

SCOPE OF SERVICES AND BUDGET: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR THE SANGER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



Image: Sanger Economic Development Corporation

Civic Solutions Partnership, LLC

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CIVICSOL

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01. COVER LETTER

Ms. Shani Bradshaw
Director of Economic Development
City of Sanger

Dear Ms. Bradshaw:

We are excited to submit our proposal to support the Sanger Economic Development Corporation in creating its first Economic Development Strategic Plan. At CivicSol, we believe that economic development doesn't happen to a community—it happens with one. That's why our approach is rooted in collaboration, data, and policy execution. We design strategies that not only inspire but also translate into measurable outcomes, capacity-building, and long-term success.

SANGER: A STRATEGIC GATEWAY IN NORTH TEXAS

Sanger has already demonstrated remarkable assets: strategic positioning along Interstate 35 that provides unparalleled access to the North Texas economy, a balanced mix of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses, and a vibrant downtown district that reflects the city's small-town charm. With nearly 12 square miles and a growing population of 10,200, Sanger has the scale to compete meaningfully in the Denton County market while maintaining the character that makes it distinctive.

This moment requires more than incremental growth—it demands a strategic transformation from reactive development to proactive economic leadership. The communities that will thrive in North Texas over the next decade will be those that can articulate their unique value proposition, align their workforce with emerging opportunities, and create the conditions where businesses choose to locate, expand, and stay.

WHY CIVICSOL: BUILT FOR IMPLEMENTATION, PROVEN IN PRACTICE

CivicSol is not just a strategy firm—we are practitioners, problem-solvers, and former city leaders who have stood where you stand. Our team includes former city managers, economic development directors, workforce leaders, and policy professionals who have led both strategy and implementation inside local government. We understand the difference between a plan that sits on a shelf and one that drives real change.

Over the past five years, we've designed economic development strategies for more than 100 communities—from fast-growing suburbs like Sanger to major metropolitan areas, rural innovation hubs, and complex regional collaboratives. Our work spans every stage of the economic development lifecycle: from comprehensive sector analysis and workforce planning to business attraction protocols, startup ecosystem development, and downtown revitalization initiatives. What sets us apart is our integration of strategy with systems—we don't just recommend what should happen, we design how it will happen, who will do it, and how success will be measured.

OUR TEXAS EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTEXT

Our deep experience in Texas communities gives us unique insight into the opportunities and challenges facing places like Sanger. We've worked extensively with Type A and Type B economic development corporations, understand Texas economic development law and incentive structures, and have helped numerous communities navigate the balance between growth and character preservation. From Terrell's

strategic positioning east of Dallas to Buda's rapid growth in Central Texas, we understand how communities like Sanger can leverage proximity to major markets while building their own distinctive economic identity.

We also understand the significance of developing first-ever economic development strategic plans. Like Sanger, many of the communities we've worked with have been creating their inaugural comprehensive economic development strategies—from fast-growing suburbs like Gilbert, Arizona establishing their first formal economic development framework to regional collaboratives in the Quad Cities developing their first unified approach. We bring specialized expertise in helping communities navigate this foundational planning process, ensuring that first-time strategies are both ambitious and achievable, comprehensive yet focused, and designed for successful implementation from day one.

OUR COMMITMENT: TOOLS FOR REAL-WORLD IMPLEMENTATION

Our deliverables won't just be recommendations—they'll be tools for execution designed specifically for SEDC staff and board capacity. From an implementation matrix that assigns clear responsibilities across both corporations to a Year 1 work plan with immediate action steps and budget implications, we provide the frameworks needed to track progress, adapt strategies, and maintain momentum across election cycles and staff transitions. We know this matters because we've been inside city governments ourselves—we understand budget realities, staff capacity constraints, and the critical importance of designing strategies that can actually be implemented.

We also understand that economic development strategy isn't just about what the SEDC does directly—it's about how the SEDC enables, coordinates, and amplifies the work of others. Our approach will help you maximize leverage with existing partners while identifying new collaboration opportunities that can accelerate progress. Whether that's strengthening relationships with regional partners, building new connections with workforce development providers, or creating innovative public-private partnerships, we'll help you design systems that multiply your impact.

We are ready to help Sanger write its next chapter as a leading economic development success story in North Texas. We see a city with tremendous assets, clear leadership, and the vision to build something distinctive and sustainable. Please don't hesitate to contact us at steven@civicsol.com or laura@civicsol.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Steven Pedigo
Co-Founder, CivicSol



Laura Huffman
President & Co-Founder, CivicSol

02. COMPANY PROFILE

CIVICSOL: STRATEGY THAT GETS DONE

CivicSol is a nationally engaged economic development and public strategy firm, headquartered in Austin, Texas, with deep experience in fast-growing suburban and regional communities across the United States. Founded by two seasoned practitioners with decades of experience inside local government, we help public agencies, cities, and coalitions translate big ideas into operating plans—workforce initiatives, innovation districts, governance frameworks, investment strategies, business retention systems, and everything in between.

We work at the intersection of research, policy, and operations. That means we ask big questions—about industry shifts, regional competitiveness, demographic trends, and equity—but always with an eye toward practicality. How will this strategy get funded? Who will run it day-to-day? What systems are needed to sustain it through election cycles? Which partnerships are essential for success? What are the budget implications, and how do they align with existing revenue streams? We bring a strong bias toward action and accountability. That's what distinguishes CivicSol—and what makes us the right partner for Sanger.

Our two founding principals, Laura Huffman and Steven Pedigo, bring both deep expertise in city management and a proven track record in strategic planning for local governments. Combined, we wield over 45 years of experience spanning municipal leadership, chamber of commerce management, economic development practice, and workforce strategy. We've worked in over 100 communities across the U.S.—not just writing bold strategies but standing up the systems, structures, and partnerships that make them real. We understand what it takes to move a plan from concept to execution, from launch to institutionalization, from political vision to administrative reality.

OUR TRACK RECORD: FROM STRATEGY TO RESULTS

What sets CivicSol apart is our integration of strategy with implementation systems. We don't just identify what should happen—we design how it will happen, who will be responsible, what resources are required, and how progress will be measured. Our approach generates early buy-in by giving stakeholders a meaningful seat at the table, ensuring that the final strategy isn't just visionary—it's owned by the community.

Recent examples of our impact include:

Austin Infrastructure Academy: We designed and launched a nationally recognized workforce platform that connects local talent with \$25 billion in infrastructure investment, earning the National Association of Workforce Boards' 2024 "Trailblazer Award" for innovation.

Terrell Economic Development Strategy: We helped this suburban metroplex community develop a comprehensive plan that leverages its proximity to Dallas while maintaining local character, resulting in new business recruitment protocols and workforce development partnerships.

Buda Economic Development Strategic Plan: We supported this fast-growing Central Texas city in creating a five-year implementation roadmap that includes detailed sector analysis, business retention initiatives, and entrepreneurial support systems to create an Innovation Hub in the Texas Hill Country.

Multi-jurisdictional Regional Strategies: We've successfully facilitated economic development planning across multiple communities in Arizona, Iowa, Texas, and beyond, understanding the complex dynamics of coordination, resource sharing, and unified messaging while respecting local autonomy.

DEEP TEXAS EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING YOUR LANDSCAPE

Our Texas roots give us unique insight into the regulatory environment, political dynamics, and market conditions that shape economic development success in communities like Sanger. We understand Texas economic development law, the structure and governance of Type A and Type B corporations, and the opportunities and constraints of ½ cent sales tax funding. We've worked extensively with Texas communities navigating rapid growth, infrastructure challenges, workforce development needs, and the balance between economic opportunity and community character.

We also understand the North Texas market dynamics that create both opportunities and competition for communities like Sanger. Our work in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex—in communities like Terrell, Sachse, and Mesquite—has given us insight into regional industry trends, workforce patterns, transportation assets, and the competitive positioning that smaller communities need to succeed in this dynamic market.

Sanger occupies one of the most enviable positions in North Texas—strategically positioned along Interstate 35 with direct access to both Dallas-Fort Worth and Oklahoma markets, bordered by Lake Ray Roberts to the east and positioned as a gateway between Denton's innovation economy and rural Texas. But Sanger's greatest asset isn't just location—it's timing. North Texas is experiencing unprecedented growth, with Denton County leading the region in population and job growth.

The question isn't whether economic development will come to Sanger; it's whether Sanger will be ready to capture and direct that growth in ways that benefit existing residents and businesses while attracting the kinds of high-quality investment that strengthen the community's long-term prosperity.

03. PROJECT APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING

Sanger is entering a defining moment in its economic development journey—one shaped not by untapped land or conventional growth models, but by the city's ability to maximize its strategic location, leverage its existing assets, and compete strategically in an increasingly sophisticated North Texas economy. With its position along Interstate 35, proximity to Dallas-Fort Worth's job centers, and access to Denton's innovation ecosystem, Sanger's future economic success will depend on its ability to act strategically and proactively while maintaining the community character that makes it distinctive.

This moment requires more than just a strategy—it calls for a clear, data-informed roadmap that helps the SEDC maximize existing assets, validate and expand target sectors, strengthen relationships with current businesses, and build the workforce development partnerships essential for long-term competitiveness. The strategy must be both practical and forward-looking, connecting talent development and industry growth to infrastructure investment, quality of place initiatives, and community well-being.

UNDERSTANDING SANGER'S COMPETITIVE POSITIONING

Sanger occupies a unique position in the North Texas economic landscape. Unlike communities competing primarily on available land or low costs, Sanger's advantages lie in its strategic access, quality of life assets, and potential for targeted development that enhances rather than transforms the community's character. The city's location provides businesses with access to Dallas-Fort Worth markets while offering employees a small-town quality of life increasingly rare in the metroplex.

The challenge—and opportunity—lies in translating these assets into a coordinated economic development strategy that attracts the right kinds of businesses, supports existing employers, and builds the infrastructure (both physical and programmatic) needed for sustainable growth. This requires understanding not just what Sanger has to offer, but how those assets align with market trends, business location decisions, and workforce development needs in the broader region.

KEY STRATEGIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



Market Position and Business Attraction: Sanger's strategic positioning within North Texas creates significant opportunities for targeted business attraction, but success requires sophisticated understanding of industry trends, site selection criteria, and competitive positioning. The community needs strategies that leverage its transportation access and quality of life while differentiating it from other communities along the I-35 corridor.



Business Retention and Expansion (BRE): A more structured, proactive approach to business retention and expansion is essential to maintain economic momentum and support existing employers. This includes understanding current business needs, identifying expansion opportunities, addressing policy or infrastructure barriers, and creating systems for ongoing business relationship management.



Workforce Development Alignment: Sanger's economic strategy must connect with regional workforce development resources while building local capacity to serve both employers and job seekers. This includes understanding labor market dynamics, skills gaps, training

opportunities, and the connections between workforce development and business attraction/retention.



Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development: Small business development and entrepreneurship support represent significant opportunities for economic dynamism, job creation, and community wealth building. This includes access to capital, technical assistance, mentorship, and creating an environment that supports innovation and local investment.



Infrastructure and Development Capacity: Strategic infrastructure investment and targeted development policies are core to business attraction and retention. The plan must address how infrastructure priorities, development incentives, and land use decisions align with economic development goals.



Regional Collaboration and Positioning: Success requires understanding Sanger's role within the broader North Texas economic ecosystem, including relationships with neighboring communities, regional economic development organizations, workforce development boards, and transportation authorities.



Organizational Effectiveness: The dual structure of Type A and Type B corporations creates both opportunities and coordination challenges. The strategy must address how these entities can work together effectively while maximizing the impact of available resources and ensuring clear, coordinated community messaging.

METHODOLOGY

We propose a four-phase scope of work, running from September 2025 through April 2026, that moves from discovery to economic research and stakeholder engagement, ending with implementation. Each phase includes defined deliverables, bi-weekly check-ins, and milestone moments for feedback and alignment. Our methodology is iterative and participatory, ensuring the final strategic plan is evidence-based and community-owned.

01.	02.	03.	04.
LAYING THE GROUNDWORK	MAPPING SANGER'S ECONOMY	LISTENING TO SANGER	FROM VISION TO ACTION
Project Kickoff and Stakeholder Alignment	Economic Research and Data Analysis	Community and Stakeholder Engagement	Strategy Development and Implementation Roadmap
Sep. 2025	Oct. – Dec. 2025	Jan. – Feb. 2026	Mar. – Apr. 2026

PHASE 01. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

SEPTEMBER 2025

WHY THIS MATTERS

Economic development strategy that lacks foundational alignment is strategy that fails in implementation. Sanger's plan must reflect not just best practices from other communities, but the specific priorities, values, and operational realities of Sanger's leadership and community. Without early investment in relationships, shared understanding, and process design, even the most sophisticated analysis can produce recommendations that don't fit local context or political realities. This phase ensures that everything we build together is designed for Sanger's specific circumstances and genuine implementation success.

WHAT WE WILL DELIVER

1.1 PROJECT KICKOFF MEETING AND PLANNING ALIGNMENT	Convene a kickoff session with SEDC Boards, City Council, and staff to confirm project scope, align on desired outcomes, clarify roles, and establish shared communication cadence.
1.2 WORK PLAN AND ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR	Develop a detailed, living work plan and engagement calendar that outlines project phases, key milestones, and stakeholder outreach activities. This tool will identify benchmark communities for comparison and provide transparency for leadership and the public.
1.3 CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS	Conduct comprehensive review of background documents including the 2020 City of Sanger Comprehensive Plan, economic reports, and other relevant studies to understand existing priorities and frameworks.
1.4 STEERING COMMITTEE LAUNCH, CITY TOUR, AND STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS	Establish a Steering Committee composed of SEDC Board members, city leaders, and select community stakeholders to guide the project and ensure strategic alignment throughout the process. Host an in-person launch event with a guided city tour and early stakeholder interviews.

WHAT SANGER GAINS



A dedicated Steering Committee to guide strategy development and ensure alignment with leadership priorities;



A detailed Work Plan and Engagement Calendar to track progress and keep stakeholders informed;



Strategic alignment between CivicSol, SEDC leadership, and Sanger's existing comprehensive plans and municipal initiatives;



Early stakeholder engagement process to build community support and involvement in the planning process.

PHASE 02. MAPPING SANGER’S ECONOMY

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2025


WHY THIS MATTERS


Sanger's economic future starts with understanding its present. This phase provides a comprehensive, fact-based analysis of the city's economic landscape, industry clusters, and development opportunities. Through peer benchmarking, sector analysis, and market assessments, we'll highlight Sanger's competitive advantages, identify strategic gaps, and surface actionable opportunities for bold, future-focused decisions.


WHAT WE WILL DELIVER


2.1 PEER BENCHMARKING ASSESSMENT	Evaluate demographic, economic, and quality-of-life indicators, benchmarking performance against 8-10 peer communities across North Texas. Compile and analyze current and projected demographic, workforce, housing, and income trends to establish a comprehensive economic baseline and illuminate where Sanger leads, lags, or has competitive opportunities.
2.2 CLUSTER AND SECTOR SCAN	Conduct scan of current and emerging industry clusters in the Dallas-Fort Worth and North Texas regions, incorporating analysis of the Governor’s <i>Bigger. Better. Texas.</i> economic development plan to identify sectors aligned with Sanger's assets and opportunities. Review regional employment trends, investment patterns, and workforce alignment to provide targeted recommendations for sector development based on state and regional priorities rather than comprehensive local cluster analysis.
2.3 PEER EDO BEST PRACTICES ANALYSIS	Assess the SEDC's organizational structure, funding mechanisms, staffing, programming, and strategic orientation, comparing it to 5–6 peer EDOs to identify strengths, gaps, and best practices in economic development governance and execution. Incorporate evaluation of current business retention and expansion processes, incentive structures, and policies within the peer comparison framework to provide integrated recommendations for organizational and program improvements.

WHAT SANGER GAINS

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A comprehensive "State of Sanger" report illustrating Sanger’s economic baseline and competitive positioning;
- 

A clear understanding of competitive position relative to peer communities across North Texas;
- 

Integrated assessment of organizational effectiveness and BRE programs with peer comparison insights;
- 

Targeted sector recommendations based on regional DFW trends and state economic development priorities.

PHASE 03. LISTENING TO SANGER

DECEMBER – JANUARY 2026





WHY THIS MATTERS

Data tells us what's happening, but community voices tell us what's possible. Sanger's strategy must be grounded in the lived experiences, priorities, and aspirations of residents, business owners, and community leaders. This phase creates multiple touchpoints for authentic engagement, ensuring that the final plan reflects not just economic opportunity, but community values and vision. Through business roundtables, community surveys, stakeholder interviews, and public sessions, we'll capture diverse perspectives and build ownership of the process across Sanger.

WHAT WE WILL DELIVER

3.1 BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION ROUNDTABLES	Facilitate structured conversations with existing Sanger businesses to understand their experiences, challenges, and growth plans. Assess workforce needs, infrastructure requirements, and policy barriers while identifying opportunities for business expansion and retention support.
3.2 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOCUS GROUPS	Facilitate targeted focus groups with local employers, educational partners, training providers, and job seekers to understand workforce needs, skills gaps, and training opportunities. Assess alignment between available workforce development resources and employer needs while identifying opportunities for enhanced partnerships and program development.
3.3 ONE-ON-ONE STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS	Conduct individual interviews with key stakeholders including property owners, elected officials, community organization leaders, and development partners to gather in-depth insights on opportunities, challenges, and strategic priorities.
3.4 SMALL BUSINESS, INNOVATION, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP ROUNDTABLES	Host focused discussions with local entrepreneurs, small business owners, startup founders, and innovation support organizations to understand the entrepreneurial ecosystem, identify barriers to business creation and growth, and explore opportunities for enhanced entrepreneurship support services.

WHAT SANGER GAINS

-  Direct input from existing businesses on retention and expansion needs and growth opportunities;
-  Targeted workforce development insights from employers and training providers across the North Texas region;
-  In-depth stakeholder perspectives on strategic opportunities and challenges facing the Sanger community;
-  Understanding of entrepreneurial ecosystem strengths, gaps, and business development opportunities for enhanced support.

PHASE 04. FROM VISION TO ACTION

FEBRUARY – MARCH 2026

WHY THIS MATTERS

We're not just creating a document—we're crafting a living roadmap that will guide economic development decisions for the next five years. The strategic framework connects recent successes with a sustainable future that benefits businesses, residents, and the broader community. This phase transforms aspirations into action—setting clear priorities and committing to concrete steps that will strengthen Sanger's economic resilience.

WHAT WE WILL DELIVER

4.1 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Integrate all findings into a comprehensive Strategic Framework with unified economic vision, measurable goals, and priority strategies tailored to Sanger's strengths and opportunities. Include fiscal strategy and funding prioritization recommendations to prioritize and fund key economic development goals, including potential use of financial incentives, grants, public-private partnerships, and reallocation of internal resources.

4.2 STRATEGIC VISIONING WORKSHOP

Facilitate interactive workshops with SEDC leadership, staff, and key stakeholders to review and refine the strategic framework and vision statement. These sessions will ensure the final plan balances economic development objectives with the community's values and vision for Sanger's future.

4.3 IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP, YEAR 1 WORK PLAN, AND RESPONSIBILITY MATRIX

Develop detailed implementation matrix assigning each action to specific responsible parties, supporting partners, and realistic timelines with comprehensive Year 1 Work Plan for immediate implementation. Create specific action plans for small business development and entrepreneurship support, as well as workforce development and talent attraction initiatives. Conduct fiscal impact analysis to estimate costs and funding needs for implementing identified actions to ensure the plan is financially feasible and aligned with the SEDC's fiscal capacity.

4.4 FINAL STRATEGIC PLAN AND PRESENTATION

Finalize comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan incorporating all research findings, stakeholder input, and feedback from workshops, including target sector strategies, business attraction recommendations, retention initiatives, entrepreneurial support, workforce development, and community development priorities. Present Final Plan to SEDC Boards, City Council, and community stakeholders with performance monitoring framework providing ongoing transparency and accountability.

WHAT SANGER GAINS



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan with an actionable roadmap, clear priorities, and implementation guidance for sustainable economic development success;



Specific recommendations for current program enhancement or restructuring to maximize organizational effectiveness;



Organizational capacity plan to support expanded strategy implementation and long-term economic development goals;



Comprehensive measurement framework for ongoing evaluation and improvement with performance tracking capabilities.

04. PROJECT TEAM

Our two founding principals, Laura Huffman and Steven Pedigo, bring both deep expertise in city management and a proven track record in strategic planning for government entities. Steven Pedigo, partner at CivicSol, will serve as the dedicated senior principal project manager for this engagement.

STEVEN PEDIGO
CO-FOUNDER, CIVICSOL

"I'm passionate about helping communities with strong identities—like Sanger—leverage innovation-driven workforce and economic development to create lasting opportunities."



Steven Pedigo is a trusted advisor and strategist for city leaders, brands, and placemakers worldwide, helping them build better cities and communities. With over two decades of experience, he brings deep expertise in the challenges of fast-growing suburban communities and rural innovation ecosystems, with plans in Terrell, TX; Olathe, KS; Brookings, SD; Gilbert, AZ; Vancouver, WA, Prince George, British Columbia, Deep East Texas, and more.

EDUCATION

BA, The University of Texas at Austin
MS, Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University

MA, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

NOTABLE

Assistant Dean for Faculty of Practice and Policy at the LBJ School of Public Affairs

Professor of Practice at the LBJ School of Public Affairs

CERTIFICATES

Human Research

WHAT STEVEN BRINGS TO SANGER

Steven is a nationally recognized expert in workforce strategy, innovation ecosystems, and place-based development. His work helps communities like Sanger position themselves to excel in people-centered economies while driving innovation—leveraging proximity to major metroplexes, regional entrepreneurship programs, and workforce development opportunities.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

- Steven led the development of more than 100 economic and workforce development strategies, spanning transformative projects from New York City, Miami, and Jerusalem to the Yukon, San Diego, Tulsa, and Austin, Texas.
- Steven helped design the Austin Infrastructure Academy, a workforce development initiative supporting \$25 billion in regional investment.
- He is an expert in anchor institutions and university engagement, crafting strategies for The University of Texas at Arlington, Drexel University, Thomas Jefferson University, Rutgers Newark, UT-Permian Basin, and others.
- Steven is the primary author of the Texas Metropolitan Blueprint, a five-year policy framework for the state of Texas.
- He is a featured expert, quoted, and published in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The LA Times, NPR, The Houston Chronicle, Dallas Morning News, San Antonio Express-News, and more.
- He has founded two Urban Policy Labs—one at The University of Texas at Austin's Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, and a second at New York University.

LAURA HUFFMAN

CEO & CO-FOUNDER, CIVICSOL

"Real impact happens when visionary strategy meets practical execution—and that's only possible when the voices of local residents, workers, and business leaders are genuinely heard."



Laura Huffman brings more than 25 years of experience in city leadership, economic strategy, and public-private collaboration, including as Assistant City Manager for the City of Austin and Deputy City Manager for the City of San Marcos—two of the fastest-growing cities in the U.S.—as well as CEO of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. Laura is an expert in municipal budgeting, and governance helping cities manage growth while delivering core services.

EDUCATION

BA, Texas A&M University
MA, LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin

WHAT LAURA BRINGS TO SANGER

Laura specializes in turning strategy into action, with a focus on economic development and workforce planning. For Savage, she will help align programmatic excellence with Savage’s economic needs, ensuring sustainable, practical solutions that integrate with governance, budgeting, and policy for long-term growth and prosperity.

RECOGNITION

Artificial Intelligence, Cornell University
Shoal Creek Conservancy Bob Strong Award for Lifetime Achievement in Conservation
City of Austin Office of Sustainability Net Zero Hero

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

- As Assistant City Manager for the City of Austin, Laura led downtown redevelopment with a focus on local retail, small business growth, live/work housing, cultural districts, and public infrastructure including the Central Library—making downtown Austin the living room of the community.
- In her role as Deputy City Manager for the City of San Marcos, Laura championed outlet mall development as major retail and sales tax drivers, forging a path to use economic strategies to stabilize the City’s dependence on sales tax, a notoriously volatile revenue stream.
- As Texas State Director of The Nature Conservancy, she founded the North American Cities program, positioning TNC to lead the next generation of urban policies and plans that guarantee protection of natural resources.
- As President and CEO of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, Laura successfully implemented the organization’s vision, short- and long-range strategic plans, and annual operational plans.

CLARA BELK
ECONOMIC RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING, CIVICSOL

"Research is only useful if it tells a story people can believe in—my job is to connect the data to Sanger's future."



Clara Belk specializes in research and economic storytelling, ensuring Sanger's strategy is data-driven, compelling, and actionable. With experience in economic and workforce development research, ecological conservation, and public affairs, Clara has worked on projects for Terrell, TX, Prescott, AZ, and South Burlington, VT, helping communities craft clear, strategic narratives around their economic and workforce development goals and helping bring them to life.

EDUCATION

BA, Tufts University
MPA, LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin

AWARDS

Presidential Volunteer Service Award, Gold Tier

NOTABLE

Team Leader, AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps, Southern Region, Vicksburg, MS

Clara also speaks Spanish and Arabic, in Modern Standard (FusHa) and Colloquial Levantine (3miyya)

WHAT CLARA BRINGS TO SANGER

Clara has extensive experience in stakeholder engagement, transforming complex workforce and economic trends into clear, actionable insights that build buy-in from businesses, community leaders, and residents. For Sanger, she will leverage labor market data and analytics to identify workforce pathways that connect people to quality jobs, supporting strategies that drive inclusive economic growth and regional mobility.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

- Clara has conducted in-depth economic research on workforce trends, industry clusters, and labor market dynamics to support strategic workforce development plans in cities across the US. She has led occupational and workforce assessments, peer benchmarking, and stakeholder engagement process to align workforce strategies with regional economic needs.
- Clara has worked as a community organizer in Des Moines, IA, Reno, NV, Denver, CO, and Saint Paul, MN, collaborating directly with diverse cultural and community groups, labor representatives, grassroots organizations, educators, and policymakers to boost civic participation and political engagement.
- She previously completed a term of national service, where she worked with rural and ex-urban communities throughout the Southeast—including in Southern Mississippi, the Louisiana Bayou, Virginia's Eastern Shore, and Central Tennessee—to support economic development through infrastructure improvements, ecological conservation projects, and natural disaster recovery efforts.

05. RELEVANT EXPERIENCE AND REFERENCES

AGENCY NAME	CONTACT INFO	WORK PERFORMED
City of Austin, TX	Kirk Watson, Mayor, City of Austin (512) 964-8306 kirkpwatson@gmail.com	Designed and launched the Austin Infrastructure Academy, a first-of-its-kind workforce platform connecting local talent with career pathways in construction and operations, supporting \$25 billion in regional investment
Terrell Economic Development Corporation	Carlton Tidwell, President, Terrell EDC (469) 853-6512 carlton@terrelltexas.com	Led comprehensive economic development strategic planning including community engagement, target sector analysis, and implementation roadmap
City of Prescott, AZ	John Heiney, Director of Community Outreach, City of Prescott (928) 777-1220 john.heiney@prescott-az.gov	Principal strategic planning consultant developing economic development plan, sector targeting, and workforce alignment strategies
City of Mesquite, Office of Economic Development	Kim Buttram, Director of Economic Development, City of Mesquite (972) 216-6340 kbuttram@cityofmesquite.com	Designed comprehensive economic development strategy engaging over 200 stakeholders and prioritizing inclusive growth with complete cluster analysis and implementation roadmap

06. WORK EXAMPLES

THE AUSTIN INFRASTRUCTURE ACADEMY

LEVERAGING HISTORIC INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE TO BUILD LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY-SUPPORTING CAREER PATHWAYS

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: AUSTIN, TX

Austin—now the ninth-largest city in the nation—has experienced 14% population growth in the past five years, driving an increasing demand for infrastructure development. The City, and region, will invest \$25 billion in transformational regional infrastructure through the year 2040. Currently, Austin's Mobility and Infrastructure (M+I) sector employs more than 222,000 workers, making it the region's second-largest industry, surpassing healthcare and advanced manufacturing. However, to keep pace with ongoing and future investments, the city must fill a gap of 10,000 infrastructure jobs annually.

THE OPPORTUNITY

CivicSol's labor forecast revealed a critical need for a skilled workforce to support Austin's rapid infrastructure expansion. Despite the high level of investment, accessible workforce training programs do not align with the needs of both employers and job seekers. The City saw a unique opportunity to address affordability challenges by creating family-supporting jobs and sustainable career pathways in M+I, all while enhancing super-regional mobility. By strategically integrating workforce development with infrastructure projects, Austin can ensure long-term economic growth, equitable job access, and increased mobility solutions for the region.



Image: LBJ School of Public Affairs

THE CIVIC SOLUTION

To address these challenges, CivicSol conducted a comprehensive labor forecast to project the gap in labor supply and demand, assessed existing training offerings and outcomes, facilitated rigorous stakeholder engagement with training providers, employers, job seekers, project sponsors, economic development entities, and community organizations, and conducted a dynamic, iterative service delivery model design process. From this research, we developed the Austin Infrastructure Academy—a first-of-its-kind public-private network designed to connect local talent with career pathways in construction and operations. The Academy integrates recruitment, a centralized training hub, and childcare support to remove barriers to workforce participation. Our work with the Austin Infrastructure Academy received the National Association of Workforce Board's 2024 [Trailblazer Award](#), naming it the most innovative workforce program in the country.

Link: [Full Report](#)

February 2023–February 2025

Kirk Watson, Mayor, City of Austin, kirkpwatson@gmail.com

BUDA, TEXAS

A COMPREHENSIVE AND COMMUNITY-DRIVEN APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: BUDA, TX

A highly desirable Central Texas destination, Buda attracts skilled professionals and investment alike. Despite its modest size—home to approximately 17,000 residents—the city packs a punch with its access to metropolitan amenities and assets: world-class educational institutions, an international airport, and a highly-skilled workforce. What truly sets Buda apart, however, is its small-town charm. Its downtown area is adorned with independent shops, its state-recognized schools emphasize a sense of belonging and training for a 21st-century economy, and its arts community reflects the creativity that makes the City unique.

THE OPPORTUNITY

With its proximity to Austin and world-class educational institutions like Texas State University, and The University of Texas at Austin, and access to a talented workforce, Buda had an opportunity to position itself as a hub for innovation, small business growth, and workforce development. By leveraging partnerships with regional educational institutions and investing in entrepreneurial support systems, the City could chart new pathways for economic opportunity— attracting targeted knowledge-based industries, retaining highly-skilled talent, and ensuring long-term prosperity while maintaining the community's unique character.



Image: Texas Monthly

THE CIVIC SOLUTION

In partnership with the Buda EDC, CivicSol developed a comprehensive 5-year Economic Development Strategic Plan to guide the city's future growth. This process included a comprehensive benchmarking analysis of Buda and its peer communities, an evaluation of best practices from other economic development corporations, and an assessment of the economic impact of a destination hospitality center. Additionally, the process involved a series of stakeholder roundtable discussions, one-on-one interviews, and workshops with BEDC Board members and City Council members. The resulting strategy emphasized workforce development, the creation of an innovation hub—fostering entrepreneurship and supporting the small businesses that are central to Buda's identity—and marketing Buda as a unique Central Texas experience for residents and visitors alike.

Link: [Full Report](#)

January 2024–August 2024

Jennifer Storm, Buda Economic Development Corporation, jennifer.storm@budaedc.com

MESQUITE, TEXAS

CHARTING NEW PATHS AND EMBRACING FRESH IDEAS TO BUILD BETTER LIVES AND GROW PROSPERITY FOR ALL

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: MESQUITE, TX

Situated in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex, Mesquite is a city that enjoys close proximity to the urban core while maintaining a small-town charm with its outdoor activities and spectacular attractions. Mesquite has seen a recent uptick in development and business expansions thanks to forward-thinking investments in infrastructure, comprehensive strategic planning, and a strong marketing and branding approach that celebrates the community's diversity and family-friendly amenities.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The City of Mesquite is home to a robust and diverse workforce, reflecting the skills and demographics of a multicultural population that brings invaluable experience to the industries they serve. While the City plays host to a robust and growing industrial economy, retail is Mesquite's largest employment sector—at nearly nine times the workforce concentration of the U.S. overall. Retaining the budding population of young, career-trained professionals has proven difficult because the City lacks the diverse housing options needed to holistically compete for high-skilled talent. The City is poised for a state-of-the-art economic development strategy to stake its claim on growth in the DFW region, while ensuring that all residents and enterprises have an equitable opportunity to thrive.



Image: Downtown Mesquite TX

THE CIVIC SOLUTION

CivicSo's team led a comprehensive economic development planning process, evaluating Mesquite's competitive advantages and growth potential. The plan is data-driven, sector- focused, and leveraged by deep input and inclusive engagement from a diverse, multi- cultural group of stakeholders. This effort included competitive benchmarking and target cluster analyses, and engagement with more than 200 individuals through roundtable discussions, interviews, and workshops to ensure a community-driven approach. The result was a five-year economic development strategy and implementation plan that has helped position Mesquite as one of the top five cities in the DFW metroplex for investment. This plan has also laid the groundwork to attract and retain quality jobs that foster shared prosperity, grow a diverse entrepreneurial community, upskill for the jobs of tomorrow, and transform Mesquite into a destination for young professionals and families.

Link: [Full Report](#)

May–October 2022

Kim Buttram, City of Mesquite Department of Economic Development, kbuttram@cityofmesquite.com

PRESCOTT, ARIZONA

LEAVING THE ORDINARY BEHIND TO BUILD THE VERY BEST OF OPPORTUNITY IN ARIZONA

Community Snapshot: Prescott, AZ

Nestled in the mountains of central Arizona, Prescott combines historic charm with natural beauty, creating a unique quality of place that has long attracted visitors and retirees. With its historic downtown centered around Courthouse Square, outdoor recreation opportunities, and Western heritage, Prescott enjoys unrivaled quality of place assets as a growing destination. The city has recently made strategic investments in infrastructure and amenities to further economic development, including airport expansion, greenspace initiatives, and land acquisitions that position it well for future growth.

The Opportunity

While the city has experienced impressive population growth in recent years, this expansion has primarily been driven by retirees. This demographic trend has created a significant imbalance, with a workforce participation rate well below national averages and a striking shortage of younger professionals needed to sustain long-term economic vitality. Despite these challenges, the regional airport, bolstered by significant infrastructure investments, creates a foundation for developing specialized industry clusters, while the presence of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University offers potential for innovation in aviation, aerospace, and cybersecurity.



Image: Islands

The Civic Solution

Civic Solutions Partnership led a comprehensive strategic planning process, assessing Prescott's assets and challenges while convening diverse stakeholders to guide the city's economic future. The team conducted a competitive assessment, benchmarking Prescott against eight peer communities, and facilitated in-depth interviews with key business leaders, educational partners, City Council members, and the Mayor. The resulting five-year economic development strategy presents a new paradigm for Prescott's growth—one that balances development with preservation of the city's distinctive character. The plan focuses on workforce development, strategic investment in high-growth sectors, support for entrepreneurship, enhancement of Prescott's quality of place, and building strong partnerships for sustained growth. By targeting key sectors like aviation, cybersecurity, healthcare, and sustainable advanced manufacturing, the strategy positions Prescott to attract innovation while addressing workforce and housing needs.

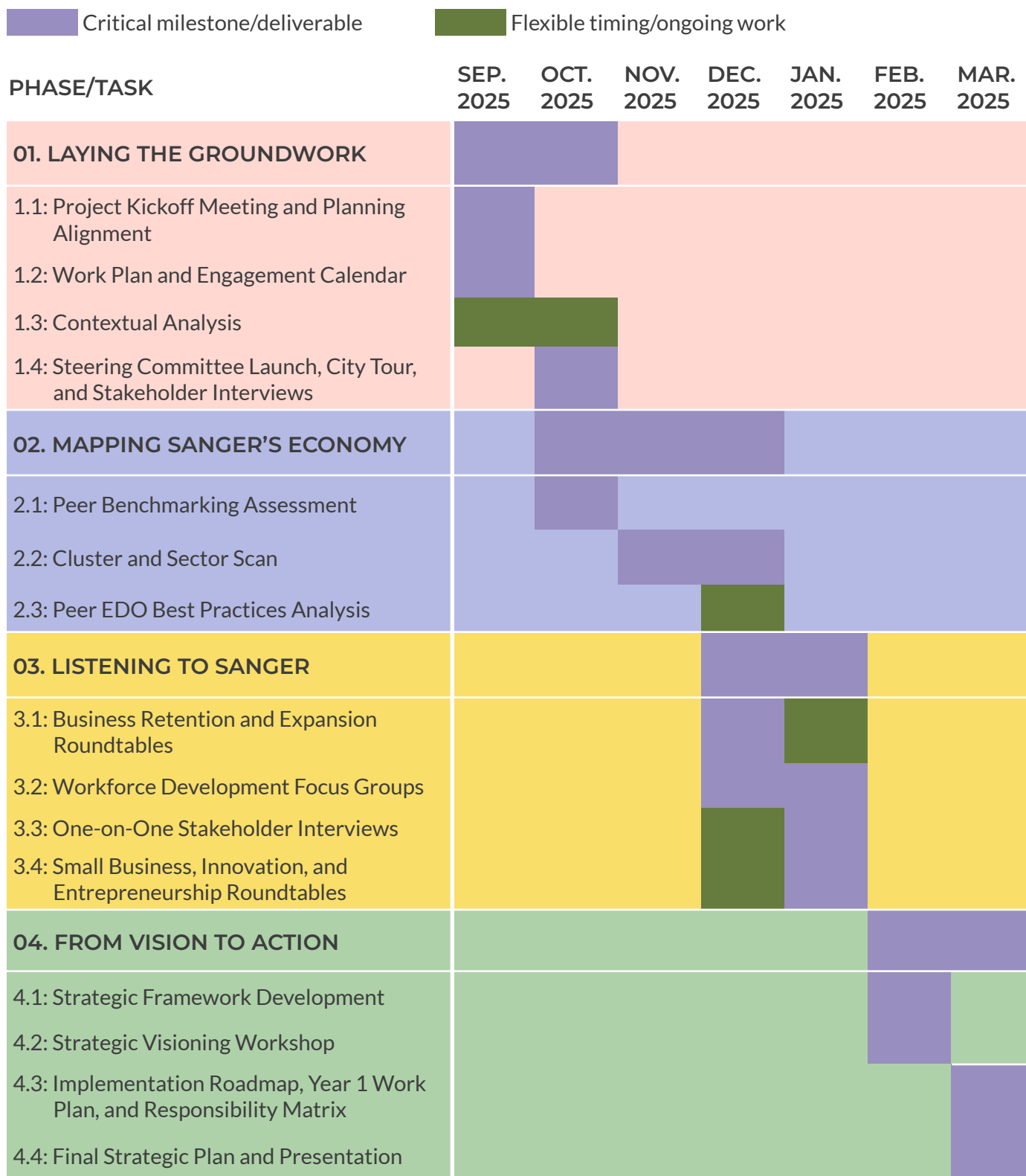
Link: [Full Report](#)

February 2024–Ongoing

John Heiney, City of Prescott, john.heiney@prescott-az.gov

07. PROJECT SCHEDULE

TIMELINE OVERVIEW: SEPTEMBER 2025 - MARCH 2026 (7 MONTHS)



08. BUDGET

PHASE	ITEM	SUB-TOTAL
01. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK	1.1: Project Kickoff Meeting and Planning Alignment	
	1.2: Work Plan and Engagement Calendar	
	1.3: Contextual Analysis	
	1.4: Steering Committee Launch, City Tour, and Stakeholder Interviews	
	PHASE 01 TOTAL	\$12,000
02. MAPPING SANGER'S ECONOMY	2.1: Peer Benchmarking Assessment	
	2.2: Cluster and Sector Scan	
	2.3: Peer EDO and Best Practices Analysis	
	PHASE 02 TOTAL	\$29,400
03. LISTENING TO SANGER	3.1: Business Retention and Expansion Roundtables	
	3.2: Workforce Development Focus Groups	
	3.3: One-on-One Stakeholder Interviews	
	3.4: Small Business, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Roundtables	
	PHASE 03 TOTAL	\$17,100
04. FROM VISION TO ACTION	4.1: Strategic Framework Development	
	4.2: Strategic Visioning Workshop	
	4.3: Implementation Roadmap, Year 1 Work Plan, and Responsibility Matrix	
	4.4: Final Strategic Plan and Presentation	
	PHASE 04 TOTAL	\$31,500
TOTAL NOT-TO-EXCEED COST (inclusive of all travel, data, and design)		\$90,000