



Workforce and Economic Development



Description

Abilene is experiencing an economic renaissance in the Downtown and South of Downtown Abilene (SoDA) district. The area's robust and diversified economy offers a broad range of opportunities, and the economy continues to be expanding and taking steps to enhance opportunities for all residents further.

As Mayor Anthony Williams said at the Mayor's Community Conversation in 2018, his top priority is economic development. Abilene is not only well-poised to "make good" on Mayor Williams' comment, but they have also already begun the journey! Between the healthcare sector that employs over 5,000 individuals, tourism that has an annual impact of \$418.6 million and creates more than 4,000 jobs, revitalization in the SoDA District, expansion of the Air Force Base, and several organizations with successful histories of helping to support entrepreneurs, the area has a strong economic base, as well as a positive future.

- Dyess Air Force Base, Hendrick Medical Center, and Abilene Independent School District are the largest employers, and there are many other employers with over 400 employees – mostly in the public sector or healthcare industries. However, Abilene's diverse economy includes over 1,000 small businesses and extensive support for new businesses.
- The Development Corporation of Abilene (DCOA), the Abilene Industrial Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce, and many others provide incentives, training, support, and other resources to private sector enterprises, entrepreneurs, and others to create jobs and support community investment.

The cultural aspects of Abilene, educational opportunities, an active faith-based community, and the low cost of living (5% below the national average), contribute to Abilene being one of the Forbes Top 100 Best Places for Small Business. Abilene's strong economic base and resident resources position it to successfully achieve its workforce and economic development goals.



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Vision Statement Options

- To be a dynamic city where opportunities are reflected in a culturally diverse workforce.
- To create ongoing opportunities for both employers and employees to thrive in Abilene.
- Abilene's Heritage: A foundation for your future and a place to launch your dreams!
- Big city feel with small-town heart and values.

Strategies

- Attract a few large, well-paying, new employers to Abilene who will be good community citizens.
- Develop a mechanism to connect employers and the workforce
- Expand and strengthen the local workforce
- Incentivize and educate youth and young adults to explore rewarding, well-paying careers
- Provide job retraining for workforce preparing for advancement opportunities





Key Indicators

- Average annual business revenue and per capita income
- Number of entrepreneurship opportunities (including minority / disadvantaged numbers)
- Employment rates of vulnerable populations
- Number of trade school, technical school, and university graduates
- Percent of graduates living in Abilene two years after graduation
- Total employment and average wage -- Abilene data and variance to state and US averages

Supporting Indicators

- Average starting salary
- Cost of living (per capita)
- Diversity of economic development
- Livable family wages
- Number of college and tech school graduates
- Number of Dyess AFB military - number of spouses working, number remaining in Abilene after discharge
- Number of entrepreneurship opportunities
- Number of families who were counseled on career opportunities
- Number of minority entrepreneurship ventures - new and cumulative
- Number of new businesses open in a year and their success - how many new positions have they added since they opened.
- Number of training certificates, trade school graduates, and internships
- Public assistance dollars allocation



Potential Partners

- Abilene Independent School District
- Abilene Industrial Foundation
- Abilene Works Website - Abilene Chamber of Commerce
- Abilene Zoo
- ACU Springboard
- Chamber of Commerce
- Churches
- City of Abilene
- Development Corporation of Abilene (DCOA)
- Disability in Action (DIA)
- Disability Resources
- Dyess AFB
- Entrepreneur Support and Guidance
- Faith Works
- Farm Bureau
- Gulf Coast Workforce Board
- Hendrick Medical Center
- Local Businesses
- Local Colleges and Universities
- Small Business Development Center
- State of Texas
- Texas Workforce Solutions



Cause Area #4: Workforce and Economic Development

- Build an easy mechanism for organizations to collaborate
- Create a river walk with a driving range to offset the cost for vendors
- Create an economic workforce pipeline work with schools and employers
- Design a Human Resources recruiting / job posting board; market to higher-need communities, Department of Human Services, and others
- Develop a series of focused programs for youth by continuing the vision of ThriveABI
- Develop and heavily market a plan to support local businesses and food producers
- Develop transition programs to help people coming out of incarceration
- Encourage / recruit civilian business that supports the Air Force
- Encourage child entrepreneurs
- Encourage universities to host community job training and placement events
- Engage diverse young people in our economic development boards
- Enhance Abilene's reputation as an agricultural center
- Enhance training for persons with disabilities
- Expand Abilene's performing arts center
- Financially support more programs to mentor young women and men in the trades
- Focus on re-entry coalition and best practices for employment
- Help businesses grow their workforce from within through leadership and reinvestment
- Identify and make available useable properties for training or educational uses
- Improve high school graduation rates
- Incentivize companies to be open to hire (or provide job training) to people with disabilities or facing other challenges
- Include career choice -- "careers" vs. "employment" -- in public school education curricula
- Increase access to childcare
- Increase access to jobs for people with disabilities, for example, deaf services, college interpreter program, raising awareness of program(s)
- Increase capacity to train health professionals
- Increase STEM education; recruit companies hiring STEM candidates
- Make / enhance Abilene business-friendly



Appendix A: Community Ideas and Concepts

Cause Area #4: Workforce and Economic Development (Continued)

- Offer a broader spectrum of culinary training
- Offer alternative workweek schedules
- Offer Career and Technical Education (CTE) high school education
- Promote Abilene's relatively low cost of living in order to attract new businesses and skilled workers
- Recruit two to three major employers
- Review / revisit the existing economic development plan
- Revitalize vacant properties/buildings
- Support / create career education and job opportunities for high schoolers; help them explore job openings beyond college
- Update City Codes to be more employer-friendly

