



# TEDC 2024 CEDA APPLICATION

All Applications Must Be Received by August 16, 2024

The 2024 CEDA nominations will be judged in each of the five categories that have made the most significant contribution to economic development in their community and the State of Texas.

## AWARD CATEGORIES

The CEDA will be awarded to one community from each of the following five population categories: (as currently marketed). Mark the population category for which you are applying. In addition to CEDA by population, applicants will be considered for five criteria awards such as: Innovativeness, Transferability, Community Commitment & Leverage, Measured Objectives and Secondary Benefits.

- Population less than 10,000 \_\_\_\_\_
- Population 10,001 to 20,000 \_\_\_\_\_
- Population 20,001 to 50,000 \_\_\_\_\_
- Population 50,001 to 100,000 \_\_\_\_\_
- Population 100,001 to 250,000 \_\_\_\_\_
- Population 250,001 and above \_\_\_\_\_

## NOMINATION:

Name of Community: \_\_\_\_\_

TEDC Member Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (individual member, not organization)

Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Community Population (as currently marketed): \_\_\_\_\_

Community/Organization Linked-In Profile: \_\_\_\_\_

Application Submitted By: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Media Contacts: [optional]

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Project U Leadership Conference

The City of Burleson Economic Development Department

**Project U is an annual, full-day leadership conference hosted by the Burleson Economic Development Department.** Open to everyone from the CEO to the entrepreneur, Project U offers a comprehensive platform for leadership development and inspiration. The conference features five nationally recognized leaders, business leaders, and authors who share their expert instruction on leadership and business, motivating and reinvigorating attendees. To further inspire and connect the community, Project U also highlights a local business, sharing its story of leadership success. By combining world-class expertise with local inspiration, Project U empowers individuals and organizations to achieve their full potential. The most recent conference was hosted locally on February 20, 2024 with 376 attendees. The event featured Damon West, Stephen Mackey, Carlos Whittaker, Jess Ekstrom, and Ryan Leak.

**I. Innovativeness:** Project U demonstrates a novel approach to leadership development and economic development by addressing a critical community need in a unique and effective manner. By offering high-quality, nationally recognized speakers at an affordable price point, Project U challenges the traditional conference model that often prioritizes exclusivity over accessibility. Unlike other leadership conferences costing upwards of \$1,000, Project U's accessible \$125 ticket price has opened the doors to a broader audience, including local business leaders, civil servants, and non-profits. This innovative pricing strategy, combined with a curated selection of nationally renowned speakers, positions Project U as a groundbreaking model for leadership development and community engagement. Through sponsorships and ticket sales, the \$130,000 event is designed to be a break-even venture for the EDC. The benefit is community involvement, professional development and local networking.

**II. Transferability:** Recognizing the need for accessible leadership development, the Burleson Economic Development team created Project U to address a community-wide challenge. Previously, the team struggled to disseminate valuable insights gained from attending external conferences. By developing a replicable model, Project U offers a solution for other communities seeking to foster leadership growth. The conference's modular structure, including speaker curation, partnership building, and event logistics, can be adapted to fit diverse community needs and resources. With a proven track record of success in attracting attendees from neighboring cities like Mansfield, Joshua, Wylie, Waco, Wichita Falls, and Kyle, Project U demonstrates its potential to be replicated and scaled in other regions.

**III. Community Commitment and Leverage:** Deeply rooted in the Burleson community, the EDC uses Project U to leverage local partnerships to maximize its impact. By collaborating with businesses, government agencies, and non-profits, the conference creates a synergistic environment that benefits all stakeholders. The decision to prioritize local vendors for catering, venue, and promotional materials has injected over \$50,000 each year into the local economy. This commitment to supporting local businesses has fostered strong community engagement and loyalty. With a growing attendee base of over 400 participants in 2025, Project U has become a cornerstone event for the Burleson community, driving economic growth, strengthening local networks and encouraging collaboration.

**IV. Measured Objectives:** Since its inception, Project U has experienced significant growth and achieved measurable outcomes. The conference has expanded from a virtual pilot program with 75 attendees in

2020 to a sold-out in-person event attracting 376 participants in 2024. By providing high-quality leadership development at an affordable price point, Project U has empowered countless individuals to become stronger leaders and contribute to the community's success. Attendee surveys consistently demonstrate high levels of satisfaction and professional growth, with 95% of respondents reporting tangible benefits to their careers and organizations in 2024. These results, coupled with positive feedback on stronger teams, improved workplace culture, and enhanced networking opportunities, underscore Project U's effectiveness in achieving its objectives.

**V. Secondary Benefits:** Beyond its core mission of leadership development, Project U has generated significant ancillary benefits for the Burluson community. By showcasing local businesses and creating opportunities for networking, the conference has contributed to a more vibrant and interconnected business environment. Additionally, the event has inspired attendees to pursue new ventures, such as the local barber who opened a barber school after attending Project U. This ripple effect demonstrates the conference's ability to catalyze economic growth and innovation within the community.

**Testimonials from featured speakers further underscore Project U's impact:**

- “I’ve spoken at many events over the years, and I must say that Project U was not only one of the most organized, but also the most fun to be a part of. The planners, the crew, the audience, all made me feel warm and welcomed. I wish I could speak there every year!” - Jess Ekstrom, Forbes Top Rated Speaker, 2x Social Entrepreneur, 2x HarperCollins Bestselling Author & Philanthropist
- “From the first time I was contacted by the team at Project U, to the moment I walked off the stage after delivering my keynote, I truly felt like I had found some long-lost friends. The way in which I was cared for and how all of the attendees were cared for is exactly what I look for when I decide to recommend an event. Project U is just getting started, and it was an honor to be a part of what they are building!” – Carlos Whittaker, storyteller, speaker, and author of *Moment Maker*, *Kill the Spider*, and *Enter Wild*, and, *How To Human*.
- “As a speaker who speaks to hundreds of audiences a year, I can tell you, with authority, that no one puts an event together like Project U. The level of love, service and caring is reflected in every aspect of their organization and planning. Such a powerful lineup of speakers, too.” - Damon West, keynote speaker and bestselling author of “The Coffee Bean”.

These testimonials highlight Project U's exceptional ability to create a positive and impactful experience for both speakers and attendees.

**Project U Media:**

-2024 Highlight Reel - [Link](#)

-2024 Photos - [Link](#)

-2024 Full Flickr Album - [Link](#)