The Digital Delta:
An Applied Technology Cluster Advancing Opportunity for the Memphis Region

Synopsis

"There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, is that we have the resources to get rid of it." When Martin Luther King Jr. said those words in 1967 the poverty rate in Memphis was 20.6%. Today the rate is 27%. In 1967, Memphis was the 17th largest city in America. Today it is the 28th. The city with America's fourth highest black population is also America's fifth largest home of houses of worship because we haven't lost hope. Our hope is embodied in the people who work 60 hours a week in two jobs just to get by, but still take night courses to learn robotics because they know that will open doors to a brighter future for their families. Our hope is reflected in the peaceful reckoning of our citizens during the 2020 civil rights protests of the Black Lives Matter movement. Our hope is rooted in the fact that 43% of our businesses are Black owned which is the highest percentage of Black owned businesses in the country. Our hope resides in the change we can make happen, because "Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability but comes through continuous struggle."

> **"This once in a generation investment will create thousands of high-quality jobs and support America's transition to electric vehicles."**
>
> – Lisa Drake,
> *Ford North America COO*
>
> *Sept 27, 2021 - TNECD Press Release*

Growth Cluster Description: The Digital Delta Applied Technology Cluster (Digital Delta) is a coalition of community and regional assets that will leverage existing industry strengths of the Memphis region, strategically improve workforce in key areas, and enable the transformation of our regional economic landscape by building the most connected urban-rural and equity-driven innovation district in the United States. **The Vision** *is to position the Memphis region as an Applied Information Technology Cluster that brings together sustainable innovation, human-centered technology, and responsive workforce solutions to build an equitable future economy, attract new industry, and support the data-fueled transformation of our traditional industry clusters–agribusiness and food, medical device and healthcare technology, and supply chain and logistics.* The coalition's vision is supported by Tennessee Governor Lee, Representative Cohen, and regional mayors in three states. This vision adopts and synthesizes recommendations from the 2014 Brookings Report, the 2020 Mass Economic Analysis, and the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). These recommendations target historical inequities and EDA investment priorities. The coalition effort responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, jobs lost due the closure of the TVA Fossil Fuel plant, and the partial recovery from the 2008 recession. The Digital Delta will happen at a pivotal time, building on the momentum generated by Ford Motor Company's historic 2021 decision to house the largest electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing site in the world in our region.

The Digital Delta includes two CEDS regions. The specific strategic recommendation themes from the CEDS report for the Memphis Area Association of Government (MAAG) and Southwest Tennessee Development District (SWTDD) as well as a summary of how the Digital Delta will respond are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

CEDS Strategic Recommendation	Digital Delta CEDS Solution Summary
Labor force issues and education/ training holding back economic growth (MAAG, SWTDD)	Engage over 2,300 primary and secondary educators in STEM related training programs, create 75,000 new jobs (50,000 quality jobs, 20,000 STEM jobs), develop multiple training pipelines based on industry-identified needs, improve opportunity for HECs, and create an adult education models in opportunity zones and rural areas for in-demand credentialling that includes wrap around support from the United Way, softskill development, and job placement.
Lack of Mass Transit (MAAG)	Establish a 150 acre future infrastructure testbed focused on sustainable mobility and electric vehicle charging infrastructure to enable a more connected city. Use Field Sites to deploy benefits to rural communities.
Research Base Not Translating to Industry (MAAG)	Establish the Digital Delta Research Hub to focus research on applied industry-cluster solutions identified in vision. Partner with stakeholders and Field Sites to align research with incoming companies and equitable outcomes.
Automation of Logistics Sector (MAAG)	Scale successful Advanced Automation Robotics Center to meet sector need. Leverage Digital Delta Testbed and Research Hub to advance logistics-sector research to enable more opportunities for communities.
Assist Communities with Regional Planning (SWTDD)	Through the Field Sites and Planning Support Team, the Digital Delta will provide planning resources to all rural communities identified as priority by economic development districts.
Rural areas not sharing in economic growth (MAAG, SWTDD)	Establish Digital Delta Field sites to translate all project benefits to entire region and partner with educators in region to ensure workforce opportunities are accessible to HEC.
Regional econ. dev. efforts not coordinated (MAAG)	Over 60 industry and regional assets have joined the Digital Delta Coalition. The governance structure is designed to ensure decision making is representative, inclusive, and does not tokenize HEC.
Expansion of Broadband (SWTDD)	Rural broadband is not a direct focus of the Digital Delta, but the translation of the testbed best practices through the Field Sites will help to secure additional funding for this SWTDD priority.
Shortage of Workers (SWTDD)	Over 750 companies will be launched or seeded, and 40 companies new or relocating headquarters in the region as a result of this effort. The Field Sites will enable some companies to land in rural communities. Business support services will include wrap around support to ensure company success.
Memphis region suffers from negative imaging (MAAG)	The Digital Delta is transformational, and the number of benefits resulting will help to change the national perception of our region.

Since 2014 when the Brookings Report was first issued, many advancements in our community have been made. A key advancement among them is the 2021 announcement from Ford and SK innovation that Southwest Tennessee would be home to the largest electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing site in the world, but major advancements in our region will not reach historically excluded communities[1] (HEC) without targeted investment. Over the last five years, the anchor organizations of the Digital Delta have worked diligently and in concert to prepare for an opportunity such as the Build Back Better Regional Challenge and our plan incorporates the progress made to date with the goals of the Digital Delta to transform the region. The Digital Delta does not include any construction or incubation projects.

Digital Delta Coalition

Over 60 regional and community assets are members of the Digital Delta Coalition. As outlined in the table below, all five transformational component projects listed in Phase 1 will be a part of Phase 2 and **the**

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[1] Historically Excluded Communities includes two primary groups in the Digital Delta – Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities throughout the region and rural communities that have historically been excluded because of programmatic focus on the Memphis metro area. The two groups may overlap in many cases.

University of Memphis remains the lead institution for the Digital Delta and will continue staffing the position of Regional Economic Competitiveness Officer through Phase 2. As a regional EDO, the **Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce (GMC)** will utilize their extensive networks and infrastructure to bring the entire Memphis business community onboard and help ensure workforce and industry recruitment needs are being executed. **Epicenter Memphis**, a nonprofit, will leverage their expertise in guiding entrepreneurial activity to help cultivate and attract a robust community of innovators and recruit corporations to the region. **Start Co.**, a non-profit, will spearhead the cultivation of infrastructure and resources for citizens and corporations that is critical to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Digital Delta. **Memphis Area Association of Governments (MAAG)** in partnership with Southwest Tennessee Development District (SWTDD) will assure representation of the wider region and that rural and regional concerns are met. The component projects have created specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound (SMART) component project goals that align with overall goals. As outlined in the Community Based Organization engagement section below, the five anchors have created an inclusive governance model with a shared governance organizational structure that provides an equity driven decision making path. The mix of projects focus on building the region's talent pool, connecting workers to quality jobs, enabling support services for the communities we serve, building the personnel infrastructure that enables the regional growth cluster to thrive, and bringing the region together through key investments in building a future ready city.

Table 2

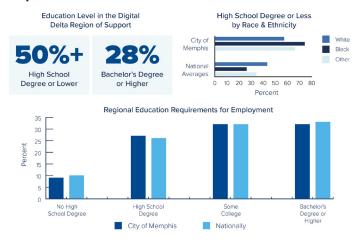| Project Name	Brief Description	Jobs Created	Direct New Capital Expenditures Generated	Direct New Companies Attracted/ Launched
Human Capital Development	Develop inclusive and accessible workforce focused on demand STEM and Industry 4.0 skills development	20,000	$1B	250
Future Ready Infrastructure	Create a 150 acre mobility testbed and regional EV charging network	15,000	$1B	N/A
Electric & Sustainable Mobility	Create a data trust and digital replica of the region for advanced R&D and commercialization of new technologies	10,000	$100M	100
Applied Research & Commercialization	Deploys Digital Delta Field Sites for rural alignment, establishes Research Hub to connect research and industry, serves as Cluster administrator	20,000	$1B	145
Applied Technology Industry Development	Scales infrastructure and incentive resources to attract companies to the Digital Delta Region	10,000	$100M	150
Totals		**75,000**	**$3.2B**	**645**

Goals: The Digital Delta will be a highly integrated system by design. Recognizing that coordination and partnership are key to overcoming regional setbacks and breaking the cycle of systemic racism, we have structured the project so that all coalition members and anchor organizations work together to meet the CEDS-aligned goals: (1) 75,000 new jobs, including 50,000 quality jobs that raise the median income to the national average and 20,000 in STEM-related fields; (2) directly generating $3.2B in new capital expenditures with a total $10B generated include indirect impact; (3) 40 new or relocated business headquarters; (4) directly create 645 companies and in total generate 750 new companies launched and seeded from entrepreneurial

and research efforts; (5) establishment of the Digital Delta test bed, and a 150-acre future- ready infrastructure development in the heart of Memphis with extension services and engagement throughout the Memphis region; (6) creation of sustainable training and workforce solutions to bring the Memphis region closer to national averages; and (7) creation and maintenance of a research and development community that secures $250m in external grant and contract funding to support the goals of the Digital Delta cluster within 10 years.
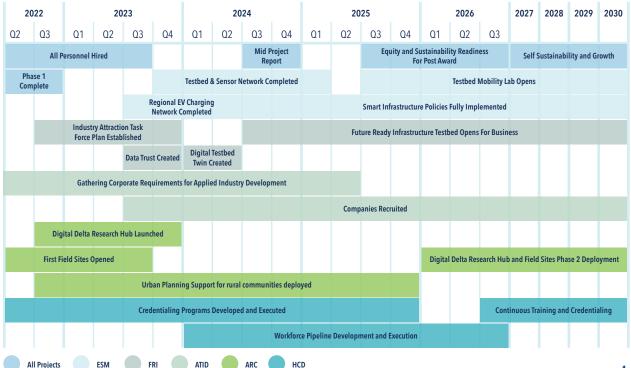
Measurable Impact: We expect to see measurable change in our workforce by 2030: Improve to 45% from 35% the 20,000 STEM graduates who are BIPOC graduates; Improve to 35% from 20% the number of Bachelor Degree attainment for BIPOC students; Improve to 50% from 31% number of quality jobs are held by BIPOC employees; Improve to 20% from 6.9% the number of Associate's Degrees that are a credential attainment for BIPOC students; Improve urban-rural opportunity exchange through field sites by 50%; Improve to 64% from 44% the number of advanced technology jobs are held by BIPOC

Graphic 1 - Education Data

Education Level in the Digital Delta Region of Support

50%+ High School Degree or Lower

28% Bachelor's Degree or Higher

High School Degree or Less by Race & Ethnicity

Regional Education Requirements for Employment

professionals; Improve to 50% from 27% the number of IT jobs that are held by BIPOC professionals; Improve to 75% from 22% the number of BIPOC households that have broadband access and a computer; Working with rural communities, increase sustainable funding for technology innovation programs by 60%; Improve overall connected households from 52% (lowest for any urban area) to 72% or 20,000 newly connected households.

Timeline

	2022		2023				2024				2025				2026			2027	2028	2029	2030

Timeline milestones:
- All Personnel Hired (2022–2023)
- Mid Project Report (2024 Q3)
- Equity and Sustainability Readiness For Post Award (2025)
- Self Sustainability and Growth (2027–2030)
- Phase 1 Complete (2022 Q2)
- Testbed & Sensor Network Completed (2023–2024)
- Testbed Mobility Lab Opens (2026)
- Regional EV Charging Network Completed (2023)
- Smart Infrastructure Policies Fully Implemented (2025–2026)
- Industry Attraction Task Force Plan Established (2022–2023)
- Future Ready Infrastructure Testbed Opens For Business (2025–2026)
- Data Trust Created (2023)
- Digital Testbed Twin Created (2023–2024)
- Gathering Corporate Requirements for Applied Industry Development (2022–2024)
- Companies Recruited (2024–2025)
- Digital Delta Research Hub Launched (2022–2023)
- First Field Sites Opened (2022–2023)
- Digital Delta Research Hub and Field Sites Phase 2 Deployment (2026–2030)
- Urban Planning Support for rural communities deployed (2023–2025)
- Credentialing Programs Developed and Executed (2022–2024)
- Continuous Training and Credentialing (2026–2030)
- Workforce Pipeline Development and Execution (2023–2026)

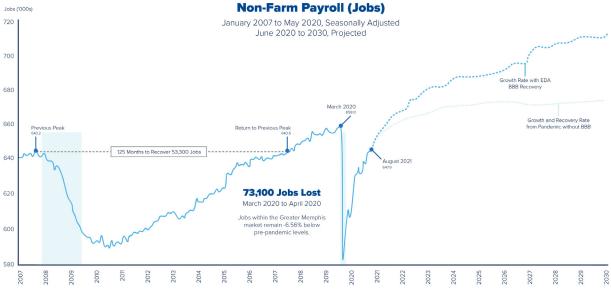Legend: All Projects · ESM · FRI · ATID · ARC · HCD

Location and Region

Memphis had only just achieved pre-2008 recession levels when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. The region faces over a decade of stagnated growth as reflected in 2020 census results which showed Memphis with no growth over the last decade compared to Nashville's 6%. The challenges of negative growth and slow recovery are exacerbated by education metrics which are below the national average (see Graphic 1 above). The region was selected because it aligns with the CEDS area served by MAAG and SWTDD and because it has the best mix of resources to maximize resilience and help our community build back better quickly. As the graphic below shows, we can recover but without the investment from EDA we expect our growth rate as a result of the pandemic to face the same slow climb we saw following the 2008 recession.
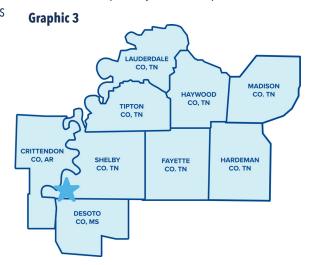
Graphic 2

Non-Farm Payroll (Jobs)
January 2007 to May 2020, Seasonally Adjusted
June 2020 to 2030, Projected

Jobs ('000s)

Previous Peak
643.2

125 Months to Recover 53,300 Jobs

Return to Previous Peak
643.6

March 2020
658.0

August 2021
647.9

Growth Rate with EDA
BBB Recovery

Growth and Recovery Rate
from Pandemic without BBB

73,100 Jobs Lost
March 2020 to April 2020

Jobs within the Greater Memphis
market remain -6.56% below
pre-pandemic levels.

Resilience is broadly defined as the ability of a community or region to anticipate, withstand, and recover from various disruptions to its economic base. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed Memphis' vulnerabilities and the Digital Delta project aims to increase the Memphis region's resilience in multiple ways. Our comprehensive planning efforts between the urban and rural communities will allow for extensive engagement from the community to define and implement a collective vision for economic recovery. Our plans to attract new business and enhance business retention will strengthen existing high-growth sectors and industries. Our expansion of high-performance and resilient infrastructure and notably increased access to Wi-Fi and EV charging stations better position Memphis to achieve resilience in the face of natural disasters made worse by the pandemic and changing climate.

Graphic 3

LAUDERDALE CO. TN
HAYWOOD CO. TN
MADISON CO. TN
TIPTON CO. TN
CRITTENDON CO. AR
SHELBY CO. TN
FAYETTE CO. TN
HARDEMAN CO. TN
DESOTO CO. MS

Specific Region Served: The Digital Delta will serve four congressional districts: TN 9th (Shelby County zip

codes - 38111, 38152, 38103, 38105, 38104, 38053, and 38054; Tipton County - 38109), TN 8th (Madison County – 38301, 38305; Haywood County- 38012, 38069; Lauderdale County - 38063), TN 7th (Hardeman County – 38052), AR 1st (Crittenden County - 72364), and MS 1st (Desoto County – 38632). Beyond these areas, we expect the impact of the work to be felt in additional regional areas inclusive of all zip codes in TN 9th and all TN 8th district zip codes in TN Counties: Madison, Lauderdale, Haywood, Hardeman; AR 1st zip codes 72301, 72332, 72376, 72327, 72348, and MS 1st zip codes 38654, 38611, 38632, 38680. Our proposed service area by county and FIPS code: Tennessee: Hardeman County (47069), Haywood County (47075), Fayette County (47047), Lauderdale County (47097), Madison County (47113), Shelby County (47157), and Tipton County (47167). In Mississippi: DeSoto County (28033) and Arkansas, Crittenden County (05035).

County	Population	% Population African American	IRR (2010)
Shelby, TN	937,166	52.10%	0.25
Haywood, TN*	17,304	51.50%	0.53
Crittenden, AR*	47,955	51.20%	0.48
Hardeman, TN*	25,443	41.80%	0.52
Madison, TN*	97,984	37.00%	0.44
Lauderdale, TN*	25,989	33.00%	0.51
Desoto, MS*	189,945	30.20%	0.39
Fayette, TN	41,133	27.00%	0.50
Tipton, TN	61,599	18.40%	0.47

*Field Site Location

Target Participants Served: The Digital Delta will serve HEC and rural communities throughout the geographic region. In order to achieve the measurable impacts outlined, every project must prioritize under-represented and minority communities. The field sites will provide access to the benefits of the Digital Delta to rural communities. According to Index of Relative Rurality (IRR), all counties in Digital Delta except Shelby are considered Level F or Level G, which is the most rural designation for counties in the index.[2] Hardeman and Lauderdale counties are among the top ten poorest counties in Tennessee today based on per capita income. The diversity of the industry clusters ensures both a wide engagement audience and also the opportunity to bring diversity to all workforce focus areas. The coalition membership includes over twenty organizations focused on equity and community-based support as well as HBCUs and programs that support our target audience through specific programs.

Regional Assets Critical to Success: The Memphis region has long been known as a logistics hub. Thanks to FedEx we are the world's largest airfreight hub. Memphis is also home to three class A railroads and is America's second largest biomedical device manufacturing center. Agriculture is the primary industry for the entire West Tennessee region, with over 52 crop varieties and 19 million acres of farmland located in the MidSouth region. The addition of the Ford and SK innovation electric vehicle manufacturing plant to the region will strengthen a growing advanced manufacturing sector. The inclusion of all major research, workforce training, and higher education institutions in the coalition will allow for an integrated and collaborative solution that leverages all regional assets in success. The **urban-rural success of the Digital Delta** is indicated by support from communities housing Digital Delta field sites including Brownsville, TN, Hernando, MS, West Memphis, AR and Ripley, TN in addition to University of Tennessee and UofM resources in Hardeman and Madison counties.

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[2] Waldorf, B., Kim, A. (2018). The Index of Relative Rurality (IRR) : US County Data for 2000 and 2010. Purdue University Research Repository. doi:10.4231/R7959FS8

Private Sector Participation

The Digital Delta is the culmination of over five years of listening and responding to the needs of the private sector in our region. We have adopted a six-part private sector engagement strategy based on the Brookings report recommendations for private sector engagement: (1) secure the global logistics brand, (2) diversify the economy beyond logistics, (3) build a next level economy workforce, (4) organize for innovation and entrepreneurial growth, (5) create new approaches to lead to development of new economy, and (6) develop new capacity and governance for regional development.

The Digital Delta Coalition's private sector engagement includes members of all industry clusters identified in the vision. Each project has included private sector participants in their advisory boards to ensure alignment with industry needs. Where appropriate, letters of support with specific commitments for the purposes of match have indicated that funds are available, unencumbered, and committed to the Digital Delta project. Additional commitments have been made from companies that, if the Digital Delta is awarded, would invest in the region. Private sector cash match totals $2.3M and is comprised of: The Walk on Union - $1.2M in match for the Future Ready Infrastructure Project; Ridgeline Partners - $1M for Applied Technology Industry Development; Regions Bank - $100k for Human Capital Development. If funded, non-match development support will be provided for the Future Ready Infrastructure Project to help scale electric vehicle infrastructure by Galp Energy ($6M) and the Walk on Union ($75M). Additional in-kind investments made by companies include Ford's commitment to support a work-based learning employer site for high school and adult learners that aligns with the Digital Delta, UMRF Ventures commitment to hire 500 students from the Digital Delta efforts, and Go With Flow's support for the EV infrastructure development.

Detailed Sustainability Plan

Build Back Better is a starting point for a new direction in our region. Our Coalition has built five engines of transformation that are structured to build sustainability throughout the grant period. In addition to each component project's identified sustainability strategy, the Digital Delta will implement project-wide efforts that not only strengthen sustainability, but more closely tie the five projects together.

Coalition Membership Sustainment Plan: The Digital Delta will implement a membership plan for industry and community asset organizations to provide financial support to sustain Digital Delta growth beyond the lifespan of the grant. By year three of the project, the Digital Delta will develop a Coalition Sustainment Plan centered on a membership-oriented strategy that focuses on a commitment to sustaining the direction of the goals of the Digital Delta and identifying new strategies. In order to ensure just and fair input, the membership plan will scale fees based on organization size and nonprofit versus for-profit status. Additionally, we have a goal of at least 30% of our coalition membership being comprised of HEC-serving institutions and organizations to ensure that equity office recommendations are adopted and followed. The membership plan will be incorporated into all component projects to ensure sustainability through financial mechanisms.

Centralized Support for Pursuit of Funding: The Digital Delta solves a major CEDS challenge for our region – coordination among key entities for strategic pursuit of economic development. By establishing a central Digital Delta administration, all coalition members will have a strategic resource for aligned pursuit of funding that leverages established economic development funding sources such as EDA and SBA, but also utilizes the grant infrastructure of research institutions to open doors to NSF, NIH, EPA, DoE, and other federal agencies that have not historically been accessible to our coalition partners due to lack of expertise in working with these agencies.

Transition, Maintenance, and Support Strategy: The Transition, Maintenance, and Support strategy is divided into two component parts: instrumentation/equipment longevity and personnel sustainability.

Instrumentation/Equipment Longevity: Any purchased instrumentation will be setup and run through the project but will be operated and maintained in perpetuity by respective entities that oversee the infrastructure where the resource resides. Partner institutions have worked closely with each organization to establish agreements for maintenance will be managed by those entities.

Personnel Sustainability: Each component project anchor organization is responsible for the sustainability of personnel beyond the life of the grant. The University of Memphis, as the lead institution, commits to supporting central administration staff so long as sustainable new sources of funding will be pursued and secured.

Equity Plan: In Phase 1 the Digital Delta adopted five equity priorities: (1) Equitable access and participation to Education and Workforce Training and Job Placement Programs; (2) Equitable access and participation in entrepreneurship and small business development and seed funding opportunities; (3) Equitable access and participation in scaled and new physical assets/infrastructure; (4) Equitable participation and access to research and development activities, databases, and think tanks; and (5) Economic Development recruitment within the cluster strategy that deliberately seeks businesses and innovators that are BIPOC owned and/or have clearly stated mission and vision statements that prioritize equitable practices. The priorities are focused on both urban and rural HEC communities and have driven the equity plan's development.

The measurable impacts in the synopsis show that the Digital Delta measures the quality of success primarily by how well we have achieved equity. We believe that sustainability and equity are inextricable, and so they are integrated in each component project. The equity plan is executed in three parts:

Shared Governance Accountability: In order to facilitate the change to our region, the Digital Delta will establish an Equity Office through the Governance plan. This office is jointly funded by all five projects and will utilize the services of the Memphis Black Business Association (MBBA) to perform the following actions: (1) convene the Equity and HEC community advisory board and represent that board to the Digital Delta Executive Committee, (2) leverage the MBBA's voice and platform in the community to advocate for the Digital Delta's promotion among HEC communities, (3) review decisions of the Executive Committee to ensure equity compliance in alignment with the grant goals.

Equity and Inclusion Oversight: The Digital Delta administration team will include an individual focused on equity and inclusion oversight. This person will lead the project teams to help ensure that the composition of their work – from student populations to contractors – are sensitive to the representation of HEC populations. They will help to connect underrepresented and minority groups to projects to ensure success and develop programming that embraces the HEC communities of the Digital Delta.

Project Representation: The Digital Delta Coalition's anchor organizations are agencies committed to diversity as demonstrated by the diverse composition of their board. Each project will commit to a leadership equity accountability plan that includes a goal of at least 33% their staff and advisory boards comprised of HEC and minority community members. For projects that engage students and workforce, our goal is to have at least 50% of the populations served come from HEC. All projects must include organizations that as part of their mission serve underrepresented and minority communities. Each project must also include rural stakeholders.
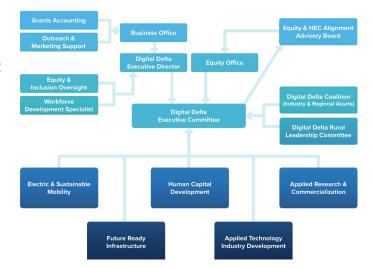
Community Based Organization Engagement & Labor Standards: The Digital Delta is a non-construction project in a right to work state. The UofM, as the lead entity and a state university, is required to follow all state

and federal regulations in regard to project labor agreements and community benefit agreements. The GMC maintains relationships with unions and other labor bodies throughout the region as part of their economic development role for the region. The University of Memphis and the anchor organization partners on each component project will notify the SBA and the Tennessee Governor's Office of Diversity Business Enterprise on any procurement activities associated with the Digital Delta. Industry partners such as Ford have stated publicly that preferences for all contracts and bids require unions first, and even where a union is not in existence yet, they must be engaged and welcomed.

The Digital Delta has explicitly engaged black owned businesses and industry by soliciting the MBBA to lead our Equity Office in the Digital Delta Governance plan. It is our intent to partner with the Black Business Association to serve as a platform for promoting engagement to the Black community of the Memphis region and ensuring that community-based organizations that serve HEC in our region are engaged transparently and fairly and that they are full participants in the process of building back better. MBBA's role in the community and their accountability to businesses will help ensure equity efforts are not tokenized.

Governance Plan: Between Phase 1 and Phase 2 the Coalition anchors and members gathered to develop a rigorous governance structure that ensures adherence to EDA requirements and policies, targeted pursuit of the goals and outcomes indicated in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Proposals, transparency to all partners and accountability to the region served. The administration and governance of the Digital Delta will help to ensure equity and sustainability of the Digital Delta project beyond the lifespan of the grant. The Digital Delta has employed a governance model with an identified decision making and grievance management protocol, as well as inclusion of

Graphic 4: Digital Delta Governance Organization Chart

HEC, rural, community and industry assets as voting members to ensure visibility and representation in decision making, to help manage all projects that embraces equity and justice for HEC in a deliberate and systemic way.

Strategic Rural Development Action Plan: Every rural community leader in the Digital Delta has cited the same major concern: in light of the new Ford and SK Innovation plant coming to our region, none of the rural communities in proximity to the mega site development have sufficient regional planning resources to respond to the changes that their communities will face. Proactive regional coordination will be necessary to ensure that the employment opportunities created by Ford and related firms accrue to the current population of our broader community and do not further exacerbate the systemic inequity for those who call the region home. In addition, regional planning will be necessary to ensure that urban residents have adequate transportation access to the site (more than 50 miles away) and that rural communities closer to the site can maintain their small-town character.

The Digital Delta will include a Planning Support Team that will lead regional planning efforts through the Field Sites to ensure urban-rural engagement and coordination. The Team will impact all component projects; it will work with the Southwest Tennessee Development District and the Memphis Area Association of Governments

to identify under-resourced rural communities that are most likely to be impacted by development implications of the Blue Oval mega site. The identified cities and towns will form a cohort of "partner communities" for a coordinated regional planning effort. For each partner community, the planning team will lead a collaborative and participatory process to develop a long-term Vision and Community Character Plan. The plans will be developed through a series of community conversations through which residents will identify their current community assets, desired changes, and important characteristics to preserve.

Overview of Work Conducted Between Phase 1 and Phase 2: Digital Delta Project Wide Work: All five projects convened their project execution structure and implemented advisory boards or consortia to execute Phase 1 tasks. At least two meetings of each body were held, with some meeting weekly throughout the Phase 1 period. The six anchor organizations convened regular meetings to discuss alignment of the work of Digital Delta and worked in coordination to build the Phase 2 application. MAAG held a workshop in March that convened all regional leadership to discuss "Are we ready?", a conversation about responding to the changes that the Ford and SK innovation site would bring to the region. The anchor organizations worked closely in crafting each proposal and shared documents such as the governance plan.

Project Specific Actions: **Human Capital Development:** Interviewed industry leaders to identify skills and credential gaps, meetings with representatives from Ford Motor Co. to understand the talent needs for Blue Oval City, touring the skills programs at Valencia College in Florida with 30+ industry leaders and other stakeholders, meeting with the Orlando Economic Partnership, to understand the transition from a tourism and logistics region to an applied technology-aerospace innovation region. **Future Ready Infrastructure:** Market analysis was conducted highlighted by over 50 discovery meetings testing core assumptions of the project. In January and February an assessment was done of the technology and equipment requirements for the regional EV charging network as well as a forecast of EV growth in the region and state. The design process also included the civic re-alignment of partners to form an Infrastructure Consortium Budgets were created based on assumptions from existing partner mobility projects, equipment costs, labor costs, and forecasting sustainability measures.

Electric and Sustainable Mobility: Market analysis was conducted. Over 50 discovery meetings testing the core assumptions of the project were held. The Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and their partner Systems Impact Mobility Family Office (SIMFO) were engaged to create a regional vision for sustainable mobility and electrification. A Mobility Consortium was formed, and a playbook was created for accessing data and for research and development purposes. A human capital plan was developed informing the budget as well as a forecast of the needed data, technology, and software requirements. **Research and Commercialization:** The project issued a call for proposals to convene research projects in support of the wider Digital Delta effort. The Advisory board convened to provide direction to the project during the pre-submission phase. The project worked with MAAG to build a regional planning strategy for the research mission and strengthened the urban-rural engagement by developing the Digital Delta Field Site program. **Applied Technology Industry Development:** Gathered Industry Development project team. Industry Attraction Task Force governance and operational planning. Pursued recruitment prospect research. Recruitment activities for three supplier prospects. Conducted Memphis-region promotional activity and communications planning. Evaluation of Black business-focused promotional agencies. Invitations issued to national technology investors for Memphis partnerships. Business support infrastructure improvements executed.

Detailed List of Changes to Vision: No significant changes were made between Phase 1 and Phase 2. The proposal has strengthened the prominence of equity across all projects and incorporated governance strategies which strategically address systemic racism and encourage participation among HEC communities.