Planning for Springfield’s future took an important step forward with the partnering among three local community organizations.

The Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln’s Communityworks Initiative has joined forces with the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce and United Way of Central Illinois to focus on improving Springfield’s economic future through the Continuum of Learning project.

The Foundation’s Communityworks Initiative focuses on Childcare, Workforce Development and Land Use, issues also focused on in projects sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and the United Way.

“The reason we got involved with Communityworks is because it’s so closely aligned with the Continuum of Learning and our workforce development efforts,” Chamber of Commerce President Gary Plummer said. “It will probably make us all more efficient. Anytime you align in a collaborative way you have a greater chance of success.”

The partnership was kick-started by the Chamber of Commerce’s decision to provide $135,000 to the Communityworks Initiative. The grant comes from the Chamber’s Strategic Leadership Council, which is part of the Quantum Growth (Q5) Initiative. The grant raises the Communityworks endowment to $475,000. The Community Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce and the local United Way will be the coordinating partners in the Continuum of Learning, which focuses on education from cradle to grave.

“The whole Q5 initiative is aligned consistently in so many different ways with Communityworks and we are excited that the Chamber of Commerce is partnering with us,” Community Foundation Executive Director John Stremsterfer said.

The local United Way will also be involved in the project. The three-pronged effort is crucial to preventing overlapping efforts and helping ensure the best possible result from the project.

“It’s very exciting for us to partner with the Chamber of Commerce and United Way because we are three organizations that have a unique perspective of community needs,” Stremsterfer said. “The collaboration is really powerful.”

The effort is expected to provide long-term benefits for the community in the effort to improve the area’s economic future through education of its workforce and planning. The need to provide companies with a skilled workforce grows larger every day as the state’s and nation’s economy struggles.

“Workforce development is emerging as the most critical component of a successful economic development program,” Plummer said.

However, the benefits of this effort won’t only be seen many years from now.

“There are also short-term benefits for the individual. If we can change one person’s life and give them the skills training, get them out of poverty and into a self-supporting profession, we’ve done a great thing,” Plummer said.

The Community Foundation jumpstarted the Communityworks Initiative in 2003 with a grant from the Grand Victoria Foundation. The Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln was one of 17 community foundations in Illinois that received the grant. The funds from the Chamber of Commerce completed the Phase Two challenge grant portion of the Initiative.