



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: _____



Canadian Solar – Mesquite’s Game Changer

Overview

The announcement by Canadian Solar, Inc, a global manufacturer and provider of solar energy products, selecting Mesquite, TX as the site for its first U.S. manufacturing location was released on June 15, 2023. The 91-acre plant was presented as a \$250 million investment that would create 1,500 jobs once it was in full production. By fall of 2023, the company’s state-of-the-art solar photovoltaic (PV) module production plant had commenced operations. A year later, in June of 2024, Canadian Solar, Inc. announced that it had begun its first expansion which would add an additional 750,000 square feet. The Canadian Solar project is a game-changing project that helped redefine Mesquite’s approach to community development and establish its position as an emerging site for clean tech companies.

Innovativeness

In economic development, there are projects that take years or decades to come to fruition and there are projects that develop at a breakneck pace. Occasionally, there is a project like the Canadian Solar project which is both. Mesquite first appeared on Canadian Solar’s radar in 2017 when the company’s CEO was touring the U.S. looking at potential sites. At the time, the company decided that market conditions weren’t right for an expansion and a couple years later the company’s CEO suffered an accident that left him paralyzed which combined with COVID-19 further delayed expansion plans.

In the meantime, Mesquite was undergoing its own transformation. Being in the highly competitive North Texas area can have its advantages and disadvantages, and Mesquite began to focus on its biggest advantage, its workforce. To leverage the full strength of its workforce, Mesquite’s economic development team needed to develop focused career pathways that aligned with a company’s short-, mid- and long-term plans. This required the ED team to rethink its approach to business attraction, retention and expansion. It created a business retention and expansion (BRE) taskforce comprised of area’s educational institutions and regional workforce agency. The team also began including the BRE taskforce in earlier stages of site selection process and in visits with business prospects.

This was a good approach as workforce concerns moved to the forefront in a post-COVID world, but it was an extremely effective approach for attracting companies in new or emerging sectors that did not have large existing pools of labor draw from and were also in the middle of raising investment capital. By bringing the BRE taskforce into the early stages of the site selection process, the ED team was able to reassure Canadian Solar and its investors that the multi-million-dollar facility investment and their fast entry into the U.S. market would not be derailed by workforce concerns.

Transferability

The model used in the Canadian Solar project although somewhat abstract is highly transferable to other communities. The ED team approached the Canadian Solar project by the adapting a concept that is used in organizational management called “cohesion” and applying it to the community development process. Under the ED team’s reinterpreted concept of “Strategic Cohesion” all community organizations needed to be in alignment under the common goal of contributing towards securing the development. This required creating an initial framework and having more consistent communication between organizations to ensure that community development goals were incorporated into the individual organization’s plans and that each organization delivered on commitments to the prospect. The process shifted away from the traditional approach of centering the site selection process on a specific site towards pitching the community, as a whole. It also changed the way the team viewed the company’s needs. Instead of looking at the company’s long-term growth as progressing through linear fixed stages, it was seen as moving through a fluid and evolutionary process. Under this approach, people became the glue holding the project together and site development, investment capital, and workforce were viewed as needs that were intertwined and would need to be addressed by both the private and public sector in the early stages of the development and throughout the life of the relationship with the company.

Community Commitment and Leverage

The Canadian Solar project represented a fundamental shift in the City of Mesquite’s Economic Development team’s approach to community development. By leveraging community partnerships, the team had more resources at its disposal such as customized employee training programs or certification classes through the community college that could be bundled as part of an incentive package. There was also more community buy-in when it came to securing approval of Canadian Solar’s Chapter 380 agreement. The politics behind incentive packages can be challenging. However, with the help of its community partners which included all the local education agencies and by including terms in the contract that stipulated above-average wage and hiring minimums, the ED team was able to reassure the council that the local community would benefit from the investment and partnership with Canadian Solar.

Measurable Objectives

Canadian Solar has hired approximately 1,000 employees to date, completed its Phase 1 expansion and Phase 2 is under the advanced stages of construction. The site of its manufacturing facility stood vacant for almost 16 years prior to Canadian Solar. In addition to its investment and economic impact, the company has proven to be a wonderful, active community partner. It was a presenting sponsor for the Mesquite CVB’s Solar Rodeo event held during the April 2024 solar eclipse. The event turned out to be a major tourism economic driver for the community and would not have been possible without the sponsorship.

Secondary Benefits

The publicity created by the Canadian Solar project has helped transform Mesquite’s image. Most recently the project was selected by the Dallas Business Journal as the Industrial Deal of the Year. It was the first time a Mesquite business was recognized by the publication.

Canadian Solar's presence in Mesquite has also helped draw other international clean tech companies to the city. Hexagon Purus, global leader in zero-emission mobility solutions, signed a 10-year lease at a 200,000-plus square facility in the fall of 2023. On July 16, 2024, Hithium Tech USA Inc, a subsidiary of a global clean energy storage products manufacturer, selected Mesquite as site for its first U.S. location. It plans to invest \$100 million in a 483,874 square foot facility. In working with Canadian Solar, the Mesquite ED team was able to develop a process that was effective at attracting and securing developments from international companies with needs that differed from those of domestic companies and plans to continue using it to grow its emerging industrial cluster.