

Sonoran Desert Biosphere Region

Comprehensive Economic Development Study:
Findings and Strategies



Meeting Agenda

- Project Scope and Purpose
- Interviews/Focus Group Report
- SWOT Analysis
- Insights and Strategy Topics

Project Scope and Purpose

- Sonoran Desert Biosphere Region
- 5-year timeline
- Rural-driven strategy
- Included Communities
 - Ajo
 - Gila Bend
 - Lukeville
 - Why
 - Tohono O'odham Nation
 - Other small I-8 communities



Interviews / Focus Group Report

- ~20 individual interviews
 - Ajo
 - Gila Bend
 - San Lucy
 - Pisinemo District
 - Gu Vo District
- 5 focus groups
 - Ajo - Businesses
 - Gila Bend - Elected officials
 - San Lucy - District Leaders
 - Ajo - Public land managers
 - GED Students - Gu Vo District

Common Topics

- Economic Drivers: Tourism, energy, government & tribal jobs
- Quality housing
- Food access
- Workforce pathways
- Healthcare access
- Leadership / Business Succession



SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Dark skies	Jurisdictional mismatch	Hospitality	Dependence on border
ISDA and triple-focus (Environment, culture, economy)	Limited workforce skill	Tourism (incl. public lands)	Aging demographic
Self efficacy	Limited housing options	Diversification / Remote Jobs	Desertification
Broadband backbone	Challenges in educational outcomes	Regional collaboration	Climate change impacts
Unique cultural heritage (3 nation)	Transportation	Renewable energy development	
Natural beauty and biodiversity		Educational and research facilities	

Strategic Topics

- **Business Opportunities**
- Education
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Analysis

- Port of Entry Impacts
 - 25-75% decrease in sales
 - 59% decrease in Park visitation
 - 43% decrease in retail foot traffic
- Green technologies

Strategic Topics

- **Business Opportunities**
- Education
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Opportunities

- Enhance entrepreneurial support
- Attract and developing high-skilled workers
 - Technology
 - Renewable energy
- Leverage regional offerings

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- **Education**
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Analysis

- % Pop 18-24 HS Graduate or Equivalent:
 - SDBR – 72.4%
 - AZ – 85.6%
- Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate:
 - SDBR – 46.8% (pop. weighted avg)
 - AZ – 76.7%

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- **Education**
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Opportunities

- Regional workforce development plan
- Radio astronomy / green tech research center
 - UofA and CalTech
- Pima County Community College

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- **Food Security**
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Analysis

- 10% of Ajo and 50% of those in the Tohono O'odham Nation are affected by type II diabetes (TOCA 2009)
- Insufficient number of groceries in region

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- **Food Security**
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Opportunities

- Food Access
 - Community/
backyard gardening
 - Traditional foods
(fruits and veggies)

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- Food Security
- **Healthcare**
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Analysis

- Population without insurance
 - AZ – 10.8%
 - SDBR – 13.8%
- Senior services / health

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- Food Security
- **Healthcare**
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Opportunities

- Improve telehealth options with specialty care support
 - Local nursing staff
- Develop career pathways in healthcare industry
- Strengthen IHS offerings

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- **Leadership & Regional Collaboration**
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Analysis

- CEDS project as pioneer model
- Concentrated leadership

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- **Leadership & Regional Collaboration**
- Quality Housing
- Tourism and Placemaking

Opportunities

- Economic Development District
- Youth council

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- **Quality Housing**
- Tourism and Placemaking
- Ajo Governance

Analysis

- Median year structure built
 - AZ – 1993
 - SDBR- 1960-1975
- Workforce interest in construction occupations
- Value to income ratio
 - AZ – 4.3
 - SDBR– 2.5

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- **Quality Housing**
- Tourism and Placemaking

Opportunities

- New development of small(er) homes
- Workforce pathway in construction industry
 - Regional collaboration
- Short-term housing for gov't contractors and others

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- **Tourism and Placemaking**

Analysis

- Economic impact
- Hotel capacity

Strategic Topics

- Business Opportunities
- Education
- Food Security
- Healthcare
- Leadership & Regional Collaboration
- Quality Housing
- **Tourism and Placemaking**

Opportunities

- Develop new hotel/resort, RV park spaces
 - Tours between touristic destinations
- Create destination amenities
 - Capture MX & international visitors

