



Southeast Alberta Economic Opportunity Strategy,
Implementation Framework and Action Plan
2025-2030

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Executive summary

A connected economic development ecosystem of organizations that collaborates, minimizes duplication, and maximizes efficiencies in service delivery is essential for regional competitiveness. Southeast Alberta has a strong network of economic development organizations that provide services in investment attraction, business retention and expansion, entrepreneurship and innovation, advocacy, and workforce development. The region’s six municipal partners are working together to explore opportunities for regional economic development, seeking to identify high-impact initiatives that will build the region’s prosperity and diversify the economy.

Recognizing that many organizations are engaged with economic development service delivery, the strategy emphasizes initiatives that would have the most significant impact and warrant substantial investment. The recommended priorities and initiatives are narrow in scope to ensure efforts are highly focused and incremental to the everyday economic development functions that are already carried out by organizations and municipal departments. They are also measurable to enable goal setting and progress tracking over time.

Strategic priorities for regional collaboration in southeast Alberta include those that are recognized as foundational to the success of all other priorities, and those related to sectors that offer high potential for growth, economic diversification and prosperity.



Labour availability is a current constraint to economic growth in southeast Alberta. To fully realize the region’s economic potential, talent attraction and retention must be a top priority for regional collaboration.

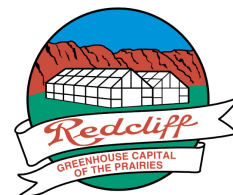
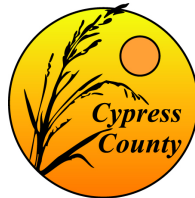
By concentrating regional efforts and resources on the sectors with the greatest potential to drive regional prosperity and growth, southeast Alberta can maximize the employment and investment benefits they offer. Identified through economic analysis and regional engagements, three high-potential sectors were selected: aerospace and defense, agriculture and agri-food, and tourism.

The action plan identifies 17 initiatives that align to the five priority areas. These are ambitious actions that might not be achievable without regional collaboration. The development of this strategy was informed by input and engagement of dozens of service providers, business leaders, elected officials, educators, and industry stakeholders. Their expertise and enthusiasm are needed to carry out many of the regional initiatives that are recommended.

A combination of operational models is recommended for implementation of the strategy and action plan. While most of the initiatives recommended in the action plan can be carried out as 'side-of-desk' responsibilities, some will require significant staff time and administrative leadership. In these cases, identification of a host organization is recommended. A five-year timeline is provided, along with suggested lead and potential partners. Some initiatives require significant investments, and potential funding sources are suggested.

To activate collaborative regional economic development opportunities in southeast Alberta, partner municipalities need to decide how they will work together, make decisions, and measure progress. A clear framework establishes a shared understanding of objectives and goals, while mitigating risks and leveraging resources.

This strategy and action plan can serve as a roadmap for southeast Alberta's economic development ecosystem. While participation in regional initiatives is encouraged, each organization can also support the priorities and initiatives through their individual strategies and operational plans. This strategy aims to propel the region into a leading economic center in Alberta. It will provide an opportunity to build trust, discover innovative solutions, and foster a consolidated and collaborative approach to economic development.



Introduction

How can a regional initiative support and leverage the work of southeast Alberta's economic development service providers to maximize outcomes? Can a focused, intentional approach to regional economic development increase competitiveness, job creation and prosperity?

Six municipal partners in southeast Alberta are working together to explore opportunities for regional economic development, seeking to identify high-impact initiatives that will build the region's prosperity and diversify the economy. Deloitte Economic Advisory was engaged to assist with the creation of a five-year Southeast Alberta Economic Opportunity Strategy, Implementation Framework and Action Plan that fosters and guides a collaborative approach to economic development.

Benefits of regional collaboration in economic development

When organizations collaborate, they can pool their knowledge, skills, and expertise. This can lead to innovative solutions and better decision making. Problems in economic development are often complex, and collaboration can bring together diverse perspectives and ideas, especially when partners expand their thinking by including organizations that might contribute new perspectives.

By combining these different viewpoints, organizations can develop a richer understanding of problems and find unique solutions or innovative service delivery approaches that address those problems from many angles.

For example, high schools offering career exploration programs can work with industry associations to help meet workforce needs of employers in growing sectors, leading to population growth, business expansion, and greater retention of intellectual capital in a region.

Agreements between municipalities and other organizations are often aimed at reducing duplication of work or benefiting from economies of scale. Economic development capacity varies between municipalities and other service providers. While budgets enable varying resourcing capabilities, collaboration allows neighbouring communities to share expertise in functional areas that are of regional benefit, such as Business Retention + Expansion (BR+E) programs, tourism development and marketing, and workforce development.



Southeast Alberta's economic development ecosystem

A connected economic development ecosystem that collaborates and maximizes efficiencies is essential for regional competitiveness. The region has a strong network of economic development organizations that provide services in investment attraction, business retention and expansion, entrepreneurship and innovation, advocacy, and workforce development.

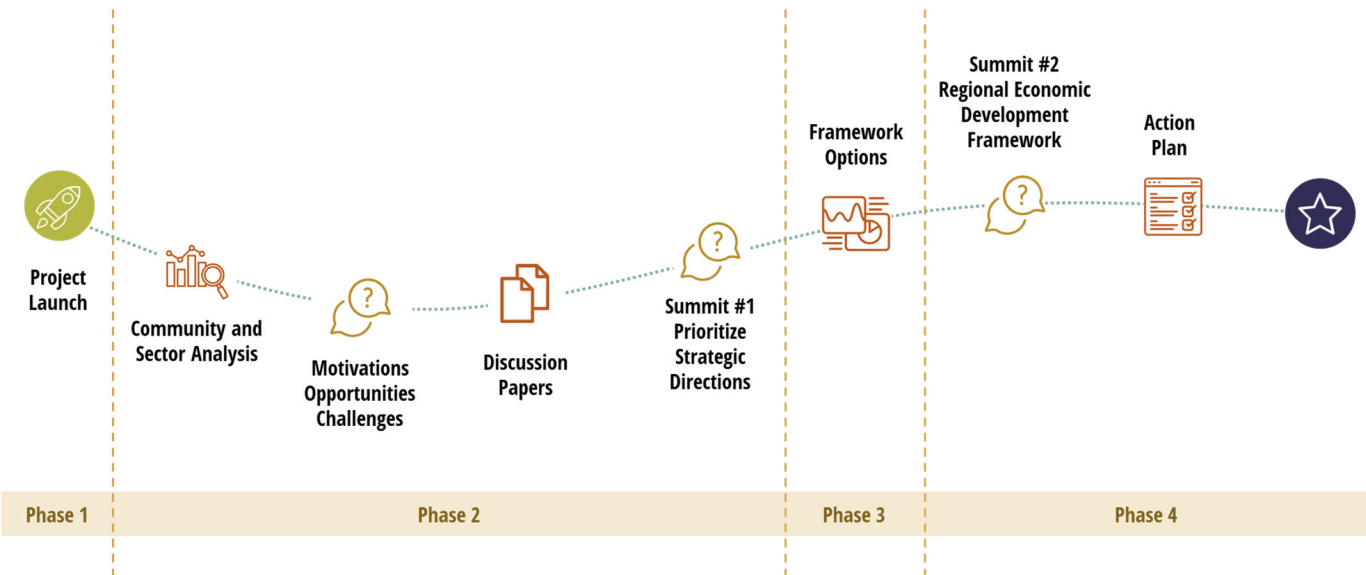
Many of the organizations listed below provide services and programs across the region, and some have a broader reach. Collaboration between service providers is strong, with many initiatives related to workforce development and business supports.

- APEX Regional Innovation Network
- Bow Island Chamber of Commerce
- Careers The Next Generation
- Community Futures Entre-Corp Business Development
- Cypress College
- Foremost Chamber of Commerce
- Medicine Hat Catholic Board of Education
- Medicine Hat College
- Medicine Hat College Centre for Innovation (C4i)
- Medicine Hat Local Immigration Partnership
- Medicine Hat Public School Division
- Palliser Economic Partnership
- Prairie Rose Public Schools
- Southeast Alberta Chamber of Commerce
- Tourism Medicine Hat
- Verge Economic Development
- YMCA Employment Centre
- Municipal economic development departments

Approach and methodology

The project was carried out through a four-phase approach that included a community and sector analysis and engagement with economic development service providers, businesses and municipal leaders to identify opportunities for regional economic development.

Figure 1: Project approach and timeline



The project's methodology included the following components:

Background review and economic base analysis

A review of background studies, reports and strategy documents was used to evaluate infrastructure readiness, workforce, economic trends, availability of land and business competition.

Mapping economic development services delivery in the region

A matrix was created to identify how organizations provide economic development services in the region through their core and non-core functions (e.g., entrepreneurship, tourism product development, visitor marketing, investment attraction, infrastructure development).

Strategic advisory panel

Deloitte's panel members provided insights on the potential of market trends to impact the region's economy. This was followed by a facilitated discussion with steering committee members to consider what implications those issues might have on the opportunities and challenges to work together.

Engagement with stakeholders

Between March and August 2024, the consulting team engaged with nearly 60 stakeholders including elected officials and senior staff of municipal governments, education providers, business owners and managers of economic development service organizations.

Discussion papers

Options for regional collaboration in foundational economic development service delivery areas and considerations for framework development were explored in a series of discussion papers. These discussion papers were provided to stakeholders as preparatory reading in advance of the two Summit workshops.

Regional Economic Summits

Two full-day workshops guided stakeholders through Design Thinking and Future Thinking exercises aimed at identifying strategic priorities and framework considerations.

Strategy and action plan development

Input from all sources has been analyzed to inform recommendations for strategic priorities and initiatives, along with recommendations on governance, operations, funding, and performance measurement.

Background analysis

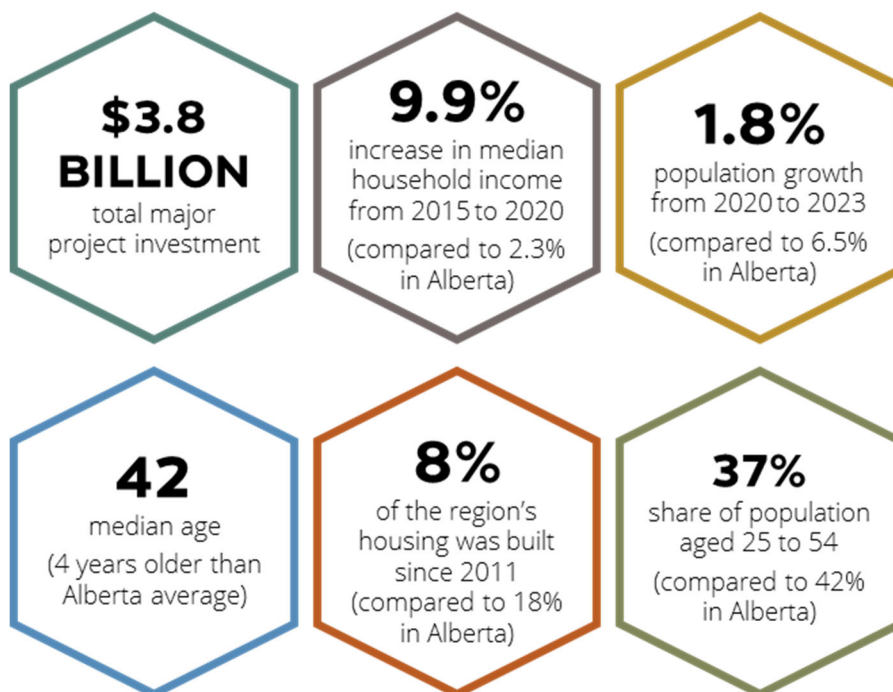
Background analysis for this strategy included a comprehensive review of regional economic data and research, extensive consultation with stakeholders, a SOARR analysis, and an examination of global disruptors and their impacts on southeast Alberta.

Regional economic analysis summary

Development of a profile of regional economic conditions in southeast Alberta began with a review of background studies, followed by a broader study of regional, provincial, and national trends. The region's service delivery ecosystem was mapped to identify the core and non-core functions of organizations providing economic development services.

An economic base analysis of relevant socio-economic indicators (demographics, income, workforce, and business climate) was completed to identify key patterns of change and trends in southeast Alberta. Highlights are shown below in Figure 2, and a detailed report summarizing the background review and economic base analysis is provided under separate cover (Economic Base Analysis, May 2024).

Figure 2: Data highlights for southeast Alberta (Census Division No. 1)





Demographics and Housing

The region had little or no population growth in the decade leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic but has rebounded with faster growth of 1.8% in total over the following three years. It continues to grow more slowly than most comparable Alberta regions.

The region has an older population (median age of 42 years) compared to the province of Alberta (median of 38). With modest growth in the region's population, combined with a persistent downward trend in natural increase and limited immigration levels, the region may face challenges meeting future labour demands.

Net migration to the region has been modest in recent years except for an upward spike in 2023 as national growth reached new highs and internal migration to rural areas increased. The region has fewer immigrants, including fewer economic immigrants, than comparable Alberta regions but has shown a strong recent increase in interprovincial migration.

Housing costs are lower in the region relative to most comparable areas and the housing stock is in good condition, although with a slower-growing population there has been less renewal of the housing stock in the last decade.



Employment and Investment

Employment has declined from its high in 2019 and is not expected to rebound to pre-pandemic levels until 2031. In 2022, employment in the region was estimated to be 41,318 jobs. The region's employment has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Industries that are most concentrated in the region relative to Alberta include a mix of chemical and rubber manufacturing industries, health and elder care, farming, national defense, and several service industries that cater to both locals and visitors (gas stations, retail stores).

The industries projected to see the largest employment increase by 2031 include hospitals, elder care facilities, dental offices, and several tourism-related industries including restaurants, traveller accommodations, and amusement and recreation industries. Industries projected to lose employment include farming and a variety of construction-related industries.

Major project investment in the region is very strong on a per capita basis, but entirely weighted toward clean energy projects. Most comparable regions have a more balanced mix of major investments that partly serve the local population through residential, retail, commercial, and tourism/recreation projects.

Engagement summary

Consultation with southeast Alberta's municipal leaders and staff, economic development service providers, business leaders, educational institutions, and community organizations revealed a consistent and widespread opinion that more collaboration is needed to build prosperity and growth. Through in-person and online engagements, participants were asked to describe their desired outcomes of economic development, and to explore possible opportunities and motivations for working together. The discussions also sought to understand:

- Potential challenges to a regional approach to economic development
- Economic development services that might benefit from a regional approach
- Barriers standing in the way of taking full advantage of opportunities

Community workshops

In March 2024, six engagement sessions were conducted in communities throughout the region, with a seventh session to gather input from economic development service providers. An overview of the region's economic profile and workforce characteristics was presented, followed by open discussions with municipal leaders, staff, business owners, and economic development professionals. Input collected from these sessions was used to develop activities for a Regional Economic Summit.

Service provider survey

Economic development partners were surveyed to identify service delivery gaps and overlaps in core economic development functions across the region. A total of 25 organizations were surveyed and nine organizations completed the survey, resulting in a 36% response rate and some preliminary data on service delivery.



What we heard: working together

Workshop participants were asked about potential opportunities and challenges of a regional approach to economic development. Advocacy was most frequently suggested as an area where a unified “one voice” approach would be more effective than individual efforts. Similarly, communities agreed that attraction of businesses and entrepreneurship/innovation would benefit from collaborative efforts, as the outcomes would be to the benefit of all. Some participants also indicated a desire for a singular point of contact for information, such as a “concierge” that would serve as a regional navigator or connector.



Advocacy

- Lobby provincial and federal governments for infrastructure development such as greater water access.
- Pursue provincial and federal investment similar to those offered by other provinces (for example the UAS site expansion).
- Advocate for regional and local needs related to provincial and federal decisions (e.g., ensuring new highways don't bypass towns).
- Explore possibility for development of a foreign trade zone and trimodal shipping hub similar to CentrePort Canada in Manitoba.
- Promote awareness of the good news stories coming out of the region (for example the 2023 drone conference).



Investment Attraction

- Other regions have succeeded in investment attraction through a cohesive effort.
- Identify ways to leverage existing industries, resources and logistical strengths (twinned highway).
- Explore development of regional foreign trade zone to reduce barriers for interprovincial and international trade.
- Ensure sustainability and alignment with values.
- Develop business park infrastructure with servicing to provide shovel-ready sites.
- Explore potential for regional water servicing options.
- Capacity for power, water, airshed needs to be openly shared.



Entrepreneurship & Innovation

- Develop high-value sectors (aeronautics, precision agriculture technology, green energy research).
- Work with post-secondary institutions to establish satellite campuses and programs related to driving and emerging sectors such as precision agriculture, aeronautics and green energy.
- Support entrepreneurs through regional innovation hub.
- Build capacity with research through an applied research centre.



Tourism Development & Marketing

- Develop unique tourism experiences and packages.
- Continue to work with Medicine Hat Tourism to promote the region as a tourism area.
- Collaborate on Canada's premier food corridor and enhance opportunities to differentiate the region.
- Support the creation of a full-scale airport that supports growth of film and tourism sectors and further investment opportunities.



Business Retention & Expansion

- Make it easy to do business, with a concierge/navigator/connector.
- Potential desire for multi-leveled approach, with some BR&E functions at local level and others at regional level.
- Pay more attention to business retention and expansion. “We've chased smokestacks for too many years, but our growth will come from within.”
- Maintain regular and ongoing contact with businesses to understand needs and identify opportunities to collaborate with other businesses.
- Gain an understanding of regional services supporting main sectors through the City's industry-specific BRE program.



Workforce Development

- Focus on workforce strengths but work towards improving trades education and retaining youth to the community. More work-industry programming is desired in the trades.
- Create workforce development initiatives that retain youth in the region. The local school division is eager to collaborate.
- Align college programming with local needs (e.g., agriculture, health care).
- Housing and childcare opportunities will be important factors in workforce and industry attraction.
- Work toward creating science and technology jobs.
- Provide immigrant supports to match capabilities to industry needs.

Regional Economic Summit #1

A collection of five discussion papers was produced as a pre-read for a full-day session in April 2024 with the project steering committee, elected officials, businesses, post-secondary institutions, and workforce support organizations. The 54 participants engaged in a Design Thinking exercise aimed at identifying the most feasible and significant priorities for a regional economic development initiative. This exercise was followed by an open brainstorming session to identify other pain points and potential solutions. Input from these activities was compiled and analyzed, producing a list of potential strategic directions.

Service provider interviews

To gain a deeper understanding of how the potential strategic directions identified during the summit might align with or complement the work already underway in southeast Alberta, one-on-one interviews were conducted with eleven economic development service providers. Questions were designed to validate issues that were identified during the regional economic summit, to recognize initiatives and services that already fulfill the potential solutions, and to revisit motivations and opportunities for a regional initiative.

Regional Economic Summit #2

More than 35 of southeast Alberta's economic development professionals and municipal leaders met for a full-day summit to explore options for a regional economic development framework. The objective of the day was to identify ways to work together, make decisions, and measure progress in regional economic development. A discussion paper distributed in advance explored the benefits of collaboration, operational and governance models, funding considerations, and measurement options. Case studies provided profiles of collaborative economic development initiatives in other jurisdictions.








SOARR analysis summary

The SOARR model of “appreciative inquiry” (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Risks, Results) represents an emerging leading practice in strategic planning. As a forward-looking model, the SOARR takes elements of what would traditionally be affiliated with a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and focuses on the risks and results.

Bringing risk and results into the conversation ensures that contingency planning receives due attention and that outcomes are reflected in an action-oriented, measurable manner. Further, analysis of strengths and aspirations can support the development of an asset-based community development model, in which identified opportunities can be leveraged, while understanding risks, subsequent, objectives and specific action steps are designed to respond to the desired results.

The SOARR model leverages insights gained through the trends analysis and community engagement, enabling a pivot from 'what has been learned' to 'what needs to happen' to support regional economic development in southeast Alberta. The concepts underpinning the SOARR analysis model are illustrated below.

S	Strengths What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of? What can we build on?	
O	Opportunities What our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?	
A	Aspirations What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve? What difference do we hope to make for all?	
R	Risks What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?	
R	Results How we know we are succeeding? What are the key goals we would like to accomplish to achieve these results?	

S

Strengths

What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of? What can we build on?

***Innovation and technology development***

Southeast Alberta boasts the Foremost UAS Test Range, which serves as a leading facility for testing and developing drone technologies. Additionally, the Canadian Forces Base at Suffield provides a platform for military research and development in the region.

Energy advantages

Southeast Alberta benefits from the availability of oil, natural gas, and hydrogen, which present significant investment opportunities. Additionally, the region enjoys an advantage in solar energy projects due to its high number of sunshine hours, making it an attractive location for solar energy development.

Transportation and market access

Southeast Alberta benefits from key transportation corridors, including the Eastern Alberta Trade Corridor and the North American Ports to Planes Corridor, which facilitate connectivity and access to global markets. Major transportation routes along Highways 1 and 3 further enhance the region's transportation network. Two ports of entry provide direct access to US markets.

O

Opportunities

What are our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?

***Economic resilience and diversification***

The twinning of Highway 3 between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat will enable further attraction of agri-food processors along Canada's Premier Food Corridor. Global demand for plant-based proteins has generated increased interest in protein derived from peas and legumes, which are primary crops in the region.

Tourism development

Southeast Alberta is a region rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, and unique experiences. With investment in infrastructure and development of new tourism experiences, the region can increase visitor spend and stay duration.

A**Aspirations**

What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve?
What difference do we hope to make for all?

***Service delivery collaboration and alignment***

Stakeholders in economic development will collaborate effectively. Businesses, job seekers, and potential investors will be able to find the information they need and navigate services easily.

Quality of life and population growth

Southeast Alberta's quality of life advantages will attract and retain residents. Immigration will support workforce growth and enhance the diversity of the communities in the region.

Increased visitation

Local businesses will benefit from visitor spending as new tourism offerings attract visitors to experience the region's attractions, events, and experiences.

Infrastructure enhancement

Highway improvements and airport expansions will support business expansion and attraction efforts.

R**Risks**

What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?

***Workforce shortages***

The slow recovery in employment and the stagnant population growth, along with an aging demographic and limited immigration, pose significant challenges to workforce availability. Workforce attraction and retention initiatives can reverse the downward trend.

Strategy implementation

Past strategies have been created but not fully implemented, leading to frustration and disengagement among stakeholders. An action plan with clear objectives and measurable outcomes can support implementation.

Infrastructure and resource limitations

The scarcity of water resources poses a challenge for industries in the region. Investment attraction efforts will depend on development of infrastructure to avoid water shortages.

R**Results**

How we know we are succeeding? What are the key goals we would like to accomplish to achieve these results?

***Enhanced collaboration and service alignment***

Southeast Alberta will have greater alignment in economic development service delivery, easing navigation for clients. Shared regional priorities will enable each organization to work toward shared goals.

Skilled workforce

High-priority sectors will see an alignment between the skills they need and the availability of skilled labour. This will contribute to population retention and increased overall prosperity. The net population of working-age people will increase.

Economic growth and sector development

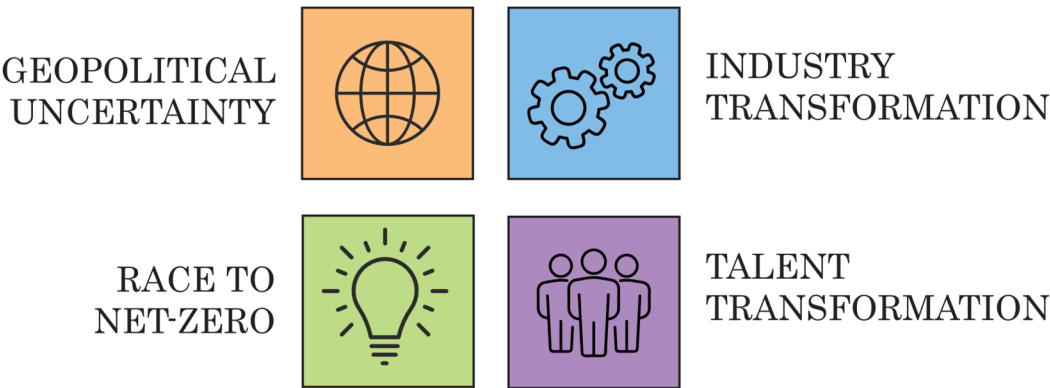
Southeast Alberta will see an increase in employment in high-potential sectors. Non-residential development will provide resources needed for municipal infrastructure and recreational facilities.



Global disruptions

The world has seen an intensification of significant political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental forces that have had considerable effects on economic and societal well-being. Felt across multiple sectors and regions, these forces are critical enough to require urgent response by business leaders and policy makers.

More than 35 of southeast Alberta's economic development professionals and municipal leaders gathered at Medicine Hat College in August 2024 for a second Regional Economic Summit hosted by the project steering committee. Through facilitated Future Thinking activities, they identified existing and emerging global disruptions that will have a significant impact on the high-potential sectors of agriculture and agri-food, aerospace and defence, and tourism. Issues identified during these discussions were analyzed and sorted into four themes:



Geopolitical uncertainty

A February 2024 survey by Deloitte found that 65% of Fortune 500 and Global 500 CEOs identified geopolitical instability as the foremost influential external issue expected to disrupt business strategies with the next year.¹ Global conflict and international trade tensions have ushered in a new era of geopolitical risk and uncertainty.

Global trade sanctions and protectionist policies have disrupted global supply chains. 64% of the businesses that Deloitte surveyed said their ability to operate has been negatively affected by supply chain disruptions, with the manufacturing sector most concerned.²

The impacts of geopolitical uncertainty could include both risks and opportunities for Canada. Identifying strategic parts of changing global supply chains where we could increase exports would help our allies diversify and build resilience, while bolstering our own economic growth.

¹ [Winter 2024 Fortune/Deloitte CEO Survey](#)

² [Global disruption in 4D: Exploring intersecting forces impacting Canada's future](#). Deloitte Future of Canada Centre.



Industry transformation

The explosion of advancements in AI, and generative AI in particular, has had a global impact on almost every sector. AI applications include everything from automating tasks using bots to enabling computers to answer complex, multi-tiered questions by “learning” from previous queries.

Precision agriculture, smart irrigation, and crop monitoring systems are examples of AI and machine learning technologies that help farmers make more informed decisions about their crops, livestock, and land. Data collected with sensors, drones, and other devices can be analyzed by AI algorithms to provide farmers with insights that can help them improve crop yields, adjust feed composition, or manage irrigation.

Oil and gas companies use generative AI to leverage predictive maintenance. By processing historical maintenance records and real-time operational data, AI can predict equipment failures before they occur.

The development of user-friendly tools and platforms has made AI much more accessible to individuals, startups and small businesses. However, Canadian organizations are lagging in adoption and development of AI technologies. While 90% of the businesses we surveyed said that adapting to technological change was a priority, only 15% are currently using AI.³ The impact could mean missed opportunities for AI-enabled economic growth and productivity gains.



Race to net-zero

There’s no question that the energy landscape of the future will be very different from today, driven by technological change, government policy, and market pressure on companies and investors to move toward net-zero solutions. Global investment in clean energy has risen by 40% since 2020 as countries diversify their energy mix.⁴ Demand for the critical minerals that are essential for many renewable energy technologies has also skyrocketed.

At the same time, there’s uncertainty around the long-term cost and effectiveness of some energy sources. While low-carbon hydrogen can be produced and used with little or no GHG emissions, its potential for adoption is yet unknown. Likewise, questions remain around the future cost and effectiveness of decarbonization technologies such as carbon capture, utilization, and storage.

The global shift to a low-carbon economy is certainly having a direct impact on Canada – and Alberta in particular. Exporting lower-emission energy, such as liquified natural gas (LNG), to countries dependent on higher-emission energy sources presents opportunities for improved global energy security, reduction in carbon emissions, and economic growth.

New energy development presents a range of impacts on southeastern Alberta, with investments of more than \$25 million in approved new solar farm plays expected to generate employment during construction phases, while a shift away from agricultural land use may have an impact on food production activities in the future.

³ [Global disruption in 4D: Exploring intersecting forces impacting Canada’s future](#). Deloitte Future of Canada Centre.

⁴ [World Energy Outlook 2023](#). International Energy Agency.



Talent transformation

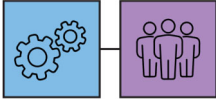
Since 2020, the world of work has changed dramatically. Around the world, employers are confronted by shortages of workers and skills gaps caused by rapidly changing skills needs, an aging population, and evolving worker preferences. Left unaddressed, the impact of this talent transformation will be seen in business innovation, growth and productivity, hurting overall competitiveness and potential.

74% of the organizations Deloitte surveyed said it's a challenge to hire employees with the skills they need.⁵ When we see increases in unemployment along with increases in job vacancies, it points to a mismatch between the skills the job seekers have, and those employers are looking for.

Baby boomers are now 60 to 79 years old. One of Canada's largest generations is retiring, driving down the labour force growth rate. Since more Canadians are leaving the workforce than entering it, we rely on immigration for almost 100% of our labour force growth.⁶ Meanwhile, since the pandemic, workers have become more interested in flexible work arrangements, and younger generations are looking for purposeful work.

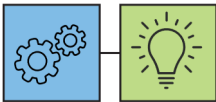
Opportunities—and risks—at the intersections

Disruptive forces don't exist in isolation. Influencing and amplifying one another, the intersection of forces creates new opportunities and risks. Analysis of how these forces interact enables us to identify emerging trends and anticipate future shifts in ways that may not be apparent when viewing the disruptions in isolation.



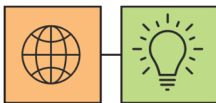
Industry Transformation + Talent Transformation

- Different skills are needed for new agriculture technologies (AI, GPS).
- Changing work and lifestyle preferences have led to declining interest in farming.
- Skilled trades will be needed for the aerospace and defence sector.



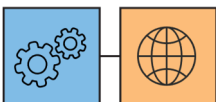
Industry Transformation + Race to Net-Zero

- A rise in ecotourism opens new opportunities for rural areas.
- GHG reduction has driven advances in precision agriculture technologies.
- Sustainable aviation goals are accelerating the development of alternative fuels, satellites and drones, and advanced air mobility (AAM).



Geopolitical Uncertainty + Race to Net-Zero

- Regulatory timelines and requirements can lead to delayed project development.
- International trade tensions can prompt supply chain disruptions.
- Global and federal electrification targets has fueled energy sector development.



Industry Transformation + Geopolitical Uncertainty

- There is an increased global demand for plant-based proteins.
- Canada's safe, stable reputation presents foreign direct investment opportunities.
- Travel restrictions may have a negative impact on tourism from important markets.

⁵ [Global disruption in 4D: Exploring intersecting forces impacting Canada's future](#). Deloitte Future of Canada Centre.

⁶ [New immigration plan to fill labour market shortages and grow Canada's economy](#). Government of Canada. February 14, 2022.

Strategic directions

Southeast Alberta communities are motivated to work together on initiatives that will transform and diversify the economy. While the efforts of individual communities and the organizations that serve the region’s businesses and workforce should not be disregarded, there are some initiatives that can only be achieved through well-planned and executed collaborative action.

The strategic directions identified in this report are prioritized based on an analysis of the region’s unique assets, stakeholder input, labour market data, and demographic projections. Recognizing that many organizations are engaged with economic development service delivery, the strategy emphasizes initiatives that would have the most significant impact and warrant substantial investment.

These priorities offer the six municipal partners opportunities to make a significant regional impact. They are narrow in scope to ensure efforts are highly focused and incremental to the everyday economic development functions that are already carried out by organizations and municipal departments. They are also measurable to enable goal setting and progress tracking over time. Performance measurement is essential to building stakeholder buy-in and ongoing support, and to ensure that efforts and resources are well-spent.

Strategic priorities for regional collaboration in southeast Alberta include those that are recognized as foundational to the success of all other priorities, and those related to sectors that offer high potential for growth, economic diversification and prosperity.

Figure 3: Strategic directions for southeast Alberta



Foundational priorities

Foundational priorities are essential to the economic growth and diversification of southeast Alberta, influencing the potential for all sectors. Regional collaboration in these two priority areas will leverage and support the ongoing efforts of existing economic development service providers. Initiatives related to these priorities might not easily fit with the mandate or resources of individual service providers, but are well-suited to a regional approach.



Priority 1: Activate industry-driven talent attraction and development.

A shortage of trained and qualified labour in skilled trades and agriculture in southeast Alberta was identified as a wide-spread concern, making it difficult to retain and grow businesses. Stakeholders described a “brain drain” resulting from limited local opportunities for youth after graduation from post-secondary education, while noting that many high school students (and their parents) show little enthusiasm in pursuing careers in the trades or in agriculture. A mismatch between the skills that local employers need, and the skillsets that jobseekers have, indicates a need to encourage youth to pursue training in high-demand occupations, and to highlight skills needs in attracting new residents and workers.

Labour availability is a current constraint to economic growth in southeast Alberta. To fully realize the economic potential, talent attraction and retention must be a top priority for regional collaboration.

Southeast Alberta’s education and workforce development service providers are already working together to close the skills gap to retain youth and meet current employment demands. In addition to its post-secondary programs, upskilling and reskilling initiatives, and corporate training programs, Medicine Hat College collaborates with the local school divisions to provide high school students a chance to explore seven trades pathways over a three-year period. Other innovative collaborations in the region include work programs for high school students in construction, agricultural technology, greenhouse management, aviation, and rodeo skills.

Educating employers, parents, and students about the benefits of work-integrated learning in southeast Alberta’s high-potential sectors can increase participation in these initiatives, and support retention of youth. However, youth retention will not be sufficient to meet projected labour demands. Attracting and retaining working age families to the region is also necessary.

Workforce attraction initiatives such as the Rural Renewal Stream of the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program are most successful when retention factors are considered. Building a culture of inclusion, both within and outside of the workplace, is essential. The Medicine Hat Local Immigration Partnership has successfully supported workforce retention through a project that focused on building a ‘circle of care’ for immigrants by

connecting them with community organizations, language service providers, health care providers, faith communities, and volunteer opportunities.



Priority 2: Align service delivery and speak with a unified voice.

Historic collaboration efforts have had mixed results and some stakeholders expressed frustration with repeated "restarting" of regional economic development. Some organizations are already providing service on a regional scale and are uncertain about the value of forming another regional economic development body. Others suggested that resistance to change might make it difficult to work together for mutual benefit.

Despite these hesitations, there is a renewed interest across most organizations and communities to work together to tap into the region's potential, citing a lack of collective advocacy, an absence of a united vision with shared priorities, and a recognition that smaller centres have had limited success in applying for grants and government incentives.

Several organizations are already working together on regional initiatives, and there is an overall desire to enhance communication and coordination between service providers. With a shared vision serving as a guiding star, organizations can plan their work knowing that each is contributing toward a common goal in their own way. In cases where several organizations perform a similar function, such as helping businesses navigate services, some believe that a more collaborative approach might improve the user journey for businesses, investors, newcomers, and workers.

Momentum will occur when all regional stakeholders are speaking from the same "playbook" and have aligned regional interests.

Business leaders, municipal leaders, and economic development professionals believe southeast Alberta can succeed in attracting provincial and federal investment for major projects if they work together as a collective. For many, this is the central purpose of a collaborative economic development effort, where rural communities and urban centres can leverage one another's strengths to achieve greater potential benefits for all.

Another advantage of working together is the united front that would be presented if municipal leaders, businesses, sector organizations, educational institutions, and businesses collectively advocate for infrastructure improvements and policy or legislative changes that would have an impact on southeast Alberta. With a strategic plan for communication with provincial and federal decision makers, such a group could speak on behalf of southeast Alberta with a strong, unified voice.

Understanding the needs and goals of the existing business base is essential to regional growth. Business retention and expansion (BR+E) initiatives are used to help individual businesses navigate available resources while providing important data used to measure business health at the sector and community levels, informing program and policy development. While several organizations are running their own BR+E initiatives, the data isn't shared between partners. A regional mindset can leverage the data to better understand concerns and potential investment attraction opportunities. Stakeholders also identified a need to streamline processes for new and existing businesses.

Regional initiatives to share information, support program navigation and alignment, and advocate for infrastructure development can improve service delivery outcomes and attract the major investments needed to diversify and grow southeast Alberta's economy.

Sector priorities

By concentrating regional efforts and resources on the sectors with the greatest potential to drive regional prosperity and growth, southeast Alberta can maximize the employment and investment benefits they offer. Identified through economic analysis and regional engagements, three high-potential sectors were identified: aerospace and defense, agriculture and agri-food, and tourism.



Priority 3: Propel the expansion of the aerospace and defence sector.

With Canada's largest restricted commercial airspace dedicated to Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) drone test flights, a research lab operated by Canada's agency for defence research and development at CFB Suffield, and significant airside and groundside business development potential at Medicine Hat Airport, southeast Alberta is a prime location for the aerospace and defence sector, presenting substantial opportunity.

Overall, the Canadian aerospace industry is #1 in research and development (R&D) investment with more than \$680 million invested in 2022, representing more than twice the total investment in all Canadian manufacturing industries.⁷ The Canadian aerospace industry's share of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) employment is also more than twice the national manufacturing average.⁸ According to Invest Alberta, the province's aerospace and defence sector includes more than 500 companies, with 25% of Canada's Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, geospatial data collection and analysis, and navigation and GPS firms headquartered in Alberta.⁹

Sustainable aviation R&D is also seeing significant investment, with \$1.75 billion earmarked by the Canadian government over seven years for sustainable aerospace projects like the \$350 million pan-Canadian, industry-led aerospace network planned by the Initiative for Sustainable Aviation Technology.¹⁰ The network will focus on funding collaborative R&D projects in four key technology areas: hybrid and alternative propulsion; aircraft architecture and systems integration; transition to alternative fuels; and aircraft support infrastructure and operations.¹¹

While the aerospace and defence sector has a significant presence in southeast Alberta, other regions in the province and across Canada are actively seeking investment and building supporting infrastructure. In 2024, an Aerospace Innovation Hub was launched in Calgary by the University of Calgary's innovation transfer and business incubator centre. With \$3.9 million in investments and industry partnerships, the Hub will provide funding, prototyping equipment, and business support to facilitate the development and scaling of innovative technologies in the aerospace sector. Similarly, Boeing has just announced a \$240 million investment to build a

⁷ https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/aerospace-defence/sites/default/files/attachments/2023/State_of_Canada_Aerospace_report2023_0.pdf

⁸ <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/aerospace-defence/en/trade-and-exporting/aerospace-and-defence-canada>

⁹ <https://investalberta.ca/ready-for-takeoff-albertas-aerospace-and-defence-sector-soars-over-the-competition/>

¹⁰ <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2023/06/canada-invests-350-million-in-national-sustainable-aviation-innovation-network.html>

¹¹ [Canada invests \\$350 million in national sustainable aviation innovation network - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2023/06/canada-invests-350-million-in-national-sustainable-aviation-innovation-network.html)

Montreal-area aerospace cluster,¹² backed by an additional \$85 million from the Quebec government in support of a plan to make the province a global leader in drone technologies and sustainable aviation. The province already claims 70% of Canadian aerospace R&D.

Existing infrastructure, regulations, and resources should be evaluated for strengths and gaps that would influence aerospace and defence decision makers. Creation of an inter-municipal designated industrial zone targeting defence and aerospace companies can position southeast Alberta as the defence and aerospace hub of Canada, while required investments should be prioritized for provincial and federal advocacy efforts.

Major players in the aerospace industry look for significant government investment, which is often tied to supply agreements. Securing commitments from provincial and federal government programs is essential when pursuing major investment attraction. Strong relationships at federal/provincial government and industry levels are needed.

Substantial financial investment is required to develop and carry out a sector development strategy and infrastructure assessment. Organizational leadership with knowledgeable and well-connected industry representation is needed to pursue investment and develop relationships.



If southeast Alberta wants to seize the opportunities presented by the aerospace and defence sector, it is critical that the region makes bold moves to strengthen its value proposition and build strong relationships with major players in the industry.

¹² <https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/news/boeing-anchors-415m-innovation-zone-133401430.html>



Priority 4: Attract investment in value-added agri-food production.

Transformation of the agriculture and agri-food sector is driven by increasing global demand for plant-based proteins, advancements in agri-food technologies, and challenging weather patterns. Three key areas of opportunity arising from these global forces are export development, agribusiness investment attraction, and agriculture technology.

Population growth and increased awareness of the dietary benefits of plant-based proteins have fueled a rising global demand for plant-based proteins, presenting a significant opportunity for agricultural exporters. With strengths in legume and pulse production, southeast Alberta is well-positioned to develop, process, and export high-quality plant-based protein products.

The twinning of Highway 3 from Lethbridge to Medicine Hat will accelerate much-needed expansions of infrastructure feeding the region's supply of potable water, creating a major opportunity to extend or leverage the agri-food zone between Lethbridge and Taber that has been branded as Canada's Premier Food Corridor (CPFC).

Focusing on agricultural inputs that are not common along the CPFC, such as lentils and chickpeas, can advance the extension and diversification of the corridor, while benefiting from proximity to established food processing suppliers and service providers.

Southeast Alberta has an opportunity to align itself with current agriculture initiatives regionally, provincially, and federally to leverage its food production strengths.

The first net-zero plant processing facility in North America is set to be built in Strathmore. Construction costs for the \$225 million pea processing facility will be offset with a \$10 million contribution from Emissions Reduction Alberta and an additional \$1 million contribution from federal and provincial governments through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) to support engineering costs and the purchase of equipment.

A \$20 million yellow pea processing pilot facility in Lethbridge that opened in 2022 with a \$1 million CAP contribution was quickly expanded to a new \$150 million facility, creating 100 new jobs. Meanwhile, a \$160 million pea processing operation is set to be built in Red Deer County, with a \$5.7 million investment from Protein Industries Canada.

Advancements in precision agriculture, irrigation, and controlled environment (greenhouse) systems enable the sustainable and resource-efficient farming practices that will not only increase yields and reduce losses in southeast Alberta but are also in global demand. The commercialization of Alberta-made agri-food and agricultural technologies presents significant high-value export opportunities.





Priority 5: Boost the economic impact of regional tourism offerings.

Southeast Alberta is a region rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, and unique experiences. With investment in infrastructure and development of new tourism experiences, the region can increase visitor spend and stay duration.

Agritourism presents an exciting opportunity for southeast Alberta, given its strong agricultural base. Farm stays, tours, and seasonal events allow visitors to experience the region's agricultural heritage first-hand. Visitors can participate in farm activities, pick fresh produce, or learn about sustainable farming practices, providing an immersive and educational experience.

Southeast Alberta has an opportunity to develop innovative tourism experiences that highlight the region's heritage, outdoor adventure, big sky, and agri-food offerings.

Southeast Alberta's rich history and cultural heritage offer a wealth of opportunities for heritage tourism. Developing or enhancing tourism experiences that align with the region's identity and connect to its culture can transport visitors back in time. The abundance of wildlife and pristine fishing spots in southeast Alberta make it an ideal destination for hunting and fishing enthusiasts. The region could also build on existing partnerships with Indigenous communities to develop Indigenous tourism experiences.

The coulees, rivers, and cactus blooms that are unique to southeast Alberta provide a stunning backdrop for outdoor activities. Hiking, boating, mountain biking, and horseback riding opportunities attract adventure enthusiasts and nature lovers. A more robust southeast Alberta experience can be offered by packaging the region's experience offerings with revenue generating tourism product, such as food and beverage, accommodations, tours, and events.

The region's unique landscapes and cultural heritage offer an array of signature experience possibilities that can catch the attention of travel writers and global visitors. Medalta's "Dinner in the Kiln" experience is an excellent example of a unique culinary experience that could be a model for others, such as dining in the desert or dinner cruises on the South Saskatchewan River. Photography and astronomy tours would also provide a chance to immerse oneself in the region's distinct offerings. By promoting and developing these signature experiences, southeast Alberta can attract tourists seeking memorable and authentic encounters, driving economic growth and supporting local businesses.

Stakeholders said that people are unaware of southeast Alberta and the opportunities it offers, limiting the region's potential for attracting businesses, investors, and workers. Regional marketing strategies that promote the region's natural resources, cultural heritage, and recreational activities can capture the attention of a wider audience.

Travel Alberta's *Lethbridge to Medicine Hat Tourism Development Zone (TDZ) Discovery Report* calls for tourism product development and increased collaboration beyond southeast Alberta's borders and between Medicine Hat and Lethbridge's destination management/marketing organizations (DMOs).



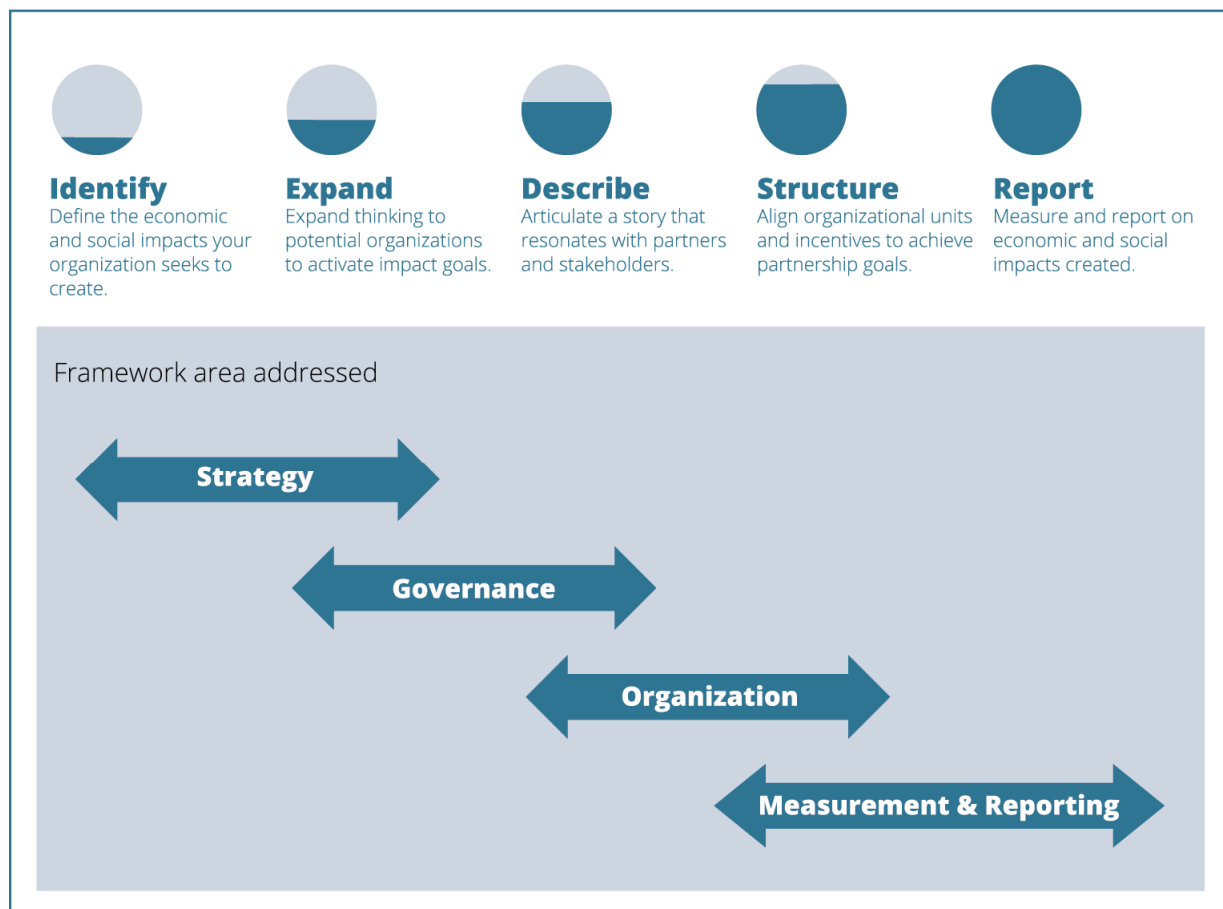
Implementation framework

A clear framework establishes a shared understanding of objectives and goals, while mitigating risks and leveraging resources.

To activate collaborative regional economic development opportunities in southeast Alberta, partner municipalities need to decide how they will work together, make decisions, and measure progress. Depending on whether partners are working on a short-term project or a continuous initiative over many years, a range of suitable framework options is available for consideration.

The formation of effective strategic partnerships follows a five-step process that begins with identification of desired impacts and continues with the identification of potential organizations that are motivated to work together toward measurable goals. As illustrated in the following diagram, this process is supported by four dimension that shape the collaborative effort's form and function: strategy, governance, organization, and measurement.

Figure 4: Strategic partnership roadmap



Adapted from *The Roadmap Toward Effective Strategic Social Partnerships*, Deloitte 2013.

Strategy

This dimension of the framework aims to identify what might be accomplished through a regional economic development initiative. Five strategic priorities were determined based on insights gained through a background analysis, assessment of local and global impacts, and intensive engagement with community leaders and service providers. The strategy is supported by an action plan that outlines the objectives and actions, leads and potential partners, and required resources. In the spirit of “form follows function,” these decisions around “what” might be accomplished will have an influence in decisions about “how” partners will go about carrying out the work— that is, considerations for governance, organization, and measurement and reporting.

Governance

The priorities and initiatives recommended in this strategy and action plan don't call for the formation of a new organization. Many of the initiatives can be carried out by working groups made up of economic development service providers, leaders in industry and education, and community champions. While there is great value in all regional partners sharing a vision and common understanding of regional growth priorities, each partner's involvement in individual initiatives can be greater or lesser depending on the fit with their existing mandate, capacity, and areas of expertise. The six-member steering committee that guided the development of this strategy and action plan, comprised of representatives of each of the partner local governments, would be a logical core group to oversee its implementation over the next five years. This group could be referred to as the Southeast Alberta Economic Opportunity Committee.

Recommendation: Maintain the core partnership of six local governments to guide the implementation of the Economic Opportunity Strategy and Action Plan.

A renewed ‘terms of reference’ document should be drafted, outlining the group's purpose, goals and responsibilities. Recommended terms are as follows:

- *Membership:* Membership will include a senior staff representative from each municipality, with authority granted by each member's council to implement the strategy and action plan.
- *Mandate and Scope:* The Southeast Alberta Economic Opportunity Committee will work to implement the Economic Opportunity Strategy and Action Plan.
- *Governing principles:* Committee members will develop a set of principles that will guide their work (collaboration, innovation, trust, etc.). Committee members will make decisions by consensus.
- *Roles and responsibilities:* As this is a regional initiative, members will make decisions that serve the best interests of the entire region rather than the interests of individual municipalities. Committee members will have due regard for regulations, bylaws and policies. Committee members will provide progress updates to their respective municipal leaders and request decisions where required. Committee members will not make decisions independently or speak on behalf of the committee. Committee members will select a chair. Resources required to conduct committee business will be contributed by each municipality ‘in-kind’.
- *Meetings and communication:* The frequency, date, and timing of meetings will be established by the committee. Meeting notes and agendas will be distributed by the chair or their designate.
- *Term:* Unless dissolved or renewed, the committee will operate from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2029.

Organization

Since the development of this strategy depended on the input and engagement of dozens of service providers, business leaders, elected officials, educators, and industry stakeholders, it would be effective to their expertise and enthusiasm to carry out many of the recommended regional initiatives. A combination of operational models is recommended for implementation of the strategy and action plan.

While most of the initiatives recommended in the action plan can be carried out as ‘side-of-desk’ responsibilities, some will require significant staff time and administrative leadership. In these cases, identification of a host organization is recommended.

Recommendation: Identify organization(s) to serve as administrative lead for some initiatives.

Initiatives that require significant staffing or project management leadership should be carried out by one or more willing organizations with available resources. Examples include hosting online platforms, coordinating data collection, and delivering BR+E programs. These initiatives may be funded through grants and/or contributions from municipal partners.

One municipality might lead purchasing and legal responsibilities, with a shared services agreement articulating a clearly defined scope of services and provisions for funding and reporting.

Recommendation: Establish sector-focused working groups to carry out action plan projects.

Each group should include 4-6 individuals from the broader economic development ecosystem with operational expertise relevant to the group’s area of focus. Working groups should meet regularly according to the needs of the projects they are working on, and meetings should be attended by a representative of the Southeast Alberta Economic Opportunity Committee who will report back to the committee. The purpose of the working groups is to get things done, so members should have the capacity to carry out work between meetings.

A project charter should set out the scope of work, deliverables, timeline and milestones. The charter should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the project team members, as well as decision-making processes, communication channels and reporting requirements. Project charters often include potential risks, constraints, or challenges that could impact the project’s success.

Financial implications

Revenue sources for regional economic development initiatives can include core operating funding or project-based grants from municipal, provincial or federal governments, as well as contributions from local businesses, community organizations, sector associations or education providers. Contributions from partners can be structured as equal shares or weighted based on use, population size, or property tax base. Funding can also come from direct tax levies imposed on residents or businesses. Partner contributions may also consider the value of in-kind contributions, where partners provide office space, staff, or equipment.

Many of the initiatives in this strategy and action plan are projects that align with the priorities of federal and provincial grant programs. Some grant programs can provide 100% of a project's costs, while others require contributions from the applicant. Wherever possible, grant applications should include administrative costs of 10-15% of the budget to account for time spent managing the project.

Grant programs are competitive, with limited available resources. The ability to advance many of the projects in this strategy depend on successful applications for funding. Some projects may be deferred to future years or cancelled if funding doesn't materialize. In these cases, anticipated applicant contributions will not be required.



Recommendation: Set an annual contribution amount for partner municipalities that will be contingent on successful grant applications.

The recommended funding model is an annual contribution from each of the six municipalities, with a base of \$2,000 per year plus an amount based on total non-residential assessment and population. Suggested partner contributions relate to costs not expected to be covered by grant funding. The action plan identifies costs for each recommended initiative.

Performance measurement

Developing a performance measurement framework for a regional economic development initiative is vital for accountability, evidence-based decision making, continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, and benchmarking. It enables regions to measure their progress, make data-driven decisions, and enhance their economic development efforts for long-term success. Measuring progress fosters transparency and allows for effective communication between partners, providing a basis for reporting and sharing updates on the outcomes and impacts of economic development initiatives.

Four categories of performance indicators can be considered:

- **Output:** Measuring activity helps ensure that shared resources are being utilized as agreed and that actions are aligned with the desired goals.
- **Outcomes:** Measuring progress allows for the evaluation of the effectiveness of different strategies and interventions. It helps identify what is working and what is not, enabling stakeholders to learn from their experiences and make informed decisions for future initiatives.
- **Quality:** By understanding which aspects of economic development are progressing and which are lagging, stakeholders can make informed decisions about resource allocation to maximize results.
- **Concordance:** Demonstrating the overall value of a partnership to each organization is measured by identifying its contribution to each partner's own goals.

Recommended performance metrics for this strategy and action plan, which should be collected at the regional level as well as for each partner municipality, include:



Net growth in prime working-age population



Participation in work-integrated learning



Recruitment Conversion rate



Net promoter score



Number of data inquiries



Number of service referrals



Event attendance



Successful advocacy outcomes



Industrial assessment in sectors of focus



New jobs created in sectors of focus



Number of investment projects








Increase in tourism revenue

ACTION PLAN 2025-2030

Action plan



Regional coordination can make it possible to pursue major economic development projects, leverage program funding, and maximize existing resources. The six municipalities in southeast Alberta are collaborating to advance high-impact initiatives that will build the region's prosperity and diversify the economy.

This action plan will serve as a roadmap to guide partners over the short, medium and long term. Community validation input was used to mark initiatives as urgent, high or medium priority. Lead and potential partner organizations are identified along with estimated financial and human resources requirements.

PRIORITIES									
 Activate industry-driven talent attraction and development.		 Align service delivery and speak with a unified voice.		 Propel the expansion of the aerospace and defence sector.		 Attract investment in value-added agri-food production.		 Boost the economic impact of regional tourism offerings.	
ACTIONS	Create and implement a population attraction marketing campaign and website.	Coordinate service delivery and enhance navigation of programs and services for businesses and jobseekers.	Identify specific barriers to investment attraction in the aerospace and defence sector.	Establish a collaborative protein processing project supported by a Protein Supercluster investment.	Spark the development of innovative tourism experiences, activities and events.				
	Support recruitment efforts in high-priority sectors with targeted online outreach.	Develop information sharing tools and events for economic development service providers.	Position southeast Alberta as the defence and aerospace hub of Canada.	Build investment attraction skills and knowledge through workshops and coaching.	Develop and promote culinary tourism experiences.				
	Increase participation in work-integrated learning and youth apprenticeship programs in high-priority sectors.	Advocate for major infrastructure investments.	Identify and boldly pursue potential aerospace and defence investment.	Develop and implement an agriculture and agri-food sector investment attraction strategy.	Elevate the online profile of the region's travel offerings.				
			Establish an Advanced Aviation Innovation Centre of Excellence.	Conduct a BREIS with producers and processors in the agriculture and agri-food sector.					








Priority 1: Activate industry-driven talent attraction and development.

Objective and actions	Financial considerations	Performance Metrics
<p>1.1 Create and implement a population attraction marketing campaign and website.</p> <p>Replicate and re-brand the “Move to Medicine Hat” campaign on a regional scale to provide workers, investors and entrepreneurs with information about opportunities in high-potential sectors.</p> <p>Supplement website with regional job postings (embedded from online job boards) and businesses for sale in southeast Alberta (enable realtors and businesses to create accounts and upload listings).</p> <p>Create a library of professional video and photo assets highlighting the region’s lifestyle and careers, with a focus on young adults and families. Emphasize the aerospace and defence, agriculture and agri-food, and tourism sectors.</p> <p>Produce an 8-page workforce attraction booklet featuring housing options and costs, unique facts, recreational amenities, career spotlights, and cultural organizations. Distribute through realtors and at festivals and events.</p> <p>Form an ambassador brigade of people who have moved to the region within the past five years, and invite them to attend lifestyle show events, trade shows and festivals in other communities with a pop-up display.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-3 years Priority: High Lead: Workforce development working group</i></p>	<p>Video and photos: \$30,000</p> <p>Website and marketing materials: \$50,000</p>	 <p>Net growth in prime working-age population (25-54 years)</p>
<p>1.2 Support recruitment efforts in high-priority sectors with targeted online outreach</p> <p>Develop a social media campaign and Google ads and serve them to people working in high-priority sectors in Alberta and other provinces, and those who have viewed websites such as indeed.com, albertaiscalling.ca and alis.alberta.ca Direct the link to the regional workforce attraction website.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years Priority: Moderate Lead: Economic Opportunity Committee</i></p>	<p>Social media campaign: \$20,000</p>	 <p>Recruitment conversion rate</p>

Objective and actions	Financial considerations	Performance Metrics
<p>1.3 Increase participation in work-integrated learning and youth apprenticeship programs in high-priority sectors.</p> <p>Actively convene meetings with industry groups to identify the essential skills that employers need from entry level employees in aerospace and defense, agriculture and agri-food, and tourism sectors. Leverage existing BR+E programs and other industry engagements to highlight current and emerging skills shortages and requirements.</p> <p>Attend industry events and meet with employers to share the benefits of work-integrated learning, and learn how to optimize placements for improved outcomes.</p> <p>Increase educator and parental awareness of career options in high-potential sectors and provide information about existing learning pathways and programs. Develop a paid social media advertising campaign targeted toward parents and youth. Provide website content and images to education partners and industry associations.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 3-4 years Priority: Moderate Lead: Economic Opportunity Committee</i></p>	<p>Social media campaign: \$30,000</p>	 <p>Number of people participating in work-integrated learning</p>








Priority 2: Align service delivery and speak with a unified voice.

Objective and actions	Financial considerations	Performance Metrics
<p>2.1 Coordinate service delivery and enhance navigation of programs and services for businesses and jobseekers.</p> <p>Create a mobile-friendly, self-service online portal to guide businesses and jobseekers through their user journey and connect them to appropriate economic development services and programs. An integrated CRM system would support referrals between service providers.</p> <p>Support advocacy efforts and collaboration between service providers by sharing infrastructure capacity and future needs, and community- and sector-level BR+E summaries.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-5 years Priority: High Lead: Economic Opportunity Committee</i></p>	<p>Annual platform fee: \$30,000-\$50,000/year</p>	<p> Number of service referrals</p> <p> Investment inquiry conversion rate</p>
<p>2.2 Develop information sharing tools and events for economic development service providers.</p> <p>Host regional economic summits twice yearly to discuss the strategy's progress and engage service providers in next steps.</p> <p>Create a private LinkedIn group for the region's service providers, enabling sharing of new programs and services, upcoming events, funding opportunities, and discussions.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-5 years Priority: Moderate Lead: Economic Opportunity Committee</i></p>	<p>\$5,000/year</p>	<p> Event attendance</p> <p> Online engagement</p>
<p>2.3 Advocate for major infrastructure investments.</p> <p>Identify and pursue major infrastructure projects that support business needs and population growth, including such things as airport expansion, highway twinning, drought mitigation infrastructure, and broadband internet.</p> <p>Facilitate research and discussion on issues, recommend position statements, and propose unified messaging. Prepare communications materials for internal and external audiences.</p> <p>Arrange and attend meetings with decision makers at all levels of government.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 3-5 years Priority: High Lead: Economic Opportunity Committee</i></p>	<p>Travel and meeting expenses: \$2,000/year</p>	<p> Successful advocacy outcomes</p>






Priority 3: Propel the expansion of the aerospace and defence sector.





Objective and actions	Financial considerations	Performance Metrics
<p>3.1 Identify specific barriers to investment attraction in the aerospace and defence sector.</p> <p>Research site selector requirements in the aerospace and defence sector and assess the region's strengths and gaps. Factors affecting ability to attract investment may include infrastructure capacity, resource availability, input costs and incentives, skills availability, site readiness, environmental management requirements, and municipal zoning, permitting and bylaws.</p> <p>Develop and implement an action plan to address identified barriers through strategic alliances or advocacy.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years Priority: High Lead: Aerospace and defence working group</i></p>	<p>Consultant fees: \$75,000</p>	 <p>Completion of investment readiness assessment and action plan</p>
<p>3.2 Position southeast Alberta as the aerospace and defence hub of Canada.</p> <p>Initiate development of a designated industrial zone targeting defence and aerospace companies.</p> <p>Produce a professional photography and video library featuring the industry, educational and research assets in southeastern Alberta.</p> <p>Conduct a comparative analysis with similar regions and determine the region's value proposition, development capacity, and assets.</p> <p>Develop an investment attraction strategy and tools (pitch book, pitch deck, pitch video) and a trade show strategy (prospect identification, trade show selection).</p> <p>Work closely with provincial and national investment attraction organizations to ensure that southeast Alberta is top-of-mind when working with potential investors.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years Priority: High Lead: Aerospace and defence working group</i></p>	<p>Consultant fees: \$75,000</p>	 <p>Industrial assessment from aerospace investments</p>  <p>New jobs created in aerospace and defence organizations</p>

Objective and actions	Financial considerations	Performance Metrics
<p>3.3 Identify and boldly pursue potential aerospace and defence investment.</p> <p>Join the Alberta government at international aerospace and defence conferences, trade shows, B2B meetings and networking events.</p> <p>Research and select prospective companies for proactive outreach. Provide trade show training to aerospace and defence investment attraction team, including prospect outreach, intelligence gathering, and relationship management.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 2-3 years Priority: High Lead: Aerospace and defence working group</i></p>	<p>\$20,000</p>	 Number and value of aerospace and defence investment projects
<p>3.4 Establish an Advanced Aviation Innovation Centre of Excellence.</p> <p>The Centre should include a training academy and state-of-the-art facilities for companies engaged in late-stage research, development and commercialization of technologies in transportation, defence, and agriculture.</p> <p>Work with government to identify potential Industrial and Technological Benefits (ITB) projects related to defence and security procurement.</p> <p>Form alliances between industry, research organizations, government, and post-secondary institutions to develop and commercialize new technologies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS)/drones • Remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) • Advanced air mobility (AAM) • Urban air mobility (UAM) • Electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) <p>Secure substantial funding (\$10M+) from federal and provincial governments, research organizations, and industry partners.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 2-5 years Priority: Urgent Lead: Aerospace and defence working group</i></p>	<p>Feasibility study: \$100,000</p> <p>Travel expenses: \$5,000</p>	 Financial contributions  Centre of Excellence is opened






Priority 4: Attract investment in value-added agri-food production.

Objective and actions	Financial considerations	Performance Metrics
<p>4.1 Establish a collaborative protein processing project supported by a Protein Supercluster investment.</p> <p>Work with Protein Industries Canada to establish a consortium with an international protein processor and local producers, to develop new ingredients and food products, and optimize processing efficiencies.</p> <p>This initiative will involve travel to meet with potential consortium partners and to host incoming site visits.</p> <p>The objective is to secure funding and investments to build a plant protein processing plant in southeast Alberta. Similar projects recently announced in other jurisdictions range between \$150 million and \$225 million.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-3 years Priority: High Lead: Agriculture and Agrifood Working Group</i></p>	<p>Project travel expenses: \$15,000</p>	<p> Financial contributions</p> <p> Plant processing plant is opened</p>
<p>4.2 Build capacity to attract investment</p> <p>Work with Invest Alberta to develop skills in identifying a unique value proposition, finding investment opportunities, and preparing for community tours with potential investors.</p> <p>Form a site visit team (elected officials, business leaders, and investment attraction staff) to coordinate and deliver community tours with potential investors.</p> <p>Revise community profile information and materials to meet the needs of site selectors and potential investors.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years, Priority: High Lead: Agriculture and Agrifood Working Group</i></p>	<p>\$5,000 Costs – photog, print, design, research? Is Invest Alberta free?</p>	<p> Creation of community profiles and site visit team</p>

Objective and actions	Financial considerations	Performance Metrics
<p>4.3 Develop and implement an agriculture and agri-food sector investment attraction strategy.</p> <p>Conduct a comparative analysis with similar regions and determine the region's value proposition, development capacity, and assets.</p> <p>Research and select prospective companies for proactive outreach. Arrange opportunities to meet, either at conferences and trade shows, or through meetings.</p> <p>Develop investment attraction tools (pitch book, pitch deck, pitch video) and an engagement strategy.</p> <p>Join provincial and national trade missions and build network by attending conferences, trade shows and events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant Forward • Pulse & Special Crops Convention • Gulfood (Dubai) <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years, Priority: Urgent Lead: Agriculture and Agrifood Working Group</i></p>	<p>Consultant fees: \$100,000</p>	 <p>Industrial assessment from plant-protein processing investments</p>  <p>New jobs created in plant protein processing organizations</p>
<p>4.4 Conduct a BREIS with producers and processors in the agriculture and agri-food sector.</p> <p>Assess adoption of precision agriculture and sustainability technologies in production and processing. Quantify recent and potential investment in these technologies and identify barriers to adoption (skills/financial/awareness).</p> <p>Identify value chain opportunities (suppliers/markets) emerging from global shifts in food production.</p> <p>Assess current and future workforce needs and skills requirements.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years, Priority: Urgent Lead: Agriculture and Agrifood Working Group</i></p>	<p>\$25,000</p>	 <p>Number of business visits</p>  <p>Investment in agriculture and sustainable technologies (\$)</p>



Priority 5: Boost the economic impact of regional tourism offerings.

Objective and actions	Financial considerations	Performance metrics
<p>5.1 Spark the development of innovative tourism experiences, activities and events.</p> <p>Host tourism product development workshops and provide seed funding for new tourism experiences and activities that leverage the region's heritage, outdoor adventure, big sky, and food and beverage offerings. Focus on creating experiences and products most appealing to the "curious adventurer" and "hotspot hunter" high-value target travellers identified by Travel Alberta in the Lethbridge to Medicine Hat Tourism Discovery Zone Discovery Report.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years, Priority: High Lead: Regional destination development working group</i></p>	\$50,000	 <p>New tourism revenue generated</p>
<p>5.2 Develop and promote culinary tourism experiences.</p> <p>Support businesses and cultural organizations in the development of new culinary tourism offerings through a program that includes workshops on food tourism basics, agritourism, partnership development, and promotion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate familiarization tours so businesses and organizations can experience offering from neighbouring regions. Build a culinary "food trail" unique to southwest Alberta's culture and traditions with linkages along Canada's Premiere Food Corridor. Produce professional photography and video assets, and develop marketing materials and online content. <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years, Priority: High Lead: Regional destination development working group</i></p>	\$75,000	 <p>Social media engagement</p>
<p>5.3 Elevate the online profile of the region's travel offerings.</p> <p>Conduct a scan of travel information websites (e.g., travelalberta.com, tripadvisor.com, driftscape.com) to confirm completeness and accuracy of content. Provide new photos and editorial where needed.</p> <p>Launch a 'net promoter score' campaign to increase reviews and ratings (Tripadvisor, Google, etc.) Work with businesses to help them understand the benefits of gathering reviews from customers and the impacts on travel planning.</p> <p><i>Timeline: 1-2 years, Priority: Moderate Lead: Regional destination development working group</i></p>	\$4,000	 <p>Number of social media reviews</p>

Appendix A: Action plan timeline and budget

Initiative	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	Lead
2.2 Develop information sharing tools and events for economic development service providers.	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	Economic Opportunity Committee
3.1 Identify specific barriers to investment attraction in the aerospace and defence sector.	\$75,000					Aerospace and defence sector working group
4.1 Establish a collaborative protein processing project supported by a Protein Supercluster investment.	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000			Agriculture and agri-food sector working group
4.2 Build capacity to attract investment.	\$5,000					Agriculture and agri-food sector working group
4.3 Develop and implement an agriculture and agri-food sector investment attraction strategy.	\$100,000					Agriculture and agri-food sector working group
5.1 Spark the development of innovative tourism experiences, activities and events.	\$50,000					Regional destination development working group
1.1 Create and implement a population attraction marketing campaign and website.		\$80,000				Economic Opportunity Committee
1.2 Support recruitment efforts in high-priority sectors with targeted online outreach.		\$10,000	\$10,000			Economic Opportunity Committee
3.2 Position southeast Alberta as the aerospace and defence hub of Canada.		\$75,000				Aerospace and defence sector working group
3.3 Identify and boldly pursue potential aerospace and defence investment.		10,000	\$10,000			Aerospace and defence sector working group
4.4 Conduct a BREIS with producers and processors in the agriculture and agri-food sector.		\$25,000				Agriculture and agri-food sector working group
5.2 Develop and promote culinary tourism experiences.		\$75,000				Regional destination development working group
2.1 Coordinate service delivery and enhance navigation of programs and services for businesses and jobseekers.			\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	Economic Opportunity Committee
2.3 Advocate for major infrastructure investments.			\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	Economic Opportunity Committee
3.4 Establish an Advanced Aviation Innovation Centre of Excellence.			\$100,000		\$5,000	Aerospace and defence sector working group
5.3 Elevate the online profile of the region's travel offerings.			\$50,000			Regional destination development working group
1.3 Increase participation in work-integrated learning and youth apprenticeship programs in high-priority sectors.				\$15,000	\$15,000	Economic Opportunity Committee
Total	\$240,000	\$285,000	\$232,000	\$72,000	\$77,000	

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This report has been provided for the purpose of informing and assisting the City of Medicine Hat and steering committee partners develop a regional Economic Opportunity Strategy, Implementation Framework, and Action Plan for southeast Alberta.

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