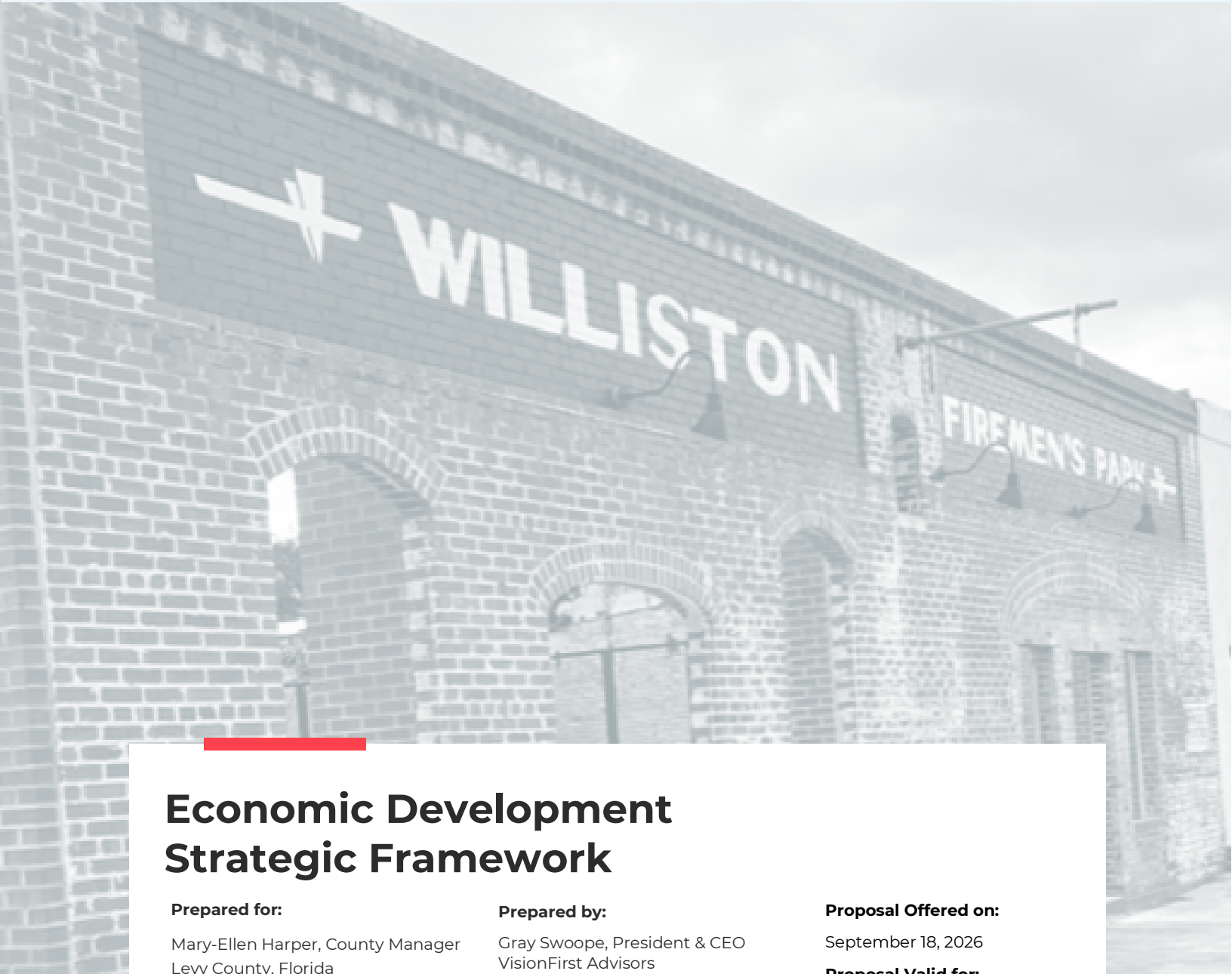


LEVY COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE



Economic Development Strategic Framework

Prepared for:

Mary-Ellen Harper, County Manager
Levy County, Florida
www.levycounty.org

Prepared by:

Gray Swoope, President & CEO
VisionFirst Advisors
VisionFirstAdvisors.com

Proposal Offered on:

September 18, 2026

Proposal Valid for:

60 days



CONTENTS

Introduction2

Firm Qualifications3

Our Firm.....4

Our Team.....5

Scope of Work.....6

Meet the Project Team 11

Professional Fees.....12

Client Highlights & References13



Strategy starts
with a vision first.

INTRODUCTION

VisionFirst Advisors is pleased to submit this proposal for a facilitated strategic session and Economic Development Strategic Framework to support Levy County and its newly established Economic Development Advisory Board.

Levy County is at an important point in shaping a new and holistic approach to economic development. The creation of the Advisory Board provides an opportunity to bring together business and business leaders, county leadership and economic development partners around a shared understanding of Levy County's opportunities and priorities for its future.

As the Board begins its work, a focused strategic planning session will provide an opportunity to better understand economic development today, consider the county's competitive position and identify priorities. Through data, facilitated discussion and interactive exercises, the session will establish a foundation for the county's economic development efforts moving forward.

VisionFirst Advisors brings a unique perspective to this work. Our team has spent most of our careers working in economic development at the local, regional and state levels. We understand how communities compete, how local and regional partners work together and the importance of developing strategies that reflect local priorities, available resources and the realities of implementation. Ultimately, we bring:

Unmatched experience. VisionFirst has developed economic development strategies in more than 40 Florida counties, giving our team extensive experience working with communities of all sizes. In both Jackson County and Highlands County, our work has included economic development and broader countywide strategies, providing valuable perspective on how economic development connects with workforce, infrastructure and quality of place.

Experienced facilitation. Our team regularly facilitates strategic discussions with boards, elected officials, business leaders and community partners. We know how to create an environment where participants can share perspectives, evaluate priorities and identify future initiatives. Our sessions are interactive and focused on producing meaningful input that can be translated into clear direction and next steps.

Realistic and implementable strategies. We focus on what communities can realistically accomplish, identifying opportunities, partnerships and next steps that reflect local capacity and provide a practical foundation for continued strategic planning.

On the following pages, you will find a suggested scope of work designed to support the Advisory Board and provide Levy County with a framework for moving forward. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to the opportunity to work with Levy County.

Sincerely,



Gray Swoope, President & CEO, VisionFirst Advisors

FIRM QUALIFICATIONS

For over a decade, our firm has addressed complex economic development challenges by actively listening to our clients' visions, crafting strategic solutions and fostering meaningful connections. We are committed to delivering clear, measurable results that drive lasting value for our clients.

VisionFirst brings a distinguished team to the project. We are analytical thinkers who can break down strategy into implementable work plans. Our team's capacity is the result of demonstrated expertise in:

- Helping economic and community development professionals create and sustain high-performing teams that lead to significant increases in partnerships, performance and positioning.
- Convening institutions, community leaders, stakeholders and taxpayers to create synergies for transformational community impact.
- Cross-walking targeted industry sectors to talent pipelines to compete in a global marketplace.

Please see our Client Highlights and References on page 19 for selected experience of developing economic development strategies.



50

STATES
REPRESENTED
IN OUR
PORTFOLIO

29

FORTUNE 500
CLIENTS

\$152B

ANNOUNCED
PROJECT CAPEX

19,000+

ANNOUNCED
JOBS

47

PROJECTS
ANNOUNCED
ACROSS
21 STATES

VisionFirst is built on seasoned leadership with shared executive experience in state economic development, now directing a growing private practice. These same principles continue to guide our work.

RESPECT + TRUST + REPUTATION + RESULTS

These values define our culture and shape every client engagement.

We recognize that our actions reflect directly on the communities we serve.

OUR FIRM

WHO WE ARE + WHAT WE DO // VisionFirst Advisors is a leading economic development consulting firm, serving clients nationwide, including 29 Fortune 500 companies.

We embed with our clients as an extension of their team, by helping define strategy, solve problems and execute. Our work is tailored, data-driven and focused on two things: increasing competitiveness and delivering results.

[CORE SERVICE AREAS]

01. STRATEGY & ADVISORY

Strategic planning, organizational alignment, target industry analysis and implementation roadmaps that guide decision-making and drive results.

02. WORKFORCE & TALENT STRATEGY

Data-driven workforce analysis, talent pipeline alignment and strategies to attract, retain and develop a competitive workforce.

03. SITE SELECTION & CORPORATE ADVISORY

Location strategy, site evaluation, workforce and cost analysis and incentive structuring to support corporate investment decisions.

04. MARKETING, BRANDING & CREATIVE

Positioning, messaging and marketing tools that elevate communities, sites and organizations in competitive markets.

OUR TEAM

Smart Tools. Real Credentials. National Reach.

VisionFirst Advisors combines decades of experience leading economic development organizations, advising businesses on location strategy and helping communities compete for investment. Because our team has worked across the public and private sectors, we bring practical insight, national perspective and proven strategies to every engagement.



Gray Swoope
PRESIDENT & CEO



Griff Salmon
PRINCIPAL



Minah Hall
PRINCIPAL



Nancy Blum
MANAGING DIRECTOR



Greg Word
MANAGING DIRECTOR



Jennifer Carroll
MANAGING DIRECTOR



Kathy Gelston, CPA
FINANCIAL ANALYST



Meghan DiGiacomo
SENIOR CONSULTANT



Lesley Hatfield
SENIOR CONSULTANT



Mackenzie Greene
CONSULTANT



Heather Dollar
ADMINISTRATION

7

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Tallahassee + Orlando (FL),
Jackson (MS), Greenville (SC),
Chicago (IL), Dallas (TX),
Huntsville (AL)

VisionFirst Advisors pairs experienced practitioners with industry-leading technology, proprietary data and nationally recognized credentials to deliver informed, data-driven recommendations.

TOOLS + RESOURCES



Institute for Professionals
in Taxation Board Member



Incentive
Negotiation
& Compliance



Energy & Utility
Coordination &
Evaluation



Economic &
Financial Modeling

SCOPE OF WORK

The most effective economic development strategies create clarity around what matters most to a community. They establish priorities, align resources and provide a framework for making decisions in an increasingly competitive environment.

As Levy County's new Economic Development Advisory Board begins its work, VisionFirst will provide the information and facilitated discussion needed to establish a shared understanding of economic development, evaluate the county's competitive position and identify priorities for moving forward.

The process combines economic analysis, facilitated discussion and VisionFirst's experience working with communities throughout Florida and across the country. The resulting Economic Development Strategic Framework will summarize key findings, identify areas of consensus and provide recommended next steps to help guide the county's economic development efforts and future strategic planning.

Each phase builds upon the previous one, moving from project coordination and research to facilitated discussion, strategic prioritization and recommended next steps.

Building Consensus

Strategy, like building a house, begins with thoughtful planning and design long before the foundation is poured. VisionFirst will utilize the initial kickoff meeting with Levy County to discuss desired outcomes, build consensus on goals and adjust the approach as necessary for success. This process will allow us to identify milestones while developing a communications structure for the engagement.

The kickoff meeting will include the team who will assist VisionFirst in coordinating information and logistics throughout the engagement. Together, we will review project objectives, refine the scope as necessary and establish a clear understanding of anticipated outcomes and deliverables.

Activities Include:

- Host a virtual kickoff meeting with Levy County's project team.
- Confirm project goals, scope and expected outcomes.
- Review communication protocols and project coordination.
- Identify and collect existing plans, studies, economic development initiatives and relevant data.
- Confirm participants and logistics for the facilitated strategic session.
- Establish project milestones and deliverable deadlines.
- **Deliverable:** VisionFirst will prepare an engagement guide outlining the project timeline, communication schedule, milestones and anticipated deliverables within 10 business days following the kickoff meeting.

Evaluating Competitiveness

To identify priorities for Levy County's economic development efforts, it is important to first understand the county's economy, assets and competitive position. VisionFirst will conduct a high-level assessment of demographic, economic, workforce and community indicators to provide a baseline for the facilitated discussion.

VisionFirst will assess Levy County's economic base and identify trends that may influence future growth, including industry, workforce, education, demographics and quality of place. The assessment will consider the information through the lens of economic development and site selection to help participants understand how data influences business location decisions and community competitiveness.

VisionFirst will compile data from trusted state and national sources including JobsEQ by CHMURA Economics and Analytics, U.S. Census Bureau, StatsAmerica, National Center for Education Statistics, National Association of Counties, Esri's tapestry segmentation reports and other relevant sources. The research will provide an unbiased baseline of information to focus the conversation and support the identification of priorities during the facilitated session.

Activities Include:

- Assess Levy County's economic base, including key demographic, workforce, education, industry and community indicators.
- Review existing economic development plans, programs, initiatives and available research.
- Identify economic and industry trends relevant to the county's future growth.
- Evaluate key assets and competitive factors through an economic development and site selection lens.
- Develop a concise data presentation to inform the facilitated strategic session.

Facilitating Strategic Discussion

Economic development is most successful when leaders understand how the pieces work together and share a common direction for moving forward. VisionFirst will facilitate an interactive session with the Economic Development Advisory Board along with invited city and county commissioners, designed to combine economic development education, data and discussion.

The session will provide context on economic and community development today, including how communities grow their economies, the importance of identifying the type of growth a community wants and the roles of local government, businesses and economic development partners.

VisionFirst will then use facilitated exercises to gather input and identify areas of alignment, including a SWOT analysis of the county's assets and opportunities and a values exercise to identify principles that should guide Levy County's approach to economic development. The

session will conclude by identifying emerging priorities, potential near-term actions and areas for further consideration as part of a future comprehensive strategic planning process.

Activities Include:

- Facilitate an approximately four-hour in-person strategic session.
- Present an overview of economic and community development.
- Review Levy County's economic and demographic profile.
- Facilitate interactive discussion of assets, opportunities and areas of focus.
- Conduct an interactive SWOT analysis.
- Identify emerging economic development priorities and potential near-term actions.
- Discuss recommended next steps and future strategic planning.
- **Deliverable:** VisionFirst will summarize key themes, priorities and areas of alignment identified through the facilitated session for inclusion in the Economic Development Strategic Framework.

Draft Facilitated Strategic Session Agenda

The following agenda is provided as a starting point and will be refined with Levy County during the Building Consensus phase.

DURATION	TOPIC
10 min.	Welcome & Meeting Purpose • Overview of session objectives and expected outcomes
20 min.	Opening Question Activity
25 min.	What Does Economic & Community Development Look Like Today? • Three buckets of economic growth • How communities work together as a team • Knowing what type of growth a community wants and how to attract it
20 min.	Data is the First Impression • Levy County by the numbers • Key demographic, workforce, industry and community indicators
45 min.	What's Working & Where Are the Opportunities? • Identify assets and opportunities • Discuss factors impacting economic competitiveness • SWOT analysis activity
10 min.	Break
30 min.	What Matters to Levy County? • Identify principles that should guide the county's approach to economic development
55 min.	Priority Pulse: What Truly Matters to Us? • Identify top economic and community development priorities • Discuss where the county can have the greatest impact

	• Identify partners and areas of shared responsibility • Identify potential near-term opportunities
20 min.	Next Steps • Review key themes and priorities • Discuss how input will inform the Strategic Framework • Outline next steps for future strategic planning
5 min.	Wrap Up & Adjourn

Developing The Strategic Framework

Following the facilitated session, VisionFirst will combine the research, data and participant input into a concise Economic Development Strategic Framework.

The framework will capture what was heard and provide Levy County with an organized set of findings and recommended next steps. It is intended to provide direction for the Advisory Board as it begins its work while identifying areas that should be explored more fully through a future comprehensive economic development strategic plan.

Rather than developing detailed strategies and tactics during this initial engagement, VisionFirst will identify emerging priorities, near-term opportunities and considerations that can help the county determine where to focus its efforts next.

Activities Include:

- Synthesize research, data and facilitated session input.
- Summarize key findings and areas of consensus.
- Refine the SWOT and identify leverage points.
- Identify emerging economic development priorities.
- Identify potential near-term opportunities.
- Outline recommended next steps for continued economic development planning.
- **Deliverable:** VisionFirst will prepare an Economic Development Strategic Framework that includes key findings, economic and competitive observations, SWOT and leverage points, emerging priorities, near-term opportunities and recommended next steps.

YOUR PROJECT TEAM

VisionFirst brings together a team of former economic development executives, nationally recognized site selectors, financial professionals and marketing and communications professionals who have spent their careers helping communities compete for investment and jobs. Collectively, our experience spans local, regional, state and corporate economic development, giving clients access to a breadth of expertise that few consulting firms can provide.

Unlike firms that rely on a single consultant, VisionFirst leverages the collective experience of the entire project team. While one team member may serve as the primary point of contact, each professional remains actively engaged throughout the project, ensuring recommendations benefit from multiple perspectives and decades of real-world experience.

We measure our success by our clients' success. That commitment to collaboration, responsiveness and long-term relationships has resulted in lasting partnerships and repeat engagements with communities and organizations across the country.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Nancy Blum-Heintz

MANAGING DIRECTOR | TALLAHASSEE, FL

Nancy leads VisionFirst Advisors' strategy practice and serves as the day-to-day lead for the engagement, coordinating the team, managing resources and guiding the development of practical, implementation-focused strategies.

PROJECT TEAM

Meghan DiGiacomo

SENIOR CONSULTANT | GREENVILLE, SC

Provides site selection and local economic development expertise to assess competitive positioning and identify opportunities to attract investment and growth.

Mackenzie Greene

CONSULTANT | HUNTSVILLE, AL

Provides economic development marketing and communications expertise to support strategy development and execution.

MEET THE PROJECT TEAM

NANCY BLUM-HEINTZ

MANAGING DIRECTOR | TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

With more than 25 years of experience in economic development, communications, education policy and public affairs, Nancy brings a unique ability to translate complex challenges into implementable strategies grounded in data, best practices and a deep understanding of place.

At VisionFirst Advisors, she leads strategic client engagements that align workforce, education, communications and economic priorities while helping communities identify opportunities, build partnerships and develop implementation-focused strategies.

Nancy leads initiatives across the nation, including supporting Florida's Great Northwest through its Northwest Florida FORWARD initiative and leading TVA's Workforce Invest grant program, now in its fifth year. She has also led the development of comprehensive economic and community development strategies in Macon, Georgia; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Ardmore, Oklahoma; Emporia, Kansas and North Louisiana, among others.

Her work focuses on regional growth, talent development, strategic communications and investment attraction through collaborative, implementation-focused strategies.

MEGHAN DIGIACOMO

SENIOR CONSULTANT | GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Meghan brings extensive experience in global site selection and economic development at the state, local and regional levels. Her commitment to client success has earned her significant recognition in the field, including being named one of North America's Top 50 Economic Developers by Consultant Connect.

Before joining VisionFirst, Meghan worked as a Senior Consultant at Global Location Strategies (GLS). She specialized in capital- and resource-intensive projects, helping companies make strategic location decisions that promoted growth and long-term success. In this role, she evaluated key location drivers such as logistics, workforce, incentives and operational risk to ensure clients were positioned for sustainable performance.

MACKENZIE GREENE

CONSULTANT | HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

Mackenzie is a creative marketing and communications professional with a passion for telling the stories of growing communities. With over six years of experience in economic development and community branding, she has led strategic marketing initiatives that support business recruitment, talent attraction and regional growth, always with a focus on elevating a community's visibility and voice.

Before joining VisionFirst, Mackenzie supported a nationally recognized remote worker incentive program that helped transform her home community in Northwest Alabama, welcoming hundreds of new residents and earning coverage in outlets including The Wall Street Journal and Business Insider. Her ability to connect strategy with meaningful, measurable impact has made her a trusted resource for communities looking to control their narrative and compete for talent and investment.

Mackenzie holds a degree in Public Relations with a minor in Marketing from the University of North Alabama. A lifelong resident of The Shoals area, she brings both professional expertise and genuine community investment to every engagement.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

The proposed fee for this engagement is \$24,500. This fee is based on the estimated time and experience of the individuals performing the work. VisionFirst Advisors is committed to meeting the project timeline and budget requirements.

The proposed fee is all-inclusive and includes project management, research and data review, preparation and facilitation of the in-person session, development of meeting materials and preparation of the summary report and recommended next steps.

The fee also includes reasonable travel expenses, production costs and project-related materials.

This price proposal is valid for 60 days.

CLIENT HIGHLIGHTS & REFERENCES

VisionFirst has collaborated with both communities throughout the nation and Fortune 500 companies to tackle strategic challenges in community and economic development, site selection, product development, organizational effectiveness, workforce training and marketing and communications. The following clients agreed to share their experiences with you. These projects demonstrate our ability to deliver high-quality results on time and within budget. We hope you find these selected references of our trusted clients as a beneficial demonstration of our effectiveness in achieving results.

HIGHLANDS COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Building a Long-Term Partnership for Organizational Excellence and Economic Competitiveness

Situation: Highlands County recognized that creating a competitive economy required more than a single strategic plan. Over the course of nearly a decade, VisionFirst partnered with the county and its economic development organization through multiple engagements designed to address the community's evolving needs and opportunities. The relationship began with an organizational strategic assessment that evaluated the newly established economic development office and identified priorities for future success. That work led to Highlands County's first Economic Development Strategic Plan, followed by a process improvement initiative that evaluated development review procedures and recommended operational improvements to better serve businesses, developers and the community. As the economy continued to evolve, Highlands County again selected VisionFirst in 2024 to help define the next chapter of its future.

Solution: Across each engagement, VisionFirst tailored its approach to the client's evolving priorities while maintaining a consistent long-term vision. The organizational assessment established foundational recommendations for the economic development organization, while the first Economic Development Strategic Plan translated those recommendations into implementation-ready goals, strategies, tactics and performance metrics. The process-improvement engagement focused on enhancing the county's development review process by optimizing coordination, efficiency and the overall customer experience. In 2024, Highlands County again selected VisionFirst to lead two separate but complementary planning efforts simultaneously: a countywide strategic plan for the Board of County Commissioners focused on the community's long-term vision, quality of life and strategic priorities, and a separate Economic Development Strategic Plan for Highlands County Economic Development focused on business recruitment, redevelopment, organizational priorities and implementation. While developed concurrently, each engagement served a distinct purpose, engaged different stakeholders and established its own recommendations, ensuring the two plans complemented one another while providing independent roadmaps for implementation.

Result: Over nearly a decade, VisionFirst has helped Highlands County adapt its strategies as the economy, development opportunities and community priorities have evolved. Rather than producing a series of standalone plans, each engagement built upon previous recommendations, creating a coordinated framework that aligns county government and economic development while recognizing their distinct roles and responsibilities. Today, Highlands County has complementary strategies that preserve the community's character, support thoughtful growth and provide clear implementation roadmaps that better serve residents, businesses and visitors alike.

Reference: Laurie Hurner, County Administrator, Highlands County Board of County Commissioners | (863) 402-6500 | lhurner@highlandsfl.gov

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Positioning a Leading Economic Development State for Its Next Chapter

Situation: South Carolina entered the engagement from a position of significant economic development success. Over the prior decade, the State recruited major national and international companies, expanded its global advanced manufacturing brand and outpaced national growth across several industry sectors. That success also raised expectations. With business conditions changing, emerging industries creating new opportunities and competition among states intensifying, the South Carolina Department of Commerce recognized the need to look beyond what had worked historically and establish a strategic direction for the next three to five years. SC Commerce engaged VisionFirst Advisors and Strategic Development Group to develop a statewide strategic action plan focused on increasing competitiveness while better aligning the agency's programs and economic development partners.

Solution: Working in partnership with Strategic Development Group, VisionFirst helped lead a comprehensive process that combined statewide economic and industry analysis, competitive benchmarking, organizational assessment and stakeholder engagement. The team engaged more than 75 business leaders and stakeholders to understand how South Carolina was competing and where its approach needed to evolve. The analysis benchmarked South Carolina against five competitor states and examined population and workforce trends, industry performance, occupational characteristics, target sectors, research and development activity and the state's competitive position for business investment. The resulting framework established two overarching objectives, Optimize Industry Strengths and Increase Organizational Capacity, organized around a Prepare, Pursue and Partner approach that connected industry recruitment and diversification with sites, incentives, workforce, innovation, rural development, marketing, organizational systems and collaboration across South Carolina's economic development ecosystem.

Result: The final Strategic Action Framework gave SC Commerce a clear path for building on the state's manufacturing success while preparing for a changing economy. Rather than simply calling for more recruitment, the framework identified opportunities to pursue higher-value and emerging industries, expand research and innovation, improve site readiness, evolve the state's incentive toolkit, address rural competitiveness and better align workforce resources with industry needs. It also addressed the agency itself, recommending ways to improve organizational capacity and more intentionally coordinate the broad network of regional and local EDOs, higher education institutions, workforce partners, utilities, logistics providers and other allies involved in economic development across the state. By connecting statewide competitiveness with organizational capacity and partner alignment, the framework provided SC Commerce with an actionable structure for adapting to changing market conditions while continuing to serve as South Carolina's lead economic development agency.

Ashely Teasdel, Deputy Secretary, South Carolina Department of Commerce |
ateasdel@sccommerce.com | 803.737.0421 (direct)

ARDMORE DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Reimagining Economic Development After the Loss of a Major Employer

Situation: In October 2023, Michelin announced the closure of its tire manufacturing facility in Ardmore, Oklahoma, resulting in the eventual loss of approximately 1,400 jobs while retaining only 200 rubber mixing positions. For over 50 years, the facility served as one of the region's largest employers, generating an estimated \$77 million in annual payroll and supporting businesses throughout Carter County and southern Oklahoma. Community leaders understood that replacing a single employer would not be enough. Instead, the Ardmore Development Authority, Ardmore Chamber of Commerce and Ardmore Tourism Authority partnered with the Oklahoma Department of Commerce to develop a comprehensive Economic Vision Plan that would help the community build a more resilient and diversified economy while capitalizing on the momentum established through Vision 2025.

Solution: VisionFirst designed a comprehensive planning process that combined economic analysis, stakeholder engagement, target industry research, site evaluation and implementation planning into a single framework. The team completed a countywide economic assessment, analyzing demographic trends, labor force characteristics, educational attainment, industry concentrations, wages and workforce participation across multiple geographic comparisons, including Ardmore, Carter County, a 45-minute laborshed and the ZIP codes representing 90 percent of Michelin's historical workforce. The engagement also included three days of in-person stakeholder interviews and community conversations, a resident survey that generated 550 responses and a site and asset optimization review of key properties, including the former Michelin facility and the Ardmore Industrial Airpark. These findings were translated into a five-year Economic Vision Plan built around six implementation-focused strategies: target industry marketing, site and property optimization, downtown development and entrepreneurship, tourism, stakeholder communications and K-12 education advocacy. Each strategy included specific tactics, implementation timeframes and clearly defined leadership roles for the Development Authority, Chamber and Tourism Authority.

Result: The Economic Vision Plan provided Ardmore's economic development organizations with more than a recovery strategy. It established a shared vision that aligned economic development, tourism and community priorities while clearly defining the role each organization would play in implementation. Rather than focusing solely on replacing lost jobs, the strategy repositioned the conversation around economic diversification, entrepreneurship, tourism, education and long-term competitiveness. The plan created a practical roadmap for implementation while reinforcing community ownership through its public release, allowing residents, businesses and stakeholders to actively participate in shaping Ardmore's future.

Publicly Available: The completed Economic Vision Plan is available on the Ardmore Development Authority's website: [Ardmore Economic Vision Plan](#)

Bill Murphy, IOM, CECD, President & CEO, Ardmore Development Authority
| bmurphy@ardmore.org | (785) 260-5775

CLAY COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Evolving Strategy to Meet a Changing Marketplace

Situation: As one of the fastest-growing communities in Northeast Florida, Clay County has experienced significant change over the past several years. Population growth, the expansion of the First Coast Expressway and increasing competition for business investment required the Clay County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC) to continually refine its strategy and tools to remain competitive. Rather than relying on a single planning effort, CCEDC engaged VisionFirst through multiple initiatives over several years, including a Strategic & Financial Development Plan, an Economic Incentives Review and Strategy, and a comprehensive update to its Strategic Plan. Each engagement addressed a different organizational need while building upon previous recommendations to position the organization for long-term success.

Solution: VisionFirst developed a series of complementary strategies that evolved alongside the organization and the community. The 2021 Strategic & Financial Development Plan established the foundation by evaluating organizational performance, conducting stakeholder engagement, assessing target industries, completing a SWOT analysis and developing implementation-ready goals focused on organizational performance, business recruitment, product development and site readiness. As competition for projects intensified, VisionFirst returned in 2023 to develop a countywide Economic Incentives Review and Strategy, evaluating existing financial and non-financial incentives, municipal policies, development processes and accountability measures while creating a tiered incentive framework tailored to the county and its municipalities. In 2025, VisionFirst again partnered with CCEDC to develop an updated Strategic Plan that reassessed economic conditions, organizational priorities and stakeholder feedback while establishing four strategic focus areas centered on targeted industry recruitment, maximizing the First Coast Expressway opportunity, marketing and communications and organizational capacity. Together, these engagements provided a coordinated framework that aligned strategy, incentives and implementation as the community's economy continued to evolve.

Result: Over multiple engagements, VisionFirst helped Clay County move beyond periodic planning to a process of continuous strategic improvement. Each project addressed a distinct challenge while reinforcing previous recommendations, allowing the organization to adapt to changing market conditions, emerging infrastructure opportunities and evolving economic development priorities. Today, CCEDC has a coordinated set of strategies that align organizational direction, incentive policies and implementation priorities, providing practical tools to guide decision-making and enhance the county's competitiveness for future investment.

Reference: Crawford Powell, President, Clay County Economic Development Corporation
| (904) 375-9394 | CPowell@chooseclay.com

JONESBORO, ARKANSAS (JONESBORO UNLIMITED)

From Strategic Assessment to a Community Vision for the Future

Situation: As Jonesboro Unlimited (JU) approached the final years of its existing five-year economic development strategy, leadership recognized that the region's economy had evolved significantly. Workforce shortages, talent retention, regional competition and changing business recruitment priorities created new challenges that were not fully addressed in the original plan. Rather than immediately launching into another strategic planning process, JU first engaged VisionFirst Advisors to conduct an independent Strategic Activity Review to evaluate the organization's progress, identify emerging issues and recommend adjustments that would maximize the effectiveness of its existing strategy while preparing for the next phase of growth.

Solution: VisionFirst facilitated board and leadership discussions, conducted a comprehensive economic and workforce analysis, completed a regional SWOT assessment and evaluated the implementation of the existing strategic plan. The resulting Strategic Activity Review identified opportunities to improve workforce development, talent attraction, infrastructure investment, entrepreneurship and regional branding while recommending priorities for the organization's next strategic planning effort. Building on those findings, Jonesboro Unlimited retained VisionFirst to develop its new five-year Economic Development Strategic Plan. The planning process expanded to include extensive stakeholder engagement, resident input, competitive benchmarking, target industry analysis, organizational assessment, workforce and laborshed analysis, vision and mission development, implementation strategies, performance metrics and four strategic pillars focused on organizational capacity, target industries, workforce competitiveness and leveraging community assets for long-term economic growth.

Result: What began as a strategic assessment evolved into a long-term partnership that provided Jonesboro Unlimited with a clear roadmap for the region's next chapter of economic development. The initial review allowed leadership to validate what was working, address emerging challenges and build consensus before beginning a new planning process. The resulting strategic plan transformed those insights into an implementation-focused framework that aligns business recruitment, workforce development, quality of place and organizational priorities around a shared vision for Northeast Arkansas. By building upon the lessons of the previous plan rather than starting over, VisionFirst helped JU create a strategy that is data-driven, stakeholder-informed and positioned to guide regional growth for years to come.

Mark Young, President & CEO, Jonesboro Unlimited | (870) 336-9063 (direct) |
MYoung@jonesborochamber.com

THANK YOU.

