Sector Partnership Launch

Information Technology

An industry-driven regional partnership of business leaders within the industry, who work together with public partners to address the shared workforce and broader competitive needs of the industry.

MARCH 27, 2025
MICROSOFT CORP.
IRVING, TX

Facilitated by:
Dallas College
Strategic Initiatives

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Ashley Lindsay | Cicero Group
Ben Bhatti | Dallas AI
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Brian Diggs | Web Apps America
Craig von Collenberg | Amazon Web Services
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Samar Khan | TripAI
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Tony Caesar |Ericsson
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Veronica Valladarez | Cisco

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SECTOR LAUNCH OVERVIEW

LAUNCHING THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

What are Next Generation Sector Partnerships?
Next Generation Sector Partnerships are regional partnerships of business leaders within one industry, who work together with public partners from economic development, workforce development, education, and training, alongside other community organizations, to address the shared workforce needs and broader competitive challenges of the industry. These partnerships are **industry-driven**, with a shared agenda, supported by a cohesive team of community support partners, and sustainable over time, and respond directly to the industry's evolving needs. Best practices and successful partnerships across various sectors nationwide continue to shape and inspire these models.

Dallas College serves as a "catalyst" for launching sector partnerships in these areas: aerospace / aviation; arts and entertainment; biotechnology; business and financial services; construction, freight, mobility, and logistics; healthcare; information technology; and manufacturing.

The Sector Partnership Launch
On March 27th, 2025, industry leaders across the Information Technology sector gathered at Microsoft's Las Colinas campus for a facilitated conversation to **identify** sector opportunities in the region, **determine** common denominators across the sector, and **prioritize** those that require action to unlock the potential growth of the sector. These leaders then explored forming **industry-led action teams** to further consider and flesh out ideas as well as determine what is going to be required from industry and public partners to capitalize on growth opportunities — launching the sector partnership.

While industry leaders participated in a facilitated conversation, conveners and public partners came to *listen-only* and observe the industry-led discussion for future connection possibilities.

As an outcome of this sector launch, industry leaders will form action teams to address key-priority areas in the industry. These teams will meet to consider needed resources, information and ideas for action and connect with public partners ready to support their **industry-driven**, shared agenda to address critical areas for sector growth and economic impact in the region.

All participating industry leaders will be invited to the first Sector Partnership Quarterly Meeting in June, to share updates from their action teams and explore how to move forward as an impactful leadership group in this sector.

OPPORTUNITIES & ACTION AREAS

DEVELOPING AN "OPPORTUNITY-GROWTH" AGENDA FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

To start the conversation, industry leaders were encouraged to share their thoughts and insights on opportunities for growth in the Information Technology Sector. These opportunities will drive future action planning conversations for the sector partnership.

What are the biggest opportunities to grow the Information Technology sector in our region?
(What could drive growth in the next few years?)

Infrastructure and Connectivity

- Connectivity (Equal Access for All)
- Integration of Physical and Digital Build Out
- Key Critical Infrastructure (interconnected)

Workforce and Talent Development

- Skilled Industry — Aligned Workforce Pipeline
- Data Analytics People Needed — Source Disparate Data
- Data Center Education / Awareness and Legislation

Innovation and Industry Leadership

- AI and Sustainability
- Be the Leaders for AI Frameworks and Policies
- Leverage Current Industry Partners

Economic Growth and Investment

- Access to Capital
- Cost Centers — Unique to Texas
- Diverse Industries

Equity and Advocacy

- Increased Focus on Low-Income / Low-Opportunity Areas
- Coordinated State / Federal Advocacy, Legislative Efforts

Regional Branding and Messaging

- Delivering a New Message: North Texas will be the Leader
- Natural Resources Management as Data Centers Grow

CAPITALIZING ON THESE OPPORTUNITIES – COMMON DENOMINATORS

Understanding that the Information Technology sector faces a variety of unique challenges, there are also common denominators that impact companies across multiple levels. Industry leaders were prompted to identify these common denominators that must be addressed to unlock the growth potential of the sector in our region.

Once all ideas were captured, each industry leader selected their top three priorities in a poll, resulting in the ranking of common denominators listed below.
The top three priorities overall were then further explored in the next section as **priority areas**.

What are the common denominators that must be addressed to unlock the potential growth of the sector in our region?	
1	• **Education about the IT Sector** (Building a talent pipeline through early exposure and academic pathways)
2	• **Policies to Encourage Business to Move to North Texas** (Creating a business-friendly environment to drive regional IT growth)
3	• **Strong IT Industry Narrative (Push Legislative / Outside Policies)** (Positioning North Texas as a national leader in IT innovation and policy)
4	• Power / Infrastructure Access has to Meet a Baseline
5	• Robust Corporation and University Research Centers Across Texas
6	• Transportation (e.g., South to North Dallas)
7	• Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (creating / promoting a welcoming environment for workers / employees)
8	• Confirm Economic Impact of Policies
9	• Increase Understanding of AI Ethics (to improve not replace)
10	• Pro-Innovation Ecosystem (e.g., mentorship for entrepreneurs)
11	• Open Innovation and Cross-Collaboration (back-to-back)
12	• Firm Business / Professional Networks
13	• Compelling Travel / Leisure Draw to this Area (FIFA / World Cup)
14	• Partner with Cities to Increase Economic Development
15	• Continuity in Resources for Small Businesses
16	• Improve the Cost of Living (e.g., housing)

PRIORITY AREAS

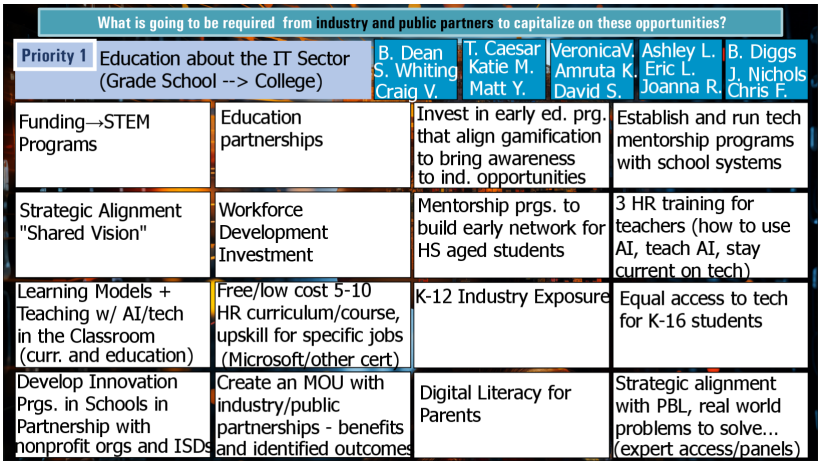
Industry leaders were then asked to consider what will be required from both industry and public partners within each top priority area to effectively capitalize on emerging opportunities in manufacturing. Each leader outlined their action ideas on note cards. Once each priority area had been discussed, industry leaders self-selected to join one or more action teams as **industry champions** for further collaboration. These teams will explore potential actions, identify resources needed from public partners, and prepare to report their progress to the sector partnership at the first quarterly meeting in June.

Priority 1: Education about the IT Sector (Grade School to College)							
To prioritize IT sector education, industry and public partners need to fund STEM programs, create engaging platforms for learning technologies, and provide AI education through parent-child learning centers. They should also offer livable wage jobs, paid internships, and real-world exposure to the IT sector for students. Collaboration through public-private partnerships, strategic alliances, and community engagement is essential to build a strong education-to-job pipeline, ensure equal access to technology, and support workforce development.							
Champions	Craig Von Collenberg Stormie Whiting	Katie McJunkin Matt Yeager	John Nichols David Steele Ted Fujimoto	Ashley Lindsay Veronica Valladarez	Tony Caesar Eric Loyd Brian Dean	Joanna Ridgway Amruta Kulkarni	Adele De Wee Brian Diggs

Adele De Wee	• Fund STEM Programs.
Amruta Kulkarni	• Create platforms for kids to learn about latest technologies—more gamification, with platforms for them to play around with coding. • Introduce more trainings and tools to optimize time.
Ashley Lindsey	• AI Education: Parent-child learning centers for K-12 families. • Livable wage jobs for students actively enrolled in industry certification / degree programs. • Education about IT Sector: Paid internships in industry for high schoolers. K-12 industry exposure to real-world progressions in IT sector.
Ben Bhatti	• Public / Private Partnerships
Brian Dean	• Focus education topics on relevant technology (internet, AI, machine learning) to build skills in next-gen technologies.
Brian Diggs	• Develop innovation programs in schools in partnership with non-profit organizations and ISDs.
Craig Von Collenberg	• Fund resources to help low-income workers into entry-level jobs; address “benefits cliff.” • Education policy that drives IT programming in education (i.e., required computer science in high school) • Industry-led skill / competency frameworks driving curriculum and education outcomes

David Steele	• Utilizing project-based learning in the K-12 system, leveraging industry connection • Corporate financial investment into early education programs that align gamification to bring awareness to industry opportunity • University mentorship programs to high school-aged to build early networks and comfortability within industry
Denita Lacking-Quinn	• Create a memorandum of understanding to ensure the industry and public partnerships — beneficial to both with identified outcomes.
Dominic Corrado	• Network, meet, and build relationships with the community to create awareness and advertise industry.
Eric Loyd	• Grade School: Expand STEM programs beyond the academic elements and introduce practical tie-ins to how companies use STEM knowledge to conduct business and provide services / products we use daily. • High School: Extend apprenticeship programs currently in place for trades (i.e., auto repair, plumbing, chef) into tech roles giving students real experience, earlier.
Joanna Ridgway	• Lobby for and pass funding for AI education and AI tools for educators to use by the 2026 school year. • Free / low-cost 5–10-hour curriculum or "courses" to upskill someone so they qualify for specific jobs (Microsoft / Other) (Issue Certificate) • 3-hour training for teachers: different training per grade level to save them time. "How to use AI?" "How to Teach AI?" "How to stay current on ongoing training / updates?"
John Nichols	• Educational Partnerships
Katie McJunkin	• Education to the public (and educators) about data centers, AI, and machine learning
Matt Yeager	• Career Technology Education (CTE) program, to align with local tech Industries • Community Partners Campaigns
Michael Sherwood	• Investment in Workforce Development • Strategic Alignment / "Shared Vision"
Mike Wilkes	• Clear expectations, understanding of opportunities (light at end of the tunnel)
Rory Martin	• Funding for IT-specific programming • Career exploration opportunities for students and young professionals • Strong education-to-job pipeline and educator and employer engagement • Knowledgeable faculty and teachers • Equal access to tech for K-16 students • Digital literacy for parents
Samar Khan	• Education: Extend AI and sustainability education, bring in industry experts, and replicate (e.g., TripAI did a program at UTD).
Shanthi Rajaram	• Make STEM easy, attractive, and fun for people / students of all kinds. • Better compensation for teachers so we attract better and more passionate teachers • Upskill teachers to align their teachings with industry trends and where it is heading.

Stormie Whiting	• Come together as an industry to broadcast companies—big / small—to sponsor schools and programs in training and education—make it fun for the students!!
Taylor Cook	• The way school is done—learning models and teaching with AI / technology in the classroom—as curriculum and education. (i.e., school in Austin with 2-hour AI learning and lectures of entrepreneurship K-12 currently enrolled) • Allow children to get paid for coming up with new ideas (maybe in cohorts). • Create facilitated sessions with industry-experienced individuals.
Ted Fujimoto	• Routine and organized career awareness of the range of career opportunities in the sector—including day-in-life, skills needed, connections to people doing this work, awareness of compensation, and future pathways • Strategic alliances with project-based learning schools (K-12) to provide real-world problems for student teams to solve • Expert panels to evaluate projects, expert access to advise project teams, workshops for best practices in project management
Tony Caesar	• Establish digital camps to be run during the summer in low-income regions. • Partner with school systems to create STEM-based curriculums. • Establish and run tech mentorship programs with school systems.
Veronica Valladarez	• Industry panel on how the future of tech requires voices from every background • Education about the IT sector (grade school to college) • Educate students on the benefits and challenges of AI. • Industry partnership with community partners to amplify tech education in underrepresented community organizations
Anonymous	• High school programs (electives) cemented into credits of internships • Family education



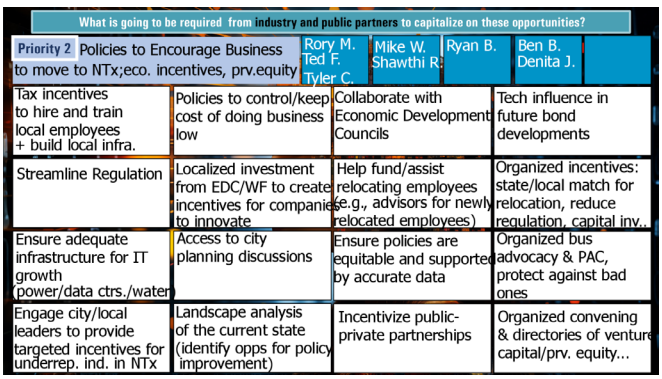
Priority 2: Policies to Encourage Business to Move to North Texas								
To encourage businesses to move to North Texas, industry and public partners need to collaborate with economic development councils, provide infrastructure and funding for small-scale industries, and offer organized incentives for relocation. They should advocate for tech-specific public-private partnerships, engage local lenders, and implement tax abatement policies. Ensuring equitable policies, providing long-term tax and land incentives, and promoting the region through marketing and outreach are also crucial steps to attract and retain businesses.								
Champions	Ted Fujimoto	Rory Martin	Shanthi Rajaram	Denita Lacking-Quinn	Ben Bhatti	Ryan Bitters	Mike Wilkes	Tyler Cook

Adele De Wee	• Collaborate with economic development councils.
Amruta Kulkarni	• Create more infrastructure and funding to small-scale industries.
Ashley Lindsay	• Policies and Business: Incentives for Public / Private Partnerships

Ben Bhatti	• Organized incentives:
	  • State match for relocation
	  • Local match for relocation - incentivize local companies to grow
	  • Continue to reduce labor regulation
	  • Capital investors for partnerships

Brian Diggs	• Advocate for tech-specific public / private partnerships.
Chris Foster	• Engage city / local lenders in DFW to target incentives for underrepresented industries in North Texas.
Craig Von Collenberg	• Tax abatement policies in exchange for business investment in local areas • Work with state and local governments to ensure adequate infrastructure for tech growth including power, data centers, water, etc. • Communicate availability of infrastructure to potential companies.
David Steele	• Localized investments from EDC/WF (Economic Development Councils/Workforce) to create incentives for companies to innovate
Denita Lacking-Quinn	• Ensure policies are equitable using accurate data to support and attract business moving to North Texas.
Doug Phillips	• Long-term tax and land incentives to pull HQs in
Joanna Ridgway	• Tax benefit for X dollars invested in upskilling workforce / public education
John Nichols	• Talent and workforce partnership grants
Matt Yeager	• Tax incentives to build out local IT infrastructure and hire and train local employees

Michael Sherwood	• Tax Incentives and Financial Tools • Marketing and Outreach: "Tech Moves to Texas" • Regulatory Streamlining
Rory Martin	• Special tax credits for particular categories of workers (similar to the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)) • An industry-aligned policy agenda and a partner to champion • A landscape analysis of the current state to identify opportunities for policy improvement
Ryan Bitters	• More exposure to EDCs, chambers, and resources to grow • Access to city planning discussions
Samar Khan	Policies: • Technology grants for SMB (Small and Midsize Business) to grow in DFW • Dallas College startup innovation fund
Shanthi Rajaram	• Welcome incentives but hire local (meet certain %). • Incentives to help businesses upskill the current workforce for future tech • Tax incentives for IT businesses
Stormie Whiting	• Add and promote our cities; tell them what there is to do / share with everyone. • Set up economic plans to help fund / assist relocating to this area. • Set them up with an advisor / friend that they can lean on when they do relocate (guarantee they stay).
Ted Fujimoto	• More organized convenings and directories of venture capital and private equity with useful insights on focus areas, criteria, state, size publishing, and updates on recent investments and profiles of the companies • Organized business advocacy and PAC to advocate for business-friendly policies and protect against bad ones that make doing business in the region less streamlined or more expensive
Tony Caesar	• Established infrastructure • Good roadways / highways
Tyler Cook	• Business development and opportunity zones and public / private facilities / real estate / corporate park → increase • Corporate and personal tax incentives and lower-cost lending (financial) access, especially for small and middle-sized companies at the state and local level
Veronica Valladarez	• Tech influence in future bond development
Anonymous	• Veteran programs • Match capital incentives from EDCs with in-kind corporate services • Engage Dallas Regional Chambers • Policies to control / keep the cost of doing business low • Target LATAM (Latin American) - targeted business using DFW as a jump point.



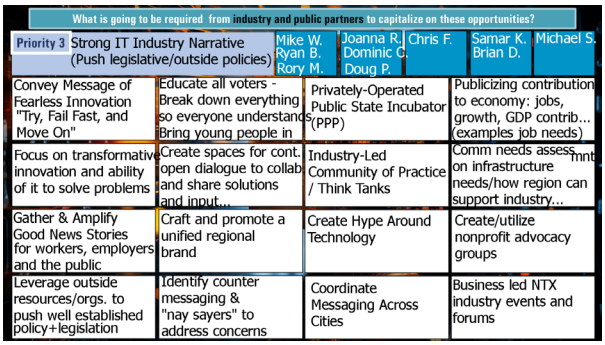
Priority 3: Strong IT Industry Narrative (Push Legislative / Outside Policies)										
To push a strong IT industry narrative and advance legislation, industry and public partners need to invest in talent, drive innovation, and emphasize problem-solving capabilities. They should conduct community needs assessments, develop coordinated communication strategies, and collect data on the economic impact of the sector. Engaging with media, creating hype around technology, and establishing cross-sector alliances are crucial for promoting a unified regional brand and advocating for business-friendly policies.										
Champions	Ryan Bitters	Mike Wilkes	Chris Foster	Rory Martin	Michael Sherwood	Joanna Ridgway	Samar Khan	Dominic Corrado	Brian Dean	Doug Phil

Adele De Wee	• Invest in talent.
Amruta Kulkarni	• Focus on transformation and innovation. • Drive innovation. • Emphasize ability to solve problems.
Ashley Lindsay	IT Narrative: • Community Needs Assessment on Infrastructure: Develop narrative on how the region could better support the industry. • Industry partnerships on coordinated comms to outside regions to attract new companies • Collect and analyze data on economic impact of sector. • Segmentation of audiences for unique valve prop narratives
Ben Bhatti	• Highlight comparison of IT workforce and encourage policies to enable IT infrastructure.
Brian Dean	• Convey narrative around not being afraid to fail. Many companies are afraid to innovate for fear of losing the investment. “Try, fail fast, and move on.” • Push the ability to innovate into learning environments. Teach them to try new things. School does not allow this today with graded assignments.
Brian Diggs	• Community engagement tools that help synthesize and contextualize the efforts
Chris Foster	• Business-led North Texas industry events and forums
Craig Von Collenberg	• Create hype around technology. • Engage with media sources to strongly highlight all the work we are talking about today.
David Steele	• Leverage outside resources and organizations to push well established policy and legislation.
Denita Lacking-Quinn	• Create spaces for continued open dialogue to collaborate and share solutions and input, maybe a website to track the work and case studies for review.
Doug Phillips	• We need the current heavy hitters in the region to co-promote value. This cannot just come from state / city / region.
Eric Loyd	• Become a destination for tech conferences.
Joanna Ridgway	• Create short elevator pitch this group consistently uses with stats.

Katie McJunkin	• Educate the public and legislators on barriers, lobbying, media, etc.
Matt Yeager	• Create / utilize non-profit advocacy groups.
Michael Sherwood	• Craft and promote a unified regional brand. • Coordinate messaging across cities.
Mike Wilkes & Dominic Corrado	• Public, state incubator privately operated (Public-Private Partnership).
Ryan Bitters	• City to Industry Growth to Align to Needs
Rory Martin	• Identify counter messaging and "nay sayers" to effectively address concerns. • Work together to gather and amplify "good news stories" for workers, employers, and the public. • Robust data collection and analysis to build a straightforward value proposition • Identify effective messengers and tactics that speak to particular audiences (kids, workers, employers, law makers, other industries).
Samar Khan	• Community of practice- industry lead (think tanks)
Stormie Whiting	• Educate all voters. • Breakdown everything so everyone understands it. • Bring younger people in the discussion, they are our future.

Ted Fujimoto	• Publicize contributions to the economy:
	  • Number of jobs / job growth / wages
	  • Examples of fastest growing job needs and range of pay
	  • Net regional GDP contribution by sector as money and percentage
	• Publicize amount of new investment capital invested in sector.
	• Organize (e.g., PACs) to advocate for business-friendly policies and protect against bad ones that make doing business in the region less streamlined or more expensive.

Tony Caesar	• Establish cross-sector alliances to drive common goals.
Tyler Cook	• Create measurements and feedback loop. • Strong visuals and illustrations • Define clear and bold vision and identity. • Highlight unique regional strengths. • Engage business leaders and entrepreneurs. • Leverage quantitative and qualitative data and evidence.
Veronica Valladarez	• Leverage non-tech forums to convey importance of IT message (ex. TCEA (Texas Computer Education Association) for educators, Dallas start up week).

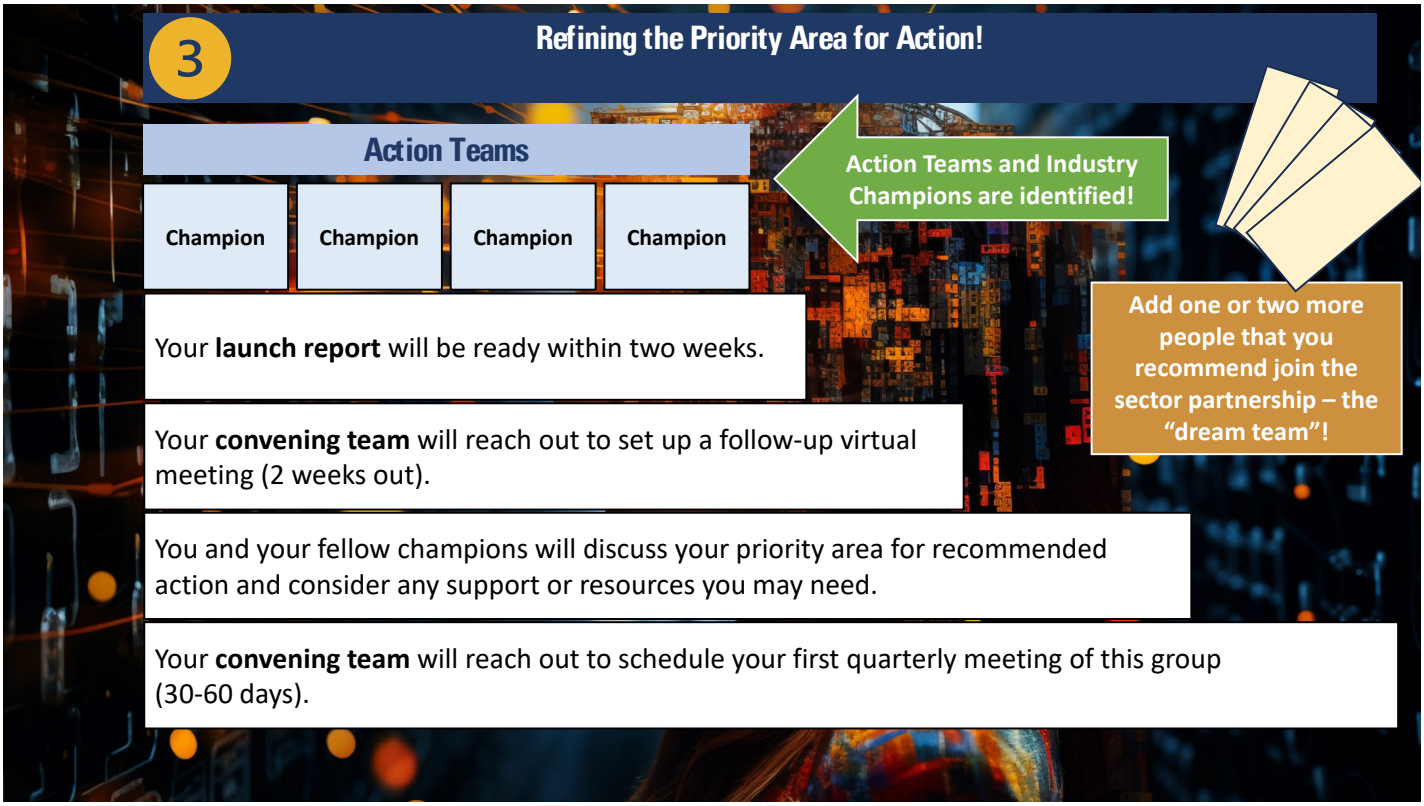


REFINING THE PRIORITY AREA FOR ACTION

As the official sector partnership launch wrapped up, industry leaders became **industry champions** and joined together under the previously highlighted priority areas to form **action teams**.

With support from the sector convening team at Dallas College, industry champions will be invited to meet with their action teams over the next two weeks for a virtual call.

The first sector partnership quarterly meeting will be scheduled in June, in collaboration with the industry champions and facilitated by the conveners from Dallas College. The meeting will be held in a similarly industry-led, facilitated format, with updates from the action teams and an emphasis on an **industry driven** shared agenda to address critical areas for sector growth and economic impact in the region.



PHOTOS