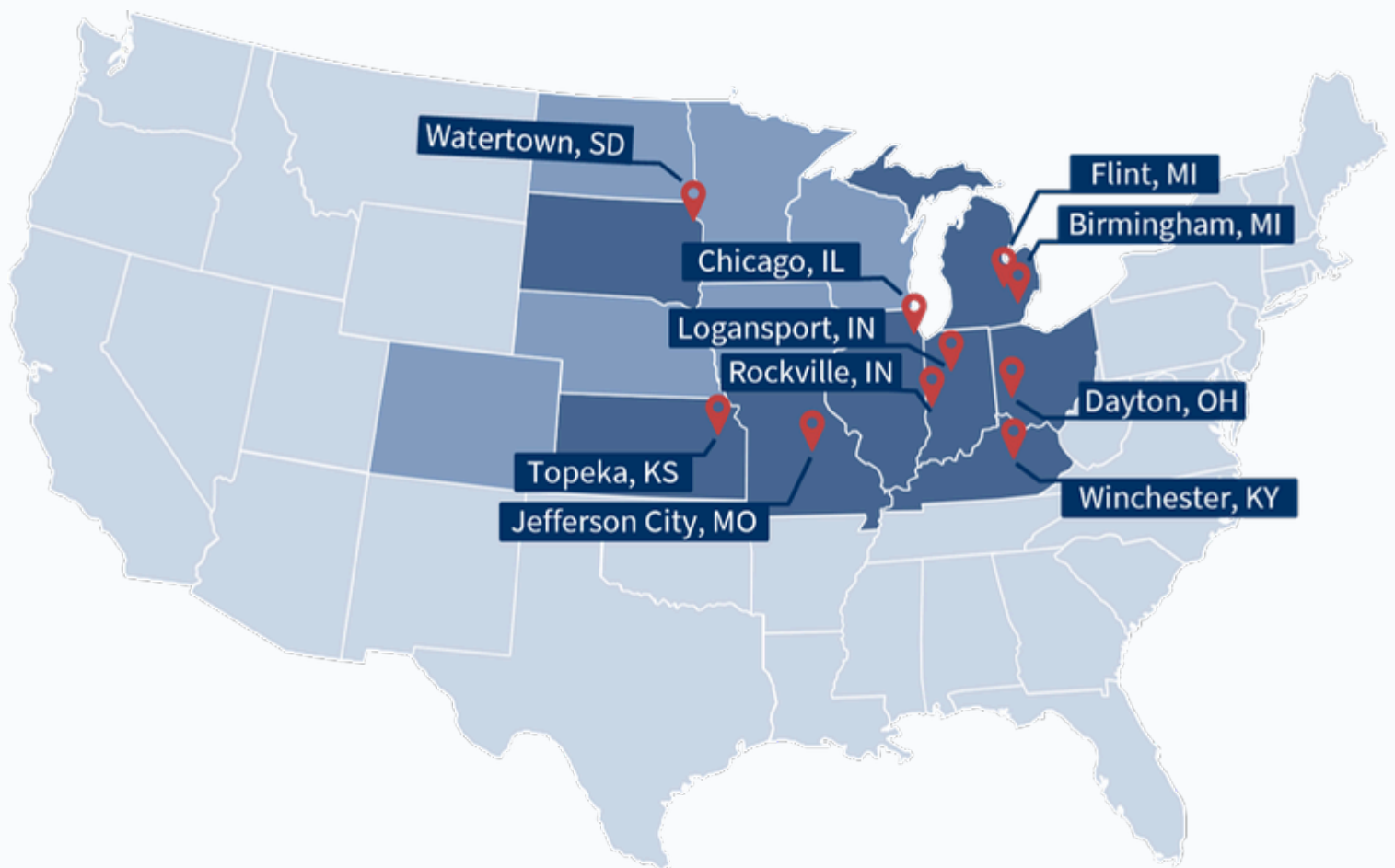


MIDWEST MEETS GERMANY 2026

MEET OUR DELEGATES FROM THE MIDWEST MANUFACTURING ECOSYSTEM

Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, Germany

July 19-23, 2026



 GACC Midwest States

 Participating States

 Delegate Locations



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Christy Householder | [LinkedIn](#)

Director

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 Logansport, Indiana

Christy Householder

Cass County Government, Department of Economic Development

Christy Householder is the Director of Economic Development for Cass County, Indiana, where she has led initiatives in economic growth, community revitalization, and regional collaboration since 2002. She works closely with local governments, businesses, nonprofits, and regional and state partners to secure funding, strengthen partnerships, and enhance quality of life across north central Indiana. Her efforts focus on sustainable growth, rural development, and creating opportunities for future generations. Christy is an active member of several professional organizations, including the International Economic Development Council and the Indiana Economic Development Association.

Motivation for joining the trip:

As Director of Economic Development for Cass County, I aim to strengthen international relationships and support regional manufacturing growth. This trip offers an opportunity to learn from Germany's advanced practices, build partnerships, and showcase assets like the Cass County Agribusiness Park to enhance our region's competitiveness.



Cliff Scott | [LinkedIn](#)

CFO

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 Winchester, Kentucky

Cliff Scott

Economic Development by Kentucky's Touchstone Energy Cooperatives (EKPC)

Cliff Scott oversees finance, treasury and risk management, regulatory and compliance services, accounting, information technology, economic development and member services. Before joining EKPC, he worked at NiSource in multiple finance and regulatory roles, including Vice President of Risk, Finance and Performance Optimization and Director of Commercial Renewable Energy Assets. He earlier served as a Finance and IT Auditor at Arthur Anderson. Scott holds a bachelor's degree in Finance and Accounting from Cedarville University and an MBA in Finance from The Ohio State University.

Motivation for joining the trip:

To better understand the economic development process and motivation for German companies desiring to locate in Kentucky.



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Cyndi Todd | [LinkedIn](#)

Executive Director

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 Rockville, Indiana

Cyndi Todd

Partnership Parke County

Cyndi, a longtime Parke County resident, combines community passion with professional expertise. She holds a Bachelor of Science and lives locally with her husband. As Executive Director of Partnership Parke County since 2015, she has helped drive over \$35 million in investment. With 20 years in customer care leadership and experience in marketing and management, she also serves on multiple regional boards and champions projects that strengthen and sustain her community.

Motivation for joining the trip:


Cyndi views participation in the American Midwest delegation to Germany as an opportunity to strengthen global partnerships that benefit her communities. As an economic developer, she builds relationships, attracts investment, and advances growth. She aims to foster collaboration, highlight regional strengths, and bring back ideas, partnerships, and opportunities that support long-term community success.



Darius Udry | [LinkedIn](#)

Director of Communications

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 Birmingham, Michigan

Darius Udry

Interstate Capital

Darius Udry leads communication strategy at Interstate Capital, overseeing brand, messaging, and stakeholder relations. An award-winning professional with decades of international experience, he has worked as a journalist, strategist, and communications leader, including roles at Radio Free Europe and Fox 47 News. He has led teams across academic, municipal, and nonprofit sectors and serves as an adjunct communications professor at Vilnius University, holding a PhD from Claremont Graduate University.

Motivation for joining the trip:

To identify German companies looking to locate in the Midwest and interested in using Interstate Capital for site selection and leasing/building industrial space.



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Grace Garcia | [LinkedIn](#)
COO
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 Chicago, IL

Grace Garcia

Calumet Area Industrial Commission


CAIC- 2026, currently serving as COO. Have over 20 years' experience in Workforce Development. The Sector Skills Academy/The Aspen Institute-Marano Fellow 2009, National Association of Workforce Development Professionals-certified Workforce Dev Professional. Next Gen Sector Model Training-Phoenix and have been involved in the implementation with Calumet Mfg Ind Sector Partnership.

Motivation for joining the trip:

Learn more about the German Apprenticeship model.



Joel Feick | [LinkedIn](#)
Business Development Manager
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 Flint, Michigan

Joel Feick

Flint Genesee Economic Alliance

Joel Feick is a business development professional with the Flint & Genesee Economic Alliance, focusing on business attraction and community outreach. His newest focus is a 1,300-acre mega site project supporting advanced manufacturing. He previously advocated for disability and inclusion at a local non-profit. Joel spent most of his career in broadcast journalism, including more than 30 years at ABC, NBC and Fox affiliates in the Flint area. He holds a Communications degree from the University of Toledo. He's elected to the Grand Blanc Township Board of Trustees. Joel is also on the board of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint.

Motivation for joining the trip:

Joel focuses on attracting German investment and jobs to Michigan, especially the Flint-Genesee region. He serves as a state ambassador, building relationships and promoting Michigan's advantages. With German heritage, he is passionate about strengthening U.S.-Germany ties and fostering business partnerships.



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Katrin Geisler | [LinkedIn](#)

Director Germany & Central Europe -
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 Frankfurt, Germany

Katrin Geisler

Missouri Department of Economic Development

Katrin is the Director for Germany & Central Europe at the Missouri Department of Economic Development, where she represents the State of Missouri in international trade and investment. Based in Europe, she focuses on building and strengthening economic ties between Missouri and key markets across Germany and Central Europe, supporting companies, investors, and partners seeking to engage with the state.

In parallel, Katrin is also active in international advisory work through her role at OCO Global, where she supports cross-border business and investment initiatives.

Motivation for joining the trip:

Katrin is joining to strengthen collaboration between Missouri and Germany, particularly in advanced manufacturing, supply chain resilience, and sustainable production. She aims to connect German partners with opportunities in Missouri, promote the state as an attractive investment destination, and build lasting, project-driven partnerships.



Matthew Godinez | [LinkedIn](#)

Assistant Secretary of Commerce
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 Topeka, Kansas

Matthew Godinez

Kansas Department of Commerce

Matthew Godinez is Assistant Secretary of Quality Places at the Kansas Department of Commerce, overseeing programs including Main Street, housing, broadband, and community development. He aligns initiatives with the Kansas Framework for Growth and strengthens partnerships statewide. Under his leadership, the division earned national honors, including IEDC and NADO awards. A Top 50 Economic Developer and Leadership Kansas graduate, he holds MEDP and CPM credentials and serves on the IEDC board.

Motivation for joining the trip:

This delegation offers insight into Germany's manufacturing, apprenticeship models, and public-private partnerships, with lessons to apply in Kansas across community development, housing, broadband, downtown revitalization, and rural initiatives. As my first international economic development delegation, it will broaden my perspective, strengthen relationships, and generate ideas to help Kansas communities become more competitive and resilient.

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Nicholas Sung | [LinkedIn](#)

Senior FDI Manager
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 Chicago, Illinois

Nicholas (Nick) Sung

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

Nicholas (Nick) Sung is the Senior Foreign Direct Investment Manager for the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity, where he leads statewide efforts to attract foreign companies to invest and expand their business operations in Illinois. He brings more than a decade of experience in international affairs and program management, including previous roles at the U.S. Department of Defense, Harvard University, and the U.S. Peace Corps.


Motivation for joining the trip:

Nick is joining this trip to strengthen Illinois' position as a key partner for German companies - especially in priority areas for Illinois Governor Pritzker's economic agenda like advanced manufacturing, AI, clean energy, and life sciences. GACC's program offers a valuable opportunity to build direct relationships with German industry, government partners, and expand transatlantic partnerships that support business growth in both Illinois and Germany.



Ron McMahan | [LinkedIn](#)

Associate Manager Economic Development
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 Winchester, Kentucky

Ron McMahan

Economic Development by Kentucky's Touchstone Energy Cooperatives (EKPC)

Ron serves as the Associate Economic Development Manager for East Kentucky Power Cooperative (EKPC), where he actively supports business recruitment, expansion, and retention efforts across the cooperative's service territory. His work focuses on fostering partnerships with industry, education, workforce, and community leaders to advance strategic growth initiatives that drive new electrical load, capital investment, and job creation throughout the region.

Motivation for joining the trip:

Ron hopes to strengthen EKPC's position by building relationships with German companies considering the U.S. Midwest and encouraging development within the EKPC service territories.

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Sarah Spees | [LinkedIn](#)
Director of Business Development
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Dayton, Ohio

Sarah Spees

Dayton Development Coalition

Sarah, Director of Business Development, partners with national and international leadership, site consultants, and business leaders to attract investment and support growth across Western Ohio's 12-county Dayton region. With more than 25 years of public and private sector experience, she is a strategic, results-driven leader focused on helping organizations succeed. She serves on the boards of the Ohio Aviation Association and the Emerge, Recovery & Trade Initiative, supporting innovation in aviation, aerospace, and defense, as well as workforce development and second-chance opportunities.

Motivation for joining the trip:

Germany is a leading source of investment in Ohio, with strong alignment in manufacturing, aerospace, and technology – especially in Western Ohio's growing German business presence. This trip provides a critical opportunity to build direct, in-person relationships with German companies and position Ohio as a proactive, business-friendly partner. Engaging early helps secure new investment pipelines from firms looking to expand into the U.S. amid rising costs and global pressures at home.



Sebastian Hesse
Director of Research
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Birmingham, Michigan

Sebastian Hesse

Interstate Capital

Sebastian Hesse specializes in evaluating industrial sites across the U.S. Midwest for manufacturing and heavy industry, using GIS and market intelligence to align locations with operational needs, efficiency, and growth. He holds an M.S. in Physical Chemistry, conducted research at Kiel University with peer-reviewed publications, and later led a scientific team at Germany's Max Rubner-Institute, strengthening his expertise in data-driven analysis.

Motivation for joining the trip:

Sebastian aims to build relationships with German companies exploring expansion into the U.S. Midwest, understand their operational needs, and identify how his platform can support their growth. He looks forward to exchanging insights on industrial growth, location strategy, and long-term investment priorities.

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Stuart Giere | [LinkedIn](#)

Business Advisor

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 Watertown, South Dakota

Stuart Giere

South Dakota Manufacturing and Technology Solutions

Stuart, a Mechanical Engineering graduate of South Dakota State University, has 30+ years of executive experience across engineering, product development, quality, marketing, sales, and business development. A successful entrepreneur, he is certified as a Scrum Professional, ICF Associate Coach, and Working Genius Facilitator. He serves as a Business Advisor with South Dakota MTS, specializing in Lean Leadership, Lean 101, and Strategic Planning, helping small and mid-sized companies improve performance across South Dakota.

Motivation for joining the trip:


I work with manufacturing companies in South Dakota every day. I am interested in seeing how things are done in other parts of the world, how efficiencies are maintained, and the unique challenges of other industries and economies.



Theodore Stalnos | [LinkedIn](#)

President/CEO

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 Chicago, Illinois

Theodore (Ted) Stalnos

Calumet Area Industrial Commission

As President and CEO of the Calumet Area Industrial Commission (CAIC), Ted Stalnos leads a network of over 140+ member organization, driving economic growth and public-private collaboration for Fortune 500 companies and regional manufacturers alike. With more than 30 years of experience in advanced manufacturing ecosystems, Ted is a champion for industrial retention and workforce innovation across the Chicagoland region. He specializes in a "business-driven" workforce model, strategically deploying public resources to design state-of-the-art training initiatives and Registered Apprenticeships that meet real-time private sector demands. Ted attended DePaul University and is an alumnus of the Aspen Institute's elite Sector Skills Academy (Class of 2005).

Motivation for joining the trip:

Open markets to Germany and to encourage industrial development in the Calumet Area.



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Meet the Team



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