

# Regional Economic Recovery: Information for communities



As 2020 began, no one could have predicted the rapid and deep challenges facing our state and nation as we enter the summer of 2020. The impact of Covid-19 on the health and economic fabric of our communities has been significant. Couple this with the dramatic decline in energy prices and demand, Texas communities face significant challenges to re-establish economic footing and plan for the future starting this summer. The IC<sup>2</sup> Institute at The University of Texas at Austin is your partner as you create [recovery and growth strategies](#) in 2020. IC<sup>2</sup> established the Regional Economic Recovery Team (Regional Recovery) to leverage the talent of the top students in Texas to help gather data for your community planning. This summer, we will engage >90 UT students to map community assets in >65 Texas communities. Our larger cities often have professional staff or funds for consultants to do similar work. Our focus will be on smaller cities and communities, rather urban centers, to maximize the distribution and impact of UT Austin during this time of crisis. The summer research phase of Regional Recovery has four components:

1. Create a Community Profile
2. Conduct Community Interviews
3. Collect Community Survey Results
4. Communicate Findings to Community Leaders

## **Create a Community Profile:**

Students will use secondary research sources to characterize key assets, including history, economy, people, physical spaces and environment, education offerings, quality of life and communication strategies, for communities across Texas. Students will summarize their findings and build out questions for community members to clarify key strengths/opportunities in the community as well as potential weaknesses/constraints. They will also note uncertain aspects of the community that they will need more information to evaluate. They will summarize their findings using several tools for communication of findings.

**Ask: Please provide students any community brochures, events catalogues, annual community reports, economic development plans or community planning documents developed by or generated on behalf of the community to enhance understanding and accuracy of analysis.**

## **Conduct Community Interviews:**

Understanding a community has limitations if done from the “outside.” One must talk to the people and understand their perceptions, values and goals to really get to know a community and its future. We would prefer that our students interview your community members in person, but due to social distancing, this will be a challenge. Our students will use phone, FaceTime, Zoom or other media to conduct meaningful one-on-one interviews with 30 or more community members – from leadership in different community functions to normal citizens who live and work locally. Students will explore what

each person values about the community, what is working locally, what is working less well, how community members view their future and clarify key asset value (strengths and weaknesses). They will summarize their findings using several tools for communication of findings.

Ask: We want to spread the word about the project and invite people representing all groups in your community to participate in the interview process. However, we need ambassadors for our students to find people willing to participate. Please introduce our students to key community members who would be willing to provide access to residents of all backgrounds, ages and walks of life to participate.

### **Collect Community Survey Results:**

Interviews allow a “dive deep” into the minds of specific community members. We need to couple this approach with one that allows us to gather perspectives and opinions from a larger number of residents. To that end, we have developed a Community Survey to help us better understand community values, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the community and individual lives, and how community services are viewed in terms of importance and satisfaction. This survey will take just 10-15 minutes to complete. We want to collect >100 surveys from each community in which our students are working. Students will summarize their findings from survey responses using several tools for communication of findings. With survey responses from ~65 communities across Texas, the collective outcome will provide a powerful new lens to view communities and economic recovery across our state. Further, as an incentive, we will be giving \$1,000 to the Independent School District in the community with the highest percentage of survey responses (survey responses/population). Consider your participation as a “name in the hat” to benefit your local schools.

Ask: Similar to the ask above, we want to invite people representing all groups in your community to participate in the survey. For this activity, we need ambassadors for our students to find people willing to participate. Please introduce our students to key community members who would be willing to provide access to residents of all backgrounds, ages and walks of life.

### **Communicate Findings to Community Leaders:**

Our students will take data from their Community Profile, link with findings obtained from Interviews and Survey responses and use a set of tools to summarize outcomes and recommendations. The final results will be provided in the form of a Community Presentation which will be shared with leaders in mid-August, 2020. We expect this report to contain new insights: how to leverage community assets, attitudes and values into concrete plans for future growth. Further, the report will be provided through the voice of the young talent each community in Texas wishes to recruit and retain. This perspective of “youth” can help community leaders connect and engage with top talent across the state to accomplish its economic and community development goals.

#### **Ask:**

Review the Community Presentation containing the asset map and recommendations, and use it to inform your planning strategies. Students will present data-supported observations and recommendations. Some suggestions will confirm your understanding and existing plans, while

others may challenge the status quo and require reassessment. Regardless, we believe that the data and recommendations will enhance and focus your economic development initiatives.

**Next Steps:**

All communities involved in Regional Recovery and others throughout Texas will be invited to join our economic development community accelerator program, [Regional XLR8](#), in September and October of 2020. This accelerator program will guide you to take data gathered by our students or from other sources and use it to define key 1) opportunities for economic development, or 2) mitigations for key community challenges. We will provide best practices to transform a chosen goal into a community-wide value proposition promoting participation and growing community momentum. As you develop your economic development intervention as part of the program, you will build a peer-to-peer network for mentoring and self-advising. Further, you will have access to expert advice surrounding key issues in community planning, communication, project management and economic impact measurement. We hope that the new community initiative born from this program will have significant impact during this critical time and also guide future economic and quality of life activities. Through Regional XLR8, you will find partners to support your initiatives as you join a statewide network of experts helping communities recover from the challenges of energy collapse and Covid-19.