



THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION PROJECT

MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION ROADMAP REPORT

August 2021



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This report presents a series of recommendations for a path forward in expanding the innovation ecosystem across Middle Georgia. This report represents the third of three reports for The Middle Georgia Innovation Project.

More information on The Middle Georgia Innovation Project can be sourced at
<https://lab2.future-iq.com/middle-georgia-innovation/>

August 2021

Report Prepared by:



This program has been prepared under contract with the Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC), as fiscal agent for The Middle Georgia Innovation Project, with financial support from the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation U.S. Department of Defense. The content reflects the views of The Middle Georgia Innovation Project and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation, the U.S. Department of Defense.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	Methodological Process	2
2.1	Task 1: Map Existing Innovation Framework and Ecosystem.....	2
2.2	Task 2: Conduct Innovation Performance and Gap Analysis.....	4
2.3	Task 3: Establish Innovation Ecosystem Working Groups	5
3.0	High-Level Roadmap Strategic Actions	6
3.1	Create the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor	7
3.1.1	Form a 'One Middle Georgia' entity to connect Key Players	8
3.1.2	Build a One-Stop Shop process for Innovators/Startups	9
3.2	Expand the Regional Focus on Industry 4.0 Technologies	10
3.3	Amplify STEM and Software Engineering in Regional Educational Programs	11
3.4	Broaden the appeal of the Middle Georgia Region	12
4.0	Roadmap Implementation Timeline.....	13
5.0	Implementation Funding	14
6.0	Next Steps	15
7.0	Acknowledgments	16
8.0	About Future iQ	17
9.0	For More Information.....	18



The ultimate aim of the project is to build an innovation ecosystem including positioning Middle Georgia as the 'Software Center of Excellence'. This aim is not just aspirational but is also considered achievable. This is an exciting prospect for the future of the Middle Georgia region, with regards to attracting and retaining businesses, workforce, and people to the region.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the State of Georgia received an initial grant from the Department of Defense Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) to implement a region wide planning process. This supported the Middle Georgia Charrette and Regional Planning Initiative, which produced a Regional Action Plan that identified six pillars of action. It was concluded there was a regional need for an innovation performance and gap analysis to identify the current innovation ecosystem including the gaps and clusters within that ecosystem. The 2018 initiative concluded that there was need to diversify from a defense-based economy to a more diversified economy which had a strong regional collaborative approach. The final report from the Middle Georgia Charrette and Regional Planning Initiative can be viewed at <https://lab.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Middle-Georgia-Charrette-and-Planning-Regional-Action-Plan.pdf>

This resulted in a project phase, starting in mid-2020, that funded The Middle Georgia Innovation Project. The overall purpose of The Middle Georgia Innovation Project is to build innovation in Middle Georgia, focusing on the concept of developing the region as a “Software Center of Excellence”. This focus is based on the identified need and opportunity to support emerging mission capability at the Robins Air Force Base, and to help drive economic diversification in the region. The intention of The Middle Georgia Innovation project was to advance the efforts in building the workforce that Georgia needs for the future and build innovation in the Middle Georgia region. In order to build the innovation ecosystem and ensuing workforce across the region as well as developing the region to become the “Software Center of Excellence”, it has been necessary to look at what currently exists within the region regarding innovation before looking at what needs to occur in order for the region to become the “Software Center of Excellence”.

The Middle Georgia Innovation Project consisted of three in-depth tasks which have led to this final Middle Georgia Innovation Roadmap Report. The three tasks consisted of:

- Task 1: Mapping the existing Innovation Framework and Ecosystem
- Task 2: Conducting an Innovation Performance and Gap Analysis
- Task 3: Establishing 3 Innovation Ecosystem Working Groups

The methodological process for each task will be outlined briefly in this report, before explanation of the high-level roadmap strategic actions which were generated from predominantly the Task 3 Innovation Ecosystem Working Groups. Roadmap implementation strategies and timelines have been produced including preliminary cost estimates and next steps. It is important to note that recommendations throughout this report incorporate the 11 county Middle Georgia region.



2.0 METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS

A key feature of this project was the level of stakeholder engagement. There was a deliberate focus on reaching the broader leadership groups across the region and providing multiple opportunities for people to contribute to the creation of the recommendations and roadmap. The stakeholder focus is important in order to build the broad support from local institutions, leaders, and organizations. This broad buy-in and support will help accelerate implementation and alignment around new ideas.

The Middle Georgia Innovation Project engagement phases consisted of both qualitative and quantitative stakeholder methodologies in order to produce an enduring case for the Middle Georgia Region to become the “Software Center of Excellence”.

- Quantitative methodologies:
 - The Industry 4.0 Disruption and Preparedness Survey
 - Network Mapping Survey
 - Rapid Polling at Regional Future Summit
- Qualitative methodologies:
 - Network Focus Groups
 - Individual Interviews
 - 3 in-depth Innovation Ecosystem working groups
 - Start-Up Innovation Ecosystem
 - Industry 4.0 Innovation Ecosystem
 - Software Engineering Ecosystem

The combination of surveys, network focus groups, individual interviews, rapid polling, and extensive working groups has ensured that the methodological background to this project is robust.



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHTS:

- Approximately 250 key stakeholders from the Middle Georgia Region took part in the Middle Georgia Innovation Project.
- Almost 40 organizations with over 100 employees were represented in the Industry 4.0 Disruption and Preparedness Survey.



2.1 TASK 1: MAP EXISTING INNOVATION FRAMEWORK AND ECOSYSTEM

The objective of Task 1 was to explore the current innovation ecosystem across the Middle Georgia region, with a focus on how Industry 4.0 technologies were being used and disseminated across the region. A series of methodologies were used to explore and understand the functioning of the existing Middle Georgia innovation ecosystem. This work took place between September 2020 and January 2021, and included:

- **High-level Environmental Scan** - this explored various military, industries, and organizations in relation to their usage of Industry 4.0 technologies. This work estimated whether usage was low, medium, or high and whether the organizations were users, seekers, or developers of Industry 4.0 technologies.
- **Industry 4.0 Disruption and Preparedness Survey** - the survey was distributed to industry and across the regional economic development network to drill down to understand how Industry 4.0 technologies were being used. The findings from the surveys provided further clarity about how prepared organizations were to incorporate the technologies, and what stage organizations were at in adopting these technologies. The survey also explored perceptions about the potential for the region to become a 'Software Center of Excellence'.
- **Network Mapping** - this built on the 2018/19 network mapping and was conducted by phone interviews with key stakeholders to explore who they work with, to help apply and use Industry 4.0 technologies. They were asked who they interact with to seek information about these technologies and who they use to help develop specific new industry 4.0 solutions.
- **Focus Groups and Interviews** - Building on the qualitative methodology of the network mapping, three network focus groups were formed in the areas of Economic Development, Military and Defense and Educational institutions. Finally, key individuals from the innovation ecosystem were interviewed in late December 2020 and early January 2021.

There is clear consensus that there is strong desire to build the region's innovation capacity, however the existing ecosystem is currently embryonic. The desire is strong, there are gaps within the ecosystem but there are clear opportunities and great interest in strengthening the ecosystem.

Task One culminated in the production of the Middle Georgia Innovation Framework and Ecosystem Report. The report can be read at <https://lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Middle-Georgia-Innovation-Framework-And-Ecosystem-Report.pdf>



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHTS:

- In order to shape the region as a 'Software Center of Excellence', a series of critical initial building blocks were identified.
- These include building the innovation ecosystem, placing a deliberate focus on Industry 4.0 technologies, and promoting existing innovation and the region's livability.



Middle Georgia is very close to becoming an impressive regional hub for innovation. The next steps in the process will be the transformational progression for the region in order to become recognized as a significant "Software Center of Excellence". The region is clearly very competitive with other similar regions across the US.

2.2 TASK 2: CONDUCT INNOVATION PERFORMANCE AND GAP ANALYSIS

The objective of Task 2 was to perform an extensive Innovation Performance and Gap Analysis of the Middle Georgia region in two reports.

- The first report provided an in-depth analysis of the potential for innovation within the Middle Georgia region against examples of comparable statewide case studies. The methodology used was one on one interviews with leaders and key stakeholders from a series of comparable regions and with local businesses that featured innovation. The Potential for Innovation and Comparable Case Studies Report can be read at <https://lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Middle-Georgia-Gap-Analysis-Report-Part-1.pdf>
- The second report examined the technical results and data that indicated both gaps and opportunities for innovation in Middle Georgia compared to the regional studies. This examination explored the current state of innovation indicators in the Middle Georgia region and compared the data with case studies known to have active and energized innovation environments. The Technical Gap Analysis Report can be read at <https://lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Middle-Georgia-Gap-Analysis-Report-Part-2.pdf> The majority of the data in this section was sourced from the U.S. Economic Development Administration's StatsAmerica – Innovation 2.0 website at Indiana University's Indiana Business Research Center (<http://www.statsamerica.org/ii2/overview.aspx>).

The case studies included:

Military Base/Communities Case Studies

- Hill Air Force Base, Odgen, UT
- Fort Benning, Columbus, GA
- Fort Gordon, Augusta, GA

Regional Case Studies

- Chattanooga, TN
- Huntsville, AL
- Southwestern Ohio - Cincinnati and the Dayton Region, OH

Local Georgia Case Studies

- Augusta, GA
- Columbus, GA
- Savannah, GA

Local Business Case Studies

- LBA Ware, Macon, GA
- Atrium Health NAVICENT, Macon, GA
- Vizitech
- Wayne Reaves Software

- FireStarter FABLab
- SPARK Macon
- Booz Allen Hamilton
- HamTECH
- WR-ALC-SME, Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex
- Personify 3D
- Grits Consulting

Education Case Studies

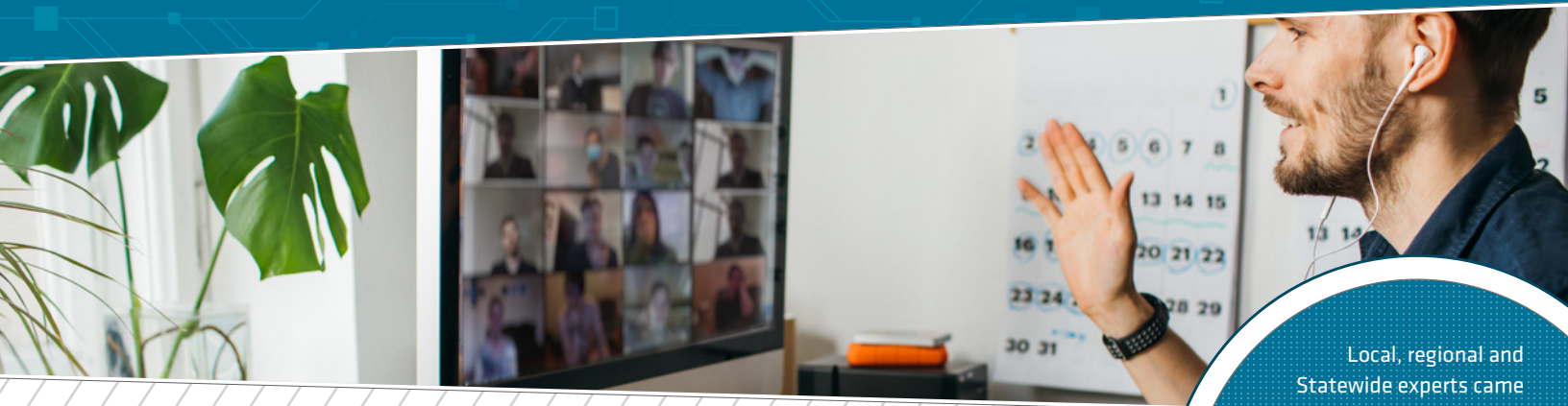
- Central Georgia Technical College
- Fort Valley State University
- Georgia College
- Georgia Tech Research Institute
- Mercer University
- MERC
- Middle Georgia State University



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHT:

- The building blocks to improving innovation performance and filling the innovation gaps will include Robins Air Force Base (RAFB), strength in knowledge creation, rapidly growing technical sectors, proximity to Atlanta and the emerging regional identity.
- The Middle Georgia region outperforms in Human Capital and Knowledge Creation, when compared with the median US value.



2.3 TASK 3: ESTABLISH INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM WORKING GROUPS

Key experts and stakeholders from the Middle Georgia region were identified and invited to join the 3 Innovation Working groups which were:

- Start-Up Innovation Ecosystem
- Industry 4.0 Technologies Ecosystem
- Software Engineering Ecosystem

Three meetings were held with each working group from March – May 2021

- Meeting 1 - Assimilate Data and Analysis
- Meeting 2 – Brainstorm how to Build the Ecosystem
- Meeting 3 – Contribute to Action Plan

Due to Covid-19 restrictions the first two meetings were held virtually via zoom with the third meeting carried out 'in person'.

The final stage, was The Future Summit, held on May 26, 2021. This was a virtual event which brought the working groups together, with local leaders, to present the initial findings and recommendations generated by the working groups.

Local, regional and Statewide experts came together in a series of extensive working groups to discuss Start-Up Innovation, Industry 4.0 Technologies and Software Engineering. The culmination was the Future Summit which tested initial recommendations and actions via rapid polling.



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHTS:

- 84% of rapid polling respondents felt that it would take 5-10 years to build an innovation ecosystem.
- 84% of rapid polling respondents believed that it was critically urgent to implement the Middle Georgia Roadmap straight away.

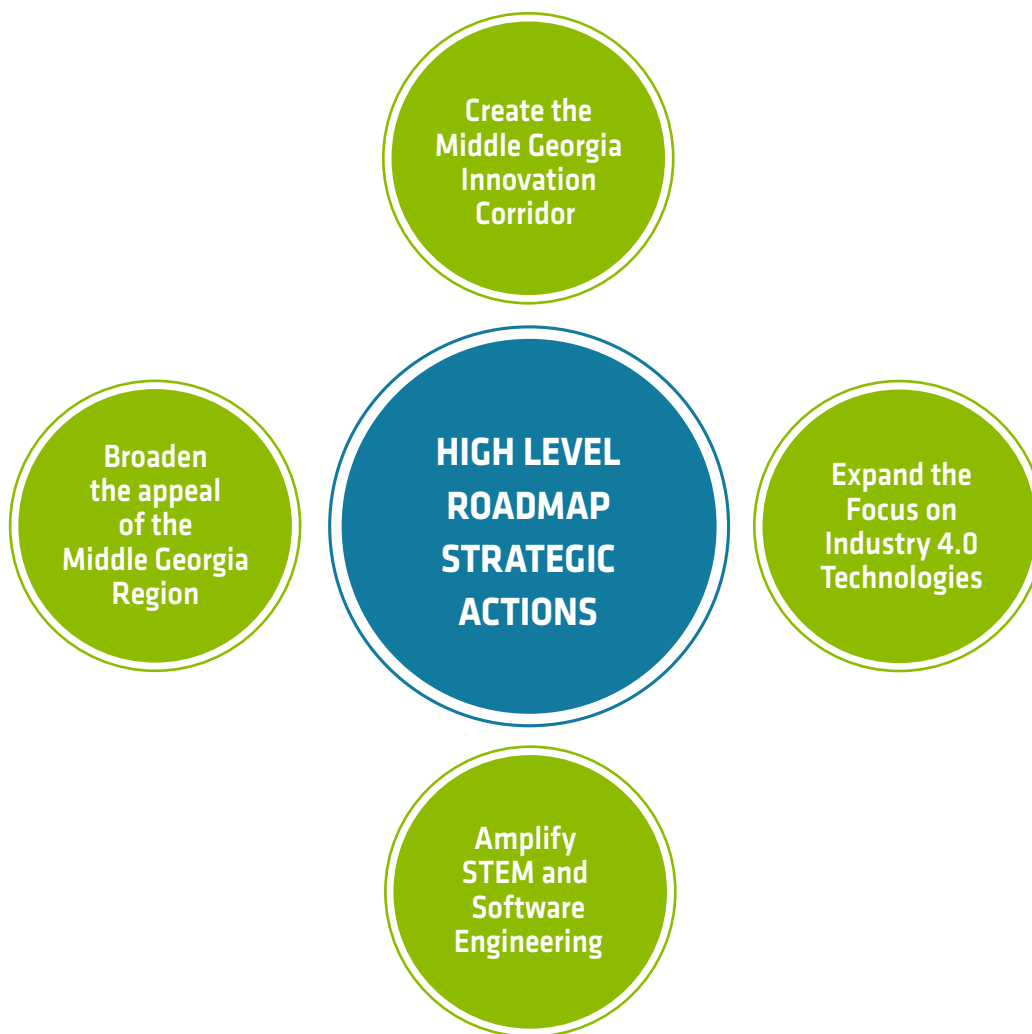




Work from surveys, interviews, case studies and in-depth working groups culminated in the production of the four high-level Roadmap Strategic Actions, which will guide the region to become the “Software Center of Excellence”.

3.0 HIGH-LEVEL ROADMAP STRATEGIC ACTIONS

High Level Roadmap Strategic Actions were generated from the work carried out in Task 1, 2 and predominantly Task 3 – the Innovation Ecosystem Working Groups. However, the work generated by the Task 3 working groups were informed by Task 1 and 2 as well as the working group participants’ existing expertise and knowledge.





71% of key stakeholders who attended the virtual Future Summit felt that the idea of creating a Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor was a very promising idea, and a further 20% believing it was probably a good idea.

3.1 CREATE THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR

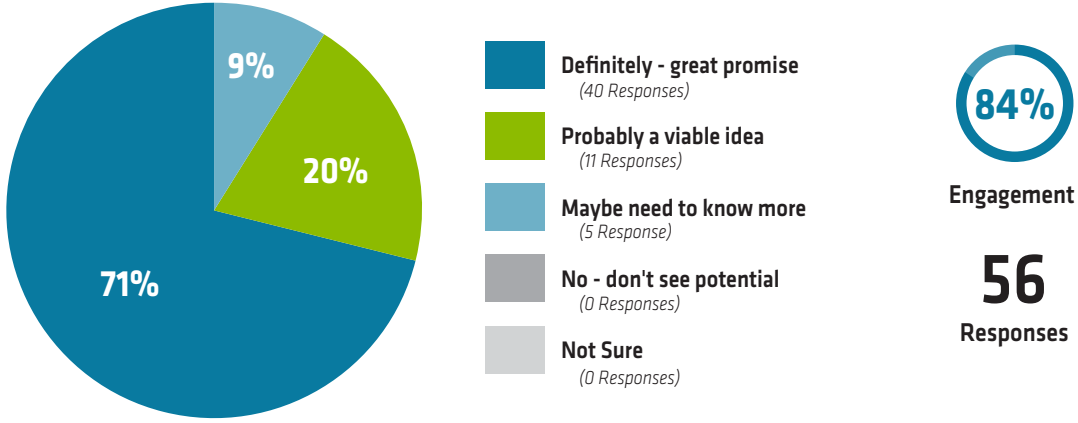
A predominant theme generated throughout the latter stages of the project, after culmination of the work from the earlier surveys, interviews, focus groups and working groups, was that there is an opportunity to create a Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor.

Primarily, there is an opportunity and need to address the following steps to create an innovation corridor:

- Create a technological inventory of what currently exists in the Middle Georgia Region with regards to innovation (RAFB, Innovation Centers, Higher Education).
- Build out a platform that highlights the current concentration of innovation. This will help the visualization of what currently exists in the area of innovation across the region and inform the next step of the process in defining a logical geographic “space” for the much needed Innovation Corridor.
- In collaboration with a ‘super working group’, create the formal concept and design of the Innovation Corridor.

The concept of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor attracted significant support at the Future Summit, held on May 26, 2021.

Is creating a Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor a promising idea?



DATA INSIGHTS:

- 47% of key stakeholders who attended the virtual Future Summit and who had been part of the overall Middle Georgia Innovation Project process believed that the most logical geographic focus for the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor would be between Warner Robins - Houston County MSA and Macon-Bibb County MSA.
- 40% believed that the corridor should incorporate the whole Middle Georgia region. This reflects the broad desire by many people to see the whole region benefit from such endeavors.

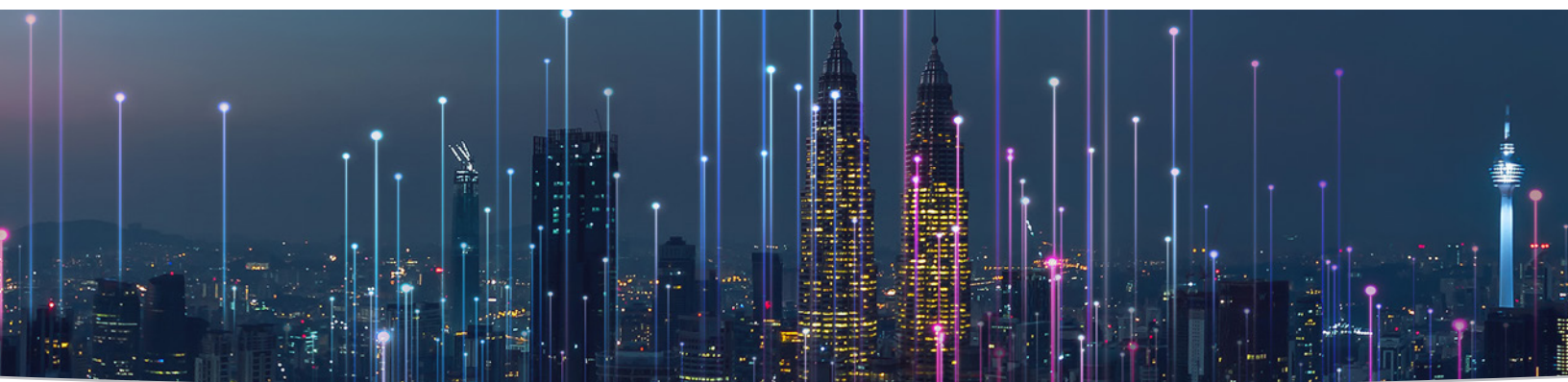


Moving forward from the “The Middle Georgia Innovation Project” there will be a need for one entity to “own and progress” the process of building innovation in Middle Georgia.

3.1.1 FORM A ‘ONE MIDDLE GEORGIA’ ENTITY TO CONNECT KEY PLAYERS

Building an Innovation Corridor includes building institutional support and structure. Throughout the planning process, the need for one entity to “own” the process was a consistent theme throughout surveys, interviews, focus groups and working groups. Currently, the Middle Georgia Innovation Project has invited many key stakeholders and out of state experts to input into the process. A key part of this has been the continued convening of stakeholders. There will be a need to continue this process, and specific recommendations include:

- Create a Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor organization. Key strategic aspects of such an organization include:
 - Focus on fostering innovation diffusion across the RAFB / Local community ‘membrane’ via resource sharing.
 - Build the ecosystem via networking and alliance creation, especially between the RAFB, Local Education Institutions and municipal entities.
 - Dedicated staff and a steering group of local groups pertinent to the process (Middle Georgia Regional Commission, MGEA, innovation centers, Development Authority of Houston County, 21st Century Partnership, supporting companies, Defense contracting companies, SCORE Middle Georgia, SBDC, Universities, Technical Schools and GA Center for Innovation).
- Key tactical functions would include:
 - Create the identity and branding of the Innovation Ecosystem process moving forward from The Middle Georgia Innovation Project.
 - Purposely build a focus on innovation in each community and focus on diversity across the region and corridor.
 - Identify potential future spin-off industries and activate venture capitalists and community capital.
 - Focus on software growth and hardware/software development across a range of existing and future opportunities; for example, in clean energy and agriculture via unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).
 - Promote methods to share information across the innovation community.



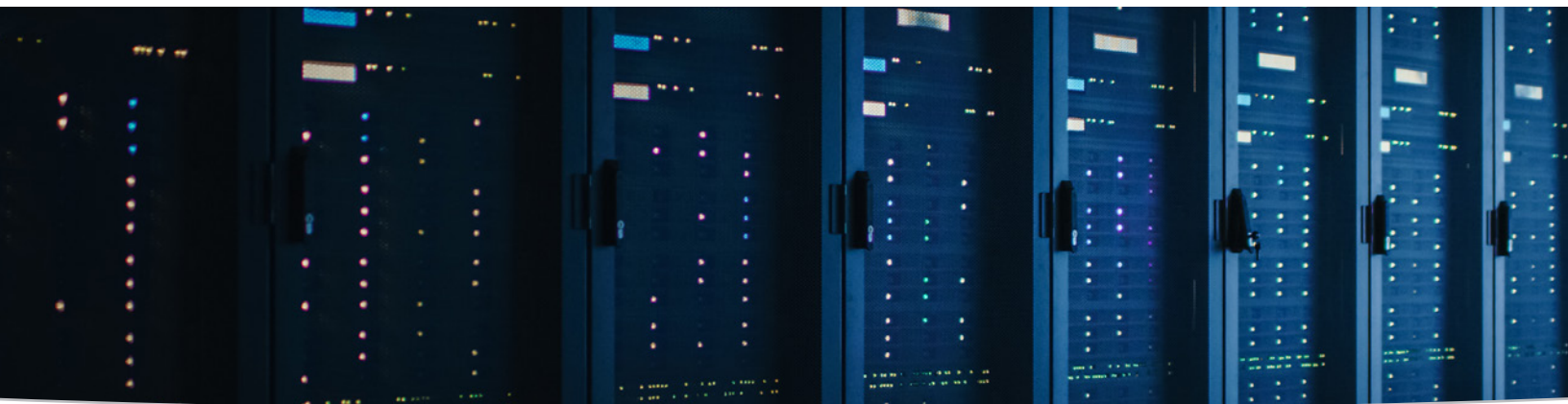


A “One Stop Shop” concept for innovators and start-ups will provide the resources, knowledge and networking necessary for innovation to expand and thrive within the Middle Georgia region.

3.1.2 BUILD A ONE-STOP SHOP PROCESS FOR INNOVATORS/STARTUPS

Within the Innovation Corridor concept, there is an identified need for a one point of contact or “One-Stop Shop” to enable all innovators and startups to connect. This has been consistently identified as an urgent need. Innovators and startups have input into the process with their ideas regarding what they feel is needed to jump start innovation and enable innovators and startups to flourish. Such a function would logically sit under the Innovation Corridor concept.

- The key function of this ‘one-stop shop’ concept includes:
 - Provide a ‘one stop shop’ go to platform for investors and innovators/businesses.
 - Provide a list of resources and publicize the resources for start-ups/innovators, including a web resource of all potential investors and venture capitalists for start-ups and innovators.
 - Provide quarterly in person meetings with/between innovators to come together to discuss their work and experiences.
 - Create extra events where innovators work together in person (Hackathons, etc)
 - Produce marketing advice on how to get the innovator’s work out into the public arena.
 - Educate on available community funding for innovators/start-ups.
 - Market the success to date around innovation and “tell the story” through media avenues.
- Additional functions could also include:
 - Provide training for innovators/start-ups to present in front of investors/venture capitalists.
 - Source potential investors and venture capitalists to invest in the Middle Georgia Innovation process.
 - Invite potential investors and venture capitalists to meet initially for one meeting, to learn about the process.
 - Identify, match and set up quarterly meetings between potential investors/venture capitalists and innovators/start-ups.



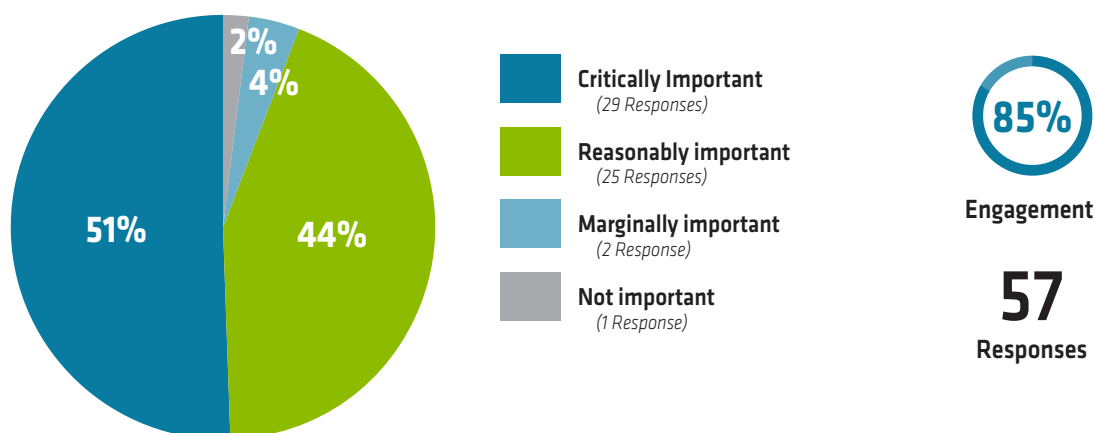
An intentional focus on Industry 4.0 will ensure that the region will become the “Software Center of Excellence”.

3.2 EXPAND THE REGIONAL FOCUS ON INDUSTRY 4.0 TECHNOLOGIES

A key focus of the Middle Georgia Innovation project was Industry 4.0 technologies. Industry 4.0 is accelerating and at a rapid pace. To be competitive, the Middle Georgia Region needs to be up to date with current Industry 4.0 technologies and looking forward to learning about future technologies. There needs to be a focus on Industry 4.0 technologies in the education system as well as in the workplace. Key recommendations for expanding the focus on Industry 4.0 technologies includes:

- Expand Industry 4.0 technology based curriculums into all levels of education (K-12 to College) in order to build a skilled workforce that can better support the region’s industries (measurables to include: number of program applicants, pathway completion, Dept. of Labor Hiring dates and related jobs).
- Identify, connect and build the network of Industry 4.0 technology experts to assist with sharing Industry 4.0 knowledge with industry and education partners. (measurables to include: number of Industry 4.0 Technology educational events hosted and facilitated annually, the number of participants at events, growth in enrollment and job attainment in the area of Industry 4.0 in the region).
- Create a mobile lab which would take the exposure/information of Industry 4.0 technologies out to all 11 counties in the Middle Georgia region. Build in a program of Industry 4.0 demonstrations, that could be hosted by the network of economic development professionals in Industry 4.0 technologies across the region to inform on industry 4.0 technologies.
- Pursue Smart Cities initiatives, that help build capacity and application of Industry 4.0 technologies. This could include working towards providing a virtual or physical tech village in Macon, Warner Robins or Milledgeville.

How important do you think is an Industry 4.0 Focus?



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHTS:

- 95% of key stakeholders who attended the virtual Future Summit believed that it was reasonably to critically important to focus on Industry 4.0 technologies.
- 64% of key stakeholders who attended the virtual Future Summit believed that the primary leadership for a focus on Industry 4.0 technologies should be Businesses and Entrepreneurs.

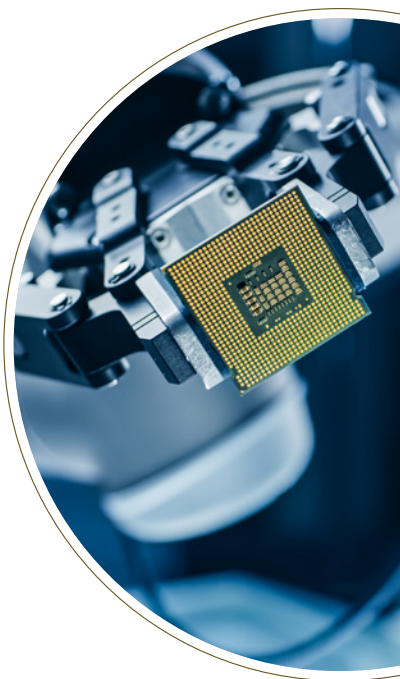


To build the innovation ecosystem across Middle Georgia, there is a need to connect industry, education partners and Industry 4.0 subject matter experts to further expand the skills and knowledge base in the region.

3.3 AMPLIFY STEM AND SOFTWARE ENGINEERING IN REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The amplification of STEM and Software engineering is critical in order to meet the demands for industry and businesses going forward. As the current and future workforce will need to be educated in Industry 4.0 technologies, this has to start early on in the education system and continue throughout the individual's education. Simultaneously, industry will need to provide "catch up" education for their existing workforce in relation to Industry 4.0 technologies. Gaps have been identified regarding the lack of knowledge of certain Industry 4.0 technologies and these need to be addressed via:

- Understanding the skills gap
 - Evaluation of current curriculums and identification of gaps in the teaching of Industry 4.0 technologies. Specific focus should be on including 5G/Internet of Things, AI, Predictive Analytics and Cybersecurity to roll out across the region. There will be a need to measure the success of the curriculums via program applicants, pathway completion, Dept of Labor hiring data and related jobs
 - Identify all industries that benefit/will benefit from a STEM workforce and run a STEM marketing campaign across the region
- Filling the skills gap
 - Convene a coalition of educators to develop a K-12 program for STEM education and to provide options for non-degree certifications. This will include a platform for sharing information across university systems and making it accessible to K-12 schools in the region. The innovation "One Entity" will need to work with the regions' superintendents of the school system to encourage the collaboration across county lines to meet the needs of future workforce development.
 - Create and execute a "Teacher Development Strategy" to invest in teachers' education to grow STEM education. This should include executing a "Teacher Act" to incentivize teachers to pursue a STEM emphasis.
 - Share the regional intern talent pool across regional industry and companies via a web resource. There will be a need to implement tradeshow to educate and inform students what industry is already doing around Industry 4.0 technologies to engage students to study these technologies and remain in the region. Measurable achievements can be sourced via the number of tradeshow hosted and facilitated annually, the number of participants at each event, growth in enrollment and job attainment.





Why do people choose to live and work in Middle Georgia? The livability appeal needs to be amplified and promoted widely to attract and retain businesses, families and talent.

3.4 BROADEN THE APPEAL OF THE MIDDLE GEORGIA REGION

The need to amplify the appeal of living and working in the Middle Georgia region was highlighted and reiterated throughout all stages of the process. The low cost of living within the Middle Georgia region, along with Houston County's excellent educational system and the appeal of Macon as a second ring city to Atlanta with a burgeoning downtown and livability was cited often. This is coupled with the strength in tertiary educational institutions, and the economic and innovation drive of the Robins Air Force Base.

There is a need to really amplify and promote what it means to live in Middle Georgia for families and young professionals who may consider moving to the region. This messaging and promotion will not only encourage workforce attraction but also encourage the retention of homegrown talent who may be considering moving to Atlanta for work and the appeal of a 'big city'. Work going forward needs to include:

- Develop a program to document the regional quality of life narrative
 - Creation of a shared "Quality of Life" vision and strategy between all Development Authorities, Chambers and the organizations on the steering committee of the newly formed organization. This will follow on from a survey to evaluate the current "Quality of Life" in the Middle Georgia region. This survey should be sent to all households, if possible.
- Creation of a 'Living in Middle Georgia' Initiative.
 - Launch a website which showcases the workforce opportunities, aesthetic appeal and overall liveability of the region. There is a need to showcase Macon with its potential as a Tier 2 city to draw people wanting an urban living experience from the Atlanta region and enhance Macon's overall liveability 'vibe'. There is also a need to showcase Houston County with its exceptional educational system and work opportunities at RAFB and other exceptional companies as well as the appeal of the other counties within the Middle Georgia region.
 - Organization of a regional press conference launching the new "Living in Middle Georgia" website and create closer relationships with key media outlets in the region as well as in Atlanta.
 - Provide incentives for relocation of talent to the Middle Georgia region. An example is the Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA) which established a new Savannah Technology Workforce Incentive to lure out of state workers via reimbursing individual moving expenses up to \$2,000.





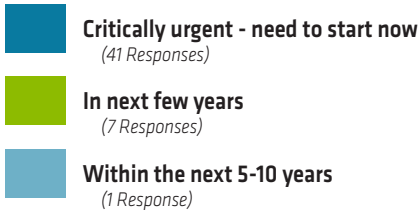
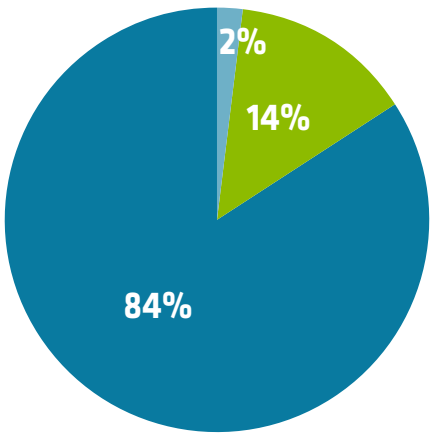
The key stakeholders in Middle Georgia are poised to get to work on the implementation of the roadmap.

4.0 ROADMAP IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Throughout the Middle Georgia Innovation project, stakeholders were asked about their sense of urgency with regards to implementation. This included probing Industry 4.0 adoption in Task 1, and timelines for implementation in Task 3. During the Future Summit on 26 May, stakeholders were asked about the sense of urgency in implementing the recommendations and roadmap, as part of the rapid polling.

Given this sense of urgency, the project has now proposed a rapid implementation phase (see Next Steps Section), proposed to run from July to September 2021. This will build the basic structures to launch the Innovation Corridor and coalesce stakeholders around the action items. This approach will accelerate the implementation of the Middle Georgia Innovation Project and maintain the momentum with the key stakeholders.

How urgent is it implement the MG Innovation Roadmap?



Engagement

49

Responses



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHTS:

- 84% of key stakeholders who attended the virtual Future Summit believed that it was critically urgent to start work now, with the balance seeing it as necessary in the next few years.
- This data, together with other stakeholder comments, reflects a strong sense of urgency and appetite.





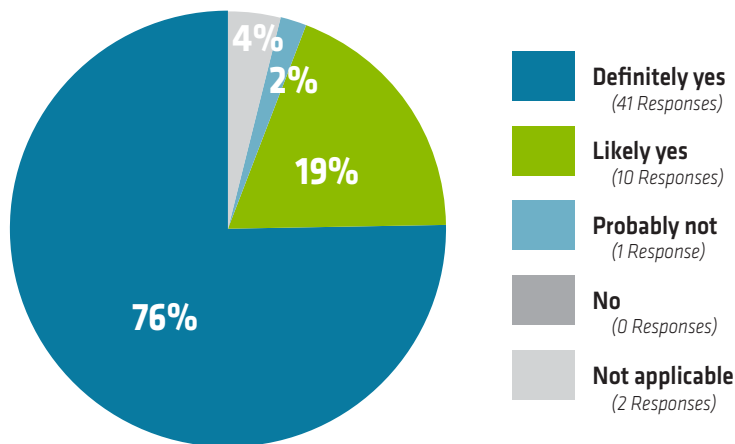
5.0 IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

The Middle Georgia Innovation project has identified strong stakeholder and institutional support to create the region as a center of innovation. The region is seeing economic growth in the core counties. The big economic drivers, including the higher / tertiary education system and Robins Air Force Base are expanding. They are also now being increasingly supplemented by growing sectors in transportation, logistics, healthcare and innovative new ventures.

Funding support for implementation will come from two main sources. Primarily this will come from the resources and institutional capacity of local organizations. Secondly, there is considerable potential for this to be supplemented by external grant funding and investment. The current environment is very conducive, with significant interest in innovation, and especially for innovation built on the digital technologies.

The Middle Georgia Innovation Project has gathered the support and interest of key stakeholders. This will bring significant institutional support to the effort.

Do you/your organization want to be part of creating Middle Georgia as center of innovation?



81%
Engagement
54
Responses



DataInsight

DATA INSIGHTS:

- The cost of implementing the actions in the roadmap will be dependent on the ability to attract local institutional support. The baseline funding required will be around \$250-\$500,000 per year; to support organizational development and key staff positions.
- The region is well placed to present investment-ready implementation plans to prospective funders.



There is potential to package together a proposition to attract the remote worker and businesses into the region, as a place to live. There is a need to make the region more attractive for people to consider moving to a regional or smaller city setting.

6.0 NEXT STEPS

The immediate next steps going forward from July to September 2021, will be additional work on The Middle Georgia Innovation Project to provide the first steps to recommendations that have been outlined within this report. These first steps make up the concluding tasks of The Middle Georgia Innovation Project, before handing off to a local entity who will “own and guide” the process going forward.

1. Building the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor

- Industry 4.0 technologies should be shared and diffused regionally and sideways, rather than vertically through organizations and industry. This can be done in part by Economic Development professionals, who may need to expand their knowledge of the new landscape of Industry 4.0 technologies as they work with businesses and industry across the region.
- Innovation Centers and Partnerships need to contribute to the overall Middle Georgia Innovation Ecosystem. They need to connect to each other and to the entire region – including industry and educational institutions, if they are not doing so already. This will help break down silos of innovation and create an environment to connect talented people and break down cliques.
- Partnerships are needed to strengthen the links between educational institutions, industry and Robins Air Force Base. Internships are to be encouraged through direct partnership with education and industry.

2. Documentation of local case studies and how they apply to innovation, industry 4.0 and the opportunity for the ultimate aim – the Middle Georgia Region to become the “Software Center of Excellence”

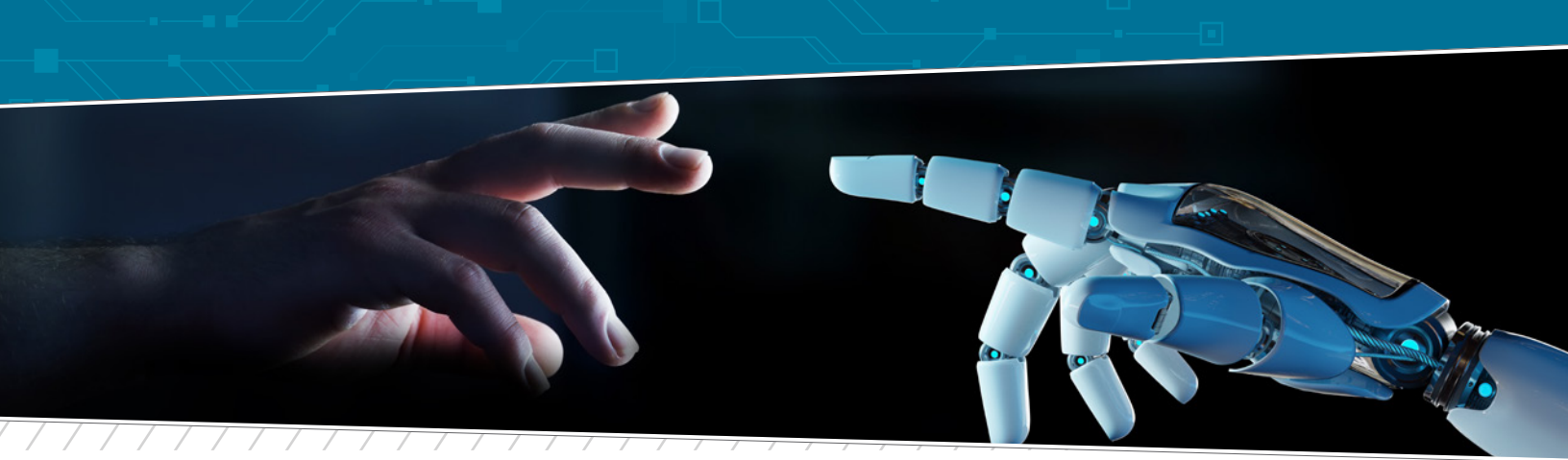
- The connection of the regional case studies to local assets will help show how potential innovators and start-ups can use the regional ecosystem.
- The case studies will focus on innovation in the Middle Georgia private sector, RAFB and elsewhere in the region with a focus on Industry 4.0 technologies.

3. Creation of the “Living in Middle Georgia” initiative

- A “Quality of Life” survey will be distributed throughout the region.
- A “Living in Middle Georgia” working group will be established, from individuals who have shown commitment, interest and expertise in the area of “Quality of Life” within the region.
- The focus will be on how to tell and promote the good news stories about living and working in Middle Georgia. The focus will be on attraction and retention of families and talent into the region, with a tighter focus on workforce and Industry 4.0.
- Creation of an identity for the region will be established via branding and a stand-alone “Living in Middle Georgia” website.

4. Launch of the “Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor”

- A working group will be established from individuals who have shown commitment to the idea of an Innovation Corridor. It is expected that these individuals will become the steering group regarding the production of the Innovation Corridor going forward.
- The launch event will take place in late September 2021, with a strong focus on inviting venture capitalists and investors to this event. The event will consist of presentations from the key stakeholders involved in The Middle Georgia Innovation Project as well as from potential partners from initiatives such as The Partnership of Inclusive Innovation.



7.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We would also like to completely acknowledge the commitment, input and sharing of knowledge of every individual who were part of this project. These individuals gave their time and expertise within surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, working groups and for the Regional Future Summit.

Middle Georgia Innovation Project Steering Group

- Laura Mathis – *Executive Director* - Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC)
- Greg Boike – *Director of Public Administration* – Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC)
- Amy Hudnall – *Director*, Center of Innovation Aerospace – Georgia Dept. of Economic Development (GDeD)
- Angie Gheesling – *Executive Director*, Development Authority of Houston County
- Dan Rhoades – *Chief Operating Officer*, 21st Century Partnership
- Melony Bagwell – *78 Air Base Wing Strategic Initiatives Group Chief*, Robins Air Force Base (RAFB)



8.0 ABOUT FUTURE IQ

Future iQ specializes in applying innovative tools and approaches to assist cities, organizations, regions and industries shape their economic and community futures. With nearly two decades of experience, the company has a global clientele spanning three continents.

To learn more about Future iQ, and our recent projects visit www.future-iq.com or by email at info@future-iq.com

For more details, and to access additional information about the Middle Georgia Innovation Project please visit <https://lab2.future-iq.com/middle-georgia-innovation/>



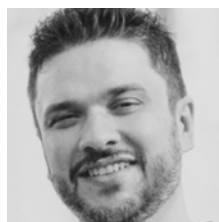
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9.0 FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about The Middle Georgia Innovation Project



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