



THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION PROJECT

THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR REPORT

October 2021



THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION PROJECT

THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR REPORT

This report presents the outcomes and recommendations from Task 5 of The Middle Georgia Innovation Project. The objective of Task 5 was to develop and launch The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor concept. This report represents the fifth report for The Middle Georgia Innovation Project.

More information on The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor can be sourced at
www.478innovates.com

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

October 2021

Report Prepared by:



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	Developing The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor	2
2.1	The Innovation Corridor Concept	2
2.2	The Super Working Group and Stakeholder Input.....	3
2.3	Definition of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor	4
2.4	Geography of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor	5
2.5	The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor Pledge	6
3.0	Creation of the “Living in Middle Georgia” initiative	7
4.0	Launching The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor	8
4.1	The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor Website.....	8
5.0	Recommendations.....	9
5.1	Immediate Building-Block Recommendations	9
5.2	Ideas and Suggested Actions	10
5.2.1	Activating the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor	10
5.2.2	Leadership and Governance.....	10
5.2.3	Funding and Support	10
6.0	Acknowledgements	11
7.0	For More Information.....	12
8.0	About Future iQ	13



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Middle Georgia Innovation Project (2021) was the first step in implementing the regional action plan from the Middle Georgia Charrette and Regional Planning Initiative (2018). Both initiatives were funded by the Department of Defense, Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC). Both initiatives focused on building innovation in the Middle Georgia region and establish it as a place which will attract new industry, businesses and workforce. The Middle Georgia Innovation Project concluded with an Innovation Roadmap Report which can be viewed at <https://lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Middle-Georgia-Innovation-Roadmap-Report.pdf>.

The ultimate aim of the Middle Georgia Innovation Project is to build an innovation ecosystem and position Middle Georgia as a “Software Center of Excellence”. The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor is the first step in achieving this goal.

Two of the high-level strategic actions that arose from the Roadmap report have been embraced in the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor process. These were “Creating the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor” and “Broadening the appeal of the Middle Georgia region”. The concept of building the “Innovation Corridor” was a predominant theme that evolved through the latter stages of the original Middle Georgia Innovation project. Middle Georgia has a concentration of pioneering Innovation Centers and partnerships, radiating around the Higher Education institutions and Robins Air Force Base. Strong regional innovation ecosystems exist which foster a strong entrepreneurial culture, a dynamic business environment and a fertile place for a strong innovation workforce. The region is rich in assets in innovation, education, industry and manufacturing and this will only increase with new missions coming from Robins Air Force Base. It was perceived by stakeholders across the region that now was the time to launch the innovation corridor across the 11-county region.

Another predominant theme throughout the whole process was the need to amplify the message about the appeal of living and working in the Middle Georgia region. The low cost of living, world class educational institutions and proximity to Atlanta and the second-tier city of Macon were reasons cited that contributed to the appeal of the region. However there has been a lack of telling the good news stories about innovation in the region, but also what is attractive about the region. Telling these stories and amplifying the message will attract a future workforce and their families as well as preserve the current workforce and graduates, who may be considering moving out of the region.

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor process has brought together innovators, industry members, educators, Robins Air Force Base and economic development professionals. With the formation of a Super Working Group, a dedicated team of experts have worked together to develop the corridor. This has resulted in a pledge for commitment to the corridor as well as a website created solely for the initiative. The website can be viewed at www.478innovates.com and tells the good news story of innovation in the region as well as that of the broader appeal of the region.



2.0 DEVELOPING THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR

2.1 THE INNOVATION CORRIDOR CONCEPT

“An Innovation Corridor is a concept to create more broad based growth across a geographic region by leveraging the innovation and placemaking assets in conjunction with these same assets in an established relatively high-performing innovation hub.”

A Blueprint for Building an Innovation Corridor, RTI International – April 2020

Innovation corridors are often established or configured so as to acknowledge an economic area that is demonstrably interconnected. The corridor approach optimizes key assets, transforming an older development paradigm that relied on speed and cost-efficiency into a more innovation-friendly model using specialization, concentration and skills development.

The principal challenges facing innovation corridors arise from governance, strategy, placemaking and labor market needs, therefore the following organizational imperatives in developing an innovation corridor are needed:

- Strong and structured collaboration across local government and institutions spanned by the corridor. Research shows the importance of formal and informal structures that facilitate the exchange of technology and insight while enhancing co-ordination according to an agreed agenda.
- A shared vision is needed if the corridor is to develop a strong brand identity and meaningful governance.
- A skilled and diversified leadership network for the corridor enhances the buy-in, across a diffuse area of stakeholders who might otherwise lack aligned interests.
- Collaborations and consortia play a key role in marketing the corridor and promoting further growth by organizing events and supplying business support tailored to needs. Collaborations also leverage expertise dispersed across higher education institutions .
- Improving the rate and weight of investment across the innovation corridor is key. Corridor actors typically need to enter into public-private funding models to deliver investment and to leverage local government assets as effectively as possible.
- Importance of strong University support systems is critical for innovation corridor development.

Innovation corridors are established to acknowledge an economic area that is demonstrably interconnected. Middle Georgia has the assets and connectivity to ensure the success of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor.





2.2 THE SUPER WORKING GROUP AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The Super Working Group was set up to articulate what the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor would resemble going forward from inception to launch. Individuals from higher education, defense, economic development, innovation centers and marketing sectors were invited to meet virtually on a weekly basis to provide expertise and knowledge in the pursuit of establishing the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor proposition and definition.

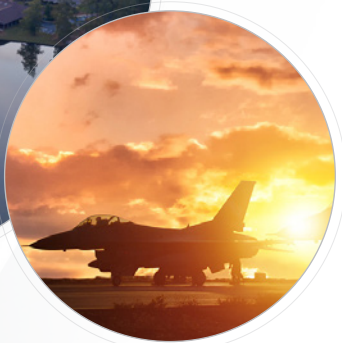
This was a strategic role in which the Super Working Group:

- Assisted and provided knowledge and expertise in developing the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor proposition and definition.
- Built stakeholder support for the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor.
- Helped seek support and endorsement from local organizations.
- Assisted in telling the story of both innovation across the Middle Georgia region and the appeal of living in the region.

The Super Working Group consisted of experts who would assist in developing the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor from inception through to launch.

Members of the Super Working Group and experts from the areas of defense, industry and innovation centers also took part in a series of video interviews. The videos explored their definition of The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor in both conceptual and geographical terms. They also explained why they thought that the Middle Georgia region was now ready to develop and launch the Innovation Corridor. Finally, they contributed their thoughts on the appeal of living and working in the Middle Georgia region.

The video interviews can be viewed at <https://www.478innovates.com/about-innovation-corridor>





2.3 DEFINITION OF THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor is defined as:

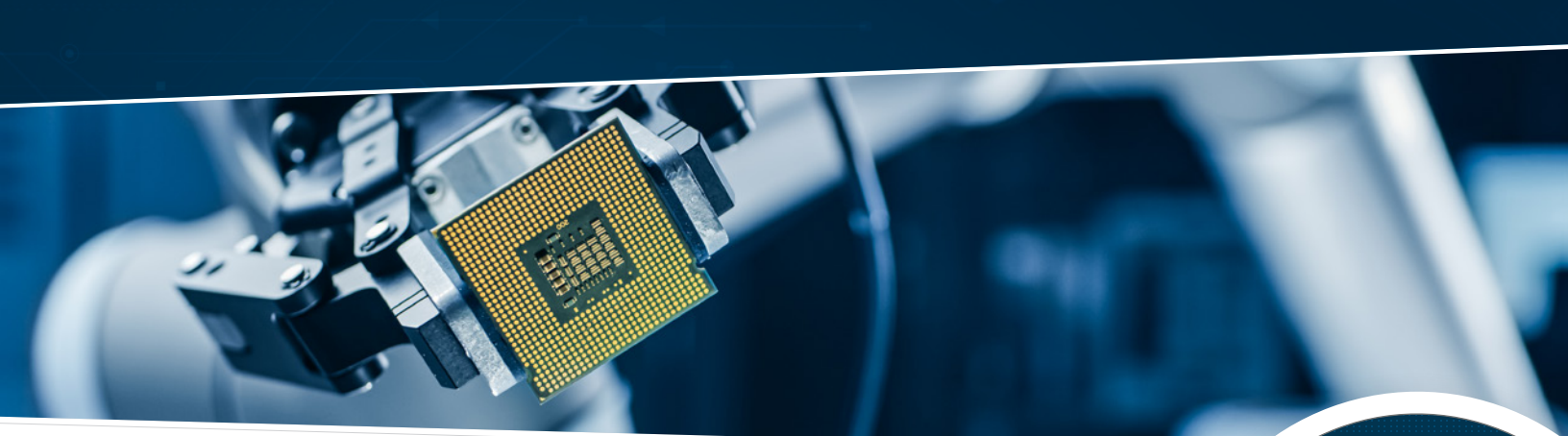
“The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor is a concept which will unite and link individuals and entities from within the 11 county Middle Georgia region. These individuals and entities will all be connected to innovation and emerging/accelerating technologies via industry, research, education, workforce, Robins Air Force Base and local communities. The corridor will continually evolve as innovation is always evolving. The corridor will be dynamic, proactive and progressive as new technologies accelerate. As a regional corridor, the corridor will be collaborative, inclusive and agile in adapting to new technologies, sharing information and attracting new talent/retaining talent for the workforce that is needed now and into the future. The ultimate aim of the Middle Georgia Innovation Project is to build an innovation ecosystem and position Middle Georgia as a “Software Center of Excellence”.

High level goals of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor are:

- Bring assets together to accelerate innovation in the region
- Drive and expand growth in globally competitive industries
- Strategically coordinate defense, educational institutions and private-sector innovation assets
- Attract national and international workforce talent and families to the Middle Georgia region.
- Preserve and build workforce across the Middle Georgia Region.
- Launch the Middle Georgia region into the national and global innovation ranks.

Innovation is constantly evolving. The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor will continually evolve and will be dynamic, proactive and progressive as new technologies accelerate.





2.4 GEOGRAPHY OF THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor is a regional effort and includes all 11 counties within the Middle Georgia region. This corridor is anchored by the counties of Houston and Macon-Bibb.

Proximity and connectivity are essential for the success of the corridor. The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor creates a defined geography, that highlights the concentration of innovation and important regional assets. As entities are connected to the Innovation Corridor, this offers them the opportunity to be at the forefront of innovation, and to be part of a growing and vibrant network.

The Innovation Corridor represents the concentration of activities, however the impact flows much wider. The Middle Georgia region is influenced by the core of the Innovation Corridor, and offers a wide range of locations for investment, residential and lifestyle pursuits.

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor covers the 11-county region, anchored by the counties of Houston and Macon-Bibb

The geography of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor and the existing innovation centers already in the region can be viewed at <https://www.478innovates.com/geography-innovation-corridor>.





2.5 THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR PLEDGE

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor Pledge was set up to garner initial support for the corridor. The pledge incorporated commitment to actions that would develop from the virtual launch of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor which was held on Tuesday 28 September 2021.

Initial actions include:

- Committing to working with the Innovation Corridor ecosystem to share and promote examples of best practice in local innovation.
- Committing to the cross promotion of innovation success stories of entities involved within the Innovation Corridor, in order to maximize publicity and tell the story of innovation across the region.
- Identifying the innovation capacity in each individual's company/organization which will build the existing and future workforce, and work to connect to like-minded innovators in the region.
- Telling the story about the liveability appeal, affordability, educational assets and the beauty of the Middle Georgia region to help develop current talent and attract new people and their families.

The Pledge garners initial support and commitment from individuals for the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor.





3.0 CREATION OF THE “LIVING IN MIDDLE GEORGIA” INITIATIVE

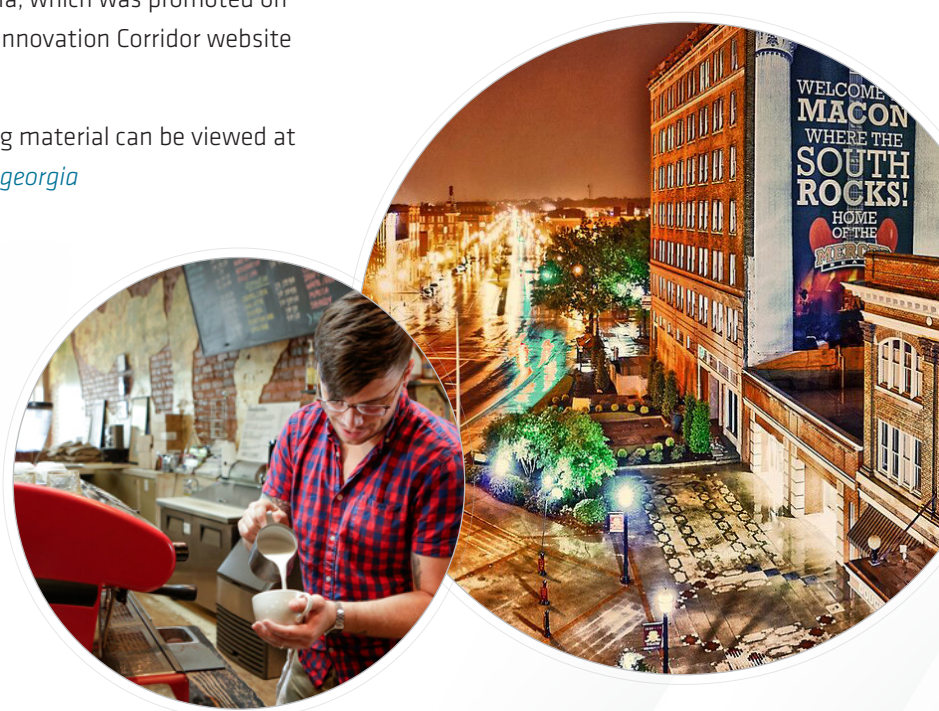
The need to amplify the appeal of living and working in the Middle Georgia region was highlighted and reiterated throughout all stages of the Middle Georgia Innovation Project. As the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor was being developed, there was continued emphasis on amplifying the message about all that is good about living in the Middle Georgia region. The promotion of this messaging would ideally attract the future workforce and their families, as well as preserve homegrown talent.

Middle Georgia has a central location that makes it very appealing. It also has the proximity to Atlanta, Atlanta Airport as well as to beaches, mountains and forests. The second-tier city of Macon offers a vibrant downtown and culture. The exceptional education system, job opportunities, relative safety and affordability of living will continue to attract professionals and their families to the region.

The “Living in Middle Georgia” initiative was part of the development of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor, running concurrently with the “Innovation in Middle Georgia” aspect. Video interviews were held with members of the Super Working Group and experts from the areas of defense, economic development, education, marketing and innovation centers to capture their thoughts on living and working in the region. They contributed to marketing material about the positive aspects of life in Middle Georgia, which was promoted on social media and included on the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor website (www.478innovates.com).

The Living in Middle Georgia videos and marketing material can be viewed at <https://www.478innovates.com/living-in-middle-georgia>

With its central location and proximity to Atlanta, the Airport and natural beauty, Middle Georgia offers everything the future workforce and their families are looking for.





4.0 LAUNCHING THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR

4.1 THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR WEBSITE

The Living in Middle Georgia logo was created to launch the branding of the initiative. This logo was used on marketing material and the website. The website was created to be the “go to” place representing the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor. The URL for the website is www.478innovates.com and the inclusion of 478 represents the telephone code for the Middle Georgia region.

The dynamic and interactive website has been created along two concurrent themes. One theme is “Innovation in Middle Georgia”, which includes information about the Middle Georgia Innovation Project, the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor and the Innovation Corridor Pledge. The geography of the Innovation Corridor has been represented using Story Maps. This has been the ideal platform in order to show virtually where innovation is occurring in Middle Georgia. The Story Maps can be viewed at <https://www.478innovates.com/geography-innovation-corridor>.

The second theme running throughout the website is “Living in Middle Georgia”. This section has incorporated all that is positive and appealing about living and working in the region. With video interviews, vignettes and dynamic banner videos, this section is vibrant and aims to promote a positive image of the region.

The website will continually evolve and mirror how the Innovation Corridor evolves.

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor was launched virtually on 28 September 2021. The event was held virtually due to Covid-19 restrictions. 120 individuals from sectors including defense, military, industry, innovation centers, education and economic development attended the launch. Angie Gheesling (*Executive Director, Development Authority of Houston County*) spoke about the Innovation Corridor from an economic development perspective. Ember Bishop Bentley (*Chief of Staff and Government Relations Officer, Middle Georgia State University*) described the Innovation Corridor from the Higher Education perspective. Colonel Duarte (*78th Air Base Wing vice commander, Robins Air Force Base*) gave the keynote address.

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor Website URL is www.478innovates.com. The inclusion of the Middle Georgia telephone code (478) represents the inclusive nature of the Innovation Corridor as it includes the 11 counties.





5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor serves a critical purpose, that supports key economic building blocks in the region. In particular, the Corridor concept plays a key future role in:

- **Creating an innovation culture, leveraging regional strengths.** The Middle Georgia region has a strength in knowledge creation. Placing a deliberate focus on innovation helps create a unique value proposition for the region and can leverage the deep skills and performance in the region's educational institutions.
- **Focus on Industry 4.0 technologies.** The rapid emergence of the new digital technologies is forcing industries and regional economies to up-skill quickly. The Innovation Corridor provides an opportunity to provide a deliberate and intentional focus on accelerating the uptake of these technologies. This also provides the opportunity for economic diversification in the region, by building a broader industrial base.
- **Sustainment of the Robin Air Force Base.** The base increasingly relies on innovation to support its critical missions. The Corridor helps bring an intentional focus to the region and will ultimately help it be defined as a 'go-to' region for innovation and innovators.
- **Building a strong defense manufacturing community.** The Middle Georgia region has a concentration of important defense facilities and support industries. Helping build this defense-orientated community will strengthen one of the region's major economic drivers.

The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor provides an intentional focus on stimulating innovation, that can support future economic diversification, as well as assist in the sustainment of the Robins Air Force Base.

5.1 IMMEDIATE BUILDING-BLOCK RECOMMENDATIONS

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS (late 2021 and early 2022)

- Convene a small local advisory group, under the leadership of Angie Gheesling, Development Authority of Houston County. Advisory group to initially include representation from the Middle Georgia Economic Alliance, 21st Century Partnership, and selected members of the project 'super working group'. This group's job will be to drive the project forward, in the short and medium term.
- Facilitate an open line of communication between the educational institutions; innovation centers; business and industry located throughout the Middle Georgia Region
- Build core funding partners and institutional support – seek outside support for programming
- Locally, promote pledge and engagement via proclamations / endorsements and letters of support
- Overall, use Innovation Corridor concept to focus effort on Industry 4.0 and Digital Transformation
- Explore the need/viability of a Software Center for Innovation to serve the communities in the Middle Georgia region and its industries



5.2 IDEAS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS

These ideas and suggested actions were developed during the final stages of the project and include input from the project team and the working group.

5.2.1 ACTIVATING THE MIDDLE GEORGIA INNOVATION CORRIDOR

- Use the identity and the branding of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor starting with the www.478innovates.com website and logo– with all stakeholders across the 11-counties.
- Encourage individuals to sign the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor Pledge.
- Conduct an in-person launch event of the Innovation Corridor –Spring 2022. This event will bring together everyone who has signed ‘The Pledge’ and set them up with work to accomplish in their counties.
- Provide the ‘one stop shop’ platform for innovators/start-ups/industry and educational institutions to connect. This could be another section of the www.478innovates.com website built in to connect people.
- Organize a regional press conference to launch the new Innovation/Living in Middle Georgia website and create closer relationships with key media outlets in the region, Atlanta and further afield. (Spring 2021).
- Purposely build a focus on innovation in each community – via workshops/roadshows in each county. This will culminate in a Quarterly meeting including all relevant stakeholders from innovation centers, education, healthcare, industry and RAFB regarding work completed and actions going forward.
- Create quarterly meetings for innovators to meet in person and discuss their work. This will include education on available community funding for innovators/start-ups.
- Produce marketing advice to innovators/start-ups regarding getting their work out into the public arena.
- Market the success to date around innovation through the 478innovates Social Media channels and all Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor pledge individuals to share these posts on their Social Media channels and websites.
- Connect to tourism providers nationally with the good news stories that are being developed from the website and initiative going forward.

The suggested ideas and actions provide the summary of ideas developed during the latter part of the project. A key focus of the ideas is to build momentum, especially in early 2022.

5.2.2 LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- Form a ‘One Middle Georgia’ regional entity to progress the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor with inclusion of Super Working Group members.
- Seek formal designation of the Innovation Corridor and support from Robins Air Force Base; the local communities and state legislature.

5.2.3 FUNDING AND SUPPORT

- Create tiered system of partnership via the Pledge with funding for higher levels of partnership.
- Invite venture capitalists/investors to meet up for a meeting in Spring 2022 – objectives will be to educate them on the Innovation Corridor.



6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Future iQ would like to acknowledge the Middle Georgia Regional Commission, as fiscal agents for the Middle Georgia Innovation Project, and The Middle Georgia Innovation Project Steering Group for their continued support, guidance and valuable input throughout the process of conducting Task 5 of the project.

- We would like to thank Angie Gheesling and Dan Rhoades for their consistent guidance, engagement, support and input with Future iQ on a weekly basis throughout the process. Angie Gheesling, Executive Director of Development Authority of Houston County provided inspirational leadership as project lead for this project, in her role as Convener.
- We would also like to completely acknowledge the commitment, input and sharing of knowledge of every individual who were part of the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor Super Working Group. These individuals gave their time and expertise at weekly meetings, through individual interviews and through providing information for collateral needed to promote the Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor. We would like to thank those individuals who gave their time to be interviewed and contributed their expertise in this way.

Middle Georgia Innovation Project Steering Group:

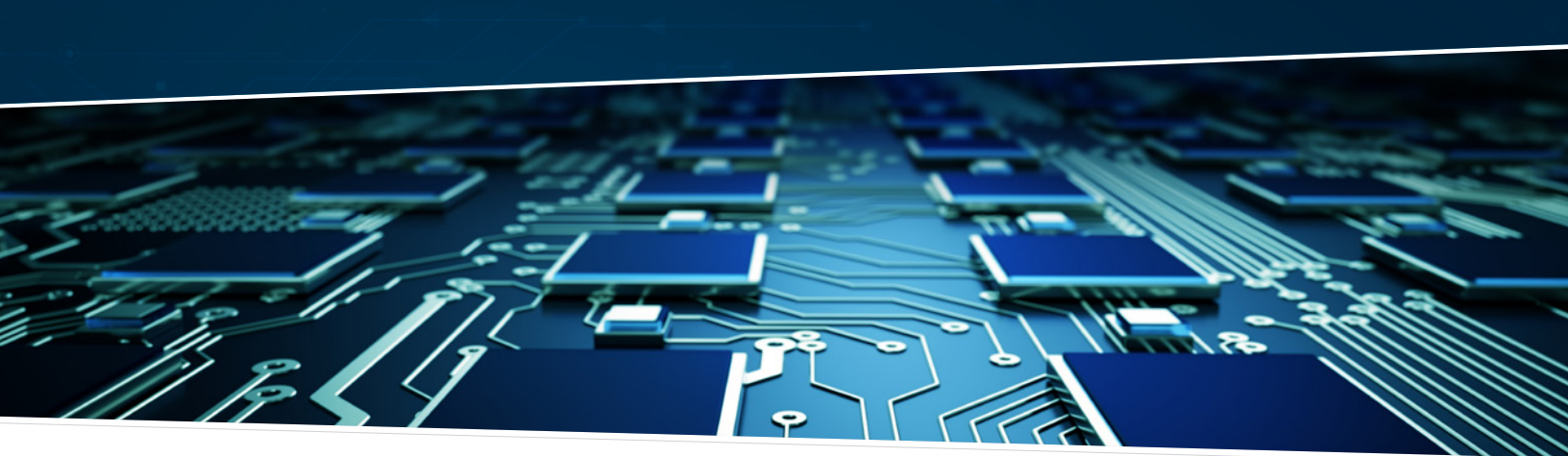
- **CONVENER:** Angie Gheesling – *Executive Director* - Development Authority of Houston County
- Laura Mathis – *Executive Director* - Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC)
- Greg Boike – *Director of Public Administration* – Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC)
- Amy Hudnall – *Director,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

Members of ‘Super Working Group’

- **CONVENER:** Angie Gheesling (Development Authority of Houston County)
- Melony Bagwell (RAFB)
- Chrissy Miner (The Miner Agency)
- Andrea Griner (CGTC)
- Ember Bishop Bentley (MGA)
- Laura Mathis (MGRC)
- Isabelle Magnin (Atrium Health Navicent)
- Stephanie Broxton (Partnership for Inclusive Innovation)
- Dan Rhoades (21st Century Partnership)
- Candice Scott (Georgia Dept. of Economic Development)
- Dr. Ivan Allen (President , CGTC)

Individual Interviewees

- Angie Gheesling (Development Authority of Houston County)
- Dan Rhoades (21st Century Partnership)
- Chrissy Miner (The Miner Agency)
- Isabelle Magnin (Atrium Health Navicent)
- Stephanie Broxton (Partnership for Inclusive Innovation)
- Robert J. Herrmann (402 Software Engineering Group, Robins Air Force Base)
- Christele Parham (Macon Black Tech and HamTECH Solutions)
- Brigadier General John Kubinec (21st Century Partnership)
- Sonya Jenkins (Advanced Project Consulting)
- Robert Betzel (Grit Consulting LLC)
- Stewart Rodeheaver (Vizitech USA)



7.0 FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor, please contact:



Angie Gheesling, *Executive Director*
Development Authority of Houston County
Phone: 478-923-5470
gheesling@houstoncountyga.net

For more details, and to access additional information about The Middle Georgia Innovation Corridor please visit www.478innovates.com

For more details on the overall Middle Georgia Innovation Project please visit <https://lab2.future-iq.com/middle-georgia-innovation/>



»»»»»» 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



David Beurle
CEO, Future iQ



Celine Beurle
COO, Future iQ



Marc Rassel
Creative Director

