



Austin
Chamber



STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS OPPORTUNITY AUSTIN 3.0 MID-COURSE ASSESSMENT

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Cover photos were sourced from the Austin Chamber website.

OVERVIEW

As has become well-known in the economic development community, the five-county Austin metropolitan area is one of the nation's most dynamic regions, consistently topping lists of best performing economies, best places for business and careers, best places for singles, and numerous others. The region's mix of dynamic quality of life, highly skilled workforce, research excellence, entrepreneurial spirit, quirky sensibility, and other traits have made it the envy of communities across the country.

In its third iteration, Opportunity Austin maintains its position as a model economic development program for chambers of commerce throughout the United States. Through its efforts, Opportunity Austin has had an outsized impact on job growth in the greater Austin region, greatly enhanced wealth-creation, and, through its ongoing policy advocacy efforts, worked to constantly improve the region's business climate. Perhaps Opportunity Austin's greatest contribution to the region is the continued diversification of the greater Austin economy. As a top Austin leader noted during public input for the Mid-Course Assessment process, the region's more balanced economic diversification was instrumental in greater Austin's ability to withstand the severity of the Great Recession.

To prepare the Chamber and the community for the fourth iteration of the initiative, it is important that the program reflects the region's current competitive realities and the adjustments made to Opportunity Austin 3.0 since its launch. As such, the following process was undertaken during the summer and fall of 2016.

IMPLEMENTATION ASSESSMENT

To assess Opportunity Austin 3.0 implementation trends and identify possible areas for strategic adjustment, the first step of this process included two components, the creation of five comprehensive competitive scorecards and Stakeholder Input. Together, these components informed our team's evaluation of the region's accomplishments that have occurred since December 2012. In addition to reviewing Opportunity Austin's public metrics, Market Street also assessed the five-county metro's performance against top benchmark regions in the following categories: Economic Performance, Workforce Capacity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Business Environment, and Quality of Place. Greater Austin was compared to some of the top regions in the country, including Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH; Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO; Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN; Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL; Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ; Raleigh-Cary, NC; Salt Lake City, UT; San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA; and Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA.

Quantitative data was married with qualitative input from top Chamber leaders and staff and representative from public and private partner entities. These included 15 interviews, two focus groups, and an online survey of Opportunity Austin investors and partners that garnered nearly 100 responses.

Key Assessment Findings

- **Overall rankings show that greater Austin has maintained its position as one of the nation's top performing metropolitan areas.** Across six key areas that measure greater Austin's economic

performance, workforce capacity, innovation and entrepreneurship, business climate, quality of place, and overall performance, the Austin region finished at or near the top of the rankings.

- **Greater Austin’s private sector employment growth outpaced all of its peers over a one- and five- year period.** From 2010 to 2015 the region added approximately 170,000 private sector jobs – a gain of 25.5 percent. Only San Jose (20.5 percent) saw five-year job growth above 20 percent. Likewise, year-over-year job growth in greater Austin (3.7 percent) outpaced all of its peer metros – only Raleigh (3.2 percent) and San Jose (3.1 percent) experienced year-over-year growth above three percent.
- **Opportunity Austin’s six target sectors have experienced considerable growth over the last five years.** Compared to its peer metros, greater Austin ranked first in employment growth in all but three sectors: advanced manufacturing, creative and digital media, and corporate and regional headquarters. Overall, employment in Opportunity Austin’s target sectors grew by 33.4 percent – adding nearly 33,000 jobs to the regional economy since 2010.
- **Greater Austin is making strides in its efforts to slow the rise of poverty.** While the region’s total and youth poverty rates still rank among the top third of comparison geographies, poverty in both categories rose at slower rates than all but two competitor metros in the previous five-year period.
- **Transportation is a key competitive concern for the greater Austin region.** Public input participants frequently cited greater Austin’s growing congestion as undermining business competitiveness and diminishing the region’s quality of life. Various data measuring congestion and commute time substantiate stakeholder concern. As was highlighted by stakeholders during public input, addressing greater Austin’s transportation challenges will require public and private consensus around both short- and long-term solutions.
- **Greater Austin’s population growth over the last five years is the fastest among its competitor metros.** Over a five-year period (2010–2015), the greater Austin region added roughly 270,000 new residents. Domestic and international migration continues to be a driving force propelling growth in greater Austin. From 2010 to 2015, the region attracted nearly 200,000 net domestic and international migrants.
- **Despite greater Austin’s ability to attract and retain talent, workforce shortages in particular skills sets are a persistent challenge.** While the Austin Chamber’s partnership with the education community is cited as a model to follow, stakeholders noted that the Chamber’s approach to workforce development may be due for adjustment.
- **Entrepreneurship is thriving in the greater Austin region.** Whether it is academic spending on research and development or the percentage of greater Austin area workers who were self-employed, the regional innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem ranked favorably against many of its peer metros. As new startups continue to fuel growth, Opportunity Austin has the potential to elevate its visibility and continue to expand its ecosystem through investments in South by South West Interactive, Innovate Austin, and Austin A-initiatives.



- **Opportunity Austin, the Austin Chamber, and the regional business community face a challenging political landscape in the City of Austin.** While many feel that the shift demands the business community's voice grow louder, others feel outreach and advocacy efforts must be more nuanced, inclusive and acknowledge that there is a "new day" for economic development within the City of Austin.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Recommendations are based on the content and results of the Assessment phase. They not only recognize where strategic adjustments were made in the Opportunity Austin 3.0 program, but also additional activities that could be incorporated into the final two-plus years of 3.0 implementation.

Recommendations are structured to reflect the three goal areas of Opportunity Austin 3.0: **Economy, Talent, and Place**. Slight adjustments have been made to the ordering and numeration of the OA 3.0 strategies where appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

As the vast majority of stakeholders noted, the Opportunity Austin program continues to be a key contributor to regional growth and prosperity. As the 3.0 initiative moves towards its second phase, challenges to the region’s transportation systems, cost structures, and business climate remain the metro area’s priority concerns. Though the perspectives of regional leaders and Opportunity Austin investors sometimes differ in terms of the degree to which business should drive regional conversations on these issues, there is clear consensus that the Opportunity Austin program should continue its aggressive pursuit of high-value job development, talent development, and transportation advocacy.

Of these, transportation was clearly conveyed by participants in the Mid-Course Assessment online investor survey as the top issue greater Austin faces today. This is highlighted by the following “word cloud” where the size of the word equates to the number of times it was used to answer the question, “What should be the highest priority strategy for the final two-plus years of Opportunity Austin 3.0 implementation?”



Market Street’s mid-course assessment is a comprehensive, holistic review of activities that are taking place to address regional priorities, both through Opportunity Austin as well as the Austin Chamber’s program of work. As such, some of the following adjusted and proposed strategies are directed towards the core Opportunity Austin program areas of **economic development** (business retention and expansion, marketing and attraction, innovation), **education and talent development**, and **transportation**, while others will be incorporated into Austin Chamber programmatic buckets such as **business advocacy**.

These Recommendations are not intended as *new* strategies, but rather *adjustments* of the five-year Opportunity Austin 3.0 program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Opportunity Austin 3.0 strategy was finalized over a year before its initial public rollout and, with more than two years of implementation completed, there have been multiple adjustments to the 3.0 program that were approved by the Steering Committee in winter 2012. The Austin Chamber has always been responsive to changes in the region's competitive challenges and opportunities and has empowered its very capable and accomplished staff to work within the funding parameters of Opportunity Austin to adjust the initiative's program of work. This programmatic evolution is informed by feedback from volunteer councils and the Economic Development Corporation Board.

This Executive Summary highlights differences between Opportunity Austin 3.0 and the mid-course strategic recommendations, including the handful of proposed new activities suggested by the process' public input feedback.

ECONOMY

- ✓ Graphical "maps" of the supply chains of existing Austin firms were not developed.
- ✓ Actions directed towards the Greater Austin Technology Partnership and its Special Interest Groups were eliminated as this program was not pursued through OA 3.0 implementation.
- ✓ A proposed "Export Austin" program and "pilot" international marketing initiative were not pursued due to resource availability priorities.
 - However, efforts continue to identify resources to prepare a greater Austin international development strategy.
- ✓ A formalized "intra-regional relocation program" directing firms considering leaving the City of Austin to potential locations in greater Austin was not officially advanced.
- ✓ The opening of a greater Austin marketing office in northern California was not pursued.
- ✓ Strategies to "Foster a world-class support system for technology startup and commercialization activities" and "Capture relocation opportunities generated by greater Austin's technology ecosystem" have been formalized into the Innovate Austin program.
 - Innovate Austin has significantly enhanced the Austin A-List event in addition to initiating efforts to connect capital markets and funders with Austin area startups both locally and through outreach on Opportunity Austin marketing missions.
- ✓ Leveraging of Austin's Formula One race as a "Showcase Austin International" inbound event has been discontinued due to a lack of prospect and consultant interest in the race.
- ✓ A new target, Space Economy, was added to the Opportunity Austin targeted marketing and attraction priorities.



- ✓ A campaign to create an Energy Management and Innovation Center and development park anchored by the Pecan Street Demonstration at Mueller was not pursued.
- ✓ A recommendation to develop an internal marketing campaign to promote greater Austin as a research center for mitigating the environmental externalities of traditional energy development and consumption was not pursued.
- ✓ A recommendation to “Leverage greater Austin’s future medical school and teaching hospital as catalysts for development of a regional life sciences and biomedical cluster” continues to advance.
 - Support for development of a medical innovation zone around Austin’s emerging medical district has become a key plank of Innovate Austin.
 - A sub-strategy within Life Sciences will be developed to fully leverage the Dell Medical School and other new health care facilities to establish greater Austin as a health and medical technology leader.
 - A recommendation to support efforts in Round Rock to transform the area around Avery Centre into a medical district was not pursued.
- ✓ A recommendation to “Make greater Austin the test bed for education technology through the creation of an Education Technology Innovation Center as a partnership of government, business, and academia” was not pursued.
- ✓ A proposed action to “Partner with UT-Austin to develop a program to identify potential business opportunities derived from Austin corporations’ idled intellectual property” was not pursued.
- ✓ Austin Chamber business advocacy efforts were expanded to include greater outreach to Austin City Council members and staff in the wake of the city’s first ward-based election.
 - Development of two new Austin Chamber advocacy-focused councils are proposed in this mid-course strategy update, including a Technology Advisory Council to better engage/involve regional technology leaders in Opportunity Austin and advocacy efforts and a Futurist Committee to explore “horizon” issues and how their potential impact on regional economic development programming.

TALENT

- ✓ Enhancements to the Opportunity Austin talent program include more robust and targeted use of technology to support FAFSA completion and college matriculation.
- ✓ A regional workforce plan for Central Texas is under development leveraging partnerships with Workforce Solutions Capital Area, the City of Austin, Travis County, and other partner entities.
 - Advancing opportunities to train workers for “middle-skill” employment has become a focus for talent development efforts.
- ✓ An annual State of Talent event is now the Austin region’s signature talent development event and showcase for strategic accomplishments and enhancements.



- An Annual State of Tech Talent event will also be considered for future implementation.
- ✓ Austin TechSource was replaced as a talent development and attraction tool by a new online initiative, Work Live Austin.
- ✓ Development of a proposed “Rapid Response Training Coalition in greater Austin focused on time-sensitive re-training and up-skilling of workers for occupations in demand” was not pursued, though efforts to quickly address workforce skills gaps are ongoing.
 - Strategies are in development to increase public and private K-12 enrollment in computer science (CS) courses.
- ✓ A recommendation to “Transition Texas State University’s Round Rock campus into a four-year branch institution” was not pursued.
- ✓ Efforts to support development of internship programs and placements have been enhanced along with new initiatives to recruit exiting Fort Hood soldiers to Austin area companies and advocate for raising federal caps on the hiring of skilled immigrants.

PLACE

- ✓ Strategies to “Foster regional dialogues on the benefits and positive impacts of greater Austin’s development” through designing a branded campaign to focus public attention on the region’s development dynamics were not formalized, though tactical activities targeted on building awareness of economic development activities and benefits are ongoing.
- ✓ A more direct focus for the Austin Chamber on supporting advocacy efforts to address local affordability issues has been advanced, incorporating ongoing work to optimize the City of Austin’s permitting process.
 - Advocacy directed towards the City of Austin’s forthcoming CodeNext process will also address affordability.
- ✓ Expansion of passenger air capacity through the Air Services Task Force has been broadened to include a focus on retaining new international flights and supporting general service airport infrastructure development goals of regional partners.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The Opportunity Austin 3.0 strategy contained dozens of tactical recommendations, many of which have been adopted programmatically by the Austin Chamber. Certain activities like an international marketing program have not moved forward due to resource-constraints or other reasons. There have also been strategic pivots based on new, promoted, or repositioned personnel at the Chamber.

The recommendations in this Opportunity Austin 3.0 mid-course implementation review are intended to capture the activities currently being advanced by the Chamber and its key partners and those planned for the final half of the strategic cycle. They also include seven additional tactics suggested by volunteer leaders, staff, and partners that could further enhance the Opportunity Austin agenda.

Implementation of any new activities would of course be contingent on funding and personnel capacity and the approval of the Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors and the Austin Chamber Board of Directors (for non-OA strategic components).

Economy

As profiled in the Implementation Assessment, greater Austin's economy continues to be among the top performers nationally. In fact, the thousands of new residents attracted to the region to take advantage of this job growth have exacerbated issues related to traffic and affordability, leading some outside the economic development community to wonder if the region should be less aggressive in the creation of new employment. However, those who remember the downturn of the early 2000s note that any slowdown in economic development activities poses great risk to greater Austin's continued success, especially in the face of future global recessions and the aggressive competition of regions that try harder every day to steal Austin's thunder.

Opportunity Austin's programs focused on retention and expansion of existing employers and attraction of outside firms have both continued to demonstrate strong results. Policy efforts have succeeded in attracting multiple international flights to Austin-Bergstrom International Airport and applied constant pressure on the City of Austin and other partners to optimize their business climates and processes. The Greater Austin Technology Partnership, the Austin Chamber's first substantive foray into the region's technology economy, has evolved into the Innovate Austin program. This is the most notable operational shift in the first half of OA 3.0 implementation.

STRATEGY 1: EXISTING BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION

Principal activities in this strategy have been and will continue to be focused on relationship building with key corporate and real estate professionals and surveying existing businesses as to their competitive issues and opportunities, databasing the results of the conversations, and following up on achievable action items.

Activity 1.1: Conduct business retention and expansion (BRE) surveys and corporate visits with metro Austin businesses.

- ✓ Consistently and effectively evaluate and enhance the BRE survey instrument to best address companies' competitive issues and support their growth.
- ✓ Coordinate and conduct corporate meetings to support target cluster development, identify recruitment opportunities, and inform out-of-market visits.

Activity 1.2: Develop, nurture, and sustain relationships with business organizations and key influencers in the real estate community.

- ✓ Identify and pursue opportunities to build relationships with relevant local organizations representing greater Austin's target sectors and other key constituency groups.
- ✓ Maintain ongoing communications with real estate professionals to support business expansion and relocation opportunities.
- ✓ Develop and host regular Real Estate Forums to highlight and promote current and future investment and development opportunities.

STRATEGY 2: TARGETED MARKETING AND ATTRACTION

The accolades the Austin metro has received in the last decade-plus as a top national destination for business and talent has made the job of marketing the region easier as prospects typically have an established perspective of the area as a competitive location. In some cases, leads come to the Austin Chamber and partners unsolicited. However, as acknowledged in Opportunity Austin 3.0, growing name recognition does not eliminate the constant need to build relationships with external prospects and relocation professionals who can drive further investment to greater Austin.

Activity 2.1: Promote the Austin region to companies, investors, and relocation professionals in out-of-market locations with proven value as sources of quality lead-generation.

- ✓ Research, plan, conduct, and assess the value of marketing mission trips to high-value domestic locations.
- ✓ Work with regional partners to program and take "mini-mission" trips to source relocation prospects and leads.
- ✓ Participate with governmental entities for opportunities to market domestically and internationally.
- ✓ Schedule, confirm, and manage prospect visits to greater Austin with regional partners according to internal protocols.
- ✓ Identify trade shows, conferences, and other out-of-market trips that will lead to quality relationship-building and prospect generation.

Activity 2.2: Capitalize on flagship events to showcase greater Austin to corporate influencers and investors.

- ✓ Continue to fully leverage the differentiated segments of SXSW to develop new prospects, recruit talent, connect with investors, and stimulate greater Austin’s technology and startup ecosystems.
- ✓ Consistently assess opportunities to capitalize on additional local and regional events to showcase the Austin region to prospects and consultants.

Activity 2.3: Consistently evaluate current and emerging target industry sectors to optimize strategies for recruitment and expansion.

- ✓ Leverage all quantitative and qualitative information to ensure that Opportunity Austin target industry sectors reflect the region’s highest value cluster-building opportunities.
- ✓ Develop a sub-strategy within Life Sciences to fully leverage the Dell Medical School and other new health care facilities to establish greater Austin as a health and medical technology leader.
- ✓ Continually optimize target-specific development and implementation plans for the following **industry sectors** inclusive of data profiles, marketing activities, talent issues, infrastructure concerns, incentive and regulatory policy, and other activities.
 - Advanced/General Manufacturing
 - CleanTech
 - Corporate Headquarters and Regional Offices
 - Data Management/Data Analytics
 - Life Science/Biotech/Healthcare
 - Multi-Media Technology
 - Space Economy

Activity 2.4: Coordinate and connect with regional economic development partners to increase greater Austin’s competitiveness for business recruitment and growth.

- ✓ Continue hosting and leveraging Regional Partner Meetings to inform Austin Chamber support strategies, advocacy, utilization of incentives, and product development assistance.
- ✓ Outreach to regional partners to participate in major and “mini” marketing trips to locations of interest.
- ✓ Ensure lead distribution, project management, communications, and follow-up protocols are effectively maintained with partner organizations.
- ✓ Provide guidance and assistance for partner acquisition of Freeport exemptions, Foreign Trade Zones, EB-5s, and other tools for recruitment.

Activity 2.5: Identify resources to prepare an international development strategy.

- ✓ Assess the resource availability to pursue development of an international development program in the second half of Opportunity Austin 3.0 implementation.
- ✓ Consider strategic components such as leveraging statutory incentive tools; development of an export program to support existing businesses; creation of a “soft landing” program for international companies expanding to greater Austin; and formation of an international delegation of Austin-area companies to meet with prospects and participate in travel.
- ✓ Conduct comprehensive research to identify top international markets for target-driven exports and FDI (foreign direct investment).

STRATEGY 3: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

As technology advances, previously reliable means to communicate key messages to targeted audiences becomes increasingly challenging. The proliferation of social media and other electronic communication channels has led to a degree of content specialization and niche marketing that greatly complicates the process of outreaching to and influencing stakeholders. Opportunity Austin communications are focused on external and internal markets to ensure that existing and potential employers, investors, partners, and leaders understand the value proposition of Opportunity Austin and the Austin region as well as past successes, current efforts, and future priorities. Internal efforts are of even greater importance because of the new ward-based Austin City Council elections that have amplified district-level perspectives and priorities.

Activity 3.1: Optimize messaging and targeted audience outreach to support economic development, capture mindshare, and secure earned media placements.

- ✓ Conduct research to identify all key stakeholder groups – including all newly configured City of Austin council districts – assess their current perceptions, and formalize the most effective engagement strategies.
- ✓ Craft and coordinate messages for promotion across multiple platforms to compellingly tell greater Austin’s “story,” communicate and amplify Opportunity Austin components and benefits, and increase awareness of the Austin Chamber’s regional impact.
 - Consider opportunities to broaden Opportunity Austin messaging to highlight the initiative’s impact on improving greater Austin as a place to live, work, and play for all communities, districts, and constituency groups.
- ✓ Work to seamlessly integrate messaging across all distribution channels.
- ✓ Continue to inform communications and development strategies by surveying out-of-market corporate executives to identify and convey their perceptions of greater Austin.
- ✓ Assist with seeding and developing dynamic news stories for local, regional, national, and international media.

Activity 3.2: Maximize the impact of online and social media.

- ✓ Consistently assess and enhance the Austin Chamber website.
- ✓ Design and develop enhanced Innovate Austin messaging that can be leveraged through marketing materials, website, and social media.
- ✓ Formalize effective strategies to fully leverage social media and analytics tools and train staff in utilizing these tools for prospect development.
- ✓ Continue producing the quarterly Site Selection and Enhance Innovation newsletters, and create and distribute a new quarterly venture capital edition of the Enhance Innovation newsletter.
- ✓ Outreach to key constituencies through targeted email marketing.

Activity 3.3: Develop targeted marketing materials and collateral.

- ✓ Produce compelling printed and electronic marketing pieces for distribution to inquiries, external events, and other forums.
- ✓ Evaluate current target industry marketing materials and update as needed, including enhancements to talent, supply chain, and other pertinent information.
- ✓ Update targeted recruitment video footage.

STRATEGY 4: INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ECONOMY

Continuing the momentum of the Austin Chamber's first major push to impact the regional technology economy through the development of the Greater Austin Technology Partnership, Innovate Austin is the logical evolution of that program. Focusing not only on cultivating the entrepreneurial ecosystem but also supporting startups' capital acquisition activities, Innovate Austin has built a solid base of relationships with key individuals and entities in greater Austin's technology economy. Incorporating these companies and leaders into the Opportunity Austin investor and Austin Chamber membership cohort and volunteer base was said by many existing investors to be an important next step.

Activity 4.1: Continue expanding the breadth, depth, and impact of the Austin A-List of the Hottest Startups event

- ✓ Work across Chamber departments and investor networks to broaden the base of event sponsorship.
- ✓ Ensure event content and programming continues to increase interest in and attendance at Austin A-List.
- ✓ Integrate event details and compelling narratives into all relevant Chamber marketing and communications channels.
- ✓ Assess the potential of awarding a cash prize to one or more top ranking local startup companies.

Activity 4.2: Leverage innovation events to support ecosystem growth and development of targeted industry sectors.

- ✓ Pursue opportunities to sponsor, host, or partner in innovation ecosystem events that can further advance the Austin Chamber's impact on the regional technology startup economy.
 - Events could include Austin Startup Week, Innotech Conference, Texas Wireless Summit, FoundersCon, IEEE, Crowdfunding Roundtable, Developing a Funding Strategy, SBIR Conference, Inventor of the Year, IBM Cloud Connect, Corporate Innovation Taskforce, and others.
- ✓ Provide marketing and other support to ecosystem events as necessary to optimize Chamber impact and event success.
- ✓ Work to identify potential corporate innovators, investors, and recruitment prospects at all events.

Activity 4.3: Pursue involvement with key regional ecosystem organizations through memberships and/or regular meeting series.

- ✓ Subscribe to and/or sustain memberships in organizations that support and enhance greater Austin's entrepreneurial ecosystem and leverage them in pursuit of Innovate Austin goals.
- ✓ Maximize the promotion and impact of monthly Morning Tech Talks in partnership with SXSW by optimizing programming and considering opportunities to connect startups with established entrepreneurs.
- ✓ Continue hosting University of Texas Startup Studio Dinners to increase startup activity and advance job creation.

Activity 4.4: Support startup and series-stage Austin area firms with capital formation challenges.

- ✓ Work with members of groups and partnerships that promote and drive access to capital such as Central Texas Angels Network, Texas Venture Capital Association, National Venture Capital Association, Angel Capital Association, CBInsights, and others to help address startups' funding needs.
- ✓ Proceed with efforts to secure participation of regional executives and thought leaders on a Capital Advisory Council to assess greater Austin's startup-funding climate and identify strategies to enhance capital formation capacity.

Activity 4.5: Promote Austin area startup investment opportunities on Austin Chamber external marketing trips.

- ✓ Continue identifying and seeking audiences with venture capitalists and other potential investors in key external Opportunity Austin markets.
- ✓ Promote key greater Austin startup firms to interested funders in visited markets.
- ✓ Seek to recruit venture capital firms or affiliate offices to establish a physical presence in the Austin area.

Activity 4.6: Take a leadership position in development of an innovation district associated with the new Dell Medical School.

- ✓ Partner with the Capital City Innovation, Inc. organization and its Board to support the creation, growth, and sustainability of the medical innovation zone centered on Dell Medical School.
- ✓ Under the auspices of Innovate Austin, leverage existing advocacy and marketing programs to support implementation of Capital City Innovation's development plan for the medical innovation zone.
- ✓ Encourage Capital City Innovation to pursue an acceleration and incubation component of the district focused on population health innovation to foster health care transformation in service of all greater Austin.

STRATEGY 5: BUSINESS ADVOCACY

The Austin Chamber, through its Opportunity Austin initiative, has invested significant time, resources, and attention to working with members, investors, partners, and local, regional, state, and national officials to optimize greater Austin's climate for business. These efforts cut across many Economy, Talent, and Place categories. While referenced in multiple sections of this Strategic Recommendations report, advocacy is housed under a single department at the Chamber. The importance of Opportunity Austin advocacy has heightened over the 12-plus years of the initiative as growth-related issues such as permitting, traffic congestion, and – most recently – affordability have risen to the forefront of regional competitive concerns. The change to ward-based City Council elections has also shifted the philosophy and actions of the City of Austin's governing entity towards policies that many in the business community feel are detrimental to economic development.

Activity 5.1: Engage Chamber members and partner representatives to support effective business advocacy.

- ✓ Utilize member advocacy communications tools like Blackbaud and others to focus and leverage investor support for key policies.
- ✓ Conduct regular meetings of District Business Roundtables, the Austin Business Alliance, and Local Advocacy Council to identify competitive issues, inform policy recommendations, and support advocacy efforts.
 - Convene and host CEO and executive roundtables across target industry firms to inform strategic action agendas.
- ✓ Continue one-on-one outreach and discussions with all Austin City Council members.
- ✓ Schedule regular or *ad hoc* meetings of staff from partner chambers and other local government relations and advocacy professionals to discuss policy issues and potential advocacy strategies.
 - Pursue grassroots engagement opportunities with targeted constituency groups, including supporting outreach campaigns of key partners.

- ✓ Consider forming an Austin Chamber Technology Advisory Council as a means to better engage and involve regional technology leaders in Opportunity Austin and Central Texas advocacy.
 - Assess issues affecting greater Austin’s technology economy, develop an advocacy platform, and formalize engagement of technology leaders in securing passage of program and policy priorities.
- ✓ Develop an Austin Chamber Futurist Committee charged with exploring and proposing “horizon” issues and opportunities that could impact greater Austin and exploring strategies for effectively positioning the region to address them.

Activity 5.2: Promote policies supporting economic development in greater Austin.

- ✓ Leverage members through the Economic Development Council to inform and support policy efforts.
- ✓ Ensure statewide policy is supportive of economic development through monitoring all proposed legislation in regular and special sessions; leading “war rooms” focused on economic development bills; monitoring relevant committee work and providing research and testimony as necessary; and briefing state and local legislative staff and delegations.
 - Key programs of focus include Jobs for Texas, Fund of Funds, Texas Enterprise Fund, Skills Development Fund, and Chapter 313.
- ✓ Participate in statewide economic development organizations to promote greater Austin’s agenda and support statewide policy efforts.
- ✓ Ensure the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) provides the Austin area with effective services through the Texas Regional Office in Dallas.
- ✓ Advocate for increases in basic and translational federal research to help enhance and create Austin area employment opportunities.

Activity 5.3: Engage in local and regional outreach and advocacy.

- ✓ Develop and consistently update voter databases.
- ✓ Monitor all local policy deliberations and research and produce briefing materials as necessary on key issues and programs.
- ✓ Schedule monthly meetings with representatives of Austin companies with local influence to discuss policy positions and act quickly to proposed City Council votes.

Activity 5.4: Engage in state-level outreach and advocacy.

- ✓ Recruit participation for the Chamber’s State Advocacy Council, convene members, and advance priority discussion outcomes.
- ✓ Continue to host Central Texas Day at the state capital.
- ✓ Maintain state lobbying registration and membership in state legislative monitoring services.



- ✓ Cultivate relationships with legislators via TexasOne trips, the Formula One race, Austin City Limits, SXSW, and other engagement opportunities.
- ✓ Participate in national conferences of state legislators to deepen relationships with the Texas contingent.
- ✓ Conduct the Promote Central Texas event.
- ✓ Partner with the Metro 8 Chambers of Texas to build networks and advance the group's legislative agenda, including 2017 priorities focused on the Texas Enterprise Fund and Chapter 313 School Value Limitation Agreements.

Activity 5.5: Engage in federal outreach and advocacy.

- ✓ Consistently track key federal legislation and policy opportunities to inform activities and output of the Chamber's Federal Advocacy Council.
- ✓ Continue programming and conducting the annual Austin to DC advocacy trip.
- ✓ Host annual Congressional Roundtables with multiple Central Texas legislators to discuss and advance the Chamber's legislative priorities.
- ✓ Organize meetings with elected officials during SXSW, Formula One, and other events frequented by Austin area congressional delegations.
- ✓ Participate in the annual U.S. Chamber of Commerce Regional Advocacy Meeting.
- ✓ Hold annual Holiday Receptions for state and federal staff.

Talent

Though the quality of its workforce has always been greater Austin's key strength – even branding itself “The Human Capital” – the region, like all U.S. communities, still struggles with talent availability for key skill sets and a reported mismatch between talent availability and employer demand. With over 140 people moving to the Austin area every day, talent attraction programs can be more targeted than those in slower-growing regions. Talent pipeline efforts are similarly geared towards advancing students more effectively towards degree programs and careers that align with the Austin metro's strongest current and future employment categories. The talent development programs at the Austin Chamber are often cited by investors as the Opportunity Austin's initiative's most laudable efforts; they have also been recognized by national publications and research organizations as national best practices. The Chamber's talent programs continue to evolve to capitalize on new technologies and advances in data analytics. The following OA 3.0 mid-course recommendations reflect only slight changes to the 2014 agenda.

STRATEGY 6: TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Because student training is comprised of a continuum of education from toddler age through college graduation, many experts feel the goal of “cradle to career” development should be to align the components of this training pipeline as effectively as possible with occupational dynamics of the local economy. Within this pipeline, there are pressure points that mark key milestones in students' advancement towards college and careers. The Austin Chamber's talent programming has leveraged data analysis and reporting and college-matriculation support to meet ambitious goals for advancing regional students to two- and four-year post-secondary degree programs. Over time, the Chamber has not only served as the business community's voice on education and workforce issues, but also become greater Austin's most visible talent development analyst, convener, and advocate.

Activity 6.1: Convene and leverage the Austin Chamber Talent Council.

- ✓ Continue to empanel top regional leaders and influencers to inform and confirm the Chamber's talent development programming as formalized by the 2016 Regional Workforce Plan for Central Texas.
- ✓ Utilize Council members to advocate for key programs and policy as needed.
- ✓ Identify and select the annual Talent Volunteer of the Year.

Activity 6.2: Establish a public-private compact with Workforce Solutions Capital Area to optimize the utilization of taxpayer dollars for workforce development.

- ✓ Develop the compact between Workforce Solutions Capital Area, the City of Austin, Travis County, and the Austin Chamber to increase certifications and degrees supporting middle- to high-skill talent.
- ✓ Collaborate on establishing common goals and metrics for enhanced training in support of growing more middle-skill jobs in Central Texas.
- ✓ Monitor and publish findings on program results and goal attainment.

Activity 6.3: Continue to produce timely and impactful student performance and labor market data.

- ✓ Work with participating Austin area school districts to collect the necessary data to develop and publish Education Progress Reports summarizing district performance.
- ✓ Compile, analyze, and publish relevant data, including monthly job openings, unemployment reports, annual college STEM enrollments and completions, labor availability, and other indicators.
- ✓ Leverage data for Chamber staff speeches, media placements, reports, and other outputs.
- ✓ Develop a metric tracking the number of workers advancing into middle-skill jobs annually.

Activity 6.4: Strive to meet the goals of the Direct-to-College Achievement Plan (DTC70).

- ✓ Effectively leverage partners and volunteers through the DTC70 Executive Council and practitioner meetings.
- ✓ Support completion of college application (Apply Texas) and financial aid (FAFSA) forms through multiple means including data-sharing agreements, information portals, digital messaging with counselors and students, Financial Aid Saturdays events, and marketing campaigns, including student contests.
- ✓ Advocate, promote, and track completion of college and career readiness coursework and assessments through data-sharing agreements, student surveying, and partner outreach.
- ✓ Expand the “Summer Melt” counseling program to improve post-secondary transition rates.
- ✓ Close achievement gaps for underrepresented student populations by developing additional dual credit programs, Early College High Schools (including the P-TECH model in New York) and Career Academies, “guided pathways” to graduation, and new options for competency-based learning.
- ✓ Continue production of the DTC70 e-news project and reports, integrating key Education Progress measures as applicable.

Activity 6.5: Develop strategies to increase public and private K-12 enrollment in computer science (CS) courses.

- ✓ Seek participation and potential co-sponsorships with local school districts, organizations, and companies.
- ✓ Incorporate calls for greater CS funding into advocacy agendas.
- ✓ Monitor enrollment trends, report findings, and adjust strategies as necessary.
- ✓ Assess the potential to establish a regional career and technical high school.
- ✓ Source capacity to improve the recruitment and training of high school CS faculty.
- ✓ Explore the establishment of Technology Education and Literacy in Schools (TEALS) in Central Texas.

- ✓ Continue researching the potential to implement the P-TECH model on one or more Austin area campuses.

Activity 6.6: Continue to research, produce, and publish the Austin Community College (ACC) Progress Report.

- ✓ Work with ACC to formalize and release the report on a regular basis.
- ✓ Partner with ACC to implement key Progress Report recommendations.

Activity 6.7: Join the University of Texas at Austin and Texas State University, San Marcos in advocating for expanded STEM enrollment and completion.

- ✓ Leverage the Austin Chamber's Talent Council to inform and support the initiative.
- ✓ Work with UT and Texas State System leadership to understand constraints to replicating successful STEM expansion models.
- ✓ Support the campuses in implementation of strategic priorities.

Activity 6.8: Continue state-level advocacy in support of education and workforce development priorities.

- ✓ Meet with the Central Texas delegation and key committee members to promote Chamber policy priorities such as adjustments to the Robin Hood funding recapture formula consideration of wages in Chapter 313 School Value Limitation Agreement, support for TEXAS Grants, and increased funding for pre-Kindergarten programs.
- ✓ Participate in the Austin Chamber's Day at the Capitol in support of talent development policy.
- ✓ Consider hosting a regional half-day summit with Chamber and regional leadership to discuss local, state, and federal policy agendas and their impact on talent initiatives.

STRATEGY 7: TALENT RETENTION AND ATTRACTION

As noted previously, the five-county Austin metro area is – and has been – one of the fastest growing in the country, with roughly 140 people moving to the region daily. Though these numbers are impressive, there are still talent-availability constraints reported by employers for key occupations and skill sets. The Austin Chamber works with its partners to address this skills mismatch and focus targeted talent attraction and retention strategies on those workers most in demand. Multiple technologies, venues, and platforms are leveraged in pursuit of these goals.

Activity 7.1: Develop and promote the annual State of Talent as the Austin region's signature talent development event.

- ✓ Work with the Talent Council to program the event, identify and confirm speakers, review past year accomplishments, and effectively position the Chamber's annual talent agenda for public release.

- ✓ Continue to integrate event promotion across all Chamber communications platforms and leverage accomplishments and findings to seed earned media coverage.

Activity 7.2: Program and host an Annual State of Tech Talent event.

- ✓ Elevate top regional executives, human resource professionals, and political leaders to establish the Austin Chamber and its Talent Council as the drivers of greater Austin efforts to improve the supply of tech talent.
- ✓ Hold the event annually, with the Talent Council serving as host committee.

Activity 7.3: Position the Work Live Austin web portal and information hub as the “front door” for regional talent retention and attraction.

- ✓ Work with all necessary partners to ensure the site’s content is current and compelling.
- ✓ Actively promote the Work Live portal through all relevant media channels and platforms.
- ✓ Outreach to top regional employers to embed the Work Live portal into their online talent attraction pages.
- ✓ Leverage human resources personnel and other key partners to maintain the site’s ongoing relevancy for regional businesses.

Activity 7.4: Produce consistent, quality collateral materials to help companies attract experienced out-of-market talent.

- ✓ Work with tech companies and executive recruiters to design and develop materials detailing the value proposition of living and working in greater Austin.
- ✓ Ensure materials feature standardized design and updatable content.
- ✓ Partner with organizations such as the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau in the development of video content.

Activity 7.5: Foster retention of corporate interns through a coordinated support program.

- ✓ Enlist firms with large intern cohorts for entry into the program.
- ✓ Identify opportunities for collaboration on networking and provision of relocation/housing information.
- ✓ Pursue the retention of interns participating in the City of Austin’s tech internship program, an extension of the White House’s TechHire initiative.
- ✓ Promote Work Live Austin and other retention tools to participating firms and interns.

Activity 7.6: Partner on the attraction of high-value tech talent conferences to greater Austin.

- ✓ Work with the Austin CVB to promote Central Texas as a preferred destination for conferences focused on the technology workforce.
- ✓ Leverage events held in the region as opportunities to recruit targeted talent to greater Austin companies.

Activity 7.7: Recruit exiting soldiers from Fort Hood to metro Austin companies.

- ✓ Continue efforts to partner with the post to promote regional job opportunities to exiting soldiers.
- ✓ Host Operation Austin hiring fairs on base at Fort Hood.
- ✓ Work with officials from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to facilitate Hire Our Heroes placements in Central Texas.
- ✓ Enhance the Boots 2 Business curriculum to better support entrepreneurship among exiting soldiers.

Activity 7.8: Advocate for raising federal caps on the hiring of highly-skilled immigrants.

- ✓ Develop talking points in favor of increasing high-skilled immigration residency slots.
- ✓ Utilize testimonials from top Austin area firms to build advocacy arguments in favor of policy adjustments.
- ✓ Promote policy changes to federal officials during the Austin Chamber's annual D.C. fly-in.

Place

In Opportunity Austin’s 12-year history, the physical realm of the five-county Austin region has changed dramatically. Not only has the metro been among the nation’s fastest growing, but local cities and counties have also topped lists of year-over-year percentage growth. Comprehensive planning models – especially long-term plans – rarely account for this rate of new population increase. Even with aggressive planning scenarios, budgeting and development protocols make it almost impossible to fund and construct infrastructure fast enough to keep up with growth. As externalities like traffic congestion, loss of undeveloped land, air quality degradation, and other issues become more prominent in the minds of voters, slow- and no-growth attitudes begin to proliferate, which leads to regulatory changes and local opposition to new housing construction that exacerbate cost pressures for purchase and rental properties. Greater Austin is facing growth-related pressures on multiple fronts, most visibly in terms of increased traffic on its roads and highways. As the principal facilitator of job creation in the region, the Austin Chamber is beginning to hear calls to be less aggressive in pursuit of employment growth. It is therefore contingent on the Chamber to continue to remind stakeholders of the destructive outcome the last time metro Austin took job growth for granted (the fallout from the bursting of the tech “bubble” in the early 2000s), and remain a vocal and proactive force to help address growth-related impacts. The Chamber is pursuing these strategies through Opportunity Austin and redoubling efforts to not only create economic value but also ensure the Austin metro area can better manage its effects.

STRATEGY 8: MOBILITY

As with any community dealing with rising levels of traffic, many in greater Austin are frustrated at what they perceive to be the slow pace of efforts to address the issue. However, the reality of transportation infrastructure development is that the process is a years-long, extremely capital-intensive exercise that often finds proponents fighting for already appropriated dollars not to mention funding for new projects. With what many report to be a leadership vacuum on transportation issues, the Austin Chamber has stepped into the breach and been the driving force for mobility advocacy in Central Texas. It is now the go-to partner for state and local public entities and leaders looking to build consensus for new projects and sway public opinion. In part due to the momentum created by the Austin Chamber, there has been roughly \$7.0 billion in transportation improvements in the past decade in metro Austin. Billions more in approved projects have been committed for a seven-year build out, not including \$720 million proposed by the City of Austin for a November 2016 referendum or billions for I-35 expansion . Despite this progress, some Opportunity Austin investors feel that traffic relief could be pursued more aggressively. Market Street feels that many of these perceptions issues could be addressed through more strategic, targeted, and sustained communications efforts with investors and partners at all levels.

Activity 8.1: *Optimize a transportation advocacy platform that positions the Austin Chamber as the region’s most influential voice on mobility issues.*

- ✓ Convene a non-partisan public-private Mobility Council and program it to engage in policy research and development, marketing and partner outreach, and government-relations advocacy.

- ✓ Secure passage in November 2016 of the City of Austin's \$720 million bond referendum to fund improvements to major Austin streets as well as proposals to expand I-35, Mopac South, and SH 45.
- ✓ Continue consulting the Austin Chamber Transportation Committee on mobility issues to inform and advance policy objectives while effectively differentiating it from the new Mobility Council.
- ✓ Determine how the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M (through its Texas Transportation Institute) can be much more impactful players in the analysis and support of mobility enhancement strategies in Central Texas.

Activity 8.2: *Implement action strategies to fulfill the Chamber's transportation policy objectives.*

- ✓ Determine how to more effectively engage with policy makers and elected officials at all levels of government to communicate the Chamber's mobility priorities and secure passage of key legislation and funding provisions.
- ✓ Continue to incorporate transportation priorities into local, state, and federal legislative agendas.
- ✓ Utilize regular meetings and annual trips to the state capitol and Washington, DC to compel elected leaders and staff to take action on Central Texas mobility priorities.
- ✓ Continue to issue action alerts and invitations for influential Chamber members to participate in grassroots advocacy efforts.
- ✓ Develop metrics to better gauge member involvement in transportation campaigns and tools to incentivize greater participation.

Activity 8.3: *Establish the Austin Chamber as the region's top knowledge source and thought leader on transportation issues and solutions.*

- ✓ Work with the Mobility Council to develop interactive, data-rich online tools to highlight mobility issues and announced/proposed project-based solutions.
- ✓ Conduct and/or contract for the development of planning and mobility studies to present defensible data in support of transportation advocacy priorities, including the forthcoming regional transportation best practices study by the Austin Area Research Organization (AARO).
- ✓ Develop strategic partnerships with transportation research and advocacy organizations to further specific mobility objectives.
- ✓ Fully leverage the interlocal agreement between the City of Austin's Transportation Department and the University of Texas' Center for Transportation Research to research and analyze services related to Central Austin mobility issues.
- ✓ Articulate the Chamber's position on transportation issues through a high-profile, coordinated, and multi-channel external communications and public relations campaign.

Activity 8.4: Evaluate and advance the potential creation of a regional mobility partnership in Central Texas.

- ✓ Determine the viability and efficacy of empowering a new regional entity to implement greater Austin mobility strategies.
- ✓ Leverage existing and potential evaluations and assessments of comparative organizational models to inform the development of Central Texas' partnership.
- ✓ Working with the Mobility Council and others, position the partnership as the region's lead advocate for comprehensive, multi-modal mobility strategies and projects.
- ✓ Consider potential resources like an infrastructure bank, contractual financing partners, and other best-practice tools to take maintenance responsibility for key arterial roads and support project funding.

STRATEGY 9: AFFORDABILITY

As is occurring in most if not all destination communities, cost of living and housing affordability are becoming prominent issues in greater Austin, most acutely in the City of Austin itself. Supply and demand issues, exacerbated – as has been the case for years – by local opposition to high-density development and dysfunctional permitting processes in the City of Austin, are helping to contribute to rising costs. A paradigm shift in how the Austin City Council is elected has also complicated matters related to the CodeNEXT zoning and development code overhaul and implementation of high-density corridors and nodes as recommended in the Imagine Austin comprehensive plan. Additional burdensome costs of living and doing business in greater Austin also arise periodically, including recent pricing pressures from Austin Energy.

Activity 9.1: Work to advance a comprehensive local affordability agenda.

- ✓ Advocate for passage of the affordability agenda presented to the Austin City Council in August 2016.
 - Leverage key leaders with insight and influence over housing and development issues in support of the affordability agenda.
- ✓ Ensure the affordability agenda is effectively implemented upon approval.
- ✓ Continue participation with the Community Advancement Network to ensure residents can capitalize on opportunities for household and professional enhancement.

Activity 9.2: Continue to position the Austin Chamber as a vocal advocate for improvements to the City of Austin's permitting and regulatory processes and policies.

- ✓ Focus the Chamber's newly created District 512 Task Force on permitting as a leading voice for permit reform in the City of Austin.
- ✓ Support the successful implementation of current City of Austin efforts to increase staffing levels, enhance technologies, and formalize a customer-focused culture in its Development Services department.

- ✓ Serve as active and vocal business advocates and contributors to the City of Austin's CodeNEXT process.
- ✓ Ensure that high-value development projects impactful to local affordability issues are supported and approved in a timely manner.

Activity 9.3: *Ensure that local energy rates are cost-competitive.*

- ✓ Support business retention and relocation activities by advocating for adjustments to Austin Energy's rate structure to enable current and future local companies to compete in the marketplace.

STRATEGY 10: AIR SERVICE

A signature win for Opportunity Austin 3.0 was the addition of a direct flight from Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA) to London, England. Austin's airport has seen rising year-over-year passenger volume for over a decade, leading to completed and proposed expansions to ABIA that will ensure it has the capacity necessary to accommodate future growth and demand. The Austin Chamber continues to advocate for additional domestic and international direct flights and greater frequencies to existing destinations as well as enhancements to general service airports in partner communities.

Activity 10.1: *Continue to effectively leverage the Austin Chamber Air Services Task Force.*

- ✓ Convene regular meetings of the Task Force and leverage member discussions to inform annual strategic goals and action plans.
- ✓ Ensure mainline air carriers (Delta, United, American, Southwest) have a presence at monthly meetings to provide updates on their experiences with ABIA and any potential future route plans.
- ✓ Develop and promote an annual membership event with an air service theme.
- ✓ Through the leadership of the Task Force chair, promote air service activities to Chamber members and communicate annual priorities.
- ✓ Align Task Force strategic recommendations with ABIA's annual air service development plan.

Activity 10.2: *Sustain and grow existing air service while identifying priority markets for expansion.*

- ✓ Retain new direct-service routes by creating a marketing plan aligned with ABIA and partner campaigns promoting new destinations.
- ✓ Utilize BRE surveys and other contact points with Chamber members regionally or at non-local offices to promote new and existing service and identify any business concerns with routes and frequencies.
- ✓ Complement the Chamber's database of Central Texas origin and destination markets with regular travel surveys of Chamber members and other partners to identify potential new domestic and international destinations.

- ✓ Utilize the Air Service Task Force and other influencers to support negotiations with carriers to expand and/or create service to key existing and potential markets.

Activity 10.3: Support infrastructure enhancements at ABIA and Central Texas general aviation facilities.

- ✓ Leverage meetings with economic development partners to incorporate local airport priorities into state and federal policy agendas.
- ✓ Capitalize on information gleaned from prospect negotiations with expanding and relocating firms to identify infrastructure challenges and opportunities related to Central Texas' commercial and general aviation airports.

CONCLUSION

As with the previous two mid-course implementation assessments of Opportunity Austin, the updates to the 3.0 program reflect new competitive realities, challenges, and opportunities that have arisen during the first half of strategic implementation and actions taken by the Austin Chamber and its partners to address them. Because these activities did not inform resource development for the 3.0 program, the personnel and fiscal capacity to take them on may not be available. There is of course always the potential to reallocate resources from existing budgets to accommodate new efforts deemed by the Economic Development Corporation Board to be necessary to advance greater Austin's competitive position and success.

This is a critical time in the Austin region's evolution from a university and government town to an internationally recognized and prominent economic powerhouse. As it has been during the metro area's rise, the Austin Chamber and Opportunity Austin program will be at the forefront of discussions and activities to ensure that greater Austin's strategic trajectory remains ascendant.

As the Opportunity Austin program has evolved over its decade-plus of implementation, its efforts have "blended" somewhat with the Austin Chamber's program of work to the degree that some feel Opportunity Austin's core goals of net new jobs and increased payroll through economic development have been diluted and its resources stretched. With the pending development of the 4.0 iteration of Opportunity Austin, the potential exists to expressly delineate and clarify the strategic activities associated with five-year Opportunity Austin programming and those incorporated into annual Austin Chamber programs of work and resourcing.