



# Sarasota County Five-year Economic Development Strategic Plan

## A Roadmap to a Robust and Agile Economy

### Executive Summary

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in partnership with

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RTI International

## Acknowledgements

The Community-wide five-year Strategic Plan for Economic Development is a collaborative output. Sarasota County Government, the Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County (EDC) Partners Council and in particular the Partners Council steering committee were instrumental in bringing the various businesses, organizations, civic groups and municipalities into the planning process. The steering committee ensured that a wide array of businesses, chambers of commerce, educational and community leaders participated in interviews, focus groups, strategy sessions and the Economic Vision and Leadership Forum.

A note of gratitude is owed to the governments of Sarasota County, the City of Sarasota, City of North Port, City of Venice and the Town of Longboat Key for providing funding for the plan through the Economic Development Trust Fund. It is also important to acknowledge the work of the EDC Board of Directors who provided guidance, support and oversight of the planning process.

The greatest appreciation goes to the 450 businesses who participated in this plan through the various interviews, focus groups, strategy work groups and the visioning Forum. Their involvement illustrates a philosophy that economic development cannot be completed in silos or owned by any one individual or organization. To truly optimize community resources and develop a more robust and diversified economy, collaboration is the platform, in which responsibility is shared and community prosperity is achieved.

Because the community has confronted the current economic challenges associated with the national recession and dramatic changes in the local real estate market, and had the opportunity to work repeatedly with the consulting team, the plan's content is unequivocal and the foundation built for a community-wide team effort.

Thank you to our community collaborators.

### **Steering Committee**

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City of North Port  
City of Sarasota  
City of Venice  
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Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce  
Gulf Coast Latin Chamber of Commerce  
Longboat Key, Lido Key, St. Armands Key Chamber of Commerce  
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North Port Chamber of Commerce  
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The Downtown Partnership of Sarasota  
Town of Longboat Key  
University of South Florida, Sarasota-Manatee  
Venice Area Board of Realtors  
Venice Area Chamber of Commerce  
Venice Main Street

## Executive Summary

Like many counties across the United States, Sarasota County has experienced a sharp downturn in jobs and the tax base. Because the region was highly dependent on housing and development industries, the county took an early hit as that market declined. Other industries soon followed with job losses. To return to employment levels of 2005 and 2006 and grow at a steady rate of approximately 2–3% per year, **Sarasota County will need to add approximately 15,000 jobs to its economy over the next five years.** On an annual basis, that is approximately 3,000 jobs per year.

This next economic development plan will need to accomplish *three key objectives*:

- Identify opportunities for short-term stimulus.
- Strategically position the county for long-term and diversified business and job growth.
- Build needed capacity in expertise and resources to compete in a changing economy

Business and community leaders are acutely aware of the need to diversify the industry base and be less reliant on just a few sectors. To take advantage of growing markets, the quality of Sarasota County's workforce will need to be enhanced. The county is aware that it has not maximized opportunities for our growing base of innovation-based companies (e.g., technology, medical sciences, manufacturing, environmental services) and will need to pay attention to these resident businesses. Yet, self-assessment shows a heightened willingness to work together and to think more strategically about the economy. As one business leader noted, *"Now is the time to put aside our need to take credit and worry about results."*

Community and business leaders have made it clear that a shotgun approach will no longer work. This proposed plan is based on **five guiding principles**:

- Promote the growth/health of existing businesses.
- Create an environment that promotes homegrown businesses and innovation.
- Diversify the economy through platforms that build on our unique assets.
- Make strategic plays in emerging markets.
- Leverage resources and investments to grow capacity to pursue economic opportunities.

## Identifying the Opportunities

Economic development practitioners agree that increasing industry diversity and growing high value jobs are most effectively accomplished by building on core strengths and strategically targeting new markets—*not* using a shotgun approach. Chasing economic markets where a region has limited infrastructure, workforce, and business expertise is an expensive venture and produces few results. Asset-based opportunities in Sarasota County include:

**Existing Businesses:** While job growth is down, the number of new companies continues to grow. In 2008, there were more than 15,450 business establishments, up from 14,780 businesses in 2006. The ability to foster growth for existing businesses offers significant potential. If just 20% of the county's establishments add on average four jobs each, the total job creation would be more than 12,300 jobs, or all jobs lost over the past few years. More needs to be done to grow businesses that have already made investments in our community.

**Aging:** By 2010, one in three adults in the United States will be over the age of 50, and by 2020, over 40% of adults will have passed their 65th birthday. This represents strong market-driven opportunities for developing products, services, and housing for an older demographic—medical services and products, aging-in-place design and construction markets, and consumer products and services for wellness. As we have witnessed through healthcare being one of the only sectors not to lose jobs recently, this market offers a robust diversification strategy and builds on expertise already in the county.

**Sustainable Systems:** Along with energy, water is at the forefront of sustainability efforts and builds on the region's expertise in marine sciences and aquaculture and water resource management. It is also a market that is not being strongly pursued by every other community. Growing opportunities for low-impact development support regional businesses in architecture, construction, landscaping, water, and energy management. Other green business opportunities can be augmented by stimulus projects from local, state, and federal governments.

**Design:** The multi-billion dollar markets of social networks, interactive technologies, and Internet broadcasting allow for many possibilities for the region's software and IT, design and advertising, film and video, and performing arts businesses. Design is rapidly growing as a productivity and development tool in other industries. Design thinking applies a designer's approach to problem solving, characterized by a deep understanding of the user, creative resolution of tensions, collaborative prototyping, and continuous modification and enhancement of ideas and solutions. Sarasota County's leading-edge design community could help

other industries develop more transformative services and technologies.

**Innovation and Entrepreneurs:** Industries depend on the ability to continually turn ideas and discoveries into new products or services to maintain their competitive edge. Regions with an innovation mind-set have a higher rate of entrepreneurial development and attraction, higher growth rates in high-wage, high value industries, and more diversification of industries. The significant array of research, capital, and professional expertise in the broader region is currently underutilized by entrepreneurs in the county, limiting the ability to start or grow innovation-based companies. With many of the pieces in place, there are immediate opportunities to strengthen the county's innovation capacity.

## An Economic Framework for Sarasota County

Reaching a target of 15,000 jobs and 2,500 new firms in five years will require the county to enhance its overall capacity for economic development and pursue targeted markets that build on the community's strengths and interests. With limited budgets from the public sector and private companies, it will be more important than ever to make the best use of existing resources and expertise. To this end, the five-year economic development strategic plan consists of six goals, summarized in the box below, and in the table on the following page.

### Economic Development Goals

1. *Grow and strengthen the competitiveness of **existing businesses**.*
2. *Develop a robust environment for **innovation and entrepreneurs**.*
3. *Be a national leader for businesses and institutions that develop products and services for an aging demographic: **Aging Platform**.*
4. *Build our reputation as a premier location for design expertise: **Design Platform**.*
5. *Expand expertise and business opportunities in applied environmental and sustainable systems: **Sustainable Systems Platform**.*
6. *Optimize how people, policies, and investments **work together** to reach our economic goals.*

Reaching these goals will mean a more strategic focus of our resources, supported by clear outcomes and strategies, and shared accountability. **Table 1.1** highlights key strategies for this plan.

**Table 1.1 Summary of Goals and Strategies**

GOAL/STRATEGY	PROPOSED LEAD	PROPOSED TASKS & ADDITIONAL PARTNERS
<b>Goal A: Grow and strengthen the competitiveness of existing businesses</b>		
<p><b>Strategy A-1:</b> Develop a robust business retention and expansion (“BRE”) program for traded-sector businesses and high value clusters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop supply and value chains for major segments (start with existing clusters); plug the leaks within the region</li> <li>• Enhance assistance for programs/services that increase competitiveness and productivity</li> </ul>	EDC	Lead development of value chain mapping for major industry clusters with information from Chambers and other economic partners.
<p><b>Strategy A-2:</b> Expand capacity and expertise in international business development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade development efforts in targeted markets</li> <li>• Education &amp; training programs</li> </ul>	Sarasota and Manatee EDCs	Act as focal point for gathering data on international market opportunities and identifying appropriate partners for assistance.  <i>Tampa Bay Partnership and Enterprise Florida would be key partners.</i>
<p><b>Strategy A-3:</b> Actively pursue the growth of targeted small businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursue an economic gardening effort</li> <li>• Strengthen collaboration among small business service providers</li> <li>• Connect small businesses to value chain/procurement efforts</li> </ul>	Chambers of Commerce	Manage the overall process and provide assistance to businesses with local and regional markets.  Assist traded-sector-based businesses identified by this process. (EDC)  Work with public agencies to link local businesses to procurement policies.
<p><b>Desired Outcomes</b></p> <p>Increased revenues and profitability for existing businesses</p> <p>Growth of small businesses</p>		
<b>Goal B: Develop a robust environment for innovation &amp; entrepreneurship</b>		
<p><b>Strategy B-1:</b> Facilitate the start-up and expansion of innovation-based businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a regional Innovation Center that provides services and facilities for innovation-based industries</li> </ul>	EDC Foundation as a joint project of the Sarasota and Manatee County EDCs	<i>Establish an advisory board of colleges, universities, capital funds, and technology groups.</i>
<p><b>Strategy B-2:</b> Enhance the entrepreneurial pool in the County including access to capital and commercialization services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening connections with research institutions</li> <li>• Angel capital network and alliances with equity funds</li> </ul>	EDC	<i>Collaborate with regional partners (Tampa Bay Technology Forum, Florida Venture Forum, Gulf Coast Venture Forum, 82 Degrees, Startup Florida).</i>
<p><b>Strategy B-3:</b> Develop districts or hubs of business and innovation activities (“eco-districts” or “design districts”)</p>	County and municipal governments	<i>Establish a public-private partnership that include developers, educational institutions, and key industry associations.</i>
<p><b>Desired Outcomes</b></p> <p>Increased number and growth of start-up companies in innovation-based industries</p> <p>Increased private sector investment in local businesses</p>		

GOAL/STRATEGY	PROPOSED LEAD	PROPOSED TASKS & <i>ADDITIONAL PARTNERS</i>
<b>Goal C: Become a national leader for businesses and services that serve an older demographic: Aging Platform</b>		
<b>Strategy C-1:</b> Establish an Institute for the Ages that can act as a focal point and aggregator for markets and industries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aggregate, organize, and make data available</li> <li>▪ Formulate and host forums on key aging issues</li> <li>▪ Develop an “open innovation” facility and business model</li> </ul>	Partners Council Strategic Team on Aging partnering with SCOPE	Oversee development of a business plan to identify lead organizations for implementation and operations.
<b>Strategy C-2:</b> Increase the capacity for existing businesses to grow and expand their market share <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhance connections with relevant research in the region</li> <li>▪ Act as broker to help to increase clinical trials and research</li> <li>▪ Establish a consortium that specializes in “aging in place”</li> </ul>	Institute/EDC	Initial efforts can be managed through contracts with the EDC; ongoing effort would be managed by the Institute.
<b>Strategy C-3:</b> Establish Sarasota County as the learning center for aging markets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide training and learning facilities</li> <li>▪ Actively recruit training and continuing education events</li> <li>▪ Establish an annual <i>Aging in Place</i> Expo</li> </ul>	Institute/EDC	<i>Tourism Development Board</i> could play a role in the funding and planning, given the likely potential for increased tourism and related impacts.
<b>Desired Outcomes</b> National reputation as leader in products and services in markets serving older demographics Growth of existing businesses and attraction of new businesses serving an “aging” market: medical, healthcare, design, construction, and related industries		
<b>Goal D: Build our reputation as a premier location for businesses and institutions with design expertise: Design Platform</b>		
<b>Strategy D-1:</b> Expand business development opportunities by building expertise in the application of design thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hold workshops and training for design thinking</li> <li>▪ Conduct a feasibility study for a Design Thinking Consortium &amp; Prototyping Center</li> </ul>	Ringling College of Art + Design, with support from Partners Council Strategy Team on Design	Use the Proof of Concept Fund (strategy F-5) to conduct feasibility study
<b>Strategy D-2:</b> Facilitate the start-up and expansion of businesses in key sectors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify and access new markets &amp; technologies</li> <li>▪ Develop capital access strategies and build the capacity of technical and management teams</li> </ul>	Sarasota and Manatee County EDCs, jointly	As described in Strategy B-1.
<b>Strategy D-3:</b> Sponsor a business plan competition in conjunction with the annual Design Summit to promote the commercialization of ideas/research	EDC	<i>Support from Startup Florida, the Florida Venture Forum, and the Tampa Bay Technology Forum</i>
<b>Strategy D-4:</b> Develop a targeted marketing campaign to increase awareness of the region’s design-related sectors	Sarasota County Arts Council,	<i>Support from EDC &amp; Convention and Visitor’s Bureau</i>

GOAL/STRATEGY	PROPOSED LEAD	PROPOSED TASKS & <i>ADDITIONAL PARTNERS</i>
<b>Strategy D-5:</b> Continually explore new market opportunities for traditional creative segments	The Film & Entertainment Office and the Arts Council	
<b>Desired Outcomes</b> Enhanced national reputation as a leader in design and design thinking Growth of firms and jobs in design-related industries Development of new design-based products and services		
<b>Goal E: Expand business opportunities in applied environmental and sustainable systems: Sustainability Platform</b>		
<b>Strategy E-1:</b> Support development and commercialization of sustainable aquaculture technologies and expansion of regional aquaculture industry	Mote Marine Laboratory, with support from the Partners Council Strategy Team on Sustainable Systems	
<b>Strategy E-2:</b> Expand marine sciences educational programs to draw students and visitors from outside the region	Mote Marine Laboratory	Support from EDC and TDC
<b>Strategy E-3:</b> Assist local businesses with environmental and sustainable products/services to maximize their market share within Florida and expand product/service offerings	Chambers EDC	Identify state and national policies where businesses have expertise. Provide connections to research and innovation resources to commercialize products.
<b>Strategy E-4:</b> Develop a consortium model that promotes Sarasota County as a location for applied and integrated sustainable concepts.	Partners Council Strategy Team on Sustainable Systems	Develop a full business and operating plan that would identify funding resources and lead partners for implementation and operations
<b>Desired Outcomes</b> Development of businesses that develop products and provide professional and technical services in sustainable markets Training and education of local workforce to seize opportunities for green jobs		
<b>Goal F: Optimize how people, policies and investments work together to reach our economic goals</b>		
<b>Strategy F-1:</b> Create green jobs and develop local expertise in sustainable development through public sector investments and programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Key public sector rehabilitation and development projects.</li> <li>▪ 2-3 signature projects</li> <li>▪ Use of public facilities as test sites</li> </ul>	Public sector agencies, including county and city governments Workforce Investment Board/ education & training institutions	Ensure outreach to and training of local businesses and workers

GOAL/STRATEGY	PROPOSED LEAD	PROPOSED TASKS & <i>ADDITIONAL PARTNERS</i>
<b>Strategy F-2:</b> Make it easier for businesses to expand in or locate to the region by using public facilities for temporary ramp-up operations	Public sector agencies and EDC/Chambers of Commerce	Collaborate on an inventory of facilities in various communities around the county.  Use the inventory for business development activities
<b>Strategy F-3:</b> Utilize public policies and procurement practices to maximize support of local businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish a policy requiring companies receiving public assistance to file a local procurement plan.</li> <li>▪ Enhance purchasing strategies to give local preference while maintaining legal obligations.</li> </ul>	EDC – lead organization  County and city governments	Chambers of Commerce to partner in this effort and assist companies filing local procurement plans to access the local marketplace through connections with their members
<b>Strategy F-4:</b> Develop locally controlled incentives for business development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Seed incentive fund with escheated lot funds.</li> <li>▪ Market, provide technical assistance, and make recommendations for the use of incentives.</li> </ul>	Sarasota County EDC	EDC Board approve use of funds under a set amount; Board of County Commissioners approve larger projects.
<b>Strategy F-5:</b> Develop a “proof of concept” fund to move targeted industry cluster or platform initiatives from idea to fully developed business concepts with funding and operating plans.	EDC or EDC Foundation  Partners Council Strategy Team	
<b>Desired Outcomes</b>  Alignment and leverage of public and private resources to do “more with less” The ability to move economic efforts from idea to implementation stages		