

Economic Development

STRATEGIC PLAN





**Gilbert: Where our
boldness anticipates
change, discovers
innovative solutions,
and cultivates economic
prosperity for all.**



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Executive Summary

Ranked as one of the best places to live and raise a family in Arizona, Gilbert has something for everyone. Situated in the southeast valley of the Phoenix metropolitan area, Gilbert offers a welcoming and safe environment to raise a family, high-performing schools, and an assortment of recreational opportunities. Gilbert's destination assets attract talent, visitors, and investors from across the globe.

Gilbert has a robust, diverse economy driven by a wide array of industries from Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to Life Sciences to Photonics. The Town provides a fertile environment for growth and expansion, offering a vibrant business climate with a highly qualified workforce (nearly five in 10 residents have a bachelor's degree or higher). Gilbert is also home to an assortment of higher education institutions and workforce development partners such as Park University, the University of Arizona College of Nursing, Arizona State University's (ASU's) Polytechnic Campus, and Chandler-Gilbert Community College. Also, through the pipeline of emerging technologies from educational institutions, strength in STEM occupations, and a strong focus on innovation and tech industries, the Town of Gilbert has the foundation necessary for long-term economic growth and success.

To support the creation of Gilbert's Economic Development Strategic Plan, Resonance performed a comprehensive demographic and economic assessment that evaluated the Town's performance across a variety of metrics compared to a number of benchmark communities and evaluated Gilbert's industry clusters to guide future business attraction and expansion efforts. We complemented the research with stakeholder engagement to address Gilbert's assets and opportunities for the future.



The following summarizes our takeaways from the research and analysis:

1. GILBERT IS A FAST-GROWING COMMUNITY WITH AUTHENTIC SMALL-TOWN CHARM.

Home to more than 270,000 residents, Gilbert's population has increased by 8% in the last five years, a rate double the U.S. average. However, the Town still maintains its small-town vibe and excellent livability amenities, making it an ideal place for many to raise a family.

2. HOME TO A KNOWLEDGE-BASED INDUSTRY AND A HIGHLY SKILLED WORKFORCE, GILBERT BOASTS A HEALTHY ECONOMY.

Educational attainment in Gilbert is 38% higher than the national average, and a third of the Town's workforce is employed in knowledge-based occupations. As a result, Gilbert has a healthy economy with an engaged and productive workforce, a low unemployment rate, and a steady increase in the number of jobs.

3. WITH STRONG INNOVATION-BASED EXPORT CLUSTERS, GILBERT IS PREPARING FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE.

Gilbert is competitive in Photonics and Optics, ICT, Clean Technology, Renewable Energy, and Life Sciences. These clusters collectively employ almost 9,000 workers in the Town. Intentional business attraction and space development are key to Gilbert, given its land availability constraints.

4. GILBERT'S EMPLOYMENT AREAS ARE STRONG ECONOMIC DRIVERS AND IMPORTANT FOR THE TOWN'S FUTURE.

The Town's four key employment areas employ 42,000 workers, which represents 60% of jobs in Gilbert. They are also home to 3,417 businesses, which comprise 51% of Gilbert businesses overall. Gilbert should continue to advocate for the preservation of land that is zoned for employment-oriented uses.

5. GILBERT WILL NEED TO GROW AND REDEVELOP ITS COMMERCIAL SPACE FOR THE FUTURE.

The ICT, Photonics, and Optics industries are fast-growing clusters, but they lack space to nurture and incubate startups. The Town can look to support these industries and ensure their growth by promoting redevelopment of existing facilities (e.g., obsolete office and commercial space) to create redevelopment opportunities.

6. COLLABORATION IS KEY TO GILBERT'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS.

Gilbert has a strategic location within the East Valley. This creates an opportunity for the Town to benefit from regional assets within a 30-minute commute and leverage cross-regional interactions to grow its own economy.



7. AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY OF VARIOUS HOUSING TYPES ARE MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR GILBERT TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT.

Residents of Gilbert were traditionally attracted to the Town because of its single-family housing options. However, with the Town approaching buildout, houses are becoming more and more unaffordable, jeopardizing Gilbert's biggest draws to families and businesses looking to relocate to the area: space and cost of living. Housing prices are among the highest in the region and 24% higher than the state average.

8. GILBERT NEEDS TO ENSURE THAT THE PATH FORWARD IS PAVED FOR ALL.

Gilbert should continue to actively welcome and include people from all walks of life. With a relatively young population (median age is 34.5), the Town also needs to ensure that young professionals are being invited to the table.

9. BRANDING IS KEY TO PROMOTING GILBERT AS A PLACE NOT ONLY TO LIVE BUT ALSO TO WORK AND INNOVATE.

Gilbert is known for being a clean, safe place to raise a family. However, the Town needs to adopt an identity as a place to do business that is anchored around its innovative clusters and workforce capabilities.

10. GILBERT HAS A WEALTH OF DESTINATION ASSETS, BUT MORE WORK IS NEEDED TO CONNECT THE DOTS.

Gilbert has several highly rated amenities and experiences, from hiking trails to trendy restaurants to specialty boutiques. However, more placemaking efforts and hospitality offerings are needed to transform Gilbert into a complete destination.

The following are the five goals of Gilbert's Economic Development Strategic Plan

1. INNOVATION FOR TOMORROW

We will create an economy that further positions the community as an innovative and resilient Town for tomorrow.



2. PREMIER ENTREPRENEURIAL TOWN

We will become the premier entrepreneurial Town in Arizona, a community that intentionally cultivates and supports its businesses.

4. DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT FOR TODAY AND THE FUTURE

We will invest and showcase Gilbert as a preeminent Town for business, families, talent, and visitors.

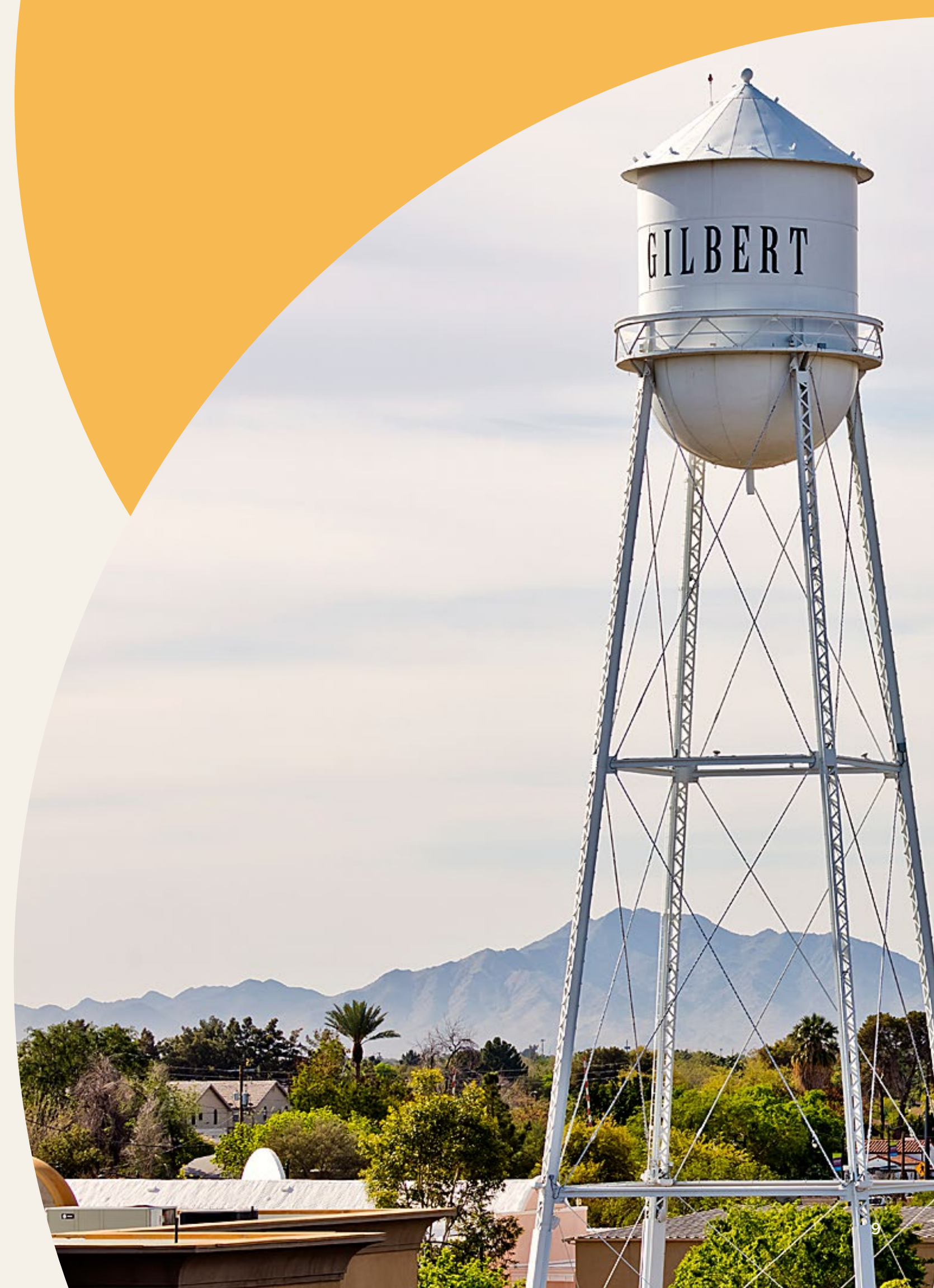
3. TOMORROW'S TALENT

We will build a robust talent pipeline to fuel the future of Gilbert.

5. CELEBRATION OF OUR TOWN

We will promote Gilbert's brand: a quality Town for life, investment, and business growth.

This report describes Gilbert's Economic Development Strategic Plan and Implementation Plan. The research conducted to support the development of this report (i.e., technical appendix) is available upon request and includes the Community Competitive Assessment (Appendix A), the Industry and Occupational Analysis (Appendix B), the Employment Area Analysis (Appendix C), and the Stakeholder Engagement Summary (Appendix D).





Discovery and Engagement

To plan for future resiliency and growth, Gilbert needs access to economic and market data that relates to what's happening in the local economy. Analyzing key data will inform policymakers, business owners, and community members as they make decisions, develop strategies, and take action in today's complex and challenging economic landscape. Harnessing key data equips the Town to confidently create informed plans that address the true needs of the community.

As such, a strong economic development strategy is grounded in extensive research that helps leaders confirm community facts

and dispel biases, identify opportunities, allocate resources, and recruit the right businesses to contribute to long-term sustainable economic growth.

The Economic Development Strategic Plan for the Town of Gilbert is data-driven, sector-focused, and leveraged by deep input and inclusive engagement from a diverse group of stakeholders. The sections below present our findings from the Demographic and Economic Analysis and the Stakeholder Engagement phases.



Demographic and Economic Analysis

Gilbert is looking ahead and planning for the future. The Town boasts an educated job force and conditions that are attractive to relocating businesses. A prosperous community speaks to the Town's quality of life, and an exceptional built environment keeps infrastructure up-to-date, integrates useful technology, and maintains general environmental health. Further, the Town is building a culture of innovation that positions the community to pivot.

To support the development of Gilbert's Economic Development Strategic Plan, Resonance performed a comprehensive demographic and economic assessment that consisted of three main components:

- + **COMPETITIVE BENCHMARKING ASSESSMENT**
- + **TARGET CLUSTER ANALYSIS**
- + **EMPLOYMENT AREA ANALYSIS**

The key conclusions of each of the evaluations are presented below.

Competitive Benchmarking Assessment

The Competitive Benchmarking Assessment synthesized the demographic and economic trends impacting the Town. The analysis compared Gilbert to 14 of its peer communities across six categories: Economic Vitality, Innovation, Talent, Diversity, Prosperity, and Quality of Place. This part of the research included data for more than 50 metrics and grouped them into key categories that provided a holistic view of the Town's comparative advantages.

The following are the learnings from this assessment:

GILBERT IS A LARGE TOWN EXPERIENCING STEADY GROWTH

The population growth rate is more than double the national average.

GILBERT IS WELL-EDUCATED

The share of Town residents with bachelor's degrees is higher than state and national averages.

GILBERT HAS A HEALTHY ECONOMY

The labor force participation rate and unemployment rate are both better than the national average and most peer communities.

GILBERT HAS A STRONG INNOVATION ECONOMY

Knowledge and STEM occupations are growing at a faster rate than in most peer cities. The Town also boasts a high rate of productivity.

GILBERT IS PROSPEROUS

The Town ranks well among its peers as it relates to equity metrics.

GILBERT PROVIDES AN EXCELLENT QUALITY OF LIFE

The Town has highly rated amenities and experiences and is a great place for families.



Target Cluster Analysis

The Target Cluster Analysis acts as the primary and essential foundation for supporting all future business attraction, expansion efforts, and incentives and for helping to shape a narrative that resonates with new enterprises, site selectors, and talent.

Our target cluster analysis also assessed traded clusters from a comprehensive lens of competitiveness, equity, and resilience, as opposed to an evaluation that relies solely on an economic growth focus. It also focused on traded (instead of local) clusters since they tend to have higher wages and higher levels of innovation, in addition to being more resilient and durable. The following are the key target clusters for Gilbert:

BIOTECHNOLOGY, LIFE SCIENCES, AND HEALTHCARE

Supported by the University of Arizona's School of Nursing and major healthcare players like Dignity Health, Banner Health, and MD Anderson Cancer Center, this sector is one of the strongest in Gilbert. It has a large employment base (15,300 employees) and a highly educated workforce. The cluster's growth over the last five years (49%) was almost double that of the state and is projected to grow by another 16% in the next five years. The cluster is a significant contributor to the economy.



PHOTONICS AND OPTICS

The Photonics and Optics cluster is the strongest in terms of competitive advantage, with employment nearly five times the national average. Growth in this cluster is largely attributed to a competitive advantage in Gilbert; and despite being a fast-growing cluster in Arizona, growth in Gilbert is even faster (25%). Moreover, 98% of this cluster's sales are out-of-region exports. The cluster is supported by strong regional collaborations — with the Arizona Technology Council, for example — and by a healthy workforce pipeline from regional educational programs (e.g., from ASU and Mesa Community College).

CLEAN TECHNOLOGY

Clean Technology is the fastest-growing cluster in Gilbert, where it grew by 181% in the last five years, thanks to a unique competitive advantage in Gilbert. It is also forecasted to be the fastest-growing cluster in Gilbert over the next five years, capitalizing on the federal incentives being offered as part of the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Package. Gilbert has a healthy workforce pipeline in this sector (e.g., from ASU and the Chandler-Gilbert Community College) and, as a result, has a strong occupational competitive advantage in the skill sets that support this cluster.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The ICT cluster employs more than 1,000 employees in Gilbert, a competitive share that is 70% higher than the national average. At nearly \$170,000, the ICT cluster in Gilbert has the highest average earnings and attracts a highly educated and productive workforce. It is a strong contributor to Gilbert's exports, with 98% of its sales out-of-region.

ADVANCED BUSINESS SERVICES

Home to major companies, the Advanced Business Services cluster employs around 3,600 employees in Gilbert. This cluster is forecasted to grow significantly in the coming years. Gilbert is home to leading professional services organizations, including Deloitte and Unicon, Inc. The Town's attractive business climate, location, and talent pool make it an excellent choice for businesses.



Employment Area Analysis

The Employment Area Analysis enables the Town to assess the importance and economic value of Gilbert's key employment areas. Focusing development efforts on these areas positions Gilbert to improve the quality of life for the people who work and live in the Town. Key industries cluster in these areas because of the proximity of local talent and similar businesses, fueling the overall competitiveness and growth of the region.

We have learned from this analysis that Gilbert's four employment areas hold 60% of jobs and 51% of businesses in the Town. Key insights for each of the four employment areas are presented below.

1. The Northwest Employment Area is one of the most mature areas of the community. It has the largest number of businesses and employment and offers light industrial and manufacturing spaces. While it is not expected to see significant expansions, it is recommended that the area be examined for opportunities for revitalization efforts, which could result in a major transformation.

2. The Banner Employment Area has a unique identity around Healthcare and Life Sciences. This area is seeing major expansions and growth in the residential population, especially among young professionals.
3. The Gateway Employment Area offers an excellent location and amenities for residents and businesses alike. It has the lowest non-residential vacancy rate and is characterized by upscale family residences.
4. The Central Employment Area offers a diverse mix of businesses and is seeing significant expansion and infrastructure improvements. Educational institutions and retail businesses are important anchors to the area.



Stakeholder Engagement

Our team performed targeted outreach to key stakeholders to gather input on strategic priorities, develop a broad sense of plan ownership and collaboration, and create advocates for the plan's goals. Discussions addressed an array of issues: growing an entrepreneurial ecosystem, maintaining the Town's employment areas, enhancing the Town's hospitality offerings, promoting the arts and cultures, and more.

The Stakeholder Engagement complemented the research and provided thoughtful guidance for the development of the Economic Development Strategic Plan. More than 80 Gilbert residents, business

owners, elected officials, economic development partners, university leaders, and others participated in a series of roundtable discussions.

From these discussions, we learned about Gilbert's people and culture, placemaking initiatives and challenges, the community's desire for inclusion and effective engagement, its location advantage in the Phoenix metropolitan area, and its small business ecosystem. We also heard about housing challenges, workforce development needs, and the need to promote equity and inclusion. Some of the key conclusions are presented below:



A QUALITY PLACE TO RAISE A FAMILY

Boasting a comfortable family vibe, Gilbert is a family-centered community, offering excellent local schools and bursting with parks, leisure activities, and an eclectic array of wonderful restaurants. It is an ideal choice for many people to raise a family.

SENSE OF BELONGINGNESS

Gilbert residents are proud of the Town, its history, and what it offers. Maintaining this sense of community is the foundation for growth, ensuring that the Town does not lose its identity as it grows and creating community ambassadors who will encourage and welcome visitation to the Town.



AUTHENTICITY

Gilbert residents appreciate the authenticity of the Town's placemaking efforts. Revitalizing the Heritage District and establishing new developments with character like Agritopia/Epicenter is in line with what Gilbert is and the identity it wants to maintain as it grows.

INTENTIONAL BUSINESS ATTRACTION

Given the shortage of land, Gilbert should be intentional regarding the kinds of businesses it attracts. It should continue to focus on attracting high-value industries that will make a significant economic impact with a small land footprint.

LEVERAGING REGIONAL ASSETS

Gilbert has a strategic location within the Phoenix East Valley. This creates an opportunity for the Town to tap into regional assets in neighboring cities to attract talent and businesses, especially since site selectors often evaluate a site based on the 30-minute commute surrounding it. As such, Gilbert should continue to create and leverage cross-regional interactions.



Economic Development Strategy

Gilbert is growing and changing. Within a matter of decades, the Town has evolved from an agriculture-driven suburb to a fast-growing economic hub with an increasingly diverse economic portfolio. Growing by 6,000–8,000 new residents each year, Gilbert anticipates its population will be 330,000 at buildout.

As economic conditions inevitably change, accompanied by new challenges and opportunities, the resilience of Gilbert's economic development strategy will be tested. Long-term economic development efforts that are built on a foundation of core values and principles position the Town to be flexible, rather than simply reactive, to these changing economic conditions.

The economic development strategy will help Gilbert realize its vision and take control of its economic future. It will unite community residents with private and public sectors and help them direct time and resources to drive better results. The strategy will focus on attracting and empowering people because the right mix of engaged people and human resourcefulness is what makes an economy work. And it will focus on placemaking — because a vibrant place attracts and retains the best and brightest people.

The defined goals, objectives, and tactics of the economic development strategy will enable stakeholders to understand their specific roles. Collectively, these individual actions will create a prosperous and equitable future for Gilbert.

This three-year plan is not set in stone. Gilbert's economic development priorities will evolve as the Town grows and the economy changes. Community leaders should examine the strategy at least annually to identify deficiencies and opportunities and update the plan to address changing needs.

The following plan lays out the guiding principles for this analysis, based on best practices in economic development. It includes seven broad goals, with each goal supported by specific evidence of its importance and key priorities. Appendix E lays out a detailed implementation matrix that includes suggested action items, key partners, and metrics.

GOAL 1

We will create an economy that further positions the community as an innovative and resilient Town for tomorrow.

Outside investment will improve the resilience of the community, enabling Gilbert to expand infrastructure and services — essential for long-term growth — without placing an extra burden on the citizens. Outside investment can also take the form of business attraction, which can quickly create quality jobs and enhance regional competitiveness. This serves as a way to signal that the Town is primed for growth and innovation, further increasing investments and business interests. With a robust investment stream, Gilbert can create shared prosperity and lessen the impact of unpredictable events. Community members can be supported in ways that would not be possible without a dynamic economy.

An economic development strategy that includes diverse, high-growth sectors will enable the Town to adapt to everchanging and unexpected conditions. Gilbert's established clusters — Life Sciences/Healthcare, Photonics and Optics, ICT, Clean Technology, and Business Services — provide a solid foundation for a resilient economic strategy. Each sector provides jobs across the income and education spectrum, from large employers that anchor the economy to the many homegrown businesses that innovate and inject life into the community. Sector strategy focuses on not just one firm or subsector but rather on the business ecosystem. When businesses of all shapes and sizes are given a place to grow, social equity and upward mobility grow, too. The result is a local economy that is competitive and dynamic.

The Evidence

- Gilbert's cluster strategy—for expansion as well as retention — should be centered on five sectors: Life Sciences/Healthcare, Photonics and Optics, ICT, Clean Technology, and Business Services. These sectors are competitive, fast-growing, and supported by strong regional collaborations and educational programs.
- Gilbert represents more than 3% of the state economy. Worker productivity is higher than the state average, supported by Gilbert's highly educated and knowledge-based workforce.
- Almost one in 10 Gilbert businesses are in professional services, collectively generating \$430,000 in sales annually.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **NEW BUSINESSES BY CLUSTER**
Tracking the number of new businesses in Gilbert by industry cluster
- **NEW INVESTMENT**
Counting the number and value of new investments in Gilbert
- **EMPLOYMENT BY CLUSTER**
Tracking employment levels by industry cluster
- **MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME**
Tracking growth in incomes and standards of living



STRATEGY 1.1

Execute a measurable business expansion and retention (BRE) program.

To support existing businesses, Gilbert needs a business retention and expansion program that is focused on its strong clusters. It must do this while also attracting new companies by utilizing a value proposition that illustrates the Town’s economic competitiveness. Additionally, to better understand its interactions with community businesses, Gilbert should host a series of round-table discussions — with major existing employers as well as policymakers. All players should come together to establish initiatives and strategies that promote, measure, and reevaluate cluster growth and engagement.



ACTIONS

- Host annual cluster working groups — Life Sciences/Healthcare, Photonics and Optics, Clean Tech, ICT, and Advanced Business Services — to identify specific cluster needs and supply chain opportunities.
- Conduct a formal business visitation plan for Gilbert’s businesses, interviewing at least 12 employers annually.
- Utilize these and other engagement tools to identify opportunities and needs and report key findings systematically.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce.

STRATEGY 1.2

Administer a lead generation initiative.

Gilbert’s economic strategy must be specific and intentional. Economic development efforts must focus on the investments that are most likely to succeed, in both new business attraction and redevelopment opportunities. This can be done within a framework that specifies target sectors, expands on best practices, and enhances collaboration among Town departments and private-sector partners.

Gilbert can also promote local investment opportunities by developing positive relationships with site selectors — particularly those conducting location searches for knowledge-based companies and global headquarters — who influence which cities will make the shortlist.



ACTIONS

- Continue to work with state and regional partners to respond to incoming requests for proposals.
- Identify annual target meeting goals by clusters and markets to inform sales/leads needs.
- Execute annual contracts with sales missions and leads.
- Collaborate with Greater Phoenix and Arizona Commerce Authority partners to host sales mission trips to target regions.

Partners include the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, East Valley Partnership, and Arizona Commerce Authority.

STRATEGY 1.3

Focus expansion efforts on scalable and mid-sized tech businesses.

Most growing tech companies require significant office space to meet their talented workforces' needs. With Gilbert's land constraints, expansion efforts should focus on scalable and mid-sized tech businesses, rather than on large corporations that require large physical space. Almost 10% of Gilbert businesses are in Professional Services, a share that's in line with the state and national averages.

ACTIONS

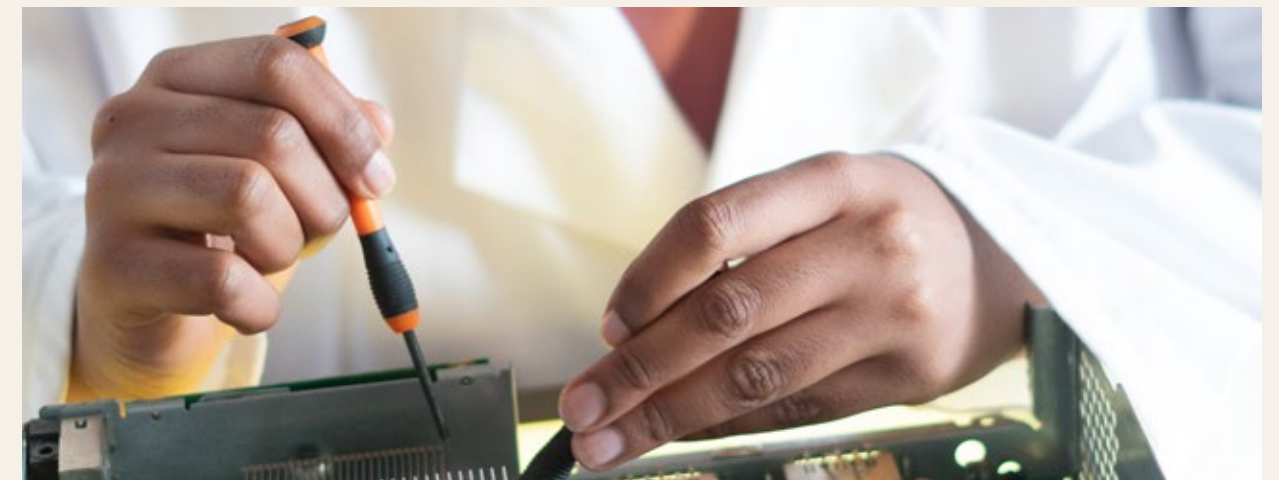
- Align Gilbert's cluster initiatives to support high-growth startups and scaleups; ensure they are represented in business retention and expansion activities.
- Expand Gilbert's participation and support in startup and entrepreneurial events and support initiatives in Greater Phoenix and across Arizona.
- Build relationships with venture capital organizations and investors. Focus on Arizona, California, New York, and Texas, among others.
- Catalog and promote resources — incubators, accelerators, meet-up events, and more — that could support scalable enterprise development.
- Encourage/collaborate on the creation of an incubator/accelerator/maker space in Gilbert.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, Arizona Technology Council, and Greater Phoenix Economic Council.

STRATEGY 1.4

Continue to align policy, planning, and permitting to support innovative industries.

Investors consider a wide range of city characteristics and behaviors when assessing the attractiveness of a community. Governance is at the top of their list, where they assess the town's vision, strategic plan, management, and planning, among other criteria. Gilbert's main strengths are its innovative industries: Life Sciences, Photonics and Optics, ICT, and Clean Technology. Continuing to align policy, planning, and local permitting processes with industry needs will ensure the Town attracts the right companies and grows its innovation cluster.



ACTIONS

- Assemble an advisory committee, including Town staff, site-selection consultants, energy company representatives, and business leaders in emerging industries to evaluate potential opportunities in Gilbert's permitting and policy planning.
- For specialized target sectors, review best practices from peer and competitor cities across Arizona and U.S. for potential implementation in Gilbert.
- Work with Town staff to develop policy and Land Development Code recommendations that can be presented to Council for approval and implementation.

Partners include various Town departments, site consultants, utilities, and business leaders.

STRATEGY 1.5

Activate a broker and site-selection engagement plan.

Site selection is a critical element of an economic development strategy. To attract new businesses to Gilbert, the Town should not only emphasize local investment opportunities but also build relationships with the decision-makers involved in site selection. Site selectors — those involved with finding locations for global headquarters, for example — have a tremendous influence on narrowing down the list and making a final choice. Gilbert and its regional partners should work together to identify businesses that are looking to relocate and establish a connection with the decision-makers.



ACTIONS

- Attend commercial development trade shows to increase exposure for Gilbert's business attraction efforts: CoreNet Global, NAIOP, Site Selectors Guild, ULI, ICSC, Select USA, and others.
- Refine and build a target site-selection list and for bi-annual community outreach.
- Host appropriate inbound Town visits, tours, and trade missions with target companies, investment representatives, and site selectors.
- Coordinate broker meet-and-greets and networking opportunities both within the Phoenix region and at external conferences.

Partners include the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, East Valley Partnership, and Arizona Commerce Authority.

STRATEGY 1.6

Lead in Clean Tech, ICT, and Photonics.

Gilbert's fastest-growing cluster is Clean Technology, almost doubling its employment over the last five years. ICT has a competitive advantage that is 70% higher than the national average. Photonics and Optics is Gilbert's most competitive cluster, mainly due to the competitive advantage of the state in these industries and the talent that supports it. Positioning itself as a leader in these industries will enable Gilbert to build an economic development identity based on its industry strengths



ACTIONS

- Host cluster working group meetings to identify cluster-oriented growth opportunities and challenges as well as supply chain development and talent needs.
- Conduct a foreign direct investment assessment to guide lead generation activities, marketing efforts, and sales missions for life science attraction efforts.
- Create target sector profiles and marketing materials.
- Collaborate with the Arizona Commerce Authority, Greater Phoenix Arizona Council, and others on a site-selection and conference strategy for targeting these innovation clusters globally.

Partners include the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, East Valley Partnership, Arizona Commerce Authority, and Arizona Technology Council.

STRATEGY 1.7

Maintain, redevelop, and reimagine commercial space and land to attract Life Sciences, ICT, and Renewable Energy.

As many companies today sort out their excess office space or look to take advantage of inexpensive leasable office space, those needing additional laboratories are looking to repurpose that office space into lab environments — a concept known as adaptive reuse. Life Sciences, ICT, Clean Technology, and Renewable Energy all require specific space requirements (e.g., clean room, wet room, or laboratory). Redeveloping and reimagining commercial space to be able to meet the needs of these industries is key to attracting them.



ACTIONS

- Convene cluster and target industry leaders, real estate professionals and others to identify specific space needs — short-term and long-term — for each emerging cluster.
- Evaluate underutilized space — retail, commercial, and flex — in Gilbert.
- Devise a series of policy recommendations and strategies to guide the Town's redevelopment and commercial real estate approach.

Partners include various Town departments and real estate brokers.



GOAL 2

We will become the premier entrepreneurial Town in Arizona — a community that intentionally cultivates and supports its businesses.

A focus on entrepreneurship and small businesses leads to the generation of new ideas and positions Gilbert to enhance economic growth.

Entrepreneurs can quickly capitalize on emerging economic opportunities, boosting the region's competitiveness. Through small business creation, Gilbert can establish a stable economy with enhanced productivity, innovation, and job creation. With a strong base, small businesses can be assisted with scale-up, leading to wealth creation and generating greater prosperity for the area.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses give the community an identity. Supporting multicultural small businesses enables the regional landscape to mirror the community it is serving. As a result, the prosperity generated is shared across all groups, and people feel a greater sense of pride in their community, making them more willing to support the local economy.

The Evidence

- Gilbert has a pro-business climate, thanks partly to the state. Arizona has a graduated individual income tax, with rates ranging from 2.59% to 4.5%. Arizona has a 4.9% corporate income tax rate, a 5.6% state sales tax rate, a max local sales tax rate of 5.6%, and an 8.4% combined state and local sales tax rate.
- Gilbert has a high share of independent workers/contractors — almost 8% of workers are not full-time employees. This share is less than 7% on the national level.
- Gilbert has a high share of remote workers — where more than 7% of workers work from home, a share that has grown by more than 70% over the last five years.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **NEW BUSINESSES FORMATION**
Tracking the number of new business registrations and licenses in Gilbert
- **INVESTMENTS**
Tracking the investment dollars made in the Town



STRATEGY 2.1

Partner with the Gilbert Chamber and others to grow Gilbert’s small businesses through technical training and networking.

Sharing information and opening the lines of communication ensures that small business needs are met by improving the capacity of business owners. By connecting entrepreneurs to mentors and training opportunities, Gilbert can create a supportive ecosystem where small businesses can thrive.



ACTIONS

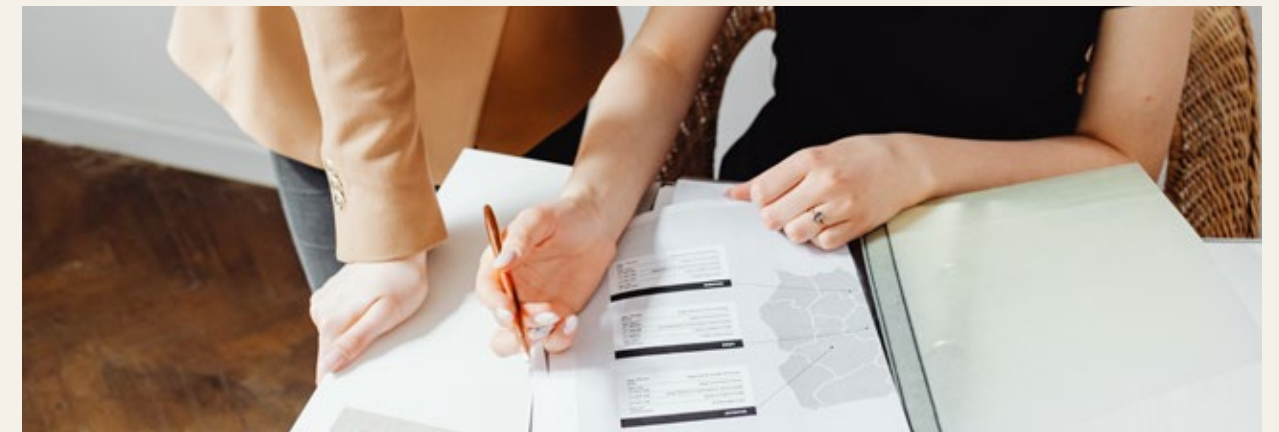
- Develop a calendar of small-business coaching — business plans, marketing plans, and succession plans — and networking opportunities for Gilbert businesses.
- Support and promote small business resources and training, via the Gilbert HUUB, offered by the Gilbert chamber and other partners.
- Utilize the bi-annual National Business Survey to track business perceptions and indicators in the Town.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Local First Arizona, CO+HOOTS, and HUUB.

STRATEGY 2.2

Collaborate to develop a financial literacy and business planning initiative for home-grown and creative businesses.

Small businesses already have experience in their field and their main areas of concern are how to run the business smoothly and finance their endeavors. This is where the Town of Gilbert can help small businesses succeed. Small businesses will need tools and resources to get their business started and continued support and resources throughout their first few years. Access to robust and up-to-date business resources will help Gilbert-based businesses remain competitive and ready to take on rapidly shifting markets



ACTIONS

- Continue partnership with Venture Forward to assess the growth in home-based businesses in Gilbert.
- Host quarterly small business webinar series offering technical and capacity-building education for microbusinesses (business planning, marketing, and more).
- Support Town-sponsored pop-up retail spaces and installations.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, SBDC, Local First Arizona, Venture Forward, CO+HOOTS, and HUUB.

STRATEGY 2.3

Celebrate Gilbert’s entrepreneurial success stories.

Behind every business are business people. Gilbert should highlight this human element of economic development by celebrating local entrepreneurs and their impact on the community. Such campaigns will benefit local businesses and also encourage more people — including people from diverse backgrounds — to open businesses.



ACTIONS

- Develop, in collaboration with community partners, a systematic approach to identify diverse and innovative small businesses in Gilbert.
- Promote Gilbert’s successes across multiple communication platforms: website, blogs, social media, and direct emails.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, SBDC, Local First Arizona, CO+HOOTS, and HUUB.

STRATEGY 2.4

Explore the creation of a business revolving loan program to provide local capital to expand Gilbert businesses.

Capital is needed to grow new and existing businesses in Gilbert. An example would be a revolving loan fund that can provide the gap financing measure Gilbert needs for the development and expansion of its small businesses. The fund replenishes itself by using the interest and principal payments from old loans to make new loans. This flexible source of capital, combined with more conventional sources, can help bridge the difference between what borrowers can obtain on the private market and what they need to start or sustain a business.

This approach has been successful for the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, which operates several revolving loan fund programs through its Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. The loans are used as gap financing products for commercial real estate development and small- and medium-sized business development in Pittsburgh. Likewise, the Oregon Business Development Fund — a state-level revolving loan fund managed by Business Oregon — provides capital to Oregon-based businesses to use for land, buildings, equipment, machinery, and working capital.

ACTIONS

- Convene a working group to advise on the creation of the revolving loan program: goals, guidelines, and value proposition.
- Evaluate best practices from Arizona and Southwest cities similar to Gilbert.
- Raise capital for funds by 2027, begin to distribute funds, and evaluate for impact.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, SBDC, and Local First Arizona.

STRATEGY 2.5

Support a buy-local Gilbert initiative.

Without “buy local” campaigns, many businesses would not have survived the pandemic. Gilbert can build on this by expanding the “Shop Gilbert” initiative that encourages residents to support retail establishments, restaurants, and other businesses in their community. Beyond the economic benefits, such an initiative will invigorate the Town’s brand and instill an even greater sense of local pride.



ACTIONS

- Convene a task force of Gilbert businesses, residents, Chamber and Town officials to reimagine the “Shop Gilbert” initiative to elevate the promotional efforts for buying locally.
- Evaluate “buy local” campaigns from other Arizona and Southwest communities and apply lessons learned to Gilbert.
- Develop a systematic, measurable plan that can be sustained over time and measured.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce and Local First Arizona.



GOAL 3

We will build a robust talent pipeline to fuel the future of Gilbert.

In today's economy, workforce capabilities — far more than any other factor — drive economic development. Talent development is vital to Gilbert's future economic success, and doing so requires a solid understanding of the area's educational attainment. The Town must gauge the knowledge and skills of its workforce and develop a plan for developing and deploying talent that aligns with its unique high-growth clusters.

The Evidence

- Gilbert is anchored by a strong knowledge-based economy, where more than three in 10 workers are employed in knowledge-based occupations, a share that has grown by 21% in the last five years.
- Almost half (45%) of residents (25 years and older) in Gilbert have a bachelor's degree or higher. This share is 50% higher than the state average and 38% higher than the national average. This is bolstered by the high educational attainment levels of people migrating to Gilbert. Almost half (42%) of migrants to the Town have a bachelor's degree or higher, indicating Gilbert's ability to attract talent.
- Gilbert is home to two higher education institutions, Park University and the University of Arizona, and is located in close proximity to Arizona State University's Polytechnic Campus and Chandler-Gilbert Community College. There are also over 60 other colleges, universities, and technical schools within a 30-minute commute.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**
Tracking the share of Gilbert residents by education level
- **CREATIVE CLASS**
Tracking the share of Gilbert residents in knowledge-based occupations
- **YOUNG PROFESSIONALS**
Tracking the share of Gilbert's prime talent pool (residents in the 25-34 age range)
- **INDIVIDUAL INCOMES**
Tracking the increase in individual incomes



STRATEGY 3.1

Collaborate with workforce partners to grow career pathway training for Gilbert's growth clusters.

The U.S. is enduring its most constrained labor market since the 1960s. Across industries — from registered nurses and software developers to retail salespeople and truck drivers — jobs are going unfulfilled. Moreover, declining fertility rates mean that the talent shortage isn't going away anytime soon. As such, Gilbert must focus on growing its own talent pool to meet the demand of its growth clusters, aligning education programs and training with local and regional workforce partners to adequately skill the workforce.

ACTIONS

- Engage Gilbert's workforce development partners, colleges, and private-sector employers quarterly to discuss needed training programs.
- Explore the creation, sourcing, and promotion of new training offerings tied to Gilbert's target clusters: certificates, badging, and executive educations.
- Conduct a survey to identify training gaps in Gilbert, especially those supporting the growth of the Town's innovation economy: ICT, Optics, and Life Sciences, among others.
- Facilitate discussions within Gilbert about housing gaps for students and those participating in workforce development.
- Review Gilbert's child care ecosystem to better understand gaps and needs, especially for those enrolled in workforce development and training programs.

Partners include Mesa Community College, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Arizona State University, Park University, University of Arizona, and Maricopa Community Colleges.

STRATEGY 3.2

Support the growth of Gilbert-based higher educational institutions: Park University and the University of Arizona.

Gilbert just recently celebrated the growth of the University of Arizona College of Nursing, which has expanded the educational offerings of the school. Universities and other institutions not only deliver tertiary education and ongoing skills training but also provide a bustling research environment that produces innovations with valuable commercial applications. Continuing to support the growth of educational offerings in Gilbert will ensure that the Town's talent has the skill set required in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing environment.



ACTIONS

- Under the higher education initiative, collaborate to expand educational and programming opportunities for colleges and universities located in Gilbert.
- Identify additional development sites within Gilbert to support long-term university expansion goals.
- Facilitate strategic partnerships among Town departments and industry leaders to leverage the resources and assets of the University of Arizona and Park University.

Partners include Gilbert-based higher education institutions.

STRATEGY 3.3

Create a plan to enhance Gilbert's remote work ecosystem, including networking and gathering spaces.

Remote and hybrid work routines are likely here to stay. A predicted 25% of the workforce will choose to do their jobs from home, and another 25% will have the option to do so. This is a positive trend for Gilbert. The Town's amenity-rich location in the East Valley is an ideal landing spot for new remote and hybrid workers to relocate and a great place for existing talent to remain. Gilbert and its partners must develop a quality-of-place strategy to promote both the community's assets and opportunities for talent to connect. As cities compete for talent, the ability to cultivate social capitalism is key to successful economic development.



ACTIONS

- Ensure the needs of the Town's remote workers are considered in continued development and redevelopment efforts in Gilbert, advocating for third spaces and coworking venues.
- Convene a community advisory group to help shape Gilbert's efforts to support remote work.
- Establish, in partnership with the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce and others, a networking group for remote workers.
- Administer a survey to understand the wants and needs of Gilbert's remote workers.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce.

STRATEGY 3.4

Evaluate the role of a housing study to better understand Gilbert's needs, uses, and demands.

A housing study will provide Town staff, elected officials, and the community with a better understanding of the housing market, housing challenges, and current and future unmet housing needs. It is intended to provide information on existing housing conditions and identify strategies to advance the future of housing in the community. It should consider ways to manage change and balance community needs — while embracing Gilbert's story, history, and heritage — to ensure that, moving forward, there are sustainable housing opportunities for everyone.



ACTIONS

- Assemble a diverse steering committee — Town officials, residents, developers, and business and community leaders — to help guide Gilbert's housing study.
- Explore past housing studies of peer communities in Arizona and the Southwest to devise an effective RFP.
- Hire a firm to evaluate the Town's housing opportunities and challenges and to make recommendations on future initiatives and programs.

STRATEGY 3.5

Promote a Town-wide welcoming initiative.

A Town-wide welcoming initiative with an emphasis on a diversified and inclusive Gilbert economy can have an important impact on the community. Such a program can encourage business creation and the participation of disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. It is also a great way to bolster the local economy by widening the pool of suppliers and creating competition, both of which have positive impacts on quality and prices. Finally, it will provide businesses of color with new avenues for networking and gaining new clients, emphasizing the Town’s commitment to equitable economic growth.



ACTIONS

- Utilize the Town’s marketing and communication platforms to promote various Town-wide cultural programs and initiatives featuring participating companies, businesses, and community leaders.
- Assemble a diverse advisory committee — Town officials, residents, cultural representatives, business and community leaders, and philanthropic representatives — to help guide Gilbert’s welcoming efforts.
- Evaluate best practices from other Arizona and Southwestern communities.

Partners include the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce.

STRATEGY 3.6

Actively promote and support young professionals throughout Gilbert.

Young Gilbert residents need more opportunities to make connections within their community. Supporting and encouraging a Young Professionals program will provide a starting point for people to build professional and personal connections and will assist local employers in retaining employees they’ve attracted from other communities.



ACTIONS

- Actively promote the successes of Gilbert’s young professionals through economic development marketing materials.

GOAL 4

We will invest and showcase Gilbert as a preeminent town for businesses, families, talent, and visitors.

Due to the pandemic and the rise of remote work, it is more important than ever for Gilbert to take active steps to attract people — doing so increases the tax base and talent pool and thus increases resilience. Placemaking draws people to a community while establishing the culture of the area. Many talented workers seek not only a place that is unique and caters to their interests but also a place that champions diversity and allows new ideas to flow. With welcoming spaces that reflect the diversity of the population, communities can create environments that enhance well-being and innovation.

The open spirit of placemaking ensures that all members of a community are included. Intentional placemaking can increase well-being and connectedness. Beyond that, placemaking can include a reimagining of cities so that resources and needs are easily reachable. With this, all members of a community can thrive, and economic growth and equity will be maximized.

The Evidence

- Gilbert has important strengths to promote as they relate to its quality of place: an authentic downtown in the Heritage District, a dynamic culinary scene, and an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Gilbert is a friendly bicycle community with its Central Trail System

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **VISITORS**
Counting the number of visitors to Gilbert
- **NEW BUSINESS**
Tracking business growth
- **NEW RESIDENTS**
Tracking population growth



STRATEGY 4.1

Activate the strategies included in Gilbert’s tourism strategic plan.

Tourism is an important part of Gilbert’s economy. There are direct impacts on visitor spending at hotels, restaurants, and other businesses. The less-obvious benefit of tourism traffic is the opportunity for the Town to present itself to prospective residents and entrepreneurs: Positive tourism experiences can attract both businesses and talent to Gilbert. Tourism also generates a strong sense of community among existing residents, which in turn enhances the Town’s brand.



ACTIONS

- Advance the tourism, placemaking, and marketing priorities outlined in Gilbert’s tourism strategic plan.
- Reflect updates and investments in economic and destination development communication and marketing materials.

Partners include Discover Gilbert, Tourism Action Group, and the Arizona Office of Tourism.

STRATEGY 4.2

Develop a strategy to attract a destination hotel (a premier facility that can be leveraged for business attraction and community gathering).

Downtowns provide investment opportunities for hotel development. In turn, hotels add tremendous value to a downtown area, drawing business and leisure visitors to the community while generating new jobs for local residents. Hotels are drawn to the central location of downtown areas, where they enjoy close proximity to a community’s unique restaurants, entertainment, schools, hospitals, and businesses. Hotels boost the local economy with guests who spend money at surrounding retail, service, and tourism establishments. By attracting a destination hotel, Gilbert can further capture and retain its visitors and tourism dollars.

ACTIONS

- Attend national trade shows targeting entertainment and hospitality/hotel brands.
- Create/update Gilbert’s investment portfolio/pitch for hospitality brands.
- Develop relationships with site selectors representing entertainment and hospitality/hotel brands and enterprises.
- Maintain and ready development sites within Gilbert to support hospitality expansion goals.

Partners include Discover Gilbert, Tourism Action Group, and the Arizona Office of Tourism.

STRATEGY 4.3

Devise a Town-wide placemaking plan.

The longstanding mantra “location, location, location” has evolved to include the importance of “quality of place.” Gilbert is competing with cities around the world for skilled workers, entrepreneurs, and investors. Promoting its robust amenities and rich quality of life positions the Town as a place that’s ripe not only for new talent, new businesses, and new investment but also one that provides a supportive environment where existing businesses can grow and expand.



ACTIONS

- Catalog underutilized spaces throughout Gilbert's downtown Heritage District (adjacent) and other target commercial corridors.
- Create a systematic placemaking program that includes selection criteria, funding plans, and marketing approaches, and ensure the plan supports the tourism strategic plan.
- Pilot a placemaking program, evaluate impact, and scale.
- Activate additional placemaking strategies throughout Gilbert, including Town-wide wayfinding and street banners.

Partners include Discover Gilbert, Tourism Action Group, and the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce.

STRATEGY 4.4

Maintain the downtown Heritage District as a premier shopping and entertainment district for residents and visitors.

The commercial heart of a community is found in its downtown and business districts. These areas create jobs for local residents and generate sales that boost the economy of the wider community. Equally important, these hubs establish an improved quality of life, serving the needs of a town's residents, workers, and visitors.

The downtown Heritage District is the vibrant core of Gilbert, boasting some of the top dining spots in the Phoenix metropolitan area. The charm of the downtown Heritage District is that it evokes both the allure of a cosmopolitan city and the nostalgia of a bucolic small town, speaking to the authenticity of Gilbert as a destination.



ACTIONS

- Continue to build relationships with downtown Heritage District property owners and businesses through a monthly visitation program.
- Maintain and promote the “Taking Care of Small Business” program in Gilbert programming/process, supporting new businesses in the downtown Heritage District and throughout the Town.
- Utilize Discover Gilbert marketing dollars to promote the downtown Heritage District and its offerings to residents and visitors alike.

STRATEGY 4.5

Extend the downtown Heritage District’s redevelopment success to other corridors in Gilbert.

With so much to offer, Gilbert should maximize its placemaking programs. Such efforts will strengthen the connection between the people and their Town. Extending placemaking efforts beyond the downtown Heritage District will reinforce Gilbert’s commitment to future revitalization. By promoting its unique cultural identity and quality of place, Gilbert will create a place that engaged residents are proud to call home.



ACTIONS

- Continuously identify and evaluate redevelopment areas and opportunities throughout Gilbert.
- Provide staffing resources and oversight to the Redevelopment Commission.
- Collaborate internally with the Town departments to facilitate infrastructure development.
- Serve as a trusted advisor to businesses and investors on new real estate/commercial development and redevelopment transactions within Gilbert.

Partners include various Town departments.

STRATEGY 4.6

Curate and promote destination experiences.

The days of old-school tourism trade shows, glossy marketing brochures, and magazine advertisements are gone. Instead of cookie-cutter offerings, today’s tourists want authentic, curated experiences. By developing a strategy for building these experiences, Gilbert can drive tourism, economic development, and local investments in new restaurants, brew pubs, recreational activities, concerts, and more. Town partners will need to work directly with stakeholders in the cultural and recreational sectors to identify experiences and local characters to highlight.



ACTIONS

- Catalog Gilbert and the East Valley’s destination assets: cultural and recreational amenities, music, art, food, breweries, and more.
- Attract additional Gilbert destination assets.
- Promote experiences and assets across various communication, marketing, and social media platforms.

Partners include Discover Gilbert and the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce.

GOAL 5

We will promote Gilbert's brand: a quality town for life, investment, and business growth.

Community branding and promotion will enable Gilbert to establish its value proposition: What makes this Town worth moving to or investing in? Storytelling is one of the most effective ways to activate and engage people's emotions and imaginations. In that vein, forming a narrative is effective at attracting people and investments to the region. With a strong brand, people become aware of and are drawn to what makes a region unique. This increases talent in the region and also increases local attachment and retention through a strong sense of place. Additionally, a brand identity can articulate unique strategic positioning, establishing a competitive advantage over other nearby regions in terms of business attraction. Promotion sets the tone for what the Town wants to be and what it wants to accomplish, creating a vision that people can invest in.

The Evidence

- Branding helps communities, cities, and destinations distill and articulate their unique strategic positioning and differentiating characteristics. A strong brand will help Gilbert compete in the global marketplace. Promoting unique characteristics is important to attracting investment, people, and capital to the Town.
- A well-articulated place-branding strategy strengthens a community's sense of place because it aligns the language and messages created for and by businesses, communities, and visitors.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **UNIQUE VISITORS**
Measuring interest in the Discover Gilbert website
- **EARNED MEDIA**
Tracking the number of articles featured in industry-related publications
- **SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**
Tracking interest in Gilbert as a destination to live, work, and visit



STRATEGY 5.1

Create promotional materials to grow Gilbert's economic development brand and support investment attraction.

The role of marketing in economic development is important because it focuses on showing investors what you have to offer and attracting them through your genuine appeal to their unique wants and needs. Gilbert needs to have the appropriate materials in place to support its economic development and tourism efforts, including websites, social media, and multimedia assets.

Economic development and tourism are as much about storytelling as they are about policy work. It's also critical for economic development staff to collect data on the effectiveness of these materials and campaigns and respond accordingly.

ACTIONS

- Evaluate Gilbert's place brand and positioning for economic development, destination development, and redevelopment.
- Refresh Gilbert's identity and marketing materials — website, social media, and more — to reflect the Town's new positioning.
- Create marketing and attraction materials for Gilbert's target sectors and hotels.

STRATEGY 5.2

Advance partnerships to enhance Gilbert's image.

Gilbert benefits from being a part of a healthy and collaborative economic development ecosystem in Arizona, specifically in the East Valley. As such, partnerships can be leveraged to enhance Gilbert's economic development image by marketing the region as well as by marketing the accessibility of the Town to regional offerings, such as the larger labor shed of the East Valley.



ACTIONS

- Maintain support and relationships with regional partners, anchor institutions, business support organizations, workforce developers, and tourism partners that support Gilbert's destination and economic development.

Partners include the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, East Valley Partnership, Arizona Commerce Authority, and Arizona Technology Council.

STRATEGY 5.3

Establish a Town ambassadors initiative.

In successful cities and business districts across the globe, communities are leveraging ambassador programs to attract and retain next-generation talent. By instituting such an initiative, Gilbert can inspire young professionals, business owners, and major corporations with a stronger sense of civic pride and involvement.



ACTIONS

- Research best practices for ambassador programs across other communities.
- Host a Gilbert Ambassadors training workshop for Gilbert businesses and engaged community members on tactics for promoting and supporting the Town via social media and more.

Partners include Discover Gilbert and the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce.

STRATEGY 5.4

Develop a communication plan to share successes and wins with policymakers, businesses, and Town stakeholders.

To achieve its economic development objectives, Gilbert needs a communication strategy that enables policymakers, businesses, and stakeholders to come together to openly discuss goals and track progress. This communication plan will ensure inclusivity in decision-making by being fully transparent about economic development activity. Moreover, it will provide a forum for sharing success stories, which can foster a greater sense of community pride among all parties.



ACTIONS

- Develop and execute quarterly communications to Gilbert's businesses, economic development, and community partners.
- Offer briefings and updates about the Town's economic development efforts.

STRATEGY 5.5

Grow the branding efforts of Discover Gilbert.

The availability of airlines, travel websites, travel agents, and transport options has made getting around easier than ever and given travelers a world of destination options. This means that cities, towns, and regions are competing with one another to attract similar people with similar interests. Growing the branding efforts of Discover Gilbert will enable the Town to spotlight the unique qualities and amenities that make it preferable to other destinations. The increased activity around Gilbert’s hotels, restaurants, and retail businesses will help boost the local economy.



- ACTIONS**
- Grow the presence of marketing campaigns in targeted destination development publications and outlets.
 - Annually refresh Gilbert’s visitor collateral, both digital and print.

Partners include Discover Gilbert, Tourism Action Group, and the Arizona Office of Tourism.





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