

# **CEDS Committee Meeting 3 - Summary of Strategic Priorities Discussions**

## **Regional Brand and Image**

### **Strategies and Solutions**

Participants emphasized the importance of defining and communicating a unified regional brand that resonates with both internal and external audiences. Suggestions included amplifying positive narratives about the region's economic vitality, cultural diversity, and quality of life. Participants discussed aligning messaging across organizations to avoid fragmented or competing identities, and investing in consistent storytelling that celebrates the region's assets while addressing misperceptions. Expanding media engagement, social campaigns, and direct outreach to target audiences were seen as key to shifting perceptions and creating a stronger sense of place.

### **Key Partners and Organizations**

Participants identified marketing firms, chambers of commerce, destination marketing organizations, regional planning agencies, and large employers as natural partners in branding efforts. Higher education institutions, professional associations, and industry groups were noted as important messengers who can help amplify the brand to students, alumni, and sector networks. Local media outlets, tourism boards, and arts and culture organizations were also recognized for their role in conveying an authentic, compelling regional image.

### **Evaluating Progress**

Tracking the reach and resonance of regional messaging was seen as essential. Suggested measures included monitoring sentiment analysis, brand awareness surveys, website and social media engagement, and earned media coverage. Participants also proposed periodic perception studies with residents, business leaders, and external audiences to gauge changes in understanding and attitudes over time.

### **Key Takeaways**

There is a shared recognition that a cohesive and well-promoted regional identity can influence talent attraction, business investment, and resident pride. Success depends on collaboration among a broad range of partners and consistent, data-informed evaluation to refine the message.

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## **Talent Migration and Retention**

### **Strategies and Solutions**

Participants focused on building a stronger value proposition for living and working in the region, especially for young professionals, remote workers, and underrepresented populations. Strategies included promoting the affordability, lifestyle amenities, and career pathways available locally, while also investing in housing, childcare, and transit options that make relocation and retention more viable. Employer-driven initiatives to improve workplace culture, offer relocation support, and expand internship-to-employment pipelines were highlighted as important tools. Participants stressed the need to leverage alumni networks, diaspora connections, and targeted marketing campaigns to reach potential returnees and newcomers.

### **Key Partners and Organizations**

Universities, community colleges, and technical schools were identified as key to connecting graduates with local opportunities before they leave. Employers, workforce boards, and human resource associations can work together to design attractive recruitment and retention packages. Real estate professionals, local government housing agencies, and community organizations were seen as important in addressing quality-of-life and affordability factors. Social and professional networking groups, along with cultural and affinity organizations, can help foster a sense of belonging for new residents.

### **Evaluating Progress**

Participants suggested tracking migration flows through IRS and census data, monitoring employment retention rates, and gathering feedback from recent hires and relocated residents about their experiences. Evaluating the effectiveness of alumni outreach, relocation programs, and targeted marketing campaigns would help guide ongoing adjustments. Some proposed tracking remote work population growth and measuring engagement in community events as additional indicators.

### **Key Takeaways**

Retaining and attracting talent requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both professional opportunities and quality-of-life factors. Partnerships that connect employers, educators, and community stakeholders are critical to creating a welcoming, supportive environment for both newcomers and long-term residents.

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## **Startups and Innovation**

### **Strategies and Solutions**

Participants discussed strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem through accessible funding, mentorship, and supportive infrastructure. Expanding incubators, co-working spaces, and innovation hubs was seen as essential to fostering collaboration and accelerating business growth. There was strong interest in developing more sector-specific accelerators and industry partnerships that align with the region's economic strengths. Participants also encouraged targeted outreach to underrepresented entrepreneurs and reducing barriers to entry by streamlining permitting, licensing, and technical assistance. Increasing visibility of local startup successes was seen as a way to inspire and attract more innovators.

### **Key Partners and Organizations**

Key partners identified included venture capital firms, angel investor networks, small business development centers, and regional economic development organizations. Universities and research institutions can provide talent, technology transfer opportunities, and facilities for innovation. Corporations interested in open innovation and supply chain partnerships were recognized as important allies. Nonprofits, chambers of commerce, and trade associations can support networking, training, and advocacy efforts.

### **Evaluating Progress**

Measures of progress might include tracking the number and growth rate of startups, investment capital attracted, and participation in incubator or accelerator programs. Participants also suggested monitoring diversity metrics among founders, business survival rates, and job creation. Assessing the level of collaboration between startups, corporations, and research institutions could provide further insights into ecosystem health.

### **Key Takeaways**

A thriving startup and innovation ecosystem requires intentional investment in infrastructure, mentorship, funding access, and inclusion. Highlighting local entrepreneurial success stories can help build momentum, while ongoing evaluation ensures the ecosystem continues to meet the needs of founders across industries.