



IGNITE Hidalgo County

Igniting Minds. Igniting Involvement. Igniting Economies.



A Comprehensive Economic Development
Strategy for Hidalgo County
2011-2015



Asset Map Highlights

HUMAN CAPITAL



STRENGTHS: 296,764 civilian labor force; 27.4 years median age population; 21 school districts with 204,529 students in K-12; 1 top-ranked public university with 18,337 students; 1 community college with 26,334 students; 18 technical schools; 1 partnership for business and industry and training; 5 workforce center offices; 3 specialized high schools. **NEEDS:** improve graduation rates and educational attainment rates; advocate for development of professional schools.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT



STRENGTHS: 20 research centers at UTPA; 1 biosciences/medical research center conducting research in genetics, cancer, obesity and diabetes; 4 agricultural research centers; promising development of nanofiber manufacturing technology at UTPA; 1 rapid response manufacturing center; 1 manufacturing assistance center; 1 material research science and engineering center; advanced manufacturing research partnership through NAAMREI WIRED project. **NEEDS:** develop research parks and business incubators; increase corporate research and development activity; secure Tier I research university status.

FINANCIAL CAPITAL



STRENGTHS: 150 bank branches; \$9.3 billion in bank deposits, deposits have doubled from 2000 to 2009; foreign investment and capital from investors in Mexico; 2 technical assistance centers for SBA loans; 1 microenterprise lender; innovation grants through McAllen Chamber of Commerce. **NEEDS:** improve access to seed capital through venture capital and angel investor networks; increase Small Business Innovation Research, Small Business Technology Transfer awards, and Emerging Technology Fund awards to local companies.

INDUSTRY AND ECONOMY



STRENGTHS: \$13.8 billion economy, strong GDP growth, 8.2% annually from 2001 to 2008; large maquiladora industry in Reynosa, Mexico (142 manufacturing plants, 72,916 employees); abundant retail stores/malls/centers; growing health care, education, and government jobs; cross-border trade with Mexico; annual influx of Winter Texans; Mexican Nationals who live, shop, invest, and visit the area; developing ecotourism in bird watching. **NEEDS:** increase investment in high-wage industries such as health care, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, material sciences, and high tech; continue regional marketing efforts by Rio South Texas Economic Council.

CONNECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS



STRENGTHS: 8 economic development corporations; 11 chambers of commerce; 3 regional economic development organizations; McAllen Chamber Inventors and Entrepreneurship Network; probusiness city governments; welcoming/friendly culture. **NEEDS:** support regional marketing and collaborative efforts to attract industry and investment.

LEGAL AND REGULATORY

STRENGTHS: environment conducive to economic development; property taxes rates comparable to other areas; broadband and wireless coverage; competitive utility rates; aggressive economic development incentives. **NEEDS:** promote benefits of dual tax system to companies doing business in U.S. and Mexico.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE



STRENGTHS: 5 international ports with Mexico, 1 additional bridge to be built; 3 airports; two major highways; 14 industrial parks; industrial parks in Reynosa, Mexico; affordable industrial land; 1 central bus terminal. **NEEDS:** increase public transportation options; identify future water sources, such as capturing rain and floodwaters for household use; invest in building Interstate highway, trade corridors, and passenger and freight rail.

QUALITY OF LIFE



STRENGTHS: low cost of living; low median housing costs; developing entertainment district in downtown McAllen; retail stores/shopping centers; golf courses; 2 museums; World Birding Center sites; access to South Padre Island; hunting and fishing; 4 minor sports teams; shorter average commute time; 1 multipurpose entertainment arena. **NEEDS:** increase cultural and entertainment venues; create regional trail network for walking, hiking, and cycling.

HEALTH CARE



STRENGTHS: 40,000 persons employed in biomedical/biotechnology industry cluster; improving quality of care and services offered locally; rapid job growth in industry; market growth of local population, Winter Texans, and Mexican Nationals driving health care demand; medical research at Edinburg Regional Academic Health Center; 9 acute/general care hospitals; 3,265 licensed beds and 2,201 staffed beds; 18 nursing homes; 248 home health agencies. **NEEDS:** invest in training programs for health care professionals, such as nurses; secure funding for medical school and regional simulation lab; increase funding for medical research at the Edinburg Regional Academic Health Center; attract pharmaceutical research and testing companies.

CEDS 5 Year Goals and Objectives

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| REGIONALISM: Bolster existing and new regional collaboration efforts. |
| Increase awareness of ongoing collaborative initiatives. |
| Provide regional network planning support and technical assistance to small cities. |
| Establish a system for regional collaboration on major infrastructure projects. |
| Increase membership in Rio South Texas Economic Council. |
| ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS: Grow Hidalgo County's economy. |
| Support increased cross-border trade, commerce and cooperation. |
| Increase access to capital for business retention, expansion and creation. |
| Ensure that industry cluster and emerging sector data is available to economic development organizations, small businesses and financial institutions. |
| Ensure that sufficient community and economic development training and technical assistance opportunities are available. |
| Increase access to broadband service, especially in rural areas. |
| Increase research and development activities in the county, particularly in high wage industries such as healthcare, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, material sciences, and high tech. |
| Increase cultural and entertainment venues and activities in the county. |
| Support development of ecotourism and outdoor recreation opportunities. |
| WORKFORCE COMPETITIVENESS: Create a globally competitive workforce. |
| Improve secondary and postsecondary education completion rates. |
| Prioritize the completion of vocational and technical training programs for workers in Hidalgo County. |
| Increase adult education and literacy rates. |
| Support development of career pathways for K-16 students to generate awareness about career opportunities in Hidalgo County's targeted industries. |
| Expand capacity for customized training and education to support business and industry needs. |
| Advocate for the development of professional schools. |
| PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: Improve regional physical infrastructure. |
| Support and sustain existing regional efforts. |
| Increase collaborative efforts supporting regional infrastructure development and expansion. |
| Participate and integrate the Rio Grande regional water planning group efforts. |
| Integrate and support regional drainage master plan. |
| Help economic development organizations generate awareness about industrial parks, transportation assets, and other components of Hidalgo County's competitive advantage. |
| Protect Hidalgo County's natural environment and promote it as an economic asset. |
| Establish alternative sources for water to meet the future needs of the county. |
| MOBILITY: Meet the comprehensive mobility needs of the region. |
| Support and integrate existing MPO/MPT plans. |
| Support and promote regional transportation networks/systems. |
| Develop strategy for freight and passenger rail systems. |
| Construct key trade corridors that connect ports to U.S. 281. |
| Support development of Interstate quality corridor using existing routes. |
| Diversify funding streams for transportation projects. |
| HEALTHCARE: Establish Hidalgo County as the premier location for healthcare in South Texas. |
| Support advancement of specialized research and development initiatives that enhance the region's competitiveness in healthcare and address community health needs, such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity. |
| Strengthen partnerships between nursing, allied health and workforce programs. |
| Increase K-16 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curriculum options to prepare students of all ages for high-growth, high-wage job opportunities of the future. |
| Encourage and build new healthcare systems. |
| Recruit and retain a competent healthcare workforce from inside and outside the region. |



Hidalgo County Judge's Office
100 East Cano, 2nd Floor
Edinburg, TX 78539
(956) 318-2600
www.co.hidalgo.tx.us