/23-11/25	Human Services, Chair: Senior Centers, Commodity, Child Support Enforcement, Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Services
Donald Horn	Councilman	Assiniboine	11/23-11/25	General Services, Chair: Informational Technology, TERO, Courts, Upward Bound, Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care Program Public Safety, Vice Chair: LES-Police, Fish & Wildlife, Buffalo, Roads Maintenance, Transportation Planning-Construction-Transit, Disaster-Emergency Services, Office of Prosecutors, Criminal Investigation, Volunteer Fire
Jay Ball	Councilman	Assiniboine	11/23-11/25	Health Programs, Chair: Behavioral Health, CDC, CHR, Com. Based Prev. Block Grant, Centralized Billings, Diabetes Coord., Diabetes Prev., Emergency Prep. Environmental Health, Family Planning/Domestic Violence, Medical Transp., Medicaid Eligibility, Micro Grant, Elderly Medical Transportation, Native Connections, Nutrition, Partnership for success, PCA, PHN, Pubic Health Emerg. Prep., SOAR, Sanitation, Security, Tobacco Prev., Tribal Health Admin., THIP, WIC, Zero Suicide
Randi Wing-Fetter	Councilwoman	Mountain Assiniboine	11/23-11/25	General Services, Vice Chair: Informational Technology, TERO, Courts, Upward Bound, Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care Program Planning Committee, Vice Chair: Planning, 477 Employment & Training, TIWAHE

Table 2. FBIC Tribal Council List[6]

I. Summary FBIC Reservation Background

Fort Belknap Tribal Planning Department Snapshot
$36,116,271 Million Funds awarded since 2006 for priority projects in Fort Belknap Reservation
100 Estimated number jobs created or retained due to winning grants

[6] https://ftbelknap.org

Overview of the Reservation

Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, in North Central Montana, is rural and sparsely populated. The reservation encompasses an area of approximately 700,000 acres and overlaps its borders with Blaine and Phillips counties. Total enrolled tribal members according to our official FBIC tribal enrollment office 8,660 with approximately 4,330 members residing on reservation. Tribal enrolled numbers are higher than US Census numbers because the Census relies on self-identification, not accurate formal tribal enrollment numbers.

There are four distinct communities:

FORT BELKNAP AGENCY	Northern reservation area. The headquarters of the FBIC tribal government Majority of FBIC tribal organization services, Indian Health Service Clinic, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Aaniiih Nakoda College, Immersion School, Housing Authority, Little River Trading Post, Fort Belknap Casino, The Grill Restaurant
HAYS	Southern reservation area. FBIC tribal government district/John Capture Community Center, Kills at Night Health/Community Center, US post office, Martin's Store, Island Mountain Development Group headquarters, Hays/Lodgepole Jr/Sr High School, Aaniiih Nakoda Tours & Gift Shop, Housing Authority Shop, Eagle Child Indian Health Service Clinic/ER
LODGE POLE	South-eastern reservation area. FBIC tribal government district office/Enemy Killer Community Center, Aaniiih Nakoda Economic Development Corporation, Red Paint Creek Trading Post, Lodgepole Elementary School
DODSON	North-eastern reservation area. Wathatau Dodson Senior Center

Residents live in housing neighborhoods and in scattered home sites throughout the reservation. A significant number of the FBIC tribal government's employees commute from surrounding communities/towns to work at FBIC. Due to insufficient housing on the reservation, many members live, and go to school in the adjacent off-reservation towns of Harlem and Dodson, and most tribal service populations include these areas.

Major employers are listed above. Occupations include tribal and federal government, public administration/office/administrative, agriculture/farming, healthcare, education, construction, retail.

There are very limited amenities and all products and services for daily living and commercial development supplies must be acquired by traveling great distances. FBIC 2020 leakage study shows the regional economy surrounding the reservation is relatively hollow and undiversified. For every dollar spend by residents in the region, 69 cents leak out. There are so many leaks that

any kind of business started on the reservation could, in principle, find regional demand. Estimates of money residents spent in a year outside the reservation: 38% food, 28% financial, 20% personal care and 23% other (oil changes, home goods). The Strategy Committee is optimistic an economic development strategy rooted in the replacement of imports and expansion of private business, and nurturing an entrepreneurial ecosystem can alleviate a long history of poverty, unemployment, and dependency.

The reservation experiences sever weather conditions such as harsh unpredictable winters with cold temperatures 40 below zero and dry hot summers with limited water resources and drought conditions. There is optimism of natural and renewable energy resources such as wind, solar, mineral that could one day have a role in the reservation's economy.

The reservation is home to many geographic features including great plains, rolling prairie, southern Little Rocky Mountains range, Three prominent buttes - Wild Horse, Snake Butte, and Three-Buttes. Key water features are the Milk River forming our northern boundary, river breaks, White Bear Creek and South Fork Peoples Creek.

Natural resources have an important role in the region's economy. Land use dominated by agriculture – small cattle ranches and larger dryland farms, hay and wheat crops, livestock leasing and grazing pastures, conservation initiatives and timber reserve.

Renewable energy infrastructure is being explored to find new energy generation options upon tribal lands. Tribal EPA department is currently pursuing feasibility of a community-scale solar plus storage solution that could provide a reliable, affordable, and resilient power supply to meet the needs of 28 new tribal housing units currently under construction.

While not one of the highest sources for the region, the tourism industry plays an important role in the area's economy. Many outdoor resources attract visitors to the area, including guided wildlife hunting, fishing and bird watching, hiking on recreation trails, Mission Canyon, and annual powwows. Our reservation is a wealth of Assiniboine and Gros Ventre pride, culture and tradition. Today, our sacred historical landscapes, cultural sites and buffalo herds connect us with our identity and ancestors who lived here for thousands of years

Broadband is a growing infrastructure asset. Underway is a tribal broadband connectivity business building out across our reservation the 100Mbps download and 20Mbps upload speeds to all underserved and unserved, creating 20 new jobs.

The reservation is influenced by the location of two State highways that run across the reservation; East-West State highway 2 and North-South State highway 66 that connects to Glacier National Park and the Canadian border entrances, important tourist destinations. There Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad touches the Eastern boarder of Dodson. Amtrak passenger train stops at Malta 17 miles East of the reservation and at Havre 45 miles North of the reservation. The nearest airport is 212 miles off reservation in Billings and 160 miles off reservation in Great Falls.

Infrastructure assets in the region are limited and dated. With small populations and large land area, the Tribal Government revenues do not lend themselves to make significant infrastructure

improvements and upgrades. Individual communities continue to experience challenges caused by aging infrastructure in water, wastewater, and road systems. The region has several departments, businesses, and entities that play a key role in the maintenance, sustainability and new development of infrastructure on the reservation: Tribal Planning, Tribal Transportation-Transit- Construction-Road Maintenance Department, Prairie Mountain Utilities Water Treatment Plant, Tribal Broadband Connectivity Business, Indian Health Services Environmental Engineering and Sanitation Deficiency System funding, Tribal EPA, IMDG, Tribal Construction, Tribal Employment Rights Office, Tribal Historical Preservation Office, Housing Authority, and Trial Land Department. The planning department brings these developers together with "Infrastructure development monthly meetings" to plan, track, collaborate and deliver priority projects.

One institution of higher education is located in the reservation, the Aaniiih Nakoda College. This institution offers programs in sciences, nursing, education, business, and arts. The "Healthcare and Social Assistance" industry is Montana's largest, employing over 139,000 people and making up over 15% of the state's workforce. The nursing program is an economic driver and helps student nurses with attainment of the Associate of Science degree, allowing the student to be eligible for licensure as a Registered Nurse in the State of Montana. The welding certificate program offers a good career in Montana, with jobs in manufacturing and fabrication and high earning potential.

Housing in the region is a huge challenge. There is a housing shortage. Much of the existing housing stock was constructed prior to 1990 and is extremely aged. Throughout several planning processes, housing assessments, and community needs assessments, the regions residents have expressed the need for more quality, affordable housing. Additionally, new housing will complement the region's population growth and opportunity for economic growth and workforce expansion.

Population and Poverty

Fort Belknap in Blaine County, Montana – Local Economy		
POPULATION	**MEDIAN AGE**	**MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME**
1434	**24.4**	**$29,766**
2.65% 1-YEAR DECLINE	6.55% 1-YEAR INCREASE	
POVERTY RATE	**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES**	**MEDIAN PROPERTY VALUE**
35.8%	**265**	**$73,000**
4.33% 1-YEAR INCREASE	5.02% 1-YEAR DECLINE	5.95% 1-YEAR GROWTH

Table 4. Fort Belknap in Blaine County, Montana – Local Economy[7]

Income

Blaine County/Fort Belknap Reservation Percentage of People whose Income in the Past 12 = Months is below Poverty Level	2021	2024
All People	32.7%	43.4%
Under 18 years	44.2%	52.2%
Related children under 18 years	44.1%	34.2%
Related children under 5 years	46.8%	55.4%

[7] https://datausa.io/profile/geo/fort-belknap-agency-mt?redirect=true

Related children 5 – 17 years	43.1%	50.2%
18 years and over	27.7%	33.8%
18 to 64 years	31.1	-
65 years and over	14.4%	22.1%
People in families	31.2%	43.4%
Unrelated individuals 15 years and over	41.2%	43.4%

Table 6. Blaine County/Fort Belknap Reservation Percentage of People whose Income in the Past 12 Months is Below Poverty Level[8]

Blaine County/Fort Belknap Reservation Household Income	2022	2023
Less than $10,000	13.4%	18.5%
$10,000 - $14,999	8.3%	7.6%
$15,000 - $24,999	18.8%	13.0%
$25,000 - $34,999	5.8%	6.5%
$35,000 - $49,999	7.4%	5.1%
$50,000 - $74,999	15.3%	14.7%
$75,000 – $99,999	10.9%	13.2%
$100,000 - $149,999	15.8%	13.8%
$150,000 - $199,999	3.9%	6.2%
$200,00 or more	0.0%	1.4%
Median Income	$44,500	$46,875
Mean Income	$54,609	$69,617
Household Income in past 12 months	56.0%	54.4%

Table 6. Blaine County/Fort Belknap Reservation Household Income[9]

Unemployment

Unemployment by Montana Counties within the Fort Belknap Reservation - U.S. Labor Statistics					
County	**Year**	**Labor Force**	**Employed**	**Unemployed Level**	**Unemployed Rate**
Blaine	2023	2,223	2,124	70	3.4%
Phillips	2023	1,829	1,715	67	3.1%

Table 7. Unemployed by Montana Counties within the Fort Belknap Reservation[10]

[8] Source: U.S Census – 2021 – 2024 American Community Survey - 5 yr. estimates
[9] U.S Census 2022 – 2023 American Community Survey - 5 yr. estimates
[10] https://datausa.io/profile/geo/fort-belknap-agency-mt/

Education

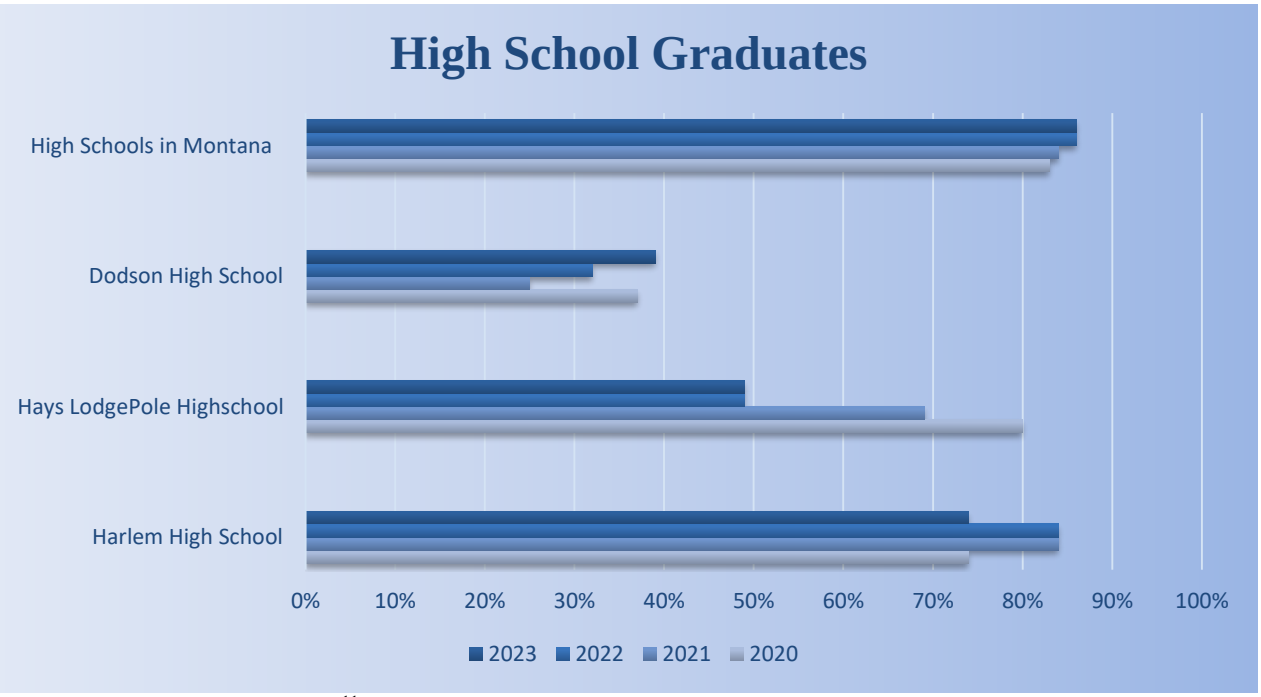


Chart 1. High School Graduates[11]

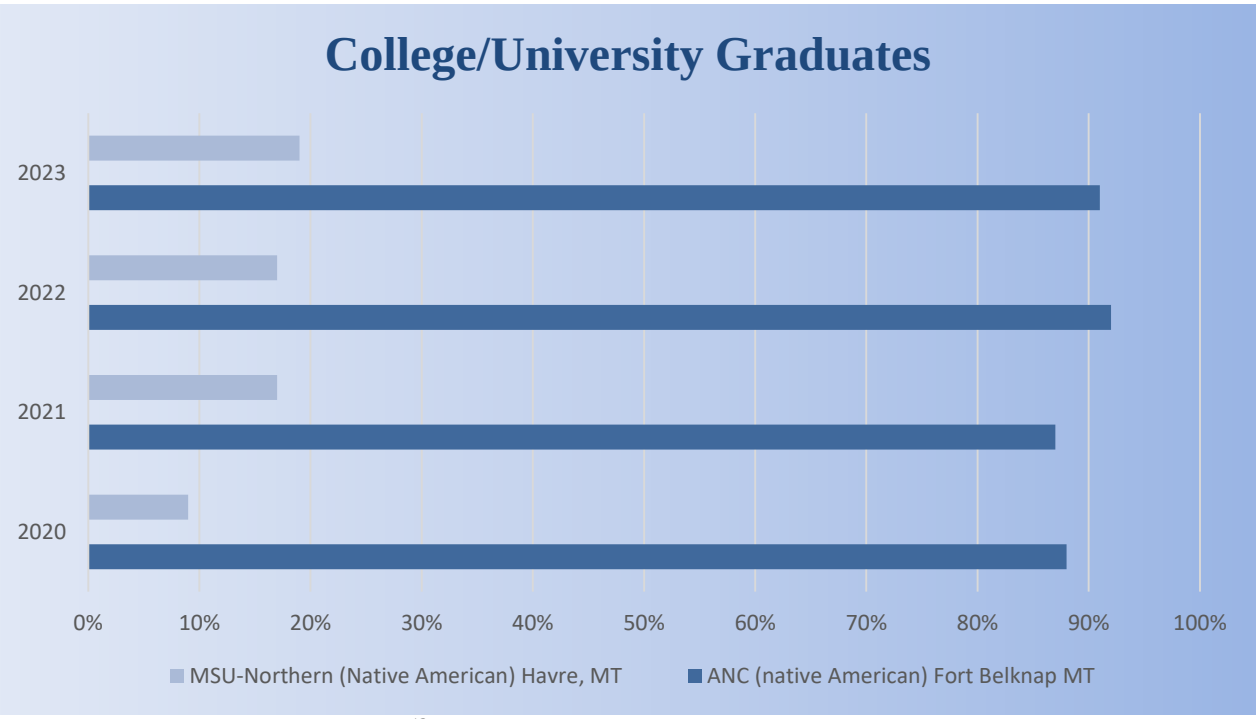


Chart 2. College/University Graduates[12]

[11] www.publicschoolreview.com

[12] https://datausa.io/profile/university

Employment

Blaine County/Fort Belknap Reservation Employment by Industry Sector	2022	2023
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting & mining	67	67
Construction	129	108
Retail trade	23	11
Transportation, warehousing and utilities	5	9
Wholesale trade	0	0
Manufacturing	0	0
Information	0	0
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	66	57
Professional, scientific and management	38	58
Educational services and health care	189	192
Arts, Entertainment, and recreation	56	53
Other services, except public administration	27	32
Public Administration	199	191

Table 8. Blaine County/Fort Belknap Reservation Employment by Industry Sector[13]

Changes in the economic environment of the region

According to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry projections, Montana was expected to add approximately 3,400 jobs in 2023 and 2028, and slow to 4,400 jobs per year from 2023 to 2028. Slower long-term growth will be due to worker shortages caused by the retirement of Montana's aging workforce. Labor force participation for younger workers will continue to decline, while rates for workers over 25 will rise due to plentiful job opportunities and rising wage levels. With the forecasted employment growth, the unemployment rate is expected to decline to as low as 3.5% in the upcoming ten years, with tight labor markets in Montana. Future employment growth is expected in all Montana's regions as follows:

Montana Regional Projections Summary 2018-2028		
Region	Annual Employment Growth	Average Annual Growth Rate
Northwest	2,070	1.2%
Southwest	2,430	1.4%
North Central	60	0.1%
South Central	910	0.8%
Eastern	10	0.0%

Table 9. Montana Regional Projections Summary[14]

Strategic Projects, Programs and Activities

The Fort Belknap Board of Investment, is a nonprofit corporation established by the FBIC Council and operated separate and distinct from the Council, under a 6-member board, responsible for managing funds derived from the interest earned from designated revenues: gas tax, tobacco tax, conservation reserve program (CRP), and Tribal land lease (when necessary to provide sufficient collateralization of a loan). The investment board manages and invests FBIC revenues into stocks and bonds to provide various loans to the FBIC such as land, business real estate, businesses, infrastructure, operating, and other economic development needs for the purpose of providing better security, a local benefit from dollars to be turning over in the local

[13] U.S Census 2022 to 2023 American Community Survey
[14] Montana Department of Labor and Industry Employment Projections 2018-2028

community, local planning and development expertise, attracting additional investment dollars using leverage of local enterprise, develop additional local businesses, resources for other nonprofits, and expand reservation on land base.

Fort Belknap Economic Development Credit Department a FBIC department offering personal short-term loans to members of the FBIC reservation, agricultural/small business/personal revolving loans, and financial literacy education through certified instructors.

Little River Trading Post, is a local convenience store is located on Fort Belknap at the junction of State Highway 2, offering fuel/diesel, souvenirs, snacks, fresh/frozen food, beer, pop and deli, for the past 37 years. The Post employs 16 staff and is currently managed by the Island Mountain Development Corporation.

Tribal Construction, a FBIC enterprise, provides construction development, water utility line repairs, project contract work and seasonal employment for 5 to 25 skilled workers, consisting of carpenters, finishers and laborers, throughout the construction season.

Fort Belknap Casino, a FBIC owned for-profit enterprise offering a Las Vegas Style gaming facility, with Class II and Class III games, for 17 years. The Board of Directors is appointed by the Tribal Council, but operates independently from the FBIC. The Casino employs seven full time positions and 13-part time positions. It is open seven days a week, 365 days a year from 10 AM- 2AM.

Opportunity Link, a nonprofit organization located in Havre, that pursues long-term solutions and promotes public-private sector collaborations for community-based poverty reduction projects in 11 rural counties and three Indian reservations in north central Montana. Fort Belknap, Rocky Boy and Blackfeet Reservations are included in Opportunity Link's rural area of organization service. Designated as Fort Belknap's Native American Business Advisor Partnership collaboration with Fort Belknap offers employment training and business plan development for small business and entrepreneurs.

North Central Montana Transit, is a public transportation system designed serve the "Hi-Line" communities of Hill and Blaine Counties and surrounding communities as well as to provide coordinated services with Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy Transit Systems. Routes offer shuttle-to-bus connections at tribal "hub" communities, and a twice-weekly shuttle service runs between Fort Belknap and Great Falls, a distance of more than 160 miles, one way. Routes also include a daily round-trip service, between Havre and Fort Belknap that accommodates 24 Havre residents working in Fort Belknap.

Bear Paw Development Corporation (BPDC), a non-profit organization governed by a 24-member board, located in Havre MT, 45 miles North of FBIC Reservation, was created for the purpose of administering programs to help improve regional economic conditions in Hill, Blaine, Liberty, Chouteau and Phillips Counties and the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy's Indian Reservations. BPDC coordinates economic development planning and project implementation among its member entities, assisting local governments in planning public works and coordinating public and private investments, by engaging in research, planning and advisory

functions. BPDC is currently in partnership with FBIC for community and economic development as a USDA grantee for construction of the FBIC's Hays Wellness Center.

Vibrant Futures, a regional plan of collaborating North Central Montana communities including Fort Belknap, was created in 2011 to create a comprehensive response to high priority needs and opportunities for a more economically sustainable development, over the next 20 years, through continued planning is intended to improve employment, housing, community health and safety, regional transportation, water quality, and resource management.

Island Mountain Development Group (IMDG), a for-profit corporation established by FBIC. It is considered the "economic development arm of the FBIC" to plan, develop, and manage for-profit businesses for the benefit of the FBIC. IMDG provides 332 jobs offering employment investments in the following key industry sectors: GVA Holdings, LLC, Island Mountain Realty Holdings, Classic Design Homes, Snake Butte Construction, Spirit Box Technologies, Buffalo Horse Inc. 8-A contracting.

Aaniiih Nakoda Community Economic Development Corporation, a nonprofit entity of IMDG, conducts economic development activities, including: a)planning, developing, and/or managing community economic development activities as deemed necessary for the efficient provision of employment opportunities on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation; b) provide training opportunities for Tribal members and residents of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation to allow them to utilize job opportunities created through community economic development; and c) support the creation of workforce housing for low-income tribal members allowing them to reside near employment opportunities.

Montana Native Growth Fund, a Native American Community Development Financial Institution located in Havre, MT, offers affordable loans, financial coaching, and homeownership support to empower Native individuals and communities.

Red Paint Creek Trading Post, a convenience and grocery store, offers 24-hour gasoline pumps, food processing and pantry in Lodge Pole, MT., located within the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. This business provides 5 employees.

Martin's Grocery Store, a thriving sole proprietorship, located in Hays MT., owned by Gerald and Sheila Martin. Since 1990, the store provides convenience store products, groceries and gasoline. This business provides employment for 4 to 6 employees.

The Smoke House Grill Restaurant and Sacred Grounds Coffee Shop, a business incubated venue of FBIC, operated business within owned and operated by Lee Blackcrow & Crystal Moore, providing full service restaurant services in a sit-down setting and coffee beverage vending throughout Indian Country since 2010. Awarded two Montana small business grants in 2010 and 2013, Sacred Grounds has expanded their business operations by updating equipment and through concession trailer renovations to continue to provide coffee beverages at Pow Wows, nationally. Located in Fort Belknap Agency, MT. this business employs 7 staff.

Native American Development Corporation (NADC), a certified Community Development Financial Institution located in Billings MT, helps connect Native-owned businesses with

resources, provides development program supports, financial resources, strategic assistance, financial training, art & tourism supports, business loans, credit counseling, and technical assistance. Health & wellness and Eagle Seeker Centers are long travel distances for Fort Belknap members.

A number of sole proprietors/individual tribal entrepreneurs on reservation: Star quilts, bed-breakfast, custom t-shirts, construction firms, roofing, food vendors, beverage vendors, and crafts and clothing vendors.

II. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis

FBICC conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis in June 2024, in which a comprehensive strategic planning process was undertaken, involving participation and input of FBICC, management, department staff, and community members with SWOT elements key to developing the CEDS. A 2025 FBICC strategic plan was officially approved by Tribal resolution in October 2025. Tribal Planning was able to collect pertinent economic data, community input and utilize the information obtained for the 2026 CEDS update. To give stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback and suggest edits, a draft of the CEDS is currently being published for a 30-day comment period through November 2025. The FBIC Strategy Committee will be asked to review the final input and make final approval for submission to EDA by December 2025.

SWOT

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• New eager Council leaders committed, united visionaries • Successful for-profit (IMDG) • Growing opportunities • Community involvement • Traditional family structure • Creating Economic unity • Traditional culture & language • Recognizing needs of community members' historical knowledge • Strong & growing land base • Sovereignty • Capable staff • Natural resources	Insufficient communication, transparency of FBIC staff to the Tribal Council and FBIC community • Micro - aggression, indirect resistance • Lack of preparedness and emergency plan • Territorial program management • Policy weaknesses • Outdated constitution • Insufficient community investment • High turnover rate • Insufficient financial literacy • Insufficient professionalism • Insufficient emergency plan • BIA – insufficient civil service and failure to uphold trust responsibility • Insufficient housing	• Water compacts • Cultivating cannabis • Wellness Center • More transparent partnership with IMDG • Constitution reform • Tribal charter reform • Renaming of Tribe • Tribal college • Training for professionalism, effective communication, & customer service • planning & planning management	• Government FED, STATE, LOCAL, BIA • Tribal politics • Lack of Tribal support • Tribal, State, and Federal elections • Termination of sovereignty • Social media • Loss of language & culture

Key Findings and Economic Priorities

At the forefront of FBIC strategy committee's minds during this planning process was the large number of overall reservation community needs to turn out a manageable number of economic development needs into actionable priorities. The SWOT analysis is the tool used in the CEDS process to identify advantages of the reservation that make it competitive in the region. The process identifies factors that might limit the reservation to realize its potential and possibilities with the greatest growth potential. Taking a hard look at the SWOT analysis, economic priority themes were drawn from strengths and weaknesses of the region.

FBIC residents feel strongly that access to adequate health services is vital to a good quality of life. There is one Tribal Health Facility, the Red Whip Center, located at Fort Belknap Agency. It has been successful centralizing multiple Tribal health services and delivering out-patient and in-school based integrated behavioral health and chemical dependency services. While open to all reservation, no equal physical space or services exists in the southern end of the reservation, and outlying communities struggle to access the Agency for reasons of no transportation, inclement weather, and time distance to travel up to the Northern end. FBIC, Bear Paw Development Corporation and IMDG will develop a second Tribal Wellness Center in the Southern end of the reservation to balance access, further determine level of care for medical, behavioral, cultural, and fitness services. Also, the Tribe wants to develop additional income streams. FBIC wants to improve health access and outcomes of which a formal health board and increased transportation for elders would complement the economic benefits, services and employment opportunities of the new wellness center and existing Health center.

FBIC residents also feel that supporting any business to the area will build economic resiliency in light of the high amount of dollars that leaves the reservation for most basic services. The lack of housing and aging infrastructure is a constant concern throughout the reservation. Investment in the reservations infrastructure is absolutely necessary to improve long-term resiliency of all the communities. Tourism and agriculture, especially farming and ranching, have potential to grow. FBIC will continue to enhance its partnerships with for-profit enterprises, IMDG and Casino for job creation, revenue generation, increase resources and expand upon economic opportunities on the reservation. To have clear communication, accountability and transparent partnerships. To develop economic opportunity, jobs and revenue generation. Improve local economy through development of basic services. The Fort Belknap water rights settlement act of 2023, passed in 2024 by the U.S. Senate, pending US Congress passage, will bring benefits through investments in infrastructure, specifically the settlement includes significant funding for improving irrigation and water infrastructure, which will support the agricultural economy. FBIC plans to monitor the legislative process, understand settlement provisions, plan for implementation, and engage in community outreach and collaboration. To improve drinking water, water/sewer, infrastructure, agriculture, housing, tourism are priorities for economic resiliency. Potentially changing lives.

Many residents express difficulties in high turnover rates of tribal employees, finding higher paying jobs in the area, and employers are finding it harder to find skilled employees. FBIC will strengthen its partnership collaboration with Aaniiih Nakoda College to improve local workforce development opportunities, produce curriculum to develop grounded leaders, professionals, internships, leadership training and scholarships.

Tourism can create jobs in rural and remote areas and is an employment-generating sector to be explored. As increasing numbers of travelers seek culturally immersive experiences in natural wilderness areas, indigenous tourism (experiences operated and hosted by indigenous and Native American people) is skyrocketing all over the U.S. and around the world. A new report from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) forecasts that indigenous tourism will inject $67 billion into the global economy by 2034. In the U.S., American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-owned hospitality businesses already contribute $15.7 billion in annual sales to the tourism and hospitality sector, according to the Economic Impact of U.S. Indigenous Tourism Businesses Report, produced by the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) in partnership with SMS Research. FBIC will explore and develop international partnerships in economic development, economy exchange, creative industries, and trade; broaden the sector of the economy that encompasses international tourism, the arts, media, and design that fuel global competence and economic growth through innovation and creativity.

FBIC strategy committee recognizes an overarching need to improve employee skills and performance, boost morale and retention, increase productivity, and ensure compliance. Training opportunities for employees and community is a time-honored approach to better managing resources, helps organizations stay competitive by addressing skill gaps, keeping pace with industry trends and fostering economic innovation. The FBIC will invest in professional training; build a skilled workforce and enhance organizational effectiveness; financial literacy, leadership, professionalism, and customer service.

Residents express a desire for fundamental organizational stability and long-term stability. Solutions themed from the SWOT reveal that providing a structured framework for achieving goals, optimizing resource use and mitigating risk will strengthen FBIC operations and economic resiliency. The FBIC will strengthen operations, planning and fiscal management systems; effective and efficient resource use, performance evaluation, and increase communication with the community.

Economic development partnerships, and building blocks for infrastructure development and improvement such as land use, zoning, and housing. Difficulties addressing insufficient skilled workforce, insufficient jobs and housing for recruitment and retention of skilled workers, insufficient small business and entrepreneurs. Major employers, Tribal Leaders, and Tribal Community members are concerned with money spent off the reservation due to no basic services. Several challenges face small businesses on the reservation, including the rural remoteness of the area, access to capital, space to operate the business Young people do not want to return, professional service providers do not stay long, and local critical infrastructure is outdated. Each meeting generated these opportunities and obstacles of creating a stable and prosperous economy.

Economic Priorities

- ✓ Ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the community
- ✓ Continually support economic opportunity and enhance local capacity of the reservation; investigate and support policies and projects that will increase the availability of affordable housing, transportation, roads, water/sewer, broadband, healthcare, tourism, agriculture, education, emergency services, and social infrastructure.

- ✓ Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the reservation
- ✓ Continually provide educational opportunities, economic and community development planning services to the reservation
- ✓ Enhance the operations of the FBIC organization
- ✓ Grow a skilled workforce on the reservation; assist and support workforce development, connect businesses with workforce programs (HR, 477, TERO, Voc Rehab, Child Support, HE, UB),
- ✓ Provide support for existing small businesses and entrepreneurs, promoting "buy-local", retain data, funnel retention and expansion resources

III. Strategic Direction & Action Plan

Our schedule demonstrates a plan of action for the coming years utilizing the CEDS goals and the most recent 2025 FBIC Tribal Council Strategic Plan approved as follows:

A) Vision, Mission, and Goals

Below is the prioritized list of core values identified by the *Strategic Planning Committee* that provides a foundation for the overall direction of the FBIC and include the following:

2026-2030 FBIC Strategic *Core Values*	
Self-determination	**Economic prosperity**
Cultural revitalization	**Protecting our lands, water & natural resources**
Community well-being	**Collective responsibility**

FBIC Strategy Committee and Planning Department will utilize the following vision, mission, goals and action items to help guide their activities, build leadership, collaboration, and ensure economic prosperity and resiliency for the Fort Belknap Indian Community.

Our Vision

"The Fort Belknap Indian Community envisions a future where the A'aninin and Nakoda cultures thrive, our sovereignty is absolute, and our people enjoy a high quality of life. We are committed to sustainable development that honors our ancestors, empowers our current members, and creates opportunities for future generations. This vision includes a vibrant economy, a healthy environment, accessible education, strong families, and a community where all members feel valued, respected, and supported."

Our Mission is "Guided by our ancestors and traditional values, the Fort Belknap Indian Community is dedicated to: Self-determination, Economic prosperity, Cultural revitalization, Protecting our lands, water & natural resources, Community well-being and Collective responsibility"

B) Goals and Objectives

These goals directly align with the core values and support the vision and mission of the FBIC while directly addressing the fundamental needs of the community. The FBICC is responsible for ensuring that Program Directors are implementing the plan within their respective departments in a manner consistent with the fixed timelines identified in the implementation plans. The ongoing progress of the plan will be reviewed and monitored by the FBICC at least monthly to ensure that all moving parts of the plan are progressing in an acceptable and responsive manner. Ultimately, the effects of these efforts will be measured by how it impacts (either positively or negatively) the enrolled members of the Aaniiih and Nakoda Tribes, who comprise the Fort Belknap Indian Community's economic region. The goals and objectives are designed to be flexible enough to evolve and reflect new directions and opportunities as they are identified.

Services that the Fort Belknap Planning Department provides, in support of the vision, goals and objectives include the following:

1. Planning and Economic Development projects and infrastructure on Fort Belknap Reservation.
2. Plan and develop grant applications to address economic and infrastructure on Fort Belknap Reservation.
3. Respond to EDA Scope of Work, in Three-Year Planning Grant.
4. Assist Tribal Programs with submitting grant applications electronically.
5. Assist Tribal Programs in responding to reporting requirements for various Funding Sources.

Implementation, Evaluation and Performance Measures

Fort Belknap Indian Community has made a strong effort of utilizing the strategic planning process to identify needs of the reservation and using the strategic plan as a guide in preparing grant applications to funding sources to meet those needs. The strategic plan has been used in planning for annual milestone range planning projects.

Fort Belknap Indian Community adopted the practice of utilizing the S.M.A.R.T. objective format as an approach to gauge the development of measurable goals. S.M.A.R.T., an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant & Time-oriented, is a philosophy that guides the development of measurable goals. The intent of implementing this practice is to address deficiencies in a timely manner by crafting appropriate close the gaps efforts that are appropriate, realistic, and feasible so sustaining those efforts are achievable. In terms of evaluation and

performance measures, practicing the S.M.A.R.T. approach will yield Fort Belknap Indian Community.

Implementation

FB Planning Department meets weekly, FB Economic Development Committee meets monthly and the FBIC Tribal Council Planning Committee meets monthly. Progress towards goals and objectives will be tracked monthly and will help leadership and staff focus on their work in the region.

Goal 1: Healthy Community & Improved Quality of Life

Objectives:

- FBIC and IMDG will develop a Wellness Center blending modern healthcare with traditional practices. The FBIC Tribal Health Department will determine level of care for medical, behavioral, cultural, and/or fitness services to improve overall quality of life.
- FBIC and Tribal Health Department will improve health by implementing a health board comprised of health and medical staff to provide oversight of quality of patient care, treatment, and services to ensure the ethical and professional practices are provided on the reservation.

Action Items	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources-Partners	Type of Assistance
Coordinate joint planning and construction of Hays Wellness Center with FBIC, IMDG, BPDC through ARPA & USDA funding launch	High	X			Tribal Government	IMDG BPDC THD	Technical Assistance
Coordinate joint planning, service delivery and launch services with FBIC & Tribal Health Department	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	CAO, Tribal Health, Planning, & Human Resources	Technical Assistance
Finalize draft health board Bylaws, resolution					Tribal Government	CAO,	Technical Assistance

and formal documentation with FBIC & Tribal Health Department	Med	X				Tribal Health, Legal, & Planning	

Goal 2: Support Economic Opportunity & Enhance Local Capacity

Objectives:

- FBIC will enhance its partnership with IMDG to support job creation, revenue generation and enterprise expansion
- Practice clear communication and accountability to ensure the community benefits from tribal enterprises
- Identify funding for economic development on the reservation
- Plan and develop grant applications in response to the needs identified in the strategic plan, to improve the economy on the reservation

Action Items	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/ Partners	Type of Assistance
Assist Reservation with planning economic and community development needs	High	X	X	X	Tribal Government	FBIC's Enterprises: IMDG, Casino, TERO, Tribal Construction, PMU, Insurance Co., Housing Authority, & Planning	Technical Assistance
Roadmap, reporting, enterprise diversification	Med	X	X		Tribal Government	Tribal Revenue & Enterprise Income/ CAO, FBIC's Enterprises, Legal, & Planning	Technical Assistance

Update the 2020 FBIC Leakage and Tourism Feasibility Studies	Med	X			Tribal Government	FBIC Enterprise Income, IDC Planning, MTDOC/ IMDG & Planning	Technical Assistance
Explore & develop international partnerships in economic development, MOU's, joint ventures, economy exchange, creative industries, & trade; broaden the sector of the economy that encompasses tourism, the arts, media, & design that fuel global competence & economic growth	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	BIA-TTGP, MT-DOC-TT &TTSBGP, AIANTA, NADC, EDA, FB Investment Board, Private Foundations, FBIC's Enterprises/ IMDG-Tourism, Dance Committee's, ANC, Community	Technical Assistance
Support Native artists and tourism operators connect with global audiences; coordinating with international industry partners, promote cultural heritage & economic growth	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	NADC Art & Tourism Program, MT DOC Travel Trade Marketing Program/ IMDG Tourism, Local Entreprenuers, Opp Link NABA, FBIC's Econ Dev Credit & Planning Dept.s	Technical Assistance

Goal 3: Improve Educational Opportunities

Objectives:

- FBIC will strengthen its collaboration with ANC to develop a pipeline of grounded leaders and professionals. The partnership will provide curriculum development, internships, leadership training, and scholarships.
- Plan and develop grant applications, in response to the needs identified in the Strategic Plan, to improve educational opportunities on the reservation

Action Items	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/ Partners	Type of Assistance
Coordinate joint planning with Aaniiih Nakoda College, and Communities to offer business development resources, curriculum, internships, and leadership programs	Med	X	X		Tribal Government	SBA, NADC, OPP Link, BPDC/FBIC's CAO, Education, Human Resources & Planning Dept.'s	Technical Assistance
Coordinate with ANC to expand certificate programs beyond behavioral health tech, health science, tribal management and wielding to include electrician and plumber	Med	X	X		Tribal Government	SBA, NADC, OPP Link, BPDC/FBIC's CAO, Education, Human Resources & Planning Dept.'s	Technical Assistance
Bolster early childhood language immersion programs (LLL, ANC IS); to improve educational and employment outcomes, boosting earning potential,	Med	X			Tribal Government		Technical Assistance

supporting sustainable cultural tourism industry							
Foster entrepreneurs and small business by assisting in developing financial and workforce programs, training for expansion, start-up support, business incubation & marketing	High	X	X	X	Tribal Government	ANC, OPP Link NABA, IMDG, BPDC, NADC/FBIC's Economic Dev. Credit & Planning Dept.'s	Implementation

Goal 4: Support Maintenance and Enhancement of the Physical Infrastructure of the Reservation

Objectives:

- Assist FBIC in developing and securing funding for housing, water/sewer, roads and transportation, broadband, renewable energy and other physical infrastructure projects
- Plan and develop grant applications, in response to the needs identified in the Strategic Plan, to improve a wind range of improvements for infrastructure, facilities, and other capital assets on the reservation

Action Items	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources-Partners	Type of Assistance
Maintain a tribal capital improvement plan, master project list & repository for leadership decision making and priorities:	Med	X	X		Tribal Government	CAO, FB Infrastructure Development Committee, & Planning	Technical Assistance

>Assess needs for infrastructure, facilities and other capital assets >Set priorities >Develop timeline >Assign in-house staff or seek external expertise							
Finalize draft zoning ordinance & land use plans, advertise public comment & gain Tribal council approval	Med	X			Tribal Government	FBIC's Enterprises, Local Businesses, Legal, FB Infrastructure Dev. Committee, Community, Departments & Planning	Technical Assistance
Continue implementing new housing development to address housing shortage for all & Assist FBIC in securing funding for planning and implementation of new homes for people to live/work on reservation: >Eagle valley housing development	High	X	X	X	Tribal Government	FBIC-ARPA, US-HUD, ICDBG, EDA, DOT, EPA/ Council FB housing authority, planning, EPA, land, TERO/THPO, Prairie Mtn. utilities, IMDG, transportation, construction	Technical Assistance & Implementation

underway 24 homes 12/2025 >LP Leggins Flats housing development underway EA/design 12/2026 >Old Hays housing development underway planning 12/2027							
Assist FBIC in securing funding for the planning and implementation of upgrades to existing domestic water/sewer infrastructure: >Pine Grove, Leggins & Agency water tank repair cleaning >PMU water/sewer distribution mapping technology & analysis >Old Hays pump house, well & tank >Water treatment plant clarifier filter materials & re-design	High	X	X	X	Tribal Government	FBIC-Tribal Funds, I.H.S.-SDS, US-HUD, ICDBG, USBR, EDA, DOI, EPA/ Council FB Infrastructure Dev. Committee, Prairie Mountain Utilities, I.H.S. Env. Engineer, Tribal construction	Technical Assistance & Implementation

Assist FBIC in developing and securing funding for roads and transportation infrastructure	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	USDOT, FHWA, DOI, TTP, SS4A, RTA, HPP/FBIC Tribal Transportation Construction, Transit & Planning Dept.'s	Technical Assistance
Assist FBIC in further implementing Red Elk communications business start-up & further securing funding for broadband infrastructure	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	NTIA, TBCP, BEAD, NTBG/FBIC's Red Elk Business, I.T. & Planning Dept.'s, & TERO enterprise	Implementation
Assist FBIC in securing funding for planning and implementation of renewable energy generation options upon tribal lands for energy independence, economic development, & energy resilience	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	US-DOE, EPA, DEMD, DOI, BIA, TEDC/ FBIC's enterprises & EPA, Land, THPO & Planning Dept.'s, FB Infrastructure Dev. Committee	Technical Assistance & Implementation

Goal 5: Identify Funding for Economic Development Training & Capacity Building

Objectives:

- Invest in professional training to build a skilled workforce and enhance organizational effectiveness
- Plan and develop grant applications in response to the workforce needs

Action Items	Priority	Short Term	Mid Term	Long Term	Lead Agency	Resources-Partners	Type of Assistance

		1-2 yrs	3-5 yrs	5-10 yrs			
Assist FBIC with providing business training, certifications, workshops and evaluations focused on business planning, leadership, professionalism, customer service, financial literacy, and other relevant topics	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	FBIC tribal funds & NNAHRA, UM-MSU, DOL, Falmouth Institute/ FBIC's human resources, planning, economic development credit, 477-E&T dept.'s, MTNGF, OPP Link NABA,TERO	Technical Assistance
Conduct employee needs assessments, community needs assessments, customer satisfaction analysis	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	FBIC tribal funds/ FBIC's human resources, planning, economic development credit, 477-E&T dept.'s, MTNGF, OPP Link NABA,TERO	Technical Assistance

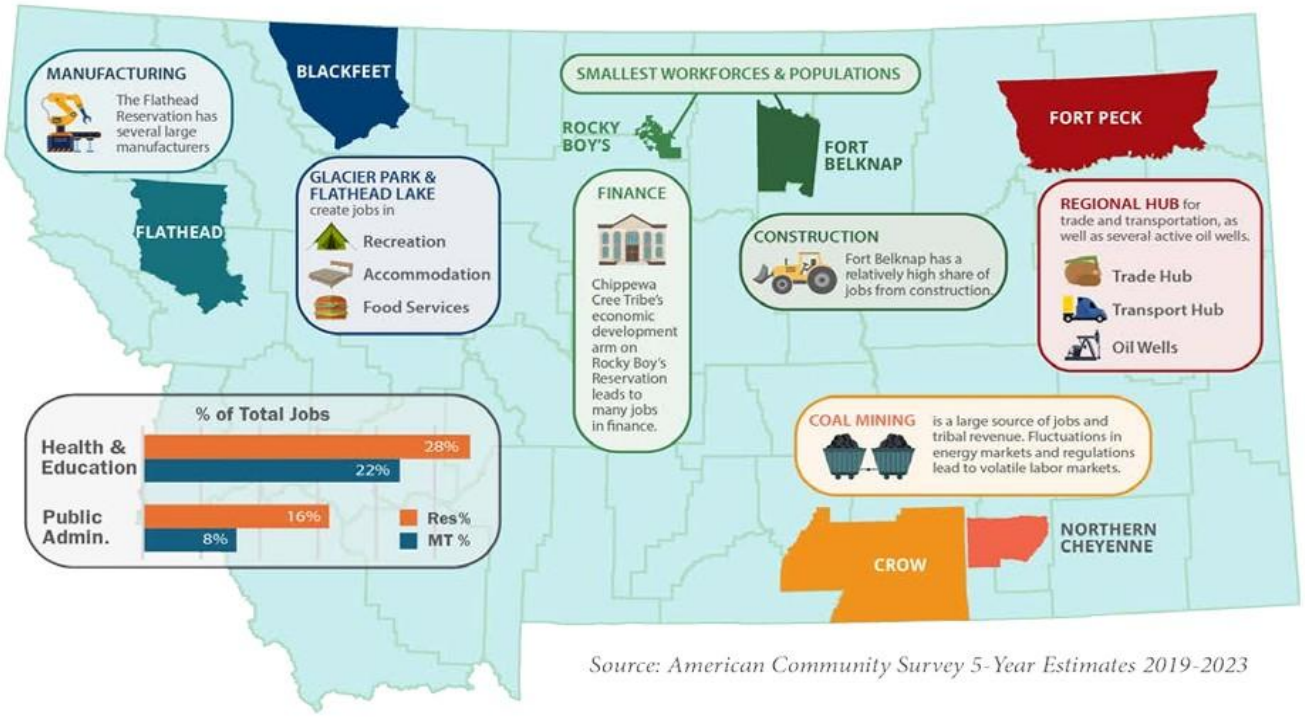
Goal 6: Improve Tribal Operations, Planning and Fiscal Management

Objectives:

- Strengthen planning and management systems to ensure effective and efficient resource use
- Enhanced project management, performance evaluation and communication with the community

Action Items	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources-Partners	Type of Assistance
Project management evaluations, accountability reports	Med	X	X	X	Tribal Government	FBIC tribal funds, federal funds, and planning grants/	Technical Assistance

						FBIC's CAO, CFO, human resources and planning Dept.'s	
Improve audit and idc proposal submissions	High	X	X	X	Tribal Government	FBIC tribal funds/FBIC CFO, Sec-Treas., auditing firm, financial consultant CPA	Technical Assistance
community needs assessments, project analysis, regularly update strategic plan and CEDS	High	X	X	X	Tribal Government	FBIC tribal funds/FBIC's leaders, administration, departments, entities, community, businesses, partners & community	Technical Assistance & Implementation



IV. Evaluation Framework

The goals in this CEDS were identified through the public community meetings and leadership, departmental meetings held throughout June-September 2025 and through review and discussion of other tribal enterprise plans, our previous CEDS, and regional plans. Under each goal, evaluation considerations are listed. These criteria will be addressed by the FB Planning Department throughout the timeframe of this CEDS to gauge progress.

Performance measures

FB Planning Department is a FY25-28 Partnership Planning grantee under the Economic Development Administration (EDA). This project supports development of a CEDS in the FBIC reservation (region) which comprises portions of Blaine and Phillips counties in Montana. The CEDS process is designed to bring together the public and private sectors in creation of an economic development roadmap to diversify and strengthen the regional economy.
While this planning project does not directly fund capital construction or business development, its expected impact on the Fort Belknap Indian Community's economy is significant and far-reaching. By strengthening the Tribe's ability to plan for, prioritize, and secure funding for high-impact infrastructure and resilience projects, this CEDS initiative will improve investment readiness, increase federal and private grant competitiveness, and enhance long-term regional economic stability.

As a EDA grant recipient, the project performance report (PPR), a concise, semi-annual document (typically under six pages) will be completed and submitted to the EDA Project Officer. It will focus on comparing actual project progress against the original scope of work, schedule and performance measures. Additionally, the Government and Performance Act (GPRA) ED-915 report form requirements will met periodically measure the short and long-term impact of the project. The following eight performance measures will be used by the FB Planning Department to evaluate successful development and implementation of the CEDS:

- Number of economic development initiatives from the CEDS process implemented during the investment award period that led to private investment and jobs, and identify the sources of funding for each initiative
- Category of each project: facility construction, facility rehabilitation, technical assistance, infrastructure, planning or other
- Number of projects classified as either technology or brownfields
- Number of investments funded by any source
- A list of economic development initiatives and/or projects
- Estimated number of jobs created or retained
- Estimated amount of private sector investment generated
- Estimated amount of public sector investment generated
-

Projected Impact of Critical Infrastructure Planning

Through a structured, community-informed planning process, FBIC anticipates measuring the following long-term outcomes from its infrastructure focus:

- **Project Readiness**: By clearly articulating infrastructure priorities and aligning them with engineering inputs, land use codes, and federal agency coordination, FBIC will accelerate the timeline for capital project deployment. This includes projects like the

Eagle Valley housing infrastructure buildout, Tribal administration facility expansion, and renewable energy installations at public buildings.

- **Business and Housing Enablement**: Improvements in zoning, roads, and utility capacity will unlock new housing developments and make sites available for commercial investment. This directly supports job creation and local spending capture by preparing the physical environment for economic activity.
- **Job Creation Through Construction**: While precise figures will depend on capital grant awards following the planning period, FBIC anticipates that infrastructure implementation tied to this CEDS will support dozens of construction jobs and temporary hires, especially through Tribal enterprises like Snake Butte Construction and IMDG.
- **Increased Grant Competitiveness**: A modern, EDA-compliant CEDS with clear infrastructure goals and cost estimates will allow FBIC to pursue large-scale funding from agencies such as USDA, HUD, BIA, and EPA. These awards can range from $250,000 to $5 million per project, potentially bringing in tens of millions in outside investment over the CEDS horizon.
-

V. Economic Resilience

Integrating resilience into FBIC's economic development strategy is expected to yield protective and adaptive benefits, including:

- **Avoided Economic Loss**: By proactively identifying vulnerabilities in transportation, broadband, health, and emergency response systems, the Tribe can take steps to reduce service disruptions during future crises, protecting employment, public health, and business continuity.
- **Workforce Stability and Development**: Resilience planning will consider flexible workforce models, emergency worker access, and redundancy planning, enabling quicker recovery after shocks. This has downstream benefits on Tribal workforce retention and training programs.
- **Stronger Local Institutions**: Integrating resilience across departments will improve FBIC's governance capacity. For example, stronger coordination between the Planning Department and Tribal Health on climate, disease, and infrastructure issues will result in more cohesive implementation of both economic and health strategies.
- **Enhanced Capacity for Adaptive Growth**: Planning for future uncertainty, whether related to climate, federal funding cycles, or global pandemics, which positions FBIC to remain economically viable across multiple scenarios.

Together, these impacts will not only improve the Tribe's ability to address historic inequities and modernize infrastructure, but also enhance its long-term economic sovereignty. By investing in a forward-looking, comprehensive CEDS, FBIC is making a generational commitment to strategic, data-informed development.

Disaster and Economic Recovery & Resiliency

Pre-disaster Mitigation Plan

The 2022 FBIC PDM, FEMA approved Plan helps guide community disaster and emergency services and focus hazard mitigation activities. It includes profiles of significant hazards and identifies projects to mitigate impacts. The plan identified the following hazards to have the highest probability of occurring on the reservation:

- Floods

- Wild land fires
- Winter storm events
- Severe storms with high wind, tornadoes or hail
- Hazardous Materials transportation related event
- West Nile Virus

The plan recommends goals and objectives to address these events and includes an action plan that ranks priority and establishes jurisdictional responsibility. The plan conforms to the Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) (44 CFR Parts 201 & 206), Interim Financial Rule and the Federal Rule, the Federal Emergency Management Act (FEMA), Region 8 crosswalk for tribal plans.

Emergency Operations Plan

The Fort Belknap Emergency Operations Plan (FBEOP) was approved by the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council in July 13, 2009 and is in response to the "Disaster Relief Act of 1974" Public Law 93-288. FBEOP provides guidance for emergency personnel to respond to incidents. The plan identifies emergency functions, includes a plan for who should perform those functions and includes a plan to develop capacity to execute the operating procedures. The plan is divided into three sections:

1. General Information – Authorities, applicability, scope, policies, objectives and assumptions.
2. Pre-Incident Stage – Command structure, communication, emergency management strategies, air operations, funding, TERC and Modifications.
3. Function – Standard Operating Procedures, roles and responsibilities of incidents.

Tribal Emergency Response Committee (TERC)

The Fort Belknap Indian Community has a Tribal Emergency Response Committee, composed of Program Directors and Managers of Programs which could help in emergency situations, such as Law Enforcement, Corrections, Fish& Wildlife, Department of Health Services, Bureau of Indian Affairs, etc. The TERC committee meet quarterly, monthly, weekly, or daily depending on the climatic and emergency need on the reservation. The tribe maintains a Disaster and Emergency Fund for unexpected flood, fire, winter storm, drought, cyber threats, other natural disasters, contingency plan implementation and protective measure activity. The Tribe employs a DES Coordinator who operates the Incident Command structure.

Resilience and Recovery

Economic Recovery & Resilience 2026-28

- Conduct resilience-specific data collection from Tribal Health, Emergency Services, and Education departments
- Evaluate vulnerabilities related to natural disaster risks
- Begin interdepartmental work sessions to identify continuity of operations goals
- Review past emergency response performance and broadband infrastructure gaps

Economic Recovery & Resilience 2028-30

- Draft dedicated Resilience section of CEDS with stakeholder input
- Develop resilience performance metrics and tracking indicators

- Conduct workshops on economic activity, broadband reliability, and emergency coordination
- Align planning with external resilience resources (FEMA Homeland Security, Hazard Mitigation, CDC Preparedness)

Economic Recovery & Resilience 2030-31

- Finalize resilience metrics and evaluation framework
- Incorporate resilience goals across SWOT, action plan, and evaluation sections
- Submit all resilience-related coordination documentation as appendices
- Host final stakeholder presentation on resilience strategies and continuity planning