



FALLS FUTURE 2.0 STRATEGY



Falls Future 2.0

Wichita Falls, TX | June, 2022



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INTRODUCTION

Wichita Falls' leaders took bold action to embrace a strategic approach to community and economic development with the 2018 plan "Falls Future." In recent years, Wichita Falls has made tremendous progress activating this strategy. While this early progress has been impressive, stakeholders in Wichita Falls understand their work is only just beginning. Successful communities never stop planning. Wins that seem sudden or progress that feels inevitable are often the product of thoughtful planning, implementation, and evaluation carried out over many years.

Wichita Falls must maintain the momentum of the first Falls Future plan but also update this 1.0 strategy with an even more ambitious agenda that can inspire the community, attract new investment, and take the community to the next level of success. Falls Future 2.0 will be a bold yet attainable five-year community and economic development strategy driven by data and community feedback.

ABOUT BROAD RIPPLE STRATEGIES

Broad Ripple Strategies has been selected as Wichita Falls' partner to develop Falls Future 2.0. BRS represents nearly 30 years of experience crafting community, workforce, and economic development strategies that build consensus, drive investment, and get results. Our team has helped more than 60 clients develop 90+ strategies for community and economic development, talent and workforce sustainability, and quality of place. Our team partnered with Wichita Falls on the development of the first Falls Future strategy and has previous experience in Arlington, Austin, Pearland, San Marcos, and Waco in Texas.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Falls Future 2.0 will be developed through a four-phase process that began in January 2022 and will conclude in June 2022. It is led by a dynamic Steering Committee of key community leaders. This group is tasked with sharing their perspectives and insights, reviewing research and input findings, considering the guidance the BRS team provides, and making key decisions about the priorities and strategies that will define the new strategy. The 24 leaders selected for the Steering Committee reflect the diverse opinions, perspectives, and backgrounds of Wichita Falls and its residents.

Phase 1: Stakeholder Engagement

Input from the people who live and work in a community is an essential component of a strategic planning process. The BRS team worked with the Wichita Falls Chamber to develop a robust engagement process consisting of interviews, focus groups, and an online survey (available in both English and Spanish) that garnered 3,261 responses.

Phase 2: Competitive Assessment and Implementation Evaluation

This phase provided key insights into Wichita Falls' competitive position and will help the Steering Committee to make informed decisions on the key issues and opportunities that will shape Falls Future 2.0. The Competitive Assessment synthesized existing research, quantitative data, and qualitative input to evaluate Wichita Falls as a place to live, work, and do business. It is complemented by a concise Implementation Evaluation that identifies key "lessons learned" from the activation of the first strategy.

Phase 3: Falls Future 2.0

This phase resulted in the development of a next-level strategy for Wichita Falls that blends ongoing initiatives that warrant continuation with new priority programs and investment. Falls Future 2.0 establishes strategic priorities for the next five years for partners in Wichita Falls. Creation of the strategy occurred in three phases: a high-level outline or framework of goals and objectives; a draft strategy; and final plan. Each phase incorporated review and comment from the Steering Committee, whose work completed with the final approval of Falls Future 2.0

Phase 4: Implementation Guidelines

While Falls Future 2.0 will determine "what" Wichita Falls will do strategically for the next five years, the Implementation Guidelines will prescribe "how" that will be accomplished. It will analyze and establish implementation costs and resources, lead and support entities for priority strategies, launch dates and project phasing, and performance measures to track progress toward goal attainment. The Guidelines will be developed in consultation with the Wichita Falls Chamber and other partners that will play a direct role in activating the strategy.

THE DRAFT FALLS FUTURE 2.0 STRATEGY

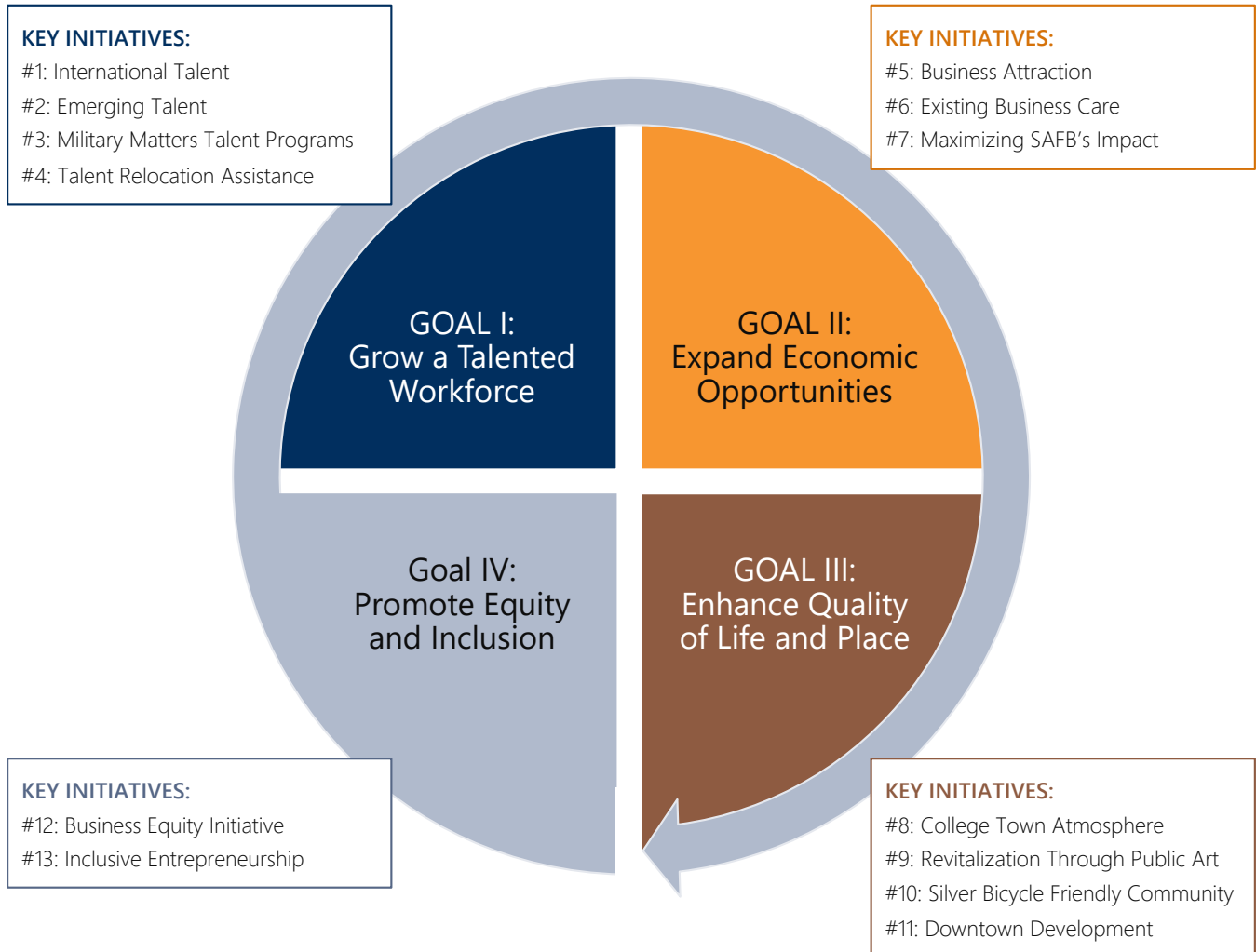
Based on the key findings from research and input and the guidance of the Steering Committee, it is reasonable to organize Falls Future 2.0 around the following framework. At the top are **four Goals** that the strategy's principle aims. The Goals are:

- GOAL I:** Grow a Talented Workforce
- GOAL II:** Expand Economic Opportunities
- GOAL III:** Enhance Quality of Life and Place
- GOAL IV:** Promote Equity and Inclusion

In addition to being the focus of Goal IV, the concepts of **equity and inclusion** are also **guiding principles** that cut across all aspects of Falls Future 2.0. This dynamic and the relationship between the strategy's Goals and Key Initiatives are depicted in the **Falls Future 2.0 Framework graphic on the following page**. Underneath each proposed Goal is a set of **Key Initiatives** that correspond to specific programs and/or investments. The Key Initiatives incorporate a range of ongoing and planned activities along with new concepts that can help Wichita Falls achieve a higher level of success. The strategy includes a **total of 13 Key Initiatives**, a limited number that is consistent with stakeholders' desire for a **focused strategy**.

The remainder of this document describes the Key Initiatives in further detail, including an objective statement, recommended actions, and best-practice examples. **While the initiatives and recommended actions are numbered for the purposes of clarity, their arrangement in the document does not imply hierarchy or priority.** It is also important to note that there are numerous efforts underway in Wichita Falls to address various aspects of the strategy. This is partially by design, as a strategic plan of this nature can be likened to "jumping on a moving train." Additionally, there are many important activities that fall outside the scope of a holistic economic development strategy for the Wichita Falls Chamber and its partners to implement. The Falls Future 2.0 strategy is designed to complement these existing efforts as opposed to duplicating work.

The Falls Future 2.0 Framework



Key Initiative #1: International Talent

Objective: Strengthen the workforce and engage an underutilized talent resources through a pilot program to assist Wichita Falls firms with hiring international graduates from MSU.

Midwestern State University is home to a large population of international students, most of whom are from the Caribbean. International students have been an integral part of MSU for decades, but when it comes to Wichita Falls' workforce, they represent a major untapped resource. Stakeholders said that many of these individuals would like to remain in Wichita Falls after graduation but are unable to do so because they cannot find employment with a local company willing to sponsor them for a work visa. One input participant remarked that these students "have big ideas and are in great fields but want to go to Dallas. We need to find a way to keep them here."

To remain in the United States after graduation, international students who graduate with certain types of four-year or advanced degrees must find work with an employer that is willing to sponsor them for a special visa. This is commonly an H-1B visa, which according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce "provides the most streamlined process to gain permanent resident status for a foreign employee." Navigating the H-1B process can be complex, however, which input participants said has acted as a deterrent for some local companies.

Stakeholders in Wichita Falls – including Talent Partnership staff and MSU administrators – have already started discussions about how best to assist both companies and international students with the visa process. This Key Initiative seeks to translate these initial conversations into a formal pilot program to provide technical and financial assistance to companies seeking to hire international talent in Wichita Falls. This concept generated significant interest among business leaders contacted during the input process, and stakeholders added that the opportunities will only increase as MSU seeks to build on its historical recruiting strengths in the Caribbean to attract an even broader range of international students from Europe and other areas.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Convene an International Talent Working Group to establish the pilot program

- Convene representatives from MSU, local business executives and HR professionals, the Chamber, and other relevant partners to guide the design and activation of the pilot program
- Identify opportunities to engage Wichita Falls' existing international population – including international SAFB personnel and families – in program design and outreach activities
- Outreach to immigration lawyers and other professionals with relevant experience to participate in the group or – if participation is not feasible – offer guidance as needed

2. Perform initial program research

- Leverage existing resources, including the H-1B guide published by the U.S. Chamber
- Survey employers on their international hiring experience, current practices, and future interest
- Work with MSU to examine historic trends for where MSU graduates have ended up and to survey the current international student body on post-graduation plans
- Based on the scan of existing resources and local research, create a custom one-pager or whitepaper that establishes the “business case” for hiring international graduates in Wichita Falls

3. Design and brand the pilot program

- With the International Talent Working Group, design a pilot program to help Wichita Falls companies hire international graduates from MSU
- Create a specialized brand identity to help with program recognition
- Develop an International Hiring Guide with clear instructions (e.g., flowcharts or step-by-step procedures) for firms in Wichita Falls seeking to hire international talent; ensure that the Guide provides instructions for a variety of hiring scenarios, including individuals on student visas, MSU graduates seeking H-1B visas, international talent from SAFB, etc.
- Work with the group to develop other needed technical assistance and designate a liaison to help interested employers access resources for assistance
- Develop resources to support subsidized legal services; evaluate the feasibility and desirability of pooling resources to keep an immigration attorney on retainer to assist companies as issues arise
- Align advocacy agendas to support policies favorable to hiring qualified international graduates

4. Establish program targets and metrics to inform program trajectory

- With the International Talent Working Group, identify a desired number of successful H-1B visa applications for the initial pilot
- Confirm metrics to track employee retention, employer satisfaction, and return on investment
- If successful, scale up the program to engage more companies and prospective graduates
- Monitor immigration law and administrative policies for any changes that would impact program design and implementation

Key Initiative #2: Emerging Talent

Objective: Develop and retain talented individuals in Wichita Falls by connecting students to employment and career exploration opportunities.

In general, there are two ways that a community can grow a stronger workforce: attracting talented individuals from other places and producing “homegrown” talent. For a community such as Wichita Falls with limited population growth, homegrown talent is particularly important. Stakeholders said they would like to see strengthened connections between local employers and the community’s talent pipeline.

The Competitive Assessment revealed several areas to target for improvement. Midwestern State University and Vernon College (counting all campuses) awarded more than 2,000 degrees and certificates in 2020. But input participants said students from these institutions frequently choose to locate elsewhere after graduation. The Wichita Falls Independent School District (by far the region’s largest PK-12 education provider) has high school graduation rates that are far above the Texas average. But just 60 percent of these graduates are considered by the state to be “College, Career, or Military Ready.”

This Key Initiative entails a multi-pronged approach to address these issues. It involves expanding upon the Intern Wichita Falls program that emerged through the implementation of the first Falls Future strategy. When done well, internships can help employers access innovative talent, enhance educational experiences for students, and “attach” program participants to the community. It recommends complementing the existing program and internship guide with a robust program for summer interns and engaging The Circuit young professionals group to help support key activities.

The Initiative also entails working to increase college, career, and military readiness among PK-12 students and working with employers in the trades, advanced manufacturing, etc. to identify career track positions and better position these opportunities to students and recent graduates who are unsure about college. Finally, it proposes a new youth leadership program to help local high school students enhance their academic, social, and life skills.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #1: TopCity Interns (Topeka, KS)
- #2: Worlds of Work (West Alabama)
- #3: Youth Leadership Initiative (Des Moines, IA)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Scale up existing Intern Wichita Falls programming

- Through the Wichita Falls Talent Partnership, continue strong collaboration between the Chamber, MSU's Career Management Center, Vernon College, Wayland Baptist University, WFISD, and the business community
- Utilize the Intern Wichita Falls brand and continue to carry out promotional campaigns targeting employers and prospective internship participants
- Ensure that promotion and outreach efforts are inclusive; engage a diverse set of volunteers with strong network connections and trust to raise awareness organically within specific communities
- Work with partners to establish updated baseline and "stretch" goals for internship participation

2. Create programming to connect summer interns to the Wichita Falls community

- Work with the Talent Partnership, The Circuit, and other partners to design and implement new programs to help summer interns discover why Wichita Falls is a great place to live and work
- Potential programming could include networking events such as lunch and learns with local business leaders, social events that highlight local food, drink, and amenities, and volunteer opportunities to help deepen community connections
- Help promote program engagement by offering free food and a resume credential (e.g., "Intern Wichita Falls Graduate") for interns who complete the program
- Seek corporate sponsorships to help cover program costs

3. Engage The Circuit young professionals group to support activities

- Work with The Circuit to create and implement quarterly "YP-led" events for interns such as lunch-and-learns or group activities
- In collaboration with employers, promote membership in The Circuit to help interns who have been hired into full-time positions develop networks and adjust to professional life in Wichita Falls

4. Work with ISDs to enhance college, career, and military readiness of PK-12 students in Wichita Falls

- Convene local ISDs, higher education partners, and the business community to begin discussions about how the community can support PK-12 schools in boosting the percentage of graduates that the Texas Education Agency considers to be college, career, and military ready

5. Promote “pathways” to career-track opportunities in manufacturing and the trades to PK-12 students

- With employers, WFISD, Vernon College, and other partners, connect students who are unsure about college to apprenticeships and career-track positions in field such as advanced manufacturing
- Develop inclusive outreach techniques to promote opportunities to students, parents, and PK-12 faculty and staff; could include interactive career fairs, visits to advanced manufacturing facilities, etc.
- Work with employers to offer “signing bonuses” or similar incentives to recent high school graduates who enter a career-track job and complete a minimum period of service

6. Create a youth leadership program for high school students in Wichita Falls

- With the Talent Partnership, PK-12 and higher education partners, The Circuit, and the business community, create a youth leadership program for high school students in Wichita Falls
- Develop programming to help high school students enhance their academic, social, and life skills and interact with local community leaders, including young professionals from The Circuit who grew up in Wichita Falls
- Work with local schools to enroll classes of students that reflect the racial and ethnic, cultural, geographical, and socioeconomic diversity of Wichita Falls
- Seek corporate and philanthropic gifts to ensure that program tuition is free

Key Initiative #3: Military Matters Talent Programs

Objective: Grow Wichita Falls’ workforce and improve standards of living and quality of life for military families and veterans through enhanced Military Matters talent programming.

Sheppard Air Force Base is another critical component of Wichita Falls’ talent pipeline. The base strengthens the community’s workforce in two key ways. First, an average of 234 individuals “exit” their military career while stationed at SAFB each year according to data provided by the Chamber. These individuals (and their family members) have skills and experience that are valuable to a wide variety of employers if they can be retained in the community. Overall, nine percent of Wichita Falls residents between the ages of 18 and 64 are veterans, nearly double the national average. SAFB is also home to a significant number of “trailing spouses and partners.” While these individuals may be in Wichita Falls for a short time, they can be an important source of talent for local firms.

As part of the implementation of the first Falls Future strategy, the Wichita Falls Talent Partnership created several talent programs within the “Military Matters” initiative. Input participants praised these efforts and said they would like to see the community continue and expand its efforts to assist “military affiliated talent.”

This Key Initiative focuses on continuing to support and grow the Military Matters talent programs to create a stronger workforce and improve standards of living and quality of life for military families and veterans. A portion of this work will entail enhancing marketing and visibility efforts of existing offerings. Also included is a recommendation to develop a pilot program seeking to leverage the emergence of remote work to help military spouses and partners secure local employment. Under this concept, local firms with “full remote” options could be paired with well-qualified trailing spouses and partners who could begin their employment in person and transition to remote work upon moving to their next assignment.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Grow and enhance existing Military Matters programs

- Through the Wichita Falls Talent Partnership, increase advocacy efforts among local employers to promote the benefits of hiring military veterans and family members; continue to share opportunities with the Sheppard Airman & Family Readiness Center and other relevant base resources
- Continue programming for military spouses and partners, including Hidden Gems and Sheppard MSPN; establish increased goals for program participation
- Through the Talent Partnership, seek opportunities to retain international personnel and families stationed at SAFB upon the conclusion of their military service

2. Create an enhanced multi-faceted promotional campaign for Military Matters programs

- Work with the Talent Partnership, SAFB officials, and other partners to develop a multi-channel promotional campaign targeted at military affiliated talent
- Develop a video series and social media campaign that features “success stories” of companies and military affiliated talent
- Work with SAFB leadership to identify potential enhancements for promoting Military Matters programs through on-base advertising, e-mail lists, etc.
- Evaluate the use of outdoor advertising and posters, etc. in businesses adjacent to the base
- Develop channel-specific metrics to track campaign success and adjust programming

3. Pilot an “in-person to remote” hiring program for military spouses and partners

- Work with Wichita Falls firms with full remote work policies to identify military spouses and partners who can work in an in-person job while stationed in Wichita Falls and transition to remote work upon moving to the next assignment
- Prioritize the recruitment of individuals whose spouses and partners are near the end of their military careers; develop resources to offer “return bonuses” to program participants who move back to Wichita Falls on a full-time basis

4. Advocate for military-friendly hiring policies

- Work with the Chamber, SMAC, and other partners to advocate at the state and national level for policies that support increased hiring of military affiliated talent

Key Initiative #4: Talent Relocation Assistance

Objective: Connect, promote, and expand resources that help Wichita Falls firms recruit talent from outside the region to meet workforce needs and enhance the overall talent base.

The first three Key Initiatives in the “Grow a Talented Workforce” goal focus on better retaining individuals who are already part of Wichita Falls’ talent pipeline. Conversations with local business leaders revealed, however, that hiring for some positions requires identifying candidates from outside the Wichita Falls region. Stakeholders said this is likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future, particularly for in-demand occupations that are difficult to fill even in the nation’s most dynamic economies.

Business leaders said it can be difficult to recruit qualified candidates from outside the region. To address this issue, partners in Wichita Falls have developed several tools and resources. The Chamber prepared a relocation guide that highlights the benefits of Wichita Falls as a place to call home. And in 2019, the City of Wichita Falls approved the WFEDC’s recommendation to fund an Employee Relocation Incentive Program. The program offers employers in certain “export-oriented” business sectors an incentive ranging from \$4,000 to \$8,000 to recruit new employees from outside the Wichita Falls Metropolitan Statistical Area. Employers receive the incentive after the individual is employed for six months.

Stakeholders said the relocation guide and incentive program have been welcome developments, but many firms remain unaware of their existence. This Key Initiative seeks to address this challenge by “packaging” the community’s existing efforts into a branded talent relocation assistance program. The initiative also recommends new efforts, including a custom website for individuals considering relocating and assistance with candidate identification for firms that lack experience or expertise with out-of-market recruiting.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #4: KC Heartland / Share the Love (Metro Kansas City, MO-KS)
- #5: Ask a Local (Omaha, NE)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Create a branded talent relocation initiative to package and promote new and existing resources

- Develop an identity for the community's relocation assistance offerings; consider repurposing the "Choose Wichita Falls" label for relocation assistance programs

2. Launch a custom website for individuals considering relocating to Wichita Falls

- Work with public and private partners to develop a website geared toward talented individuals from other regions who may be considering relocating to Wichita Falls; highlight key resources and quality of life and quality of place assets
- Promote the website to local companies that hire out-of-market talent and ensure that the site is search engine optimized and visible on social media platforms to reach potential relocation candidates searing for information about Wichita Falls
- Work with the Wichita Falls Convention & Visitors Bureau to identify potential synergies between talent marketing and destination marketing activities

3. Promote the Employee Relocation Incentive to Wichita Falls companies

- Leverage business retention and expansion (BRE) activities, Chamber membership, small business services, and other channels to increase awareness about employee relocation assistance
- Establish a numeric goal of number of individuals and/or firms assisted through the incentive program per year and over the anticipated lifespan of the initial WFEDC investment
- Work with the WFEDC and employers to develop and track metrics to monitor the initiative's success; seek qualitative feedback from participating employers on program satisfaction and opportunities for improvement
- If successful, seek resources to expand the program in terms of size and/or scope (e.g., supporting firms in health care or other key industries outside of the initial program design)
- Work with the Busines Equity Initiative (see Key Initiative #12) to provide best-practice guidelines for companies seeking to recruit diverse talent from outside the Wichita Falls region

4. Provide pooled candidate identification services for smaller firms without sufficient capacity

- Assist small employers in export-oriented industries (e.g., manufacturing) with advertising for and identifying out-of-market candidates; utilize career and resume websites, proprietary labor market data, and Chamber staff capacity to carry out work
- Promote the availability of the Employee Relocation Incentive to offset moving costs; resource other assistance services on a fee-for-service basis or offer the program as an investor or member benefit

Key Initiative #5: Business Attraction

Objective: Ensure that Wichita Falls’ programs, tools, and investments in business attraction activities and assets are optimized for export-oriented job growth.

Economic diversification was a major theme to emerge from the input process. Stakeholders in Wichita Falls strongly desire a wider range of business activity and employment opportunities that can raise levels of prosperity and create opportunities that will appeal to talented individuals. At present, Wichita Falls’ economy is heavily concentrated in government and services. By contrast, Wichita Falls has relatively low levels of employment in “export-oriented” sectors that bring new wealth into the community by selling goods and services to other markets.

Business attraction represents one way that a community can grow jobs in export-oriented sectors. In Wichita Falls, the Chamber carries out business attraction on behalf of its community partners. Recent efforts have brought in new companies such as Clayton Homes and Pamlico Air, which together could lead to \$50 million in investment and more than 550 new jobs. Input participants said they would like to see more business attraction “wins” in the coming years.

This Key Initiative focuses on maximizing the chances for business attraction success. This will entail maintaining a best-practice marketing program as well as addressing three key needs and opportunities that emerged from the input process: conducting a review of the community’s economic development incentives, advancing upgrades to the Wichita Falls Business Park, and identifying ways in which institutional partners can support economic growth. This latter opportunity is particularly important given MSU’s incorporation into the Texas Tech University System.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Maintain and enhance best-practice economic development marketing practices

- Continue to maintain excellent relationships with state economic development staff, site location consultants, and other individuals engaged in the lead-generation pipeline; seek feedback on marketing, messaging, and product development activities and make any needed adjustments
- Evaluate the return on investment of outbound marketing activities (e.g., trade missions and conferences) and seek out additional high-value opportunities
- Regularly update website and marketing materials to meet evolving industry standards

2. Commission a review of economic development incentives

- Retain an external firm with understanding of state and national competitive realities to evaluate the full range of economic development incentives offered by the Wichita Falls Economic Development Corporation (WFEDC) and other relevant partners
- Consistent with the City of Wichita Falls' 2021 Strategic Plan, consider post-pandemic opportunities such as remote and hybrid work and other emerging technologies
- Evaluate the desirability of establishing tax incentives and small grants to existing export-oriented companies in Wichita Falls that are increasing headcount and/or making capital investments (see Recommended Action #3 in Key Initiative #6)

3. Advance upgrades to the Wichita Falls Business Park

- Continue to implement WFEDC-funded improvements to the Business Park, including road widening and upgrades, water and sewer improvements, and landscaping
- Incorporate information about the upgrades and photos of improvements into economic development marketing materials

4. Work with institutional partners on catalytic economic opportunities

- Work with MSU to identify potential opportunities for adding new academic programs and/or research capacity that could support additional economic activity in Wichita Falls
- Pursue public-private partnerships at SAFB (see Key Initiative #8); seek to create new development sites with airport access

Key Initiative #6: Existing Business Care

Objective: Enhance, expand, and connect services to help existing businesses of all sizes grow and thrive in Wichita Falls.

Business attraction activities in the preceding Key Initiative represent just one way to grow export-oriented jobs. Best-practice communities also engage in business retention and expansion (BRE) activities to ensure that their existing firms have what they need to remain and grow in the community. This is particularly important as various estimates over the years have identified existing business expansions as the leading source for job growth within regional economies.

The Chamber provides BRE services in Wichita Falls on behalf of its community partners. Chamber economic development staff conduct regular site visits with local employers to assess whether firms may be primed for an expansion or at risk of leaving the market and providing direct assistance accordingly. The program also helps uncover needs and challenges that are consistent among employers, which can inform strategic adjustments. The development of the Employee Relocation Incentive Program (see Key Initiative #4) is an example of an effort that arose from employer feedback in BRE visits.

This Key Initiative entails providing a range of “existing business care” for businesses in Wichita Falls. This includes continuing to operate a best-practice BRE program. It also involves engaging and serving smaller firms that cannot be contacted through BRE site visits. This is important in the Wichita Falls region, where companies with fewer than 20 employees account for nearly one in four total jobs. Accordingly, the Key Initiative recommends an online survey to contact smaller firms, potential incentives for existing firms of all sizes, and the expanded use of pre-construction meetings to simplify the development process for a wider variety of expansions and investments.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Continue to operate a best-practice business retention and expansion (BRE) program

- Continue to task the Chamber with executing a BRE program on the community's behalf
- Conduct annual visits with all major employers and maintain regular working relationships with key business executives, plant managers, etc. as needed
- Assist firms considering expansions in Wichita Falls and/or firms that are at risk of relocating
- Leverage BRE findings to guide Falls Future 2.0 implementation activities and inform other policy decisions and investments

2. Develop an online business satisfaction survey to broaden feedback

- With key public and private partners, develop an annual or bi-annual survey open to all businesses in Wichita Falls, focusing especially on firms that are not engaged through BRE site visits
- Utilize survey findings to guide support services and identify additional opportunities and challenges

3. Consider establishing incentives for existing export-oriented businesses based in Wichita Falls

- Through the proposed incentives review (see Recommended Action #2 in Key Initiative #5), evaluate the feasibility of creating incentives for export-oriented that have been based in Wichita Falls for a minimum number of years that are adding headcount and/or making capital investments
- Incentives could include tax incentives, fee waivers, or grants for small businesses; offerings should be designed to help retain firms in Wichita Falls and catalyze job and investment growth that may not have occurred otherwise

4. Expand the use of pre-construction meetings to simplify the development process

- Support the City of Wichita Falls in enhancing customer service experiences and streamlining municipal processes as outlined in its 2021 Strategic Plan
- Continue to utilize "one-stop" pre-construction and permitting meetings for major commercial and industrial developments and pursue additional capacity to offer such meetings to a wider variety of projects (e.g., reducing the minimum threshold of jobs or investment)

Key Initiative #7: Maximizing SAFB's Impact

Objective: Support SAFB by pursuing new missions, leveraging opportunities for economic growth, and enhancing experiences for base personnel and families.

Sheppard Air Force Base is critical to the future success and prosperity of Wichita Falls. The Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts estimates that as of 2019, SAFB supported more than 22,000 direct and indirect jobs and had a statewide economic impact of more than \$4.6 billion. This Key Initiative focuses on ensuring the long-term success of SAFB. It focuses on several ways in which the community can support the base and leverage its presence to promote economic growth.

Foremost among them is seeking to expand the base's mission. Input participants praised the work of the nonprofit Sheppard Military Affairs Committee (SMAC) and its partners and expressed confidence that the current SAFB mission is sustainable and secure. Stakeholders said the time is now right to go further and advocate for an expanded mission at SAFB. Individuals with knowledge of military affairs said this will likely require the community to increase its presence in the Washington, D.C. area by retaining a consulting partner who can help the community refine its messaging and increase the visibility of its advocacy efforts.

Stakeholders said that there is further potential for the base to support economic growth in export-oriented sectors through public-private partnerships. One specific near-term opportunity is developing an industrial site or sites adjacent to the Wichita Falls Regional Airport that would be attractive to private aviation and aerospace companies. Unlocking this potential would require working with SAFB leadership, the Department of Defense, and other relevant partners to secure permission for additional private users to utilize the bases runways and supportive facilities.

Strengthening the community's support for SAFB will also involve improving experiences for base personnel and their families. This could involve aesthetic improvements near the base to build upon the momentum of the recently completed Main Gate improvement project. It could also entail pursuing developments and businesses that would appeal to Airmen in Training and younger base personnel.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #6: Goodfellow AFB / San Angelo public-private partnerships (San Angelo, TX)
- #7: Grand Sky Joint Use Agreement (Grand Forks County, ND)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Continue the work of the Sheppard Military Affairs Committee (SMAC)

- Support SMAC and ensure that it is sufficiently resourced and staffed to continue its advocacy in support of sustaining and expanding the mission at SAFB
- Leverage SMAC's SWOT Analysis and work with SAFB leadership, SMAC, external advisers, and other relevant parties to determine ways in which the public and private sectors in Wichita Falls can support the pursuit of new missions for SAFB

2. Enhance messaging and resources for advocacy at the federal level

- Retain the services of a military affairs consultancy, government relations firm, or similar adviser based in the Washington, D.C. area to increase the visibility of SAFB and the Wichita Falls region with key decision-makers at the federal level
- Work with this external partner to develop messaging and strategies to both sustain the existing SAFB mission and pursue new opportunities

3. Pursue public and private investments to enhance quality of life for military personnel and families

- Build upon the momentum of the Main Gate improvement project to enhance aesthetics and access to SAFB; ensure that the Main Gate project and all other capital improvements are well-maintained on a long-term basis
- Seek upgrades to both the public and private realms adjacent to SAFB, particularly along Burkburnett Road
- Upgrade sidewalks and install safe pedestrian crossings to help base personnel access businesses; incentivize improvements to commercial centers adjacent to the base
- With SMAC, the City, and other partners, aggressively pursue state and federal grants and other monies to fund needed upgrades adjacent to the base
- Work with base leadership and potential private investors to identify additional entertainment options or amenities that could be developed near the base
- Pursue increased bicycle connectivity (see Recommended Action #3 in Key Initiative #11) and improved transit connectivity to enhanced college town amenities that may appeal to Airmen in Training and other base personnel (see Recommended Action #2 in Key Initiative #9)

4. Strengthen a collaborative framework for pursuing public-private partnerships

- Continue to work with SAFB leadership, Department of Defense officials, SMAC, economic development professionals, and other key stakeholders to identify opportunities for public-private partnerships that support economic growth
- If necessary, establish a collaborative task force of local partners to pursue specific opportunities
- Engage higher education institutions to assess interest in co-locating education and training programs at the base, either as a standalone operation or in support of a specific public-private partnership opportunity

5. Pursue the development of new Airport-adjacent industrial sites with runway access

- Continue to pursue the development of potential industrial site(s) adjacent to the Wichita Falls Regional Airport
- Through the Chamber, develop a “marketing prospectus” that identifies potential end-users for the development and helps establish a business case for public investment
- Work with SMAC, SAFB officials, and the Department of Defense to secure agreements for use of SAFB runways and supportive facilities that would be necessary to make the development viable
- Work with the WFEDC and other relevant partners to develop resources for site planning, access, and preparation

Key Initiative #8: College Town Atmosphere

Objective: Cultivate a “college town feel” in Wichita Falls through investments in MSU athletics and off-campus amenities and expanded opportunities for community involvement

While MSU enrolled nearly 6,000 students during the 2019-20 academic year, many stakeholders said that Wichita Falls lacks a “college town feel.” Said one individual, “You see that in Denton with UNT – with the green – it’s in your face. You can’t drive through Lubbock without seeing Raider Red on everything.” The input participant added that this feeling is largely absent in Wichita Falls.

Stakeholders said they would like to see Wichita Falls cultivate a college town atmosphere. Doing so would help boost community pride and give residents “something to rally around” while also helping to raise the profile of MSU during a time when higher education institutions are facing challenges related to enrollment and funding. This Key Initiative deals with ways – both large and small – to help promote a college town atmosphere in Wichita Falls.

At the top of the list are two “moonshot” ideas that emerged from stakeholder engagement. The first is building a new on-campus football stadium at MSU. (The team currently plays at Memorial Stadium, which is located far from campus and better suited to high school athletics.) The second would be transitioning the school’s athletic programs from NCAA Division II to NCAA Division I FCS to increase fan interest and reunite with former rivals from the Division II Lone Star Conference who have made a similar move in recent years. An on-campus stadium represents a major capital investment and Division I athletics are associated with significantly higher scholarship, compliance, and administrative costs relative to Division II. Accordingly, these big-ticket items would almost certainly require substantial private donations and investments to become a reality. But input participants nevertheless expressed a strong desire to pursue these ambitious projects. Other recommendations in this Key Initiative address improving off-campus options and access in the vicinity of the MSU and Vernon College Century City campus and enhancing opportunities for students to engage in the Wichita Falls community.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #8: Tarleton State transition to Division I FCS (Stephenville, TX)
- #9: Anthony Field at Wildcat Stadium (Abilene, TX)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Ensure strong collaboration between MSU and the Wichita Falls community

- Work with MSU leadership to support efforts to expand enrollment or otherwise enhance the visibility and reputation of the institution
- Identify areas in which MSU is well positioned to lead and areas that will require community support

2. Pursue the development of an on-campus football stadium for MSU

- Work with MSU officials and potential private donors to pursue the development of a new on-campus football stadium for MSU
- Commission a feasibility study to identify expected stadium costs and potential donors
- In conjunction with the feasibility study, partners could also determine the viability of funding additional operating expenses associated with transitioning MSU athletics from NCAA Division II to NCAA Division I FCS to boost interest and reunite with former rivals from the Lone Star Conference
- If private funding can be secured, engage MSU, the Chamber, and other community partners to promote games and seek buy-in from the business community through the sale of sponsorships, suites or corporate hospitality areas, and tailgating opportunities

3. Enhance off-campus amenities and multimodal transportation access for MSU students

- Work with property owners and prospective private developers and investors to identify opportunities for mixed-use redevelopment of underutilized and/or underperforming commercial properties in the vicinity of the MSU and Vernon College Century City campuses
- Could also pursue additional recreation and/or entertainment amenities that appeal to younger residents; would also likely appeal to Airmen in Training and other SAFB personnel
- Evaluate the need for additional master planning work to ensure high-quality urban design and strong multimodal connectivity to off-campus amenities

4. Create opportunities for students to engage with the Wichita Falls community

- Work with public, private, and nonprofit partners to provide additional community support for MSU's annual Maverick's Day of Service event; seek corporate sponsorships to fund food, prizes, and other perks to increase participation
- Connect students to existing and expanded Intern Wichita Falls programming (see Key Initiative #2)
- Engage student artists and volunteers in public art revitalization efforts (see Key Initiative #9)
- Emphasize entrepreneurial support and events for students (see Key Initiative #13)

Key Initiative #9: Revitalization Through Public Art

Objective: Launch a public art program to improve aesthetics and enliven underutilized spaces throughout Wichita Falls.

During the stakeholder engagement process, the appearance of portions of Wichita Falls emerged as a competitive and quality of life concern. When asked to rate the “aesthetics and appearance of the community,” fewer than 14 percent of online survey respondents described this feature as “strong or very strong” compared to more than 44 percent who rated it “weak or very weak.” Input participants said that some parts of the community are negatively impacted by vacant or underutilized private properties and/or public rights of way that need beautification.

The City of Wichita Falls has taken steps to address these issues. It has launched a collaborative revitalization program with initial efforts concentrated in the Floral Heights, Highland Addition, and Southland Addition neighborhoods. It has also created a Vacant Structure Registry for Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods to help ensure that unoccupied buildings are secure and well-maintained and that a local contact is available to address any issues.

This Key Initiative complements the City’s ongoing efforts with a new program designed to enliven the community with public art. Stakeholders said that Wichita Falls has the right capacity to support and enhance public art, including the Wichita Falls Alliance for Arts and Culture and many talented artists and dedicated neighborhood volunteers. Input participants said these organizations and individuals could help design and implement relatively low-cost aesthetic improvements on blank walls, vacant buildings and storefronts, and (in cooperation with the City) on public rights of way.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #10: Public art programs (Sioux Falls, SD)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Develop resources and capacity to support a community-wide, multi-faceted public art program

- Complement the City of Wichita Falls' Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative with a new community-wide effort to utilize public art to enliven public properties and enhance the appearance of private commercial buildings
- Build upon the partnership between the City of Wichita Falls and the Wichita Falls Alliance for Arts and Culture and work with public, private, and nonprofit partners to develop additional resources to fund grants and stipends for artists and to ensure the program is effectively administered
- Ensure that the program engages diverse artists and that public art projects are distributed equitably throughout the Wichita Falls community

2. Commission murals on highly visible blank walls on public and private properties

- Work with artists and public and private stakeholders to create murals in highly visible murals throughout Wichita Falls
- Create a framework for selecting artists and mural designs and resource stipends to compensate artists for their time

3. Enliven areas with high foot traffic with creative public art and street treatments

- Work with the City of Wichita Falls and private parties to support additional creative public art installations on public property, sidewalks, etc.; potential treatments include pop-up parks and gathering spaces, creative street furniture, decorative sidewalks, and crosswalks, etc.
- Engage an external partner such as the Better Block Program to provide technical assistance and a "toolkit" for neighborhood groups and other interested parties to advance placemaking efforts
- Pair improvements to the public right of way with an increased emphasis on litter removal

4. Activate vacant storefronts in key commercial areas with art installations and other temporary uses

- Create a micro-grant program to support low-cost, high-impact temporary art installations in key commercial areas; work with property owners and local artists to identify candidate projects
- Under the program, artists would develop renderings and budgets to apply for a small grant (e.g., \$500 to \$2,000) to cover material costs and a small stipend for the artist; artists would be responsible for supplying labor for installation and (if applicable) removal
- Evaluate the performance of the City's Vacant Structure Registry program and consider expanding the initiative throughout the community in support of additional storefront activation and to ensure that commercial properties remain in good condition

Key Initiative #10: Silver Bicycle Friendly Community

Objective: Enhance quality of life and quality of place in Wichita Falls through programs and investments that will lead to a Silver Bicycle Friendly Community award.

Wichita Falls has long had an association with bicycling due to the Hotter’N Hell Hundred bicycle ride, MSU’s nationally competitive varsity cycling program, and the nearly completed Circle Trail. “A Bicycle-Friendly Community” was one of the seven catalysts in the first Falls Future strategy, and its implementation was highly successful. Various community members came together to form the Bike Wichita Falls volunteer group and the City of Wichita Falls has included bicycle friendly initiatives as part of its 2021 Strategic Plan. Together, these entities worked with community partners to help Wichita Falls receive a Bronze Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) award from the League of American Bicyclists in 2019, the second year of implementation (This designation was initially envisioned as a goal for year four.)

Wichita Falls now has an opportunity to go even further in cementing bicycling as part of the community’s identity. A logical next step is making progress toward a Silver-level award from the League of American Bicyclists. Stakeholders familiar with conditions in Wichita Fall and the BFC program requirements say that this will require a new level of commitment to creating staff capacity and advancing bicycle-friendly infrastructure.

Unlike much of the work required to receive the Bronze designation, these next steps will be resource intensive, and stakeholders were clear that the City cannot do it all alone. Partners should seek every opportunity to leverage state and federal funds and private donations to complete projects. Input participants said these investments will be worth it for the quality of life and quality of place returns they will provide. Stakeholders also noted the potential impact of bicycling on transportation equity, as improved infrastructure could help individuals who do not have access to a vehicle access jobs and amenities.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #11: Buffalo Bicycle Master Plan Update (Buffalo, NY)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Continue “Education” and “Encouragement” efforts

- With Bike Wichita Falls, the City of Wichita Falls, and other key partners, continue and enhance efforts to promote bicycling through outreach, education and training programs, advocacy, etc.
- Engage the business community to promote bike to work events and benefits for employees who commute to work via bike or other forms of active transportation

2. Complete ongoing and planned infrastructure projects

- Complete the remaining sections of the Circle Trail and continue to implement planned bike lanes as funding becomes available
- Upon completion of the Circle Trail, publicize the achievement through internal awareness building, a “grand opening ride” or other special event, and earned media placements in out-of-market outlets

3. Develop a new bicycle master plan to inform next-level infrastructure opportunities

- Work with public, private, and nonprofit partners to resource and commission a new bicycle master plan for the City of Wichita Falls, updating the current guiding document dating to 2005
- Ensure that the plan establishes a vision for a connected network of bicycle infrastructure that leverages existing quiet neighborhood streets and shared use paths and identifies priority areas for new “protected” bike lanes on arterials to accommodate users of varying ages and ability levels
- Seek to create bicycle infrastructure connections to key job centers, amenities, and institutions, including Downtown Wichita Falls, MSU, SAFB, etc.
- Ensure that the planning process is inclusive and that proposed infrastructure upgrades are equitable; prioritize projects that serve areas with low household incomes, high proportions of households that lack access to a vehicle, and neighborhoods that have historically suffered from disinvestment
- Identify low-cost ways in which protected bicycle infrastructure can be implemented on streets with excess travel lanes
- Determine anticipated infrastructure costs and identify federal, state, local, and philanthropic resources to implement improvements

4. Increase public-sector staff capacity to support bicycling initiatives

- Add a bicycle coordinator or similar staff position at the City of Wichita Falls to oversee infrastructure implementation and other key duties

Key Initiative #11: Downtown Development

Objective: Pursue resources, tools, programs, and catalytic investments to strengthen Downtown as an economic development and quality of life asset for all of Wichita Falls.

Talented individuals – and the companies that wish to hire them – frequently prefer to be located within or near areas that are mixed-use, amenity-rich, and are walkable and accessible. Locally, Downtown Wichita Falls is best suited to provide this type of environment. Accordingly, a thriving Downtown is important to the economic prospects of the entire Wichita Falls community. Input participants noted that the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic “set us back on our heels” as businesses struggled, events were cancelled, and investments were put on hold. But stakeholders report that Downtown has in recent months begun to recapture some of its pre-pandemic momentum. These individuals said the time is right to help the district achieve a new level of success.

This Key Initiative focuses specifically on the tools, programs, and investments needed to advance development in Downtown. The recommendations are designed to work with Goal 3 of the City’s 2021 Strategic Plan – in some cases amplifying existing tactics that support economic development and in other cases adding new priorities that emerged from stakeholder input.

Success in this Key Initiative will require a collaborative approach. While public sector resources and economic development incentives can be used to catalyze growth, attracting additional private investment is essential to success. Some efforts must be led primarily by the private sector. For instance, creating a Public Improvement District (PID) can only be accomplished with the express approval of a sufficient number of property owners in the area. Partners in Wichita Falls should also clearly communicate that Downtown is not funded to the exclusion of other neighborhoods and that public-sector investments are vital to the community’s overall success and prosperity. Additionally, downtown stakeholders and other interested parties must also work together to clearly define organizational roles for downtown development, events, and marketing/promotion to ensure efficient and effective utilization of resources.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #12: Public Improvement District No. 1 (Waco, TX)
- #13: Santa Fe Plaza (Temple, TX)
- #14: Storefront Activation Program (Germantown, Philadelphia, PA)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. **Leverage economic development capacity to pursue new residential and commercial development**
 - Continue to identify and work with property owners, potential investors, developers, and other private-sector partners to promote residential and commercial development and redevelopment
 - When necessary and appropriate, leverage Type 4A and 4B funds and other potential incentives to incentivize new residential and commercial development and redevelopment
2. **Establish a Public Improvement District (PID) to fund needed improvements**
 - Work with downtown property owners and businesses to establish a Public Improvement District (PID) to fund aesthetic enhancements, public safety, wayfinding upgrades, promotion, etc.
 - Research successful downtown PIDs in other Texas communities to establish the benefits of the model; arrange an inter-city visit to allow Downtown stakeholders to see these benefits firsthand
3. **Convene an inclusive process to create a vision for a “focal point” or “signature gathering place”**
 - Complement the City of Wichita Falls’ Downtown Master Plan with a strategic visioning process aimed at identifying options for a “focal point” or “signature gathering place” for Downtown
 - Retain an experienced city planning or landscape architecture firm to facilitate an inclusive process that engages key downtown stakeholders and residents from throughout Wichita Falls
 - Evaluate whether the planning process will necessitate a new market study or if existing knowledge is sufficient to inform reasonable assumptions about market demand for private-sector uses
 - The desired outcome of the process will be a vision that includes a conceptual plan for a focal point or gathering place and identifies any public investments needed to catalyze private investment
4. **Pursue strategies to activate Downtown storefronts**
 - Leverage the community-wide arts revitalization program (see Key Initiative #10) and knowledge from the City’s Vacant Structure Registry to activate retail storefronts in Downtown
 - Work with property owners to identify a large storefront that could be subdivided into “micro-retail” spaces that would help incubate new retail businesses that are not yet ready to take on a full lease
5. **Identify options to fund needed upgrades to streetscapes and public infrastructure**
 - Continue to support the City of Wichita Falls in the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan
 - Identify state and federal resources that could resource needed downtown street improvements; work with the City and other partners to identify future options to generate local revenue to fund improvements

Key Initiative #12: Business Equity Initiative

Objective: Create a collaborative initiative to champion equity and inclusion in the Wichita Falls business community and enhance opportunities for diverse talent and companies to thrive.

High-performing businesses increasingly recognize the importance of equity and inclusion to their bottom line and ability to attract and retain top workers. Similarly, talented individuals and companies value communities that are open and inclusive. Stakeholder engagement revealed, however, that Wichita Falls is struggling with these issues. Survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement, “Wichita Falls seeks to include its diverse residents in civic, social, political, and business networks.” Just 12.5 percent of Black or African American respondents and 28.6 percent of Hispanic or Latino respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

There are many societal and cultural dimensions to issues of equity and inclusion, many of which cannot be adequately addressed at the community level. That said, issues such as inclusive hiring practices and support for minority- and women-owned businesses navigating contract and procurement processes can play a critical role in advancing equity and have a close fit with a holistic economic development strategy.

Stakeholders said that many businesses in Wichita Falls would like to engage in inclusive hiring practices and utilize diverse suppliers and vendors but need assistance in doing so. This proposed Key Initiative focuses on creating a multi-faceted “business equity” initiative to address this need. The first step in the Initiative will entail bringing together a diverse group to lead on issues of equity and inclusion. Stakeholders emphasized that identifying and receiving buy-in from the right mix of individuals and organizations will be critical to the success of the initiative. Accordingly, significant time and care should be devoted to the first Recommended Action. With the right partners in place, the focus then shifts to guiding two new programs focused on inclusive hiring practices and supplier diversity and providing support for other strategic priorities such as Key Initiative #13: Inclusive Entrepreneurship and the talent initiatives in Goal I.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #15: Business Equity for Indy (Indianapolis, IN)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Convene diverse leaders to guide the business equity initiative

- Bring together a diverse and inclusive group of business and nonprofit executives, human resources professionals, and other public and private leaders; ensure that the group includes individuals who have built strong networks and trust in Wichita Falls' minority communities
- Engage the SBDC and other entrepreneurial ecosystem partners (see Key Initiative #13) to ensure that small businesses and startups are included in and served through the initiative
- Meet on a regular schedule (monthly or quarterly) to guide the business equity initiative; share best practices and lessons learned, and identify action items for inclusive hiring and supplier diversity efforts; if desired, meetings could be themed around specific issues or topics
- Ensure that the group is supported by professional staff

2. Developing a compelling brand identity and outreach campaign for the initiative

- With members of the business equity initiative and other relevant stakeholders, develop a memorable brand identity for the initiative, inclusive of a name, logo or wordmark, etc.
- Develop core messages and an inclusive outreach campaign designed to reach diverse populations in Wichita Falls; designate "brand ambassadors" to engage in word-of-mouth marketing to business executives, HR professionals, etc. to "cut through the clutter" of social media and digital advertising

3. Provide resources to assist Wichita Falls companies with inclusive hiring and promotion practices

- Work with members of the business equity initiative to identify inclusive hiring and promotion practices that have been successful in Wichita Falls
- Create or license a toolkit to assist Wichita Falls companies with inclusive hiring and promotion practices; topics could include methods for assessing existing capacity, guidance on the role of corporate culture and unconscious bias, best practices for recruiting, and performance metrics
- Evaluate the desirability of developing an "inclusive hiring pledge" for Wichita Falls companies

4. Create a supplier diversity program for minority- and women-owned businesses

- Develop a directory of minority- and women-owned businesses (including small businesses and startups) that are interested in supplying and/or contracting with area businesses and institutions
- Conduct an outreach effort to develop the initial list and regularly seek out new participants;
- Facilitate introductions between minority- and women-owned businesses and large regional firms and anchor institutions with available contracting opportunities

- Develop annual or semi-annual training sessions for minority and women business owners on navigating contracting and procurement processes

Key Initiative #13: Inclusive Entrepreneurship

Objective: Connect Wichita Falls’ existing entrepreneurial ecosystem and enhance technical assistance, mentorship opportunities, and access to capital for a diverse range of entrepreneurs.

Business attraction and BRE – discussed in Key Initiatives #5 and #6 – represent two pathways to growing jobs in a local economy. The third is providing support and assistance to entrepreneurs and startups. While most enterprises will never hire hundreds of employees and realize revenues in the tens or hundreds of millions, entrepreneurs and locally grown businesses can collectively have a major impact on a community’s economic growth and capacity for wealth creation. Entrepreneurship also represents an important pathway to building wealth in communities that have traditionally suffered from disinvestment.

Data reveal that Wichita Falls has a relatively strong level of entrepreneurial and startup activity. Nearly 13 percent of the community’s jobs are in firms that are five years old or newer, nearly two percentage points higher than the national average. Additionally, workers in Wichita Falls are also more likely to be self-employed. Self-employed individuals are typically sole proprietors, independent contractors, and individuals with part-time businesses who, if successful, may eventually incorporate their operations. The community also has existing assets that support entrepreneurship, such as the Midwestern State Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and MSU’s Dillard College of Business and Munir Abdul Lalani Center for Entrepreneurship and Free Enterprise.

This Key Initiative seeks to connect and collectively market the community’s existing entrepreneurial resources. It also addresses other competitive needs and challenges that emerged from stakeholder engagement, including a need for enhanced mentorship opportunities and access to capital – particularly for minority entrepreneurs.

COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

- #16: The 800 Initiative (Memphis, TN)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Connect and enhance the visibility of existing technical assistance resources

- With the Chamber, (SBDC), and other partners, work to map local entrepreneurial ecosystem assets, including existing programs and entities, established entrepreneurs willing to serve as mentors, capital providers and investors, etc.; Identify and seek to fill any programmatic gaps
- Develop a multi-pronged outreach campaign to promote these available resources to a wide range of entrepreneurs and prospective entrepreneurs in Wichita Falls
- Work with the SBDC and mentors (see next Recommended Action) to hold monthly or semi-monthly “office hours” in locations around the community to “meet people where they are”

2. Provide customized mentoring services for minority entrepreneurs

- Develop a network of mentors with strong network connections and trust to raise awareness organically within various neighborhoods and/or social and cultural groups within Wichita Falls
- Through this network, help minority entrepreneurs access technical assistance and access to capital
- Create networking opportunities for entrepreneurs and small business owners that highlight the geographic, racial/ethnic, and cultural diversity of Wichita Falls

3. Establish a revolving loan fund to expand access to capital

- Create and capitalize a self-replenishing revolving loan fund (RLF) to enhance Wichita Falls’ small business climate and help entrepreneurs make initial capital investments, support the development of new products, and test market viability
- Convene economic development and entrepreneurship professionals, local financial institutions, foundations, and other potential funding partners to establish, capitalize, and manage a fund
- Establish criteria and loan terms, define acceptable uses of monies, and establish a loan review committee; require companies that receive funding to seek guidance from the community’s small business and entrepreneurial assistance services
- Ensure that the availability of funds is well-publicized, particularly in traditionally underserved communities that are likely home to entrepreneurs who lack access to traditional sources of capital

4. Support entrepreneurial programs for Wichita Falls’ student population

- Work with education partners including the SBDC, MSU’s Dillard College of Business, and the Munir Abdul Lalani Center for Entrepreneurship and Free Enterprise, the Business Management Program at Vernon College, and WFISD to identify updated entrepreneurial opportunities for students

APPENDIX: COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

The following projects, programs, and initiatives are profiled to enable Falls Future 2.0 implementation partners to explore example efforts similar to the strategy's Key Initiatives and their components. While many of these comparisons may be considered best practices, these examples are intended to highlight processes and outcomes that can inform implementation activities in Wichita Falls.

#1: TopCity Interns (Topeka, KS)

<https://choosetopeka.com/topcity-interns/>

Each summer, major employers in Topeka, KS hire hundreds of interns. These students come from the hometown Washburn University, nearby schools such as the University of Kansas, and institutions throughout the country. To introduce these students to the community, partners in the community launched TopCity Interns in 2017. This program for summer interns is operated by the Greater Topeka Partnership, an umbrella organization over the community's Chamber, economic development organization, downtown organization, and convention and visitors bureau.

The program seeks to introduce interns to the city and its business leaders in the hopes that they will want to return to the community to work after graduation. It includes social events that allow interns to explore the city and its food and drink, lunch and learns with local leaders, and opportunities for volunteer services. The program is sponsored by many of the community's top corporations and expects to enroll more than 200 interns in summer 2022.

#2: Worlds of Work (West Alabama)

<https://worldsofwork.com>

Worlds of Work, better known in the region as "WOW" is an initiative of West Alabama Works, Region 3 Workforce Development Council and the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama. The program seeks to create awareness about career options among students and educators in West Alabama Works' nine-county service area. This region includes Tuscaloosa, home to the University of Alabama, and the Mercedes-Benz manufacturing plant located in nearby Vance. WOW differentiates itself from traditional career and college fairs by offering fun, hands-on experiences at two signature events: an interactive career expo and a college and career day. The expo is for high school seniors who wish to enter the workforce full-time following graduation or work part-time while attending college. The expo is organized into "worlds" of industry sectors with high-demand, high-wage career opportunities that students have the opportunity to explore through exciting activities. These sectors include construction, engineering healthcare, auto manufacturing, and so on. Students who attend the expo are guaranteed at least one job interview with a participating company.

#3: Youth Leadership Initiative (Des Moines, IA)

<https://www.gdml.com/yli>

The Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute is a non-profit organization that has developed “community champions.” Since its launch in 1982, the Leadership Institute has graduated more than 2,500 leaders from its programs who have gone on to serve in nearly 300 organizations in the community. In 2001, the organization launched its Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) modeled after numerous similar efforts around the country. This program is supported by local corporations and the Greater Des Moines Partnership (which operated the program for eight years prior to it returning to the Leadership Institute in 2019).

The program seeks to get high school students out of the classroom and into “real-life learning experiences throughout Greater Des Moines.” Students learn about the region’s opportunities and challenges from local business and community leaders. In the process they learn self, group, professional, and community leadership skills to prepare for their futures. The program is tuition-free thanks to sponsorships from local companies and philanthropic organizations. Students may apply in their freshman, sophomore, and junior year of high school to participate in the program the following year. Each class includes approximately 35 students from public and private high schools around the region.

#4: KC Heartland / Share the Love (Metro Kansas City, MO-KS)

<https://kc.org/share-love>

The KC Heartland campaign is the region’s internal and external branding initiative for talent. It has multiple components, including opportunities for residents to become a KC Heartlander and “share the KC love with the world.” Heartlanders get access to special perks like custom content, exclusive updates on local happenings, discounts at certain stores and businesses, and additional benefits throughout the year.

Other ways residents can “share the love” is by submitting candidates for the KC Hearts + Minds program that showcases Kansas Citians doing exciting things worth sharing. They can also use #KCHeartland across social media channels to share their KC Heartland moments and the reasons they enjoy living in greater Kansas City. KC Heartland also makes available Zoom backgrounds, logo images, and lock-ups to support users’ amplification efforts.

#5: Ask a Local (Omaha, NE)

<https://www.omahachamber.org/talent-workforce/jobs-careers/ask-a-local/>

As part of Greater Omaha’s talent attraction efforts, residents can sign up for the “Ask a Local” program and have their bios and contact information posted on the Omaha Chamber’s talent and workforce page. The website urges visitors to get a local perspective, noting that, “These local Omahans are ready with answers when new residents or those looking to relocate to Omaha have questions. Each Omaha ambassador lists a different set of interest areas for visitors to ask the about, including outdoor recreation, cooking, LGBTQIA+ communities, craft beers, roller derby, food, theater, sporting events, live music, neighborhoods, family activities, childcare, schools, food, and expatriate and immigrant issues.

#6: Goodfellow AFB / San Angelo public-private partnerships (San Angelo, TX)

<https://www.aetc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3038035/san-angelo-community-wins-2021-altus-trophy-for-best-community-support-in-aetc/>

San Angelo, Texas is home to [Goodfellow Air Force Base](#), a joint training base home of the 17th Training Wing that serves Air Force, Space Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard. The base serves a population of more than 12,000 people including students, permanent party, civilians, dependents and retirees.

San Angelo has a strong reputation for its support of the military, having three times received a community support award known as the Altus Trophy from the Air Education and Training Command (AETC). San Angelo is particularly known as a leader in developing public-to-public, public-to-private partnerships.¹ The City of San Angelo, supported by the San Angelo Chamber, has more than 40 memorandums of understanding with the base. These public-private partnerships seek to provide mutual benefit to the city and GAFB by pooling resources to reduce cost. A key recent accomplishment was an agreement that allowed Airmen to use Angelo State University dormitories, thereby alleviating an on-base housing shortage and activating college facilities that were underutilized due to the pandemic. According to a [published report](#), the Air Force is studying this model for use in other communities.

¹ Bouligny, James. “City of San Angelo Wins Altus Trophy for Unprecedented 3rd Time.” *San Angelo LIVE!* May 20, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://sanangelolive.com/news/san-angelo/2022-05-20/city-san-angelo-wins-altus-trophy-unprecedented-3rd-time>

#7: Grand Sky Joint Use Agreement (Grand Forks County, ND)

<https://www.northropgrumman.com/careers/northrop-grumman-in-north-dakota/>

Grand Sky is billed as the country's first business park dedicated to the unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) industry.² It is located in Grand Forks County, ND adjacent to Grand Forks Air Force Base, home to the 319th Reconnaissance Wing. The 217-acre park opened in February 2015 and received a significant boost in 2016 when the U.S. Air Force and Grand Forks County signed a Joint-Use Agreement after 18 months of negotiations. The agreement allows both manned and unmanned aircraft to utilize the base's 12,351-foot runway. The agreement was critical to the park's anchor tenant, the multinational aerospace and defense giant Northrup Grumman, which announced plans to build a 36,000-square-foot research and training facility.³ According to Northrup Grumman, the facility is a "premier, innovative one-of-a-kind site that specializes in Aircraft Operations, Mission Engineering, Integrated Logistics, and Software Sustainment." While specific opportunities adjacent to Sheppard Air Force Base may differ from the Grand Sky, the park is nevertheless a good example of the potential to utilize Joint Use Agreements to support industrial development.

#8: Tarleton State transition to Division I FCS (Stephenville, TX)

<https://tarletonsports.com/news/2020/7/1/general-tarleton-officially-joins-ncaa-division-i-western-athletic-conference.aspx>

<https://athleticdirector.com/video/transitioning-to-d1-with-tarleton-state-james-hurley/>

Tarleton State University is a public university in the Texas A&M University System with its main campus in Stephenville, TX. According to its website, it enrolls more than 14,000 students. In July 2020, the institution's athletic programs completed their reclassification from NCAA Division II to Division I. The school's teams compete in the Western Athletic Conference, which sponsors football at the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) level.

Tarleton State is a recent example of a Texas school that has reclassified from Division II to Division I. Between 1994 and 2020 its athletic teams competed in the Division II Lone Star Conference, which has also been home to Midwestern State University since the late 90s. Moving up within the NCAA hierarchy is typically associated with major cost increases for scholarships, compliance and support staff expansion, facility upgrades, and so on. In the interview linked above, Tarleton State President James Hurley discusses the reasoning behind the move, how stakeholders built support and funding, and the desired outcomes.

² Jewett, Brandi. "Groundbreaking on Grand Sky project represents years of preparation." *Grand Forks Herald*. September 10, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.grandforksherald.com/newsmd/groundbreaking-on-grand-sky-project-represents-years-of-preparation>

³ Carey, Bill. "U.S. Air Force, UAS Park Sign Joint-Use Agreement for Runway." *AIN Online*. April 4, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.ainonline.com/aviation-news/defense/2016-04-04/us-air-force-uas-park-sign-joint-use-agreement-runway>

#9: Anthony Field at Wildcat Stadium (Abilene, TX)

<https://acu.today/2017/09/28/debut-of-wildcat-stadium-surpasses-all-expectations/>

Abilene Christian University (ACU) is a private Christian university in Abilene, TX. According to its website, the school has an enrollment of roughly 5,300 students, approximately 3,500 of whom are undergraduates. ACU's sports teams competed against Midwestern State University for many years as a member of the NCAA Division II Lone Star Conference; ACU has since transitioned to NCAA Division I along with several other Texas institutions that compete in the Western Athletic Conference, which sponsors football at the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) level.

Also like Midwestern State, ACU's football team for many years played its home games at an off-campus stadium it shared with the local Independent School District. In September 2017, however, ACU played a game at a permanent on-campus home for the first time since 1942 with the opening of Anthony Field at Wildcat Stadium. The new stadium has a capacity of 12,000 and was designed by HKS Architects.

ACU – whose athletic programs were peers to MSU within the past decade – represents an example of a Texas institution that has sought to enliven its campus and community with a new stadium. Its experience is also instructive of the financial capacity needed to turn such a vision into reality. The process of creating Anthony Field at Wildcat Stadium began in earnest with the largest donation in the school's history – \$30 million of which \$15 million was earmarked for football – along with other significant follow-on gifts. Such giving would almost certainly be required for MSU to pursue a similar outcome.

#10: Public art programs (Sioux Falls, SD)

<https://www.artssiouxfalls.org>

Sioux Falls, SD has a long history of investing in the arts to promote community revitalization and quality of life. Some of these investments have involved significant investments: converting a disused historic high school building into a community hub for arts and entertainment, creating a renowned outdoor amphitheater and gathering space, and commissioning the [Arc of Dreams](#), an dramatic stainless steel sculpture that bridges the Big Sioux River.

Partners in Sioux Falls have also utilized public art in a variety of creative and less capital-intensive ways to enliven places around the community. Downtown Sioux Falls, Inc. (DTSF) has subsidized murals in and around the community's downtown area to transform blank walls into vibrant pieces of art.⁴ DTSF also operates the [ArtBox](#) program, which wraps 26 otherwise nondescript downtown utility boxes in vinyl coverings from local artists of all abilities. According to DTSF, proposals were solicited in Arabic, Amharic,

⁴ Sneve, Joe. "Why murals will be the next big public art trend in downtown Sioux Falls." *The Argus Leader*. July 29, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/2019/07/29/why-murals-next-big-public-art-trend-downtown-sioux-falls/1839657001/>

English, Nepali, Somali, Spanish, and Swahili to engage as many potential artists as possible. The City of Sioux Falls has even solicited public art to [beautify storm drainage systems](#) that discharge into the Big Sioux River. According to the City’s website: “Since 2016, the City of Sioux Falls has partnered with local businesses, organizations, and individuals to paint murals on stormwater inlets downtown to help raise awareness of the effect stormwater runoff has on water quality.”

Outside of downtown, an eighth-grade class at Whittier Middle School – located in the city’s most diverse neighborhood – conceptualized beautifying a heavily graffitied wall with a vibrant mural. The class and a teacher engaged City’s Department of Parks and Recreation and the Sioux Falls Arts Council and worked with local stakeholders and artists to plan a mural. Stakeholders ultimately engaged an artist from Kansas, who in a roughly two-month residency created an impactful mural with the help of more than 250 residents.⁵

#11: Buffalo Bicycle Master Plan Update (Buffalo, NY)

<https://gobikebuffalo.org/project/buffalo-bike-master-plan-update/>

The Buffalo Bicycle Master Plan Update is an example of a strong, city-level bicycle master plan. Completed in 2016, this document built on previous master plans to provide a new blueprint for expanding the city’s existing bicycle infrastructure network and outline an approach to phased implementation. The plan was funded through state grants to a local nonprofit, [GObike Buffalo](#), and matching funds from the City of Buffalo. It was developed by a consultant team led by Alta Planning + Design, a nationally renowned bicycle and pedestrian planning firm.

According to the plan’s executive summary, the framework leverages the city’s radial street grid to propose a connected network of on-street bikeways to complement the community’s pre-existing greenway trails. The planning team assigned a “typology” to each street in an attempt to determine the “types of bicyclists” who would be comfortable riding on the street once the plan’s recommendations had been implemented. The types of bicyclists were derived from empirical research that has shown that people typically fall into one of four categories related to bicycling: 1) Strong and Fearless, 2) Enthused and Confident, 3) Interested but Concerned, or 4) ‘No Way, No How’. These categories served as the guiding principle for the plan, and emphasis was placed on identifying routes that catered to the majority of people that would bicycle if dedicated facilities were provided, known as the ‘Interested but Concerned’ group of riders.

⁵ “Sioux Falls, SD: Whittier Neighborhood Mural Project.” National Endowment for the Arts. Retrieved from: <https://www.arts.gov/impact/creative-placemaking/exploring-our-town/sioux-falls-sd-whittier-neighborhood-mural-project>

#12: Public Improvement District No. 1 (Waco, TX)

<https://www.waco-texas.com/economic-development/public-improvement-district.asp#gsc.tab=0>

According to the City of Waco’s website, the Waco Public Improvement District (PID) No. 1 is responsible for funding a variety of services that benefit a large portion of Downtown Waco. These services include but are not limited to downtown event sponsorship, security and landscape maintenance, downtown bike lane expansion and promotion, developing wayfinding signage, and working with Baylor University to provide downtown shuttles and connections between the district and BU’s stadium on football gamedays. The PID was established in 1988 by the Waco City Council and renewed for an additional 15 years in 2012. It is governed by a 28-member advisory board of downtown property owners and stakeholders that makes recommendations to the Waco City Council. This group also encourages the development of new businesses and promote opportunities for dining, housing, and retail shopping.

#13: Santa Fe Plaza (Temple, TX)

<https://templeedc.com/temple-santa-fe-plaza-named-best-downtown-public-improvement-in-texas/>

Temple’s Santa Fe Plaza is an example of a recently developed “signature amenity” and gathering place in a small to mid-sized Texas downtown. According to the Temple Economic Development Corporation, the Plaza is a \$30 million redevelopment anchored by the community’s historic Santa Fe Depot. The project also included the redesign of adjacent streets and the development of a pedestrian path, the Santa Fe Market Trail, which connects the plaza to the Santa Fe Market, a 3.28-acre site which houses a food truck court, pavilion, garden, art and an open lawn for gatherings and events. This \$1.5 million trail project was completed in February 2020. In September 2020, the project received the Texas Downtown Association (TDA) President’s Award for “Best Downtown Public Improvement” in the state for cities with a population of 50,000 or more.

#14: Storefront Activation Program (Germantown, Philadelphia, PA)

<https://germantownunitedcdc.org/2016/02/09/gucdcs-storefront-activation-program-pairing-local-artists-and-makers-with-germantown-businesses/>

Germantown is a neighborhood in Philadelphia, located roughly six miles northwest of the city center. It is served by the Germantown United Community Development Corporation (GUCCDC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to corridor revitalization and community economic development. GUCCDC’s Storefront Activation Program pairs local artists with property owners in order to upgrade window displays for existing businesses and vacant properties. The program is intended to “enliven the street for pedestrians, attract more

customers to existing businesses, market available commercial properties, and promote Germantown to prospective businesses.”

Under the program, participating artists submit design renderings or descriptions and estimated budgets to the GUCDC. Artists also are responsible for providing the labor for installation and removal (if applicable). Project budgets may run between \$250 and \$2,500 and cover material costs and a stipend to the artist. GUCDC also serves as an intermediary between artists and business/property owners and provides promotion and marketing for displays. The program prioritizes projects that can be implemented quickly, with typically no more than 10 days for installation.

#15: Business Equity for Indy (Indianapolis, IN)

<https://businessequityindy.com>

In October 2020, partners in the Indianapolis region came together to form Business Equity for Indy (BEI). According to its website, BEI is a joint effort of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership (CICP), the Indy Chamber, in collaboration with the Indianapolis Urban League to grow a more inclusive business climate and build greater equity and economic opportunity for the Indy Region’s Black residents and people of color. The initiative brings together business leaders to seek progress on five priorities for advancing equity. As stated on the Indy Chamber’s [website](#), these priorities are:

1. Hiring & Promotion: Increase equity and the diversity of Indy’s workforce by eliminating and reducing hurdles to Black entry, advancement, and promotion across Indy’s employers and corporate board rooms.
2. Procurement & Participation: Increase the launch, growth, and success rates of Black-owned businesses and enterprises owned by people of color through expanded supplier diversity and participation opportunities.
3. Learning & Talent: Promote opportunity and access for Black talent to employment and business future.
4. Impediments to Health: Address impediments to healthcare access, public health funding, and community health challenges that disproportionately affect Black populations and people of color in Indianapolis.
5. Public Policy: Convene business and community leaders to build relationships, identify, and advocate for policies to remove barriers to opportunity for Black people and other people of color.

According to the [CICP](#), 22 businesses signed the Indy Racial Equity Pledge in the initiative’s first year and five CEO-led task forces composed of more than 80 business and community leaders have formed.

#16: The 800 Initiative (Memphis, TN)

<http://the800.org/>

Part of the broader [Memphis Moves](#) minority business development program, The 800 Initiative seeks to grow minority firms' revenue by \$50,000,000 in five years. This will be accomplished through the deliberate investment of assistance, capital, corporate engagement, and other resources. The focus is on minority firms with paid employees, as well as promising minority businesses with no paid employees. While this ambitious program would likely need to be scaled down significantly for a community of Wichita Falls' size, its core components make sense for communities seeking to grow minority-owned businesses. There are three phases to the plan: 1) Building Phase (expanded R&D and partner alignment), 2) Growth Stage (enhance promising programs), and 3) Sustainability Stage (institute policy and structural frameworks for success beyond administration).