

FROM POTENTIAL TO PROSPERITY:

A STRATEGIC AGENDA FOR GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

*Mobilizing regional action with the
Greater Philadelphia Growth Partnership*

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**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**

Executive summary

Leaders across Southeastern Pennsylvania are transforming how the region competes in the global economy and creates opportunity for its residents.

The region's assets in talent, innovation, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship are exceptional. Yet over the past decade, its economic performance has not matched its strengths. This was especially true for traded sector industries that sell goods and services outside the region and concentrate "opportunity jobs," which provide family-sustaining wages and benefits or a pathway to achieving them.

Regional leaders identified two ambitions as essential to reversing that trend and unlocking their economy's full potential:

- **Boosting economic competitiveness.** The region missed out on about 70,000 opportunity jobs in traded sectors between 2012 and 2023—gaining about half the anticipated total and falling 13 percentage points short of expected growth against national benchmarks.
- **Increasing economic mobility for families.** The region [ranked last](#) among the nation's 50 most populous commuting zones in upward mobility for low-income residents. Economic mobility also declined across the region for most racial groups and other income levels.

More opportunity requires growth. Removing individual barriers is not enough without erasing the deficit in opportunity jobs that enable workers—especially those without a four-year college degree—to get ahead. Without bolder and collective action to make structural changes, the region's competitive position will erode, impacting talent retention, employer growth, and shared long-term prosperity.

The strategy outlined in this report, as well as the formation of the Greater Philadelphia

Growth Partnership, are direct responses to those challenges. They result from two years of collaboration among economic and workforce leaders representing business, government, and civic sectors across Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties, in recognition that the economic success of one county depends on the success of all. (While 87% of the five-county region's residents live and work within one of the five counties, up to 38% cross a county border to their job.)

While economic mobility depends on sustained regional growth, growth alone does not ensure broad access to opportunity. This strategy therefore prioritizes three "opportunity industries" in which the region holds competitive advantages and strong potential to generate jobs accessible to workers across a range of skill and education levels. It identifies specific tactics for each industry that will help drive success.

Effective economic strategies depend entirely on the capacity and commitment to implement them together. Rather than compete for limited resources, this strategy aligns partners around common principles, objectives, and actions that cross institutional and jurisdictional boundaries to strengthen the region as a whole.

The industries, tactics, and implementation approach are the product of deep engagement with stakeholders across economic and workforce development, workforce training and education, industry, research centers, public agencies, and philanthropy. They were informed by lessons from best-in-class regional economic development efforts around the country, but tailored to what is distinct about Southeastern Pennsylvania.

Regional partners are now committed to executing this strategy together. Yet for a region with the ambitions and scale of Southeastern Pennsylvania, realizing its full potential will require even broader adoption of this agenda and additional commitments to take action.

ORGANIZING FOR ACTION

Regional leaders are changing how they work collectively to achieve this vision. They are establishing new structures and operating agreements that align individual efforts and resources for greater impact, strengthen joint decisionmaking, and promote mutual accountability. These commitments build the confidence of business, philanthropy, and government partners to make additional investments. Elements of this approach include:

- **Formation of the Greater Philadelphia Growth Partnership.** This new collaborative fills the gap in regional economic development functions relative to peers and serves as the vehicle for coordinated strategy execution. Early commitments from business and philanthropy will boost capabilities in business attraction and expansion, research, international engagement, identity-building and visibility, and industry-led workforce development.
- **Distributed implementation structure for opportunity industry strategies.** Delivering the full range of proposed tactics depends on the contributions of many partners. The recommended actions fall across public and private sectors, the workforce training system, academia and higher education, philanthropy, and corporate leadership. This distributed implementation of a shared strategy leverages individual strengths toward collective results by working off the same playbook. Identified through stakeholder consensus and supported by the Greater Philadelphia Growth Partnership, sector coordinators will facilitate and aid the programmatic execution among those partners to minimize overlaps, jointly identify and help pursue resources, and track progress toward common goals.
- **Business leadership and governance.** Implementation of both the Greater Philadelphia Growth Partnership and individual opportunity industry initiatives relies on the business community taking a leadership role similar to that of their peers in other regions—guiding, overseeing, and investing in a long-term regional economic agenda. For the Greater Philadelphia Growth Partnership, a business-led governance board will provide strategic direction and accountability, informed by regional and county-level partners. For each opportunity industry, the form of business engagement will vary based on activation decisions that consider relationships to industry intermediaries.



ACHIEVING GROWTH IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA'S OPPORTUNITY INDUSTRIES

A regional growth strategy must be broad enough for impact yet narrow enough to be actionable, and a plan is only “strategic” if it makes choices. Through an in-depth market assessment published in July 2025 as well as joint problem-solving with regional stakeholders, Brookings helped identify three consensus “opportunity industries” in which Southeastern Pennsylvania has both a strong competitive position and the potential to generate significant growth in opportunity jobs.

In subsequent months, leaders from across the five counties vetted options to translate that potential into reality. Economic development, workforce, and industry experts identified needs within the three opportunity industries, and specific tactics were developed to address them. Those tactics were further prioritized by identifying which could be advanced within 12 to 18 months for early results and momentum, and codifying them in activation workplans with tasks and assignments as shared project management tools for implementation. The three opportunity industries are:

- **Enterprise digital solutions (EDS).** A segment of “enterprise tech” in the information technology sector, EDS firms provide the business-to-business (B2B) software, platforms, and implementation services that companies use to manage their core operations and increase productivity. The region’s EDS position is undergirded by firms serving or spinning out of the other dominant sectors such as financial services and health care. Distinct advantages include talent availability, customer proximity, applied artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities, regulated industry expertise, and quality-to-cost ratios that support startups and attract firm expansions. However, the EDS sector needs the visibility and mainstream economic development attention to match its scale and potential.
- **Precision manufacturing in industrial technologies.** Despite national industry trends that have constrained manufacturing, the region is competitively positioned for high-quality, accessible job growth in making a subset of industrial technology products. These segments include machined components, industrial electronics, interconnects, and structural fabrication—all of which demand exact specifications with high tolerances and accuracy. Manufacturers contribute to supply chains ranging from defense and life sciences to industrial automation and energy. While the region houses headquarters or major front offices for some global companies, the sector is mainly comprised of small and medium-sized manufacturers, creating distinct talent and operations needs to sustain growth in the cluster.
- **Biomedical engineering and production.** Even as a globally recognized center for biomedical research and development, the region holds underrealized potential in retaining startups, scaling-up production in targeted areas, and attracting related anchor investments. Specific opportunities include expanding the current successful life sciences subsector emphasis on emerging platform therapeutic technologies (such as cell and gene therapy) in areas of strength such as medical devices. Reshoring of therapeutics manufacturing supply chains offers possibilities for greater production in traditional and niche categories. Across these verticals, the region can further close ecosystem gaps in access to professional and technical talent and capital that hold back seed-stage firms from growth. Focusing on these categories will convert regional prowess for innovation into more opportunity jobs that are accessible to workers without advanced degrees.

At the bottom of this report’s executive summary is a high-level outline of the tactics designed to advance growth in each opportunity industry.



A PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Release of this strategy and the formation of the Greater Philadelphia Growth Partnership marks the transition from organizing and planning to multiyear action and implementation, in which sustained effort will be required to realize shared ambitions. Guided by activation workplans, regional partners will formalize roles and responsibilities and initiate implementation of tactics while enlisting other collaborators who can contribute to those efforts. Regional partners will continue to jointly raise resources to implement this vision.

Success ultimately also depends on the support of a broader range of actors beyond regional and local economic and workforce development partners, including:

- **Business champions** to steer and invest in growth strategies and regional capacity with a long-term perspective.
- **Philanthropy** to fund initiatives that grow the economy and create quality jobs, supporting economic mobility in ways that complement programs helping residents overcome barriers.
- **The commonwealth of Pennsylvania** to support regionally led solutions through administrative, programmatic, and policy tools, such as aligning existing staff and funding with regional tactics and rewarding regional collaboration.

Finally, patience is required. Real change in economy-building goals takes years of steady commitment to execution. Early progress can be seen in specific areas such as training, but regions that fundamentally changed their trajectory stay with strategies for a decade or more. Unlike annual funding metrics or election cycles, economic performance is measured over years, and economic mobility is measured over a generation. If the long view is taken, this regional growth strategy can unlock Southeastern Pennsylvania's ability to deliver economic growth and opportunity that match its full potential.

OPPORTUNITY INDUSTRIES: STRATEGIC GOALS AND TACTICS

ENTERPRISE DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

1. Cluster organizing

- 1.1 Establish a consensus sector coordinator to organize and boost EDS cluster-building activity across relevant groups.
- 1.2 Foster greater connectivity among and responsiveness to large, established firms, including those with intramural EDS capabilities.
- 1.3 Evaluate building a more comprehensive, scaled industry-led tech alliance to match other leading regions.

2. Business attraction, retention, and expansion

- 2.1 Focus mainstream economic development efforts on EDS attraction and expansion, including proactive lead generation and international engagement strategy.
- 2.2 Execute a unified communications campaign that defines and articulates the region's value proposition both internally and externally.
- 2.3 Maintain an EDS asset inventory for application to ecosystem navigation as well as development and marketing.
- 2.4 Cultivate relationships with specialized EDS investors.

3. Talent pipelines

- 3.1 Conduct a deep regional assessment of priority EDS occupational demand and regional training pipelines.
- 3.2 Establish a regional talent leadership group among large EDS employers.
- 3.3 Create a "cooperative marketplace" to ease connections between workers and employers.
- 3.4 Target regional talent attraction and retention initiatives toward the EDS sector.
- 3.5 Evaluate expansion of apprenticeship and on-the-job training pathways, integrating the offer across talent developers.

4. Innovation and entrepreneurship

- 4.1 Expand anchor firm engagement in regional startup and scale-up growth.
- 4.2 Facilitate "sector sandboxes" linking EDS firms with enterprise customers.
- 4.3 Launch a "Global EDS Accelerator" problem-solving competition.
- 4.4 Form an EDS-relevant applied research and innovation consortium among regional universities as a resource for companies and entrepreneurs.
- 4.5 Strengthen connections with investors and capital sources focused on EDS and enterprise technologies, building on existing capacity.

Note: Activities prioritized for immediate (i.e., within 18 months) implementation are highlighted.

OPPORTUNITY INDUSTRIES: STRATEGIC GOALS AND TACTICS

PRECISION MANUFACTURING IN INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGIES

1. Regional organizing

- 1.1. Create a consolidated and enhanced regionwide manufacturing alliance, replacing existing small, fragmented groups.

2. Talent pipelines

- 2.1. Undertake a comprehensive regional manufacturing talent study.
- 2.2. Close equipment gaps and facility constraints for workforce training providers.
- 2.3. Improve instructor availability via new dedicated funding sources, institutional reforms to pay scales and formal certifications, and mechanisms to jointly recruit instructors on loan from industry.
- 2.4. Focus mainstream workforce development resources to support the sector, including more incumbent worker training.
- 2.5. Launch dedicated “industry navigator” functions to reach more employers.
- 2.6. Initiate new technical assistance programs to enhance internal human resources capacity to engage in talent demand planning and access.
- 2.7. Undertake a regional youth engagement campaign to elevate awareness and interest in manufacturing careers.

3. Supports for small and medium-sized manufacturer (SMM) capacity-building

- 3.1. Launch a succession planning technical assistance program for SMMs, including employee ownership options for greater local retention.
- 3.2. Scale and enhance technical assistance offerings to help firms navigate product and process improvements that facilitate ongoing competitiveness amid growing market penetration of emerging technologies.
- 3.3. Establish a testing and demonstration platform to vet and raise visibility of new technologies to improve SMM productivity, especially AI applications.
- 3.4. Create a physical center of gravity for regional SMMs to access acceleration, capital, and technical assistance, and enable shared facilities.
- 3.5. Convene private equity actors to identify solutions for retaining local SMM firms.
- 3.6. Facilitate greater intra-regional supply chain matchmaking to bolster market opportunities and sector cohesion.

4. Site selection and land use

- 4.1. Assess local land use policies—especially those that constrain the growth of existing manufacturing firms—to inform engagement with subregional jurisdictions.
- 4.2. Develop a comprehensive regional site inventory and readiness assessment to improve response to firms on business attraction and expansion inquiries and identify opportunities to bring sites closer to delivery.

Note: Activities prioritized for immediate (i.e., within 18 months) implementation are highlighted.



OPPORTUNITY INDUSTRIES: STRATEGIC GOALS AND TACTICS

BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING AND PRODUCTION

1. Regional organizing

- 1.1. Institutionalize a permanent regional life sciences cluster initiative.
- 1.2. Reinforce mainstream economic development activities targeted at the sector and priority specializations.
- 1.3. Expand regional commercialization and tech transfer functions.

2. Sector diversification

- 2.1. Organize and engage medical device firms to understand and serve ongoing competitiveness needs.
- 2.2. Establish a common front door for firms to access regional health care systems for device clinical trials.
- 2.3. Support enhanced navigation and matchmaking between medical device innovators and regional contract manufacturers to capture more local production.

3. Executive and enterprise talent

- 3.1. Launch a campaign to steward, retain, and attract C-suite life sciences talent.
- 3.2. Organize industry executives as a collective to welcome and build a stronger community of high-level regional C-suite industry talent.
- 3.3. Engage universities to target entry-level and Master of Business Administration (MBA) business talent for recruitment into the sector.

4. Skilled technical workforce

- 4.1. Undertake a comprehensive regional life sciences talent study.
- 4.2. Advance alignment among existing workforce development programs and shared uptake of proven models for designing high-demand occupational training.
- 4.3. Deploy a regional youth engagement campaign to elevate awareness and interest in life sciences manufacturing careers.
- 4.4. Galvanize more employer champions to invest in and partner with workforce and educational institutions.

5. Capital access

- 5.1. Identify and size existing resident capital sources in a comprehensive map to more clearly define resources and gaps.
- 5.2. Engage philanthropy, high-net-worth individuals, and other “nontraditional” investors on opportunities to invest in early-stage startups.

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