

Leading With Purpose

AAED Strategic Plan 2026-2030

The Arizona Association for Economic Development (AAED) is dedicated to supporting economic development professionals and strengthening economic development practices across Arizona. The Strategic Plan 2026-2030 outlines how AAED's collective efforts will support economic development professionals and advance statewide impact. As Arizona's economic landscape continues to evolve, this plan positions AAED to lead with clarity, remain grounded in its core mission, and deliver meaningful value to members across the state.

Vision

AAED is the trusted leader for Arizona's economic development community, promoting a vibrant and diverse economy.

Mission

AAED serves as Arizona's unified voice for responsible economic development through education, advocacy, and statewide collaboration.

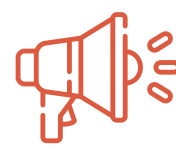
Values

- Professional Excellence
- Ethical Practice
- Statewide Inclusion
- Collaboration
- Practical Learning
- Innovation
- Member Driven Leadership

Pillars



EDUCATE



ADVOCATE



COLLABORATE

Forces Shaping AAED's Future

Economic development in Arizona is operating in an increasingly complex and evolving environment. Federal and state policies and funding structures, workforce and housing constraints, infrastructure capacity, technological change, and rising public expectations are reshaping what the profession requires. While AAED does not control these external forces, it plays a critical role in helping practitioners understand, adapt, and respond effectively.

The profession has shifted from a primary focus on attraction and marketing to one centered on making sure projects succeed.

Economic development professionals now manage grants, coordinate workforce efforts, oversee infrastructure improvements, meet regulations, and track results. The role has become more hands-on and complex, requiring strong practical skills and problem solving. AAED has a leading role to play in helping members build those skills.

Community competitiveness is increasingly determined by readiness rather than incentives alone.

Having a skilled workforce, adequate housing, reliable infrastructure, and strong partnerships determines whether projects move forward. AAED supports economic development professionals in working across many sectors to support growth.

Public understanding has not kept pace with the profession's growing complexity.

With greater scrutiny of public investment, clear communication and transparency are essential. AAED helps members explain their work and build trust with elected officials, partners, and communities.

AAED's Community: Informed and Engaged

Stakeholder engagement with more than 100 contributors confirmed AAED's strong culture, high quality education, and valued statewide convening role. Members also identified key priorities: clearer advocacy direction, structured leadership pathways, increased staff capacity, and improved accessibility for rural and tribal communities.

These forces directly informed AAED's strategic pillars. The plan balances building on organizational strengths with expanding capacity, clarity, and inclusivity to ensure AAED remains responsive, relevant, and sustainable in a more complex economic development landscape.



From Strategy to Action: Recommendations

In each of the pillars, clear, actionable priorities will guide implementation and reinforce professional excellence, meaningful member engagement, statewide connection, and long-term impact.

Pillar 1: Educate

Elevate the profession and expand economic development capacity. AAED will serve as Arizona's leading engine for professional learning in economic development.

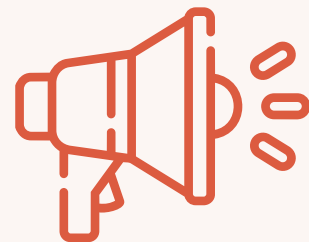


Strategic Recommendations:

- Build structured learning journeys organized by career stage.
- Launch a Leadership Academy with mentorship and succession support.
- Expand Economic Development Master Class for elected officials and community partners.
- Modernize education content with emphasis on data, AI, readiness, communications, and delivery.
- Strengthen experiential learning through Arizona Gems and site-based case studies.

Pillar 2: Advocate

Strengthen the voice and influence of the economic development industry. AAED will serve as a trusted, credible, nonpartisan voice that strengthens understanding of economic development.



Strategic Recommendations:

- Adopt a clear advocacy decision framework.
- Strengthen policy monitoring and issue brief capacity.
- Build member advocacy capability through training and tools.
- Lead statewide economic development learning and awareness.

Pillar 3: Collaborate

Create a connected, high value network

across Arizona. AAED will strengthen statewide connections, reduce regional isolation, and increase collaboration across sectors and geographies.



Strategic Recommendations:

- Establish predictable, year-round engagement.
- Implement hybrid participation standards.
- Expand rural, tribal, and cross-sector participation.
- Strengthen committee effectiveness and alignment.
- Maintain flagship conferences while evolving meeting formats.

About the Arizona Association for Economic Development

The Arizona Association for Economic Development is the statewide professional association for economic development practitioners and partners across Arizona. AAED convenes public, private, nonprofit, academic, and utility stakeholders who contribute to economic development outcomes in communities across the state.

Elevating Professionals.
Advancing Communities.
Strengthening Arizona.