



Introduction

The Economic Strategy Project is the first-ever public-private partnership to perform an in-depth assessment for the San Luis Obispo County economy. Unlike other strategic plans, which act as a guide, the Economic Strategy is an ongoing work plan, implemented through countywide collaboration, under a governance structure and dedicated staff. The project is in its fourth year of implementation, and has transformed the region's approach to economic development.

Need

Equally important to supporting local businesses, through the economic downturn, was assessing the region's economic assets and growth capacities, and understanding the obstacles to growth, to prepare for the new economic opportunities that would emerge. This required a more sophisticated and proactive level of communication between private industry and local government.

Stewardship

Driven by private industry, with support of local government and a variety of stakeholder organizations, the project resulted in a sustainable and long-term economic model. This new and unified approach has served to broaden discussion on topics of competing needs, building consensus around a single goal, to achieve equity through a stronger and more diverse economy that supports the region's quality of life on the central coast, anchored upon its environmental assets.

Key Stakeholders:

- County of San Luis Obispo
- Economic Vitality Corporation
- Cities (7)
- Elected Officials
- Chambers of Commerce
- Workforce Investment Board
- Small Business Dev. Centers
- Visitors and Conf. Bureau
- Trade Organizations
- Investor Owned Utilities
- Educational Institutions
- Major Medical Centers
- Cluster Companies
- Media Partners
- Adjacent Counties

The Solution: Economic Strategy/Convening Public-Private Partnership

The Economic Strategy project is a true public-private partnership, with equity in funding and benefit. The initial data identified key industry sectors, which have historically generated the highest number of jobs and new business growth. Using the data as a foundation, over 125 business leaders, within six clusters of opportunity, provided input into a wide range of economic initiatives. In collaboration with a broad group of stakeholders, cross cluster action plans developed included specific strategies, and realistic and measurable outcomes. The endorsement of the Economic Strategy by the County Board of Supervisors resulted in an overarching guiding document, through a public-private collaboration to modify the County's Economic Element of the General Plan, aligning policy and the allocation of resources with, and support of regional economic goals.

Strategies

The Economic Strategy is an evolving plan that remains responsive and actionable. This requires frequent monitoring and communication with industry partners and local government. As a result, economic development initiatives remain informed, and engaged steward leaders and industry champions continue to emerge.

This framework for governance, implementation and advocacy, supported by dedicated staff, creates a recognized and dependable platform from which to launch significant initiatives. Through regional recognition of the project's accomplishments, the Economic Vitality Corporation is now able to mobilize key stakeholders and to act in a timely and nimble fashion. By leveraging capacity through collaboration, achieving more consistent regional branding, and taking a fresh look at legislative opportunities, the San Luis Obispo County region has become a leader in the State's economic recovery.

Key Collaborations:

- **Integrated Infrastructure Committee** - By convening this advisory committee of County staff and key industry stakeholders, critical decisions regarding the planning, prioritization, and finance of infrastructure now benefit from early-stage information related to private-sector investment opportunities, encouraging public-private partnerships, and resulting in short- and long-term planning efficiencies. As referenced, this work is ongoing.

Partners - County of San Luis Obispo, Economic Vitality Corporation, and the Building Design & Construction cluster companies.

- **Workforce Housing Task Force** - The findings of a countywide survey, to gain an understanding of employer/employee housing needs and preferences, became a point of reference for broad community outreach on the economic impact of housing. This outreach extended to each jurisdiction, informing current General Plan Housing Element updates. Recently, an Ad Hoc Workforce Housing Task Force convened to evaluate a broad range of opportunities to increase workforce housing. The advisory body will present findings and recommendations, and continue to advocate for and implement potential solutions related to policy, financing, and land use.

Partners - County of San Luis Obispo, Building Design & Construction cluster companies, Economic Vitality Corporation, Home Builders Association, Workforce Housing Coalition, Chambers of Commerce, and affordable housing developers.

- **Economic Analysis Program** – This one-year pilot program to develop a program framework and conduct economic analysis of discretionary permit projects was intended to communicate to decision makers the beneficial impact of development on local jobs, earnings, sales revenues and property values. The successful pilot resulted in the formal adoption of a voluntary economic analysis program, utilizing third-party service providers, at the discretion of the applicant. Formal program remains in process.

Partners - County of San Luis Obispo, Economic Vitality Corporation, and the Building Design & Construction cluster companies.

Major Results/Accomplishments

- **Economic Element of the General Plan** modified to overarching guiding document aligned with economic strategy goals.
- **Economic Analysis Program** developed and piloted. Voluntary program adopted to quantify beneficial impacts of development projects and inform discretionary review (ongoing).
- **First-ever Local Employers' Job Fair** coordinated through collaboration with Cal Poly State University and Cuesta Community College, now in its fourth year (ongoing).
- **805connect** online business community developed and expanded to tri-county region (ongoing).
- **Broadband Consortium Pacific Coast** grant participant to form tri-county consortium for the purpose of progressing regional goals for broadband infrastructure and adoption (ongoing).
- **Topaz Farm and California Valley Ranch** broad industry advocacy effort resulted in approval of two of the world's largest solar projects.
- **Health Information Technology Exchange** informational sessions coordinated to convene key stakeholders and initiate dialogue on formation of a regional network (ongoing).
- **County Land Use Economic Study** contractor selection and industry participation in strategic growth economic analysis study and peer review of findings.
- **County Process Improvement Committee** industry engagement in evaluating both building and land use permit processes.
- **County Business Assistance Team** requested and developed to expedite projects, which further countywide planning and economic development goals (ongoing).
- **Workforce Housing Survey** findings published and strategically communicated to inform and influence short- and long-term planning decisions. Ad Hoc Workforce Housing Task Force convened (ongoing).
- **Integrated Infrastructure Committee** convened to provide industry input into short- and long-term planning, finance, and prioritization decisions (ongoing).
- **Solarize SLO** countywide group purchasing program implemented to increase adoption of residential solar systems (107 installations, \$3.7M estimated economic impact).

EVC Role

As a neutral convener and business advocate for the Economic Strategy, the Economic Vitality Corporation is able to bridge historical boundaries and forge new partnerships. As the gatekeeper of the Economic Strategy project, afforded a broad understanding of regional resources and economic needs, the Economic Vitality Corporation is in a unique position to leverage financial investments and volunteer momentum, through strategic planning and project management, to maximize the project's impact.