



THE BORDERPLEX ALLIANCE



# BORDERPLEX

2025 ASCEND PLAN



# THE BORDERPLEX ALLIANCE

## *Progress Report- October 2021*

### INTRODUCTION

This is a 2025 Ascend Plan Progress Report detailing many of the projects launched during the implementation phase since the Plan was released on December 15, 2020.

The Borderplex 2025 Ascend Plan is a regional economic development plan released by The Borderplex Alliance in December 2020 with a vision to be completed by 2025. It is a culmination of a community vision with goals, actions and objectives developed by industry leaders and by leadership in education, workforce development and economic development. The Ascend Plan outlines 32 goals and 139 action items to be completed within five years.

The implementation of the 2025 Ascend Plan is led by Natalie Littlefield, Vice President of Strategy with support from Christian Diaz, Director of Special Initiatives. The majority of The Borderplex Alliance staff members are also working on assigned action items, and community partners naturally have become or will become leads on various initiatives as well.

The following summary includes the specific goals, objectives and action items listed in the 2025 Ascend Plan that are underway or completed, followed by a narrative description of the projects.

### Highlights

Since the beginning of 2021, The Borderplex Alliance team, along with community partners, have successfully attracted seven companies within the target industries, creating 1,812 new jobs and a total CAPEX of \$45.1 million. Five of those companies were in manufacturing, including one medical device manufacturing company with an average salary of \$52,957 and an electric vehicle supply chain company with an average salary of \$50,000. The remainder of the companies included a digital

freight forwarding company, an essential addition to the region for growing its binational logistics hub status, and a business services company with an average salary of \$54,000.

## Projects in Detail

**Goal #2:** Develop a community-wide, cooperative system for the ongoing support of business retention and expansion.

**Objective :** Form a new business retention and expansion advisory group to increase information sharing and to increase community leaders ability to make data-driven, high-impact solutions for companies and industries.

**Action Items addressed:** 2.1, 2.2, 2.4

**Progress :** The Borderplex Alliance launched a new Business Retention and Expansion Community of Practice (action item 2.1), which is a community-wide, cooperative group that will strengthen the overall support system for companies. The group is receiving a year-long training on business retention and expansion best practices from the Texas A&M Engineering Extension services. This training will help build the professional skills of the people who serve businesses in the area, and help the community respond to businesses effectively during times of crisis such as during the COVID-19 pandemic (action item 2.4). Also, at each meeting, the group receives a presentation on relevant economic data that impacts businesses and then discusses the information to determine any action the group can take to address the issues identified (action item 2.2). An analysis of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2021-2025 is underway by The Hunt Institute for Global Competitiveness (action item 2.2). The Borderplex Alliance is coordinating this project, which is being funded through a generous contribution from Workforce Solutions Borderplex. This COVID-19 impact report will be available to the community for making decisions on where to direct business retention efforts.

**Goal #4:** Develop a reputation for having a high-quality healthcare system.

**Objective :** Attract healthcare professionals, attract high-caliber healthcare-focused students, and encourage companies and individuals to live in the region based on quality healthcare services.

**Action Items addressed:** 4.4

**Progress :** Projects were funded by the newly formed Joint Seed Grant Program developed by UTEP and Texas Tech Medical School. These projects were identified by how they could have significant impact on the well-being of the community. Some of the projects build upon previously identified regional research strengths and support efforts to make the region a leader in health equity and inclusion and biomedical research for Hispanic populations (action item 4.4). Specific projects include a study to identify healthcare-significant cultural factors specific to El Paso to train health care students, a search for new early-stage biomarkers to detect ovarian cancer, a collaboration to test a new COVID-19 related antibody-based treatment using blood samples collected in the El Paso community, and several other studies.

**Goal #6:** Grow a cluster of telehealth firms in the Borderplex region.

**Objective :** Focus business development efforts on small and medium sized healthcare firms and aspiring entrepreneurs in both healthcare and IT.

**Action Items addressed:** 6.3

**Progress :** The Borderplex Alliance formed a partnership with Workforce Solutions Borderplex and the El Paso Hispanic Chamber to provide funding for digital transformation training, equipment, and marketing for medical firms in southern New Mexico and West Texas that want to begin offering telehealth services for companies. This work is progressing towards action 6.3 to provide digital transformation workshops for healthcare firms that want to provide telehealth services.

**Goal #9:** Achieve a well-developed talent pipeline for automated biomedical drug discovery and development.

**Objective :** Increase the number of graduates prepared to support an advanced and automated biomedical drug research and development cluster.

**Action Items addressed:** 9.2

**Progress:** Education Service Center Region 19 was one of two winners of the national Catalyzing CTE through Pay for Success Competition (funded by OCTAE) that concluded this past winter. Since March, Social Finance and JFF (previously Jobs for the Future) have begun providing technical assistance to ESC R-19 to help them develop or expand biomedical CTE programming and employer partnerships in the El Paso region. Biomedical Research will be

one of the main focuses of these new CTE programs, e.g., at Canutillo ISD (this program has already begun). This effort to further develop secondary biomedical education aligns with the 2025 Ascend Plan, specifically the strategic recommendation to develop the biomedical industry by identifying opportunities for project-based internships to develop students practical skills and industry knowledge (action 9.2).

**Goal #10:** Create a strong policy structure and steady capital flow for biomedical research.

**Objective :** Increase public and private funding to attract and grow new biomedical research companies.

**Action items addressed:** 10.3

**Progress :** As mentioned above, a new Joint Seed Grant Program was created by UTEP and Texas Tech Medical School to fund biomedical research projects focusing on regional health issues. The development of this seed fund for biomedical research closely aligns with the action item to provide incentives that encourage the creation of biomedical research companies in this region (action 10.3).

**Goal #11:** Develop an enviable talent pipeline that easily attracts medical device manufacturing companies and supports the growth of local companies.

**Objective :** Increase the number of students pursuing careers in this field by coordinating and fortifying existing educational programs by creating new relevant programs.

**Action Items addressed:** 11.1

**Progress :** CONREDES and BioEPJ are collaborating to develop a training program in Cd. Juarez on ISO 13485 (medical device standards) to give professors at the local universities the knowledge to have a deeper comprehension of the medical device industry and give them the tools to train the future workforce on topics related to the medical device field. This aligns with an action item to work with BioEPJ to identify skills gaps in this field and ensure that educational programs and curricula are adjusted to meet the demand (action 11.1).

**Goal #s 20, 21, and 29:** Make the Borderplex region a leader in technology-related workforce policy development and collaborative innovation. Establish a guaranteed workforce pipeline that is well-suited for advanced manufacturing and very attractive for expanding companies. Create a peerless workforce in the Borderplex region.

**Objectives :** Improve workforce system response time to business needs related to technology adoption and increasing the number of patents. Create an agile workforce system that easily adapts to new and shifting industry demands.

**Action items addressed:** 20.1, 20.2, 21.2, 29.1

**Progress :** In June 2021, The Borderplex Alliance launched its Future of Work Committee to create a peerless workforce in the Borderplex region (Goal 29, action item 29.1) and to make the region a leader in technology-related workforce policy development (Goal 20). The Committee was selected through a nomination process and includes leaders from industry, education, workforce development, and economic development from Las Cruces, El Paso, and Cd. Juarez. Manufacturing leaders are included to help establish a guaranteed workforce pipeline that is well-suited for advanced manufacturing and very attractive for expanding companies (action item 21.2). After going through a fact investigation process, the group will generate a set of policy recommendations to promote a more resilient and agile workforce system in the region (action item 20.1). The group is receiving background materials on issues related to the future of work, such as the impact of artificial intelligence on future jobs, and relevant materials related to the region's target industries. The group has heard from panels of businesspeople and workers to hear some of the issues around the future of work in their industry. The Committee had the opportunity to discuss what they heard in breakout sessions and met in subcommittees to clarify the issues and brainstorm initial solutions. The Borderplex Alliance staff wrote a first draft that combines the first issues and initial recommendations.

**Future of Work Committee Members:**

- Dr. Beth Brunk-Chavez, Dean of Extended University, UTEP
- Steven Khuong, CEO of Curacubby
- Alejandra De La Vega, Fmr. Secretary of the Economy for Chihuahua and VP of Almacenes Distribuidores de la Frontera
- Eduardo Castillo, Director, Center for Artificial Intelligence
- William Serrata, President of El Paso Community College
- Leila Melendez, CEO at Workforce Solutions Borderplex
- Tracey Bryan, President/CEO at The Bridge of Southern New Mexico
- Julio Chiu, CEO at SEISA
- Lydia Nesbitt, Director, CITA

- Gustavo Gonzalez, President at Southwest Maquila Association and VP of Operations at Commscope
- Rocio Legarreta, Sr. Director of Quality at Johnson & Johnson
- Joe Butler, Dean of Science, Engineering, & Mathematics & Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dona Ana Community College
- Dora María Aguilar Saldívar, General Director of Academic Development at UACJ
- Kathy Hansen, Director and CEO at Arrowhead Center at NMSU
- Amit Lopes, Regional Director at Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center and Assistant Professor at UTEP
- Dr. Patricia Sullivan, Associate Dean of Engineering, New Mexico State University
- Abel Salcido, Deputy Chief Technology Officer at Electronic Caregiver
- Eric Enriquez, Assistant City Manager at City of Las Cruces
- Jose Mario Sanchez Soledad, President at COPARMEX
- Katharine McAden, Head of Public Policy and External Affairs, South at Google
- Denise Avila, CONREDES Program Coordinator, Borderplex de Mexico
- Claudia Ochoa, Desarrollo Economico
- Joe Bullington, Commercialization Manager, Jacobs Technology, Inc.
- Omar Saucedo, Community Manager, Microsoft TechSpark
- Jonathan Childress, Community Manager, Microsoft TechSpark

In March 2021, the strategy team launched a Binational Technology Forum with topics related to specific goals and action items. The panels generally include representatives from all three cities in the region. The unique format of the forum allows for businesspeople, inventors, and workers to discuss a strategic industry sector from a variety of perspectives to promote greater understanding and alignment of workforce and business and to promote innovation (action item 20.2). The first forums were based on

opportunities in telehealth and transitioning to intelligent factories. In each forum, a specific project related to the 2025 Ascend Plan was launched.

Additionally, the CONREDES program in Cd. Juarez launched the CONREDES Forum (action 29.1). The purpose of the CONREDES Forum is to generate industry-led conversations that help students understand the new talent requirements that will come in the coming years and to give them tools to prepare for their immersion in the world of work. There was a total reach of 602 attendees to the conference. Further, the information gathered at this event has been compiled and will become part of the supplemental reading library for the Borderplex Future of Work Committee.

The topics at the Forum were:

1. A Practical Guide to Being a Star Candidate
2. Innovation and Technology in the Digital Age
3. Tools to Be a Successful Collaborator
4. Panel: The Work of the Future

Participating companies: APTIV, Lexmark, Robert Bosch, Johnson & Johnson, Commscope, GE Healthcare, and BRP

**Goal 30-** Make the Borderplex region a top choice for skilled workers.

**Objective :** Decrease net migration rates by fostering an inviting environment for skilled workers.

**Action items addressed:** 30.1

**Progress :** A study found that the area has an oversupply of cybersecurity talent, and the 2025 Ascend Plan suggests that the Borderplex market uses its oversupply of talent to develop talent-driven industry niches while retaining our skilled workers. To this end, the Borderplex Alliance launched a new business attraction campaign targeting cybersecurity companies cybersecurity talent.

**Goal #19:** Make the region known for having an inclusive digital economy.

**Objective :** Increase the number of households and businesses with connectivity by coordinating existing digital inclusion efforts and fill the gaps where needed.

**Action items addressed:** 19.1, 19.2, 19.3, 19.4, 19.5



**Progress :** The Digital El Paso group formed to align digital inclusion initiatives and provide support for the organizations through shared resources, policy advocacy, and funding (action item 19.5).

Digital El Paso hosted four events that explored various digital inclusion issues and featured many local, state, and national leaders in the digital inclusion space.

The DEP group launched a project to target the digital needs of the 79905 zip code where data showed that there was a significant digital divide. This project has three parts. First, DICE Skills for Employability has provided \$100,000 to support a training program. The training model will be used for skilling a team of promoters to provide basic digital literacy to households and connect to healthcare and social services while leveraging our LinkedIn Skilling offers. In the first two months of the program, 175 people have completed credentials. This digital literacy program for households aligns with the 2025 Ascend recommendation to expand digital skills training programs to reach families or households (action item 19.1).

Second, Marathon Petroleum is expected to provide \$100,000 over two years to support expanding the project's connectivity and leverage connectivity to increase the availability of STEM/CTE outreach programs available to youth in the region.

Finally, for the 79905 project, Airband is providing \$200,000 to support the connectivity component to expand Digital El Paso - a municipally operated free Wi-Fi mesh network and 100 refurbished devices (action items 19.2 and 19.4). Much of the success of the 79905 project is thanks to the leadership of Microsoft.

The Dona Ana Broadband group was also organized to serve Dona Ana County (action item 19.5) and has begun to map and document broadband service availability, access, and speed throughout Doña Ana County (action item 19.2).

Only seven months after their formation, Digital El Paso and Dona Ana Broadband were both selected by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas to take place in their first ever Digital Inclusion cohort. DEP and DAB are two of four communities selected from District 11 to participate in this three-year partnership with the Federal Reserve and a broadband consultant, Magellan Advisors. This partnership aims to create a viable plan for expanding broadband access and promoting digital inclusion in El Paso County and Dona Ana County.

Partners for each group:

Digital El Paso:

- The County of El Paso
- The Borderplex Alliance

- The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas
- Cisco
- Microsoft
- El Paso Community Foundation
- Rio Grande Council of Governments
- The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), (El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence and Hunt Institute)

Also involved, but not in weekly meetings are Workforce Solutions Borderplex, the Paso del Norte Health Foundation, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the City of El Paso, Region 19, El Paso Electric, the local water districts, a couple of service providers.

Dona Ana Broadband:

- Dona Ana County
- City of Las Cruces
- DACC
- The Borderplex Alliance
- The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas
- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)
- New Mexico Department of Information Technology

**Goal #21** Establish a guaranteed workforce pipeline that is well-suited for advanced manufacturing and very attractive for expanding companies.

**Objective :** Improve workforce system response time to business needs related to technology adoption and increase the number of patents by unifying efforts across borders.

**Action items addressed:** 21.2 and 21.5

**Goal #23** Establish an outstanding support structure to help suppliers thrive.

**Objective :** Increase the percentage of products and services sold regionally by creating business development programs and facilitating business-to-business introductions.

**Action items addressed:** 23.1, 23.4, 23.6

**Progress :** The Borderplex Supplier Association was launched in March 2021 with the mission of carrying out the strategic action items (primarily supply chain development) and educating suppliers on business development opportunities, particularly around exporting

and Industry 4.0. Supplier Association events have provided education around exporting resources and factory digital transformation. Additionally, the Association landing page includes a library of resources around exporting (working towards action item 23.4 and developing a regional export plan) and factory digital transformation.

Initiatives include business-to-business connections for supplier opportunities (action item 23.2) and the formation of a Borderplex Industry 4.0 consortium to provide free factory digital transformation consultation services to companies in the region. Additionally, the Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center has launched a new Smart Factory Certificate program to upskill the regional workforce that aims to build local supplier capacity. This is progress towards action item 23.1 to develop a general supplier development certification similar to the certification established by TMAC and BioEPJ.

**Goal #26** Make the region a renowned binational logistics hub.

**Objective :** Build a sustainable trade infrastructure transportation system by increasing public funding and project oversight and organization.

**Action items addressed:** 26.1 and 26.5

**Progress :** The Borderplex Alliance, along with several other community partners, represented the Santa Teresa/El Paso/Chihuahua area on the Texas Department of Transportation Border Trade Advisory Committee (BTAC), to undertake the development of the Texas-Mexico Border Transportation Master Plan 2021 (BTMP). The binational plan is a comprehensive, multi-modal, long-range plan that outlines 22 policies, 153 programs, and 661 project recommendations to address identified, current, and future cross-border issues and transportation needs, challenges, opportunities, and investment strategies. This work is an important part of the advocacy for greater public investment in trade infrastructure, which is action item 26.1. Further, the City of El Paso has begun developing plans to expand Foreign Trade Zone 68 (action item 26.5). There are four main pieces to the expansion: the expansion of the Zaragoza industrial park area, the expansion of the I-10/Loop 375 industrial park area, including a new park by Hunt, the expansion of the airport land, and few minor boundary modifications rolled into the expansion as the fourth piece. The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2022.

**Goal #27:** Become the destination of choice for advanced logistics companies.

**Objective :** Increase the number of advanced logistics companies by leveraging the strengths of the region's assets and the momentum of recent expansions.

**Action Items addressed:** 27.3 and 27.4

**Progress :** The Borderplex Alliance and community partners helped attract the company Forager to the region, which relates to action item 27.3 that encourages targeting freight forwarding companies and other companies that use digital technology to improve logistics and trade activities. Forager provides a digital and comprehensive border pricing and booking tool. Additionally, BPA and its partners brought Critical Materials Corporation to the region, which aligns with the intent to attract electric vehicle companies (action item 27.4). CMC operations will support their production of battery-grade lithium for use by manufacturers of electric vehicles. The Borderplex Alliance is also conducting several strategies to attract electric vehicle companies to the region, such as using a targeted account-based marketing campaign, publishing relevant white papers, and joining the ASPIRE Industry & Innovation Board (a research organization that is by invitation only, and offers educational workshops around EV and the opportunity for the organization and region to participate in EV charging research and development projects).