

# Solano County Economic Development Strategic Framework

## Mission

Maintain a high quality of life by promoting sustainable economic development within Solano County.

## Vision

Solano County is the center of the Northern California/Nevada economic mega-region and serves as a hub for biotech, high-tech, medical, agriculture, food processing, and tourism.

The strong economy is driven by well-paying jobs, a well-educated and flexible workforce, and desirable communities that have a good jobs-to-housing balance. Schools offer excellent educational options from pre-kindergarten to the post-graduate level. Solano County has a high quality of life, low cost of living, abundant water, energy and open space, and a strong transportation network.

The County, cities, nonprofit partners and the State work together to maintain a climate friendly to economic development. The public/private partnership fosters each team member's unique attributes within the larger shared identity of the county.

## Goals

Diverse Economy

Quality Jobs

Educated Workforce

Quality Environment

## Primary Economic Drivers

Agriculture and Food Processing

Tourism

Energy

Logistics

Military Operations

Biological Sciences

Health Care

Local Small Businesses

## Requisite Strategies

Market Information

Recruitment and Retention

Education/  
Workforce Development

Infrastructure Development

Promotion and Branding

## Collaborative Planning and Implementation

Economic Development Corporation Coordination

Strategic Action Teams

City/ County Cooperation

# Solano County Economic Development Framework

## ***Introduction***

This framework, which identifies steps to improve the economy in Solano County, is the product of thousands of hours of work by hundreds of stakeholders. It envisions Solano County as the center of an economic trade area that stretches from San Francisco to Reno, and offers specific steps to achieve that vision. Still, it is just the beginning - the framework needs to be implemented. To that end, municipalities are talking, local economic development corporations are meeting, and action teams are busy working. Please read through this document and, if you are excited by the ideas, become involved by joining an action team or attending the next summit.

## ***Process***

The origins of the Solano County Economic Development framework began in 2007 when county officials and others began discussing ways to improve the local economy. They realized that to make significant changes, they needed to get a broad cross-section of the community to work together. They called together a meeting, the first Solano County Economic Summit to accomplish this.

More than 180 people from all walks of life in Solano County came together on Feb. 15, 2007 to help craft an economic vision for Solano County. They listened to experts. They listened to each other. They were enticed by the notion that Solano is the center of a mega economic region stretching from San Jose to Reno.

Throughout the all-day event, they tackled tough questions. “What are the issues facing Solano County related to the economy?” “What challenges do you see that might get in the way of a healthy economic future?” “What are the economic opportunities in Solano County?” “What promising prospects are there on the horizon?” All of these questions led up to a question designed to help shape a vision for economic development for Solano County. ***“The year is 2020. The Solano County economy has outperformed your wildest expectations. Describe what you see.”***

At the end of the day, the framework for a vision, mission, goals and objectives were in place. The expectation was the participants would – individually and in small working groups – focus on the different goal areas, and report back at the next economic summit on what they have accomplished.

Between summits, a group of education and business leaders met to talk about improving workforce development and the impact of education on attracting new businesses to the area. Other small groups made headway on tourism, streamlining permitting processes, agricultural revitalization, and a myriad of other initiatives that were spurred by the enthusiasm generated at our first Solano Economic Summit.

The Steering Committee added a fourth broad goal area, Quality of Life and Infrastructure Development, which they felt needed the same level of attention as the goals of Workforce Development, Education and Training; Business Retention, Recruitment, Marketing and Promotion; and Collaborative Planning and Leadership.

On June 19, 2007, approximately 120 people gathered to continue work on the Economic Development Framework. At this second summit, participants broke into action teams and identified specific projects and the steps needed to implement those projects. Each team tried to identify at least one initial project, along with the partners, key steps, resources needed, sources of funding, and project champions.

## ***Mission***

The purpose of this effort is to **maintain a high quality of life by promoting sustainable economic development within Solano County.**

## ***Vision***

Participants agreed upon the following vision statement:

Solano County is the center of the Northern California/Nevada economic mega-region and serves as a hub for biotech, high-tech, medical, agriculture, food processing, and tourism.

The strong economy is driven by well-paying jobs, a well-educated and flexible workforce, and desirable communities that have a good jobs-to-housing balance. Schools offer excellent educational options from pre-kindergarten to the post-graduate level. Solano County has a high quality of life, low cost of living, abundant water, energy and open space, and a strong transportation network.

The County, cities, nonprofit partners and the State work together to maintain a climate friendly to economic development. The public/private partnership fosters each team member's unique attributes within the larger shared identity of the county.

## ***Goals***

**Goal 1 – Diverse Economy** – Develop a diverse economy.

**Goal 2 – Quality Jobs** – Attract and retain high quality, well paying jobs.

**Goal 3 – Educated Workforce** – Ensure a well educated workforce.

**Goal 4 – Quality Environment** – Provide a high quality, livable environment (e.g., housing, parks, community facilities, open space, etc.).

## **Primary Economic Drivers**

Participants identified the following industries as driving Solano County's economy. This will be further refined as additional data is analyzed.

- Agriculture and food processing
- Tourism
- Energy
- Logistics
- Military operations
- Biological sciences
- Health care
- Local small business

## **Requisite Strategies**

There are five strategies that came out of the discussions from the two summits:

### **A. Market Information**

A plan must be based on a solid foundation, and reliable data provides this base. Answering basic questions about the economy, e.g. "What are the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce?" will guide future economic development decisions.

**A1. Industry cluster analysis.** Conduct research to refine the initial list developed at economic summits. Identify specific industries to target.

**A2. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats by sector.** Analyze conditions by sector. This analysis should help identify more specific steps and strategies.

### **B. Recruitment and Retention**

The first step in attracting businesses is having a friendly development climate. This will allow new businesses to come in and existing businesses to thrive.

**B1. Business attraction and retention program.** This project has two parts, assisting current businesses to thrive and attracting new businesses.

**B2. Agriculture enterprise zones.** Enterprise zones would provide incentives for farmers to invest in new buildings and equipment, assist farmers with marketing, and address regulatory constraints.

**B3. Streamlining regulations.** Identify and remove unnecessary regulations. Wherever possible, align local, state and federal rules to reduce unnecessary paperwork or conflicting requirements. Priority topics include water issues and the Delta.

## C. Education and Workforce Development

Having a productive workforce begins with pre-kindergarten education and extends through postsecondary schooling. It includes both basic job readiness and specific technical skills.

**C1. Youth Summit** - Conduct a meeting to find out what classes and careers students are interested in. Additionally, the youth summit will provide an opportunity to expose students to various career options. This project was the action teams' top priority, and the team members want to complete it during the next school year (2007/2008). The resources they need include people, capital and space. The Solano County Office of Education is a potential source for funding. The next step is to gather interested people, including youth, to plan the event. Carole Paterson, Dee Alarcón, Sherry Cordonnier and Kathy Hoffman offered to be project champions.

**C2. Career Academy** - Expand an existing program, currently offered in a limited number of schools in the county, to train high school students in the trades and potentially other professions. The program lasts two years, and includes a mix of classroom work and practical experience, mentoring, and other elements.

**C3. Teachers in the Workplace / Mentors in the Schools** - Create opportunities for teachers to work in subject-relevant jobs during the summer and for non-teachers to come into the schools as mentors. The goal is to bridge the gap that sometimes develops between businesses and schools.

## D. Infrastructure Development

Good infrastructure is, literally, the underpinning of Solano County's quality of life. It is important to make sure that transportation, water, electricity, and other utility needs of businesses are met.

**D1. Infrastructure inventory** – Examine current and predicted infrastructure needs in light of projected growth. Identify steps to address shortfalls.

**D2. Project development** – Develop a prioritized list of infrastructure improvements. Identify funding and implement these projects.

## E. Promotion and Branding

Promotion and branding are key steps in this framework. Ensuring that Solano County is a great place to visit, live, work or locate jobs is the first step; publicity is the next step. There are two distinct targets of the promotions and branding campaign: business leaders and tourists.

**E1. Branding.** Identify Solano County's preferred core identity and methods of publicizing those characteristics.

**E2. Business awareness campaign.** Educate business leaders about the advantages of relocating to Solano County.

**E3. Destination Solano County.** Market Solano County to potential tourists.

### ***Collaborative Planning and Implementation***

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure a strong economy. The County and other sponsors will continue to bring stakeholders together on a regular basis to evaluate progress and reassess the goals. Additionally, there are three major vehicles for implementing this framework:

- **Economic Development Corporation (EDC) Coordination** – The Solano County EDC will work with local EDCs to implement items in the plan.
- **Action Teams** – Action teams have already started to meet to implement projects. The County and other stakeholders will continue to support them. Some participants suggested starting a Solano County think tank to examine local economic issues more closely, and this idea will be studied carefully.
- **Governmental Cooperation** – Cities and the County will continue to participate in dialogues and collaborative projects to advance the framework.