



Impact Report

2024-2025



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Letter From The CEO

Cities are under pressure to do more with less. While technology offers solutions, most lack the human infrastructure to translate tools into action. That gap is what Better Futures Institute exists to close.

Alberto Gomez, PhD

CEO, Better Futures Institute

South Texas is entering a defining moment. Bexar County alone is projected to add more than one million residents by 2040, while the San Antonio–Austin corridor moves toward an 8-million-person megaregion. Across the border, Monterrey and northern Mexico continue to attract record investment. The South Texas Triangle is being reshaped by demographic growth, industrial transformation, and binational capital flows. Opportunity is not the constraint. Capacity is.

The question is not whether growth is coming. It is whether our public systems, talent pipelines, and civic institutions are prepared to guide that growth toward shared prosperity.

BFI builds the missing layer: we train talent at the intersection of technology, policy, and community; we embed that talent in real public-sector challenges; and we develop shared data infrastructure alongside cities. This year, that work translated into tangible results. We supported more than 40 Civic Tech Scholars and generated \$2+ million in estimated annual cost-avoidance capacity for our public partners. These outcomes demonstrate that strategic investments in civic capacity unlock outsized returns.

But the numbers tell only part of the story. What matters most is the leadership infrastructure we are building — a generation equipped to translate between technology, policy, and community. Students who do not simply code, but convert data into decisions that improve lives. Cities that do not merely adopt tools, but develop the capability to deploy them effectively.

As we move into 2026, our focus remains clear: How do we build the capacity cities need to turn technology into action?

Thank you to our partners, students, funders, and collaborators who make this work possible.

BFI At A Glance

One year of impact driving a culture of innovation through workforce development, community research, and public purpose AI.

\$2 Million

Estimated savings generated for our public partners, including the City of San Antonio & VIA.

\$182,000

Invested in paid internships and created access to high-paying career pathways.

300+

College and high school students engaged with key community stakeholders to address urban challenges through our Policy & Civic labs.

100+

Local leaders participated in our programs, strengthening cross-sector collaboration and supporting talent retention by building professional local networks for students.

40+

Civic Tech Scholars trained on solving real-world problems by developing innovative solutions with public agencies.

4

Major public research publications addressing San Antonio's most pressing issues, including Workforce of the Future, Beyond Basketball, and the South Texas Triangle collaboration with the *San Antonio Express-News*.

Theory Of Change

Better Futures Institute builds the civic infrastructure that enables cities to translate technology into action.

Despite sustained economic growth, San Antonio and South Texas face persistent structural challenges—job scarcity in high-growth sectors, income inequality, and economic segregation. As Bexar County's population reaches 3.8 million by 2040, rapid advances in AI and digital systems are outpacing public institutions' ability to respond.

The constraint isn't technology or funding, it's human infrastructure: people and systems capable of translating between data, policy, and communities to make decisions that improve lives.

BFI builds that missing layer by training talent at the intersection of technology, policy, and community research; embedding that expertise in real public-sector challenges through paid internships and fellowships; and developing shared data and AI infrastructure alongside cities. This approach focuses on leverage, not service delivery. We help agencies build internal capacity to solve problems repeatedly.

By starting in South Texas, where growth collides with inequality, we're stress-testing a model designed to scale nationally. When cities have the talent, tools, and systems to translate technology into action, they become more resilient, fair, and adaptive.

Focus Areas

We harness technology, data, research, and storytelling to empower communities, advance innovation, and inform policy.

Programs

Empowering young leaders in STEAM via an internship and fellowship program.

Research

Enhancing policy focused on socioeconomic development and urban transformation in South Texas.

Public Technology

Activating community engagement and building solutions for resilient cities.

Better Futures Series

Spotlighting San Antonio residents shaping innovative efforts in their community.

Talent & Workforce Development

Civic Tech Scholars Program

The Civic Tech Scholars Program empowers emerging leaders in STEAM fields through paid, real-world social impact projects and a strong network of mentors. Designed as a launchpad for regional talent across San Antonio and South Texas, the program offers hands-on experience at the intersection of data science, AI, product development, policy design, and community research. Scholars collaborate with BFI staff, civic leaders, and industry partners to design solutions and produce applied outputs, including tools, policy recommendations, dashboards, briefs, and reports.

By embedding Scholars in high-impact, place-based work, Better Futures Institute bridges academic learning and career readiness while strengthening the local workforce pipeline and supporting long-term talent retention. The program aligns with university academic calendars, offering full-time summer cohorts and part-time placements during the spring and fall semesters.



In spring 2025, Civic Tech Scholars partnered with VIA Metropolitan Transit to modernize how public transit services are planned and evaluated. Working with real operational datasets, Scholars built tools that automated time-intensive workflows and improved service-level analysis.

“Better Futures Institute strengthened our operational efficiency by automating GTFS quality assurance and advancing how we analyze service data. The tools developed provide deeper visibility into route performance and service planning, enabling our teams to make faster, data-informed decisions and build a scalable foundation for modern transit management.”

Brian Dillard, Vice President of Innovation & Technology, VIA Metropolitan Transit

“Meeting with the scholars and seeing their prototypes become real tools that we can use—it validated the whole experience. These weren’t theoretical projects; they addressed real needs, and that’s what makes it meaningful for our team and the scholars alike.”

Eddy Bautista, VIA Application Developer, VIA Metropolitan Transit

\$182,000

in Paid Internships

200+

Applications per Program

40

Civic Tech Scholars

30+

Regional Leaders Visited

65%

Women

45%

First-Generation Students

“Going into it, I didn’t really know much about the opportunities San Antonio has to offer in terms of career growth and development. The Workforce of the Future event really helped a lot of students, myself included, understand that San Antonio is a growing city—especially in the tech industry. There are so many opportunities for new graduates to apply their skills in ways they might not expect, in a city they might not have considered. A lot of people think about places like Chicago, New York, or Austin, but San Antonio is really on the rise. I think that perspective changed for a lot of students.”

Fizza Dhuka (UT Austin | Focus: Product)

“This experience gave me formative community outreach skills and allowed me to build meaningful connections, not only with my fellow scholars but also with stakeholders in San Antonio whom I would have never otherwise met. I also gained invaluable professional development skills that I will carry into future experiences.”

Eliana Arriaga (UT Austin | Focus: Policy)

“Better Futures serves as a bridge-builder for students by giving them a platform to use their skills on civic technology projects around San Antonio. We get more exposure to how the city works, what we can do for economic development, and making our environment more sustainable and creating more green spaces, especially in downtown where there’s a lot of buildings. Meeting more people, connecting with them, and building my network has been very valuable.”

Ruchika Sharma, Program Coordinator at Better Futures Institute

“I came across the economic development dashboard for the City of San Antonio and noticed improvements that could be made to report economic data to residents, industry leaders, and local businesses. I was nervous to bring it up, but when I did everyone was super collaborative and wanted to expand on that.”

Savannah Rakowitz (BFI Scholar | Focus: Research)

One of the biggest takeaways didn’t know when I first got into the program was the amount of connections that you would make. Beto has introduced this to so many people from so many different walks of life. I’ve never experienced that at any internship or research (program) at all.

Dylan Yáñez (BFI Scholar | Focus: Engineering)

Learn more at: <https://www.bfinstitute.org/programs/civic-tech-scholars>

BFI Fellowship Program

The Better Features Fellowship awards grants to support remarkable individuals, empowering them to advance new and innovative approaches to research, improve, and enhance community impact. By collaborating with civic tech scholars, industry experts, and program stakeholders, fellows turn insights into policy recommendations and other creative outputs such as briefs, reports, and publications.



Strategic partnership with 80/20 Foundation

The fellowship program is funded by 80|20 Foundation and is focused on building San Antonio's future by empowering emerging talent. Through 80|20's mission to "Attract, Grow, and Retain" local workforce and entrepreneurs, the partnership cultivates a new generation of innovators equipped to shape sustainable, equitable growth across the city and region.





Fellow Spotlight: Eddie Romero | 2024–2025 BFI Fellow

As a Better Futures Institute Fellow, Edward (Eddie) A. Romero’s work focuses on the intersection of economic development, public accountability, and community-centered governance. During his fellowship, Romero examined Sports and Entertainment Districts, Community Benefits Agreements, and data governance frameworks, producing research that helps cities balance large-scale development with transparency, equity, and long-term public value. Working alongside Civic Tech Scholars and BFI leadership, his fellowship contributes practical policy insights that empower communities, inform decision-makers, and strengthen how data and development strategies serve the public interest.

“As a San Antonio native at the center of the city’s growth in residents and visitors, I applied for the Better Futures Institute fellowship to explore how development can more effectively address the complexities of poverty. By adding to the existing toolbox to break the cycle of poverty, I aim to create strategies that will make San Antonio a better place for all.”

Edward Aaron (Eddie) Romero, M.A

Better Futures Conversations: Policy And Civic Labs

8

Civic and Policy Labs

300+

Student Participants

100+

Local Professional Mentors

The Better Futures Conversations: Policy and Civic Lab is a core activity designed to immerse scholars in the systems shaping the future of cities. In collaboration with the City of San Antonio, the Better Futures Institute scholars engaged directly with public officials, civic leaders, and regional experts to explore the policies, challenges, opportunities, and promising practices driving San Antonio and the broader South Texas Triangle.

Spanning topics such as urban planning, regional economic dynamics, governance, workforce development, and quality of life, the series provided a foundation in how cities plan, grow, and respond to emerging needs. Sessions highlighted key issues, including infrastructure resilience, cross-border trade, public engagement, the future of work, and equitable access to opportunity.

By connecting scholars to real-world policy questions and regional context, the Policy and Civic labs strengthened their connection to their community and prepared scholars to contribute meaningfully to the region's future.

Event Spotlight: Workforce Of The Future: Policy & Civic Lab



On July 9th, 2025, more than 200 college and high school students doing professional internships across San Antonio gathered at UT San Antonio's School of Data Science to attend Workforce of the Future: Policy & Civic Lab.

Hosted by the Better Futures Institute, in partnership with Students + Startups, the half-day event featured civic dialogue, collaborative learning, and professional development. Students also participated in an interactive workshop where they shared their top priorities for choosing a city to live in and proposed ideas to help San Antonio retain young, skilled talent.

The event included opening remarks by Bexar County Judge Peter Sakai and a keynote address by Beto Altamirano, CEO of Irys Technologies and BFI Board member. Following the introductory remarks, BFI CEO Alberto Gomez moderated a panel on workforce trends, regional opportunities, and challenges that young people face after graduation. Panelists included Romanita Matta-Barrera, Chief Business Advancement Officer of greater:SATX, Andrés Andujar, former CEO of Hemisfair; Tiana Carter, Assistant Vice President of Human Resources at USAA; and Roberto Rios, Senior Manager of Human Resources at Toyota Motor Manufacturing.



28%

Ranked Job Opportunities as the Top Priority. Students called for expanded mentorship programs and professional development spaces to better bridge education and employment pathways in San Antonio.

19%

Ranked Cost of Living as the Top Priority. Students emphasized the need for more affordable housing options and the creation of a centralized housing portal to improve accessibility and transparency.

16%

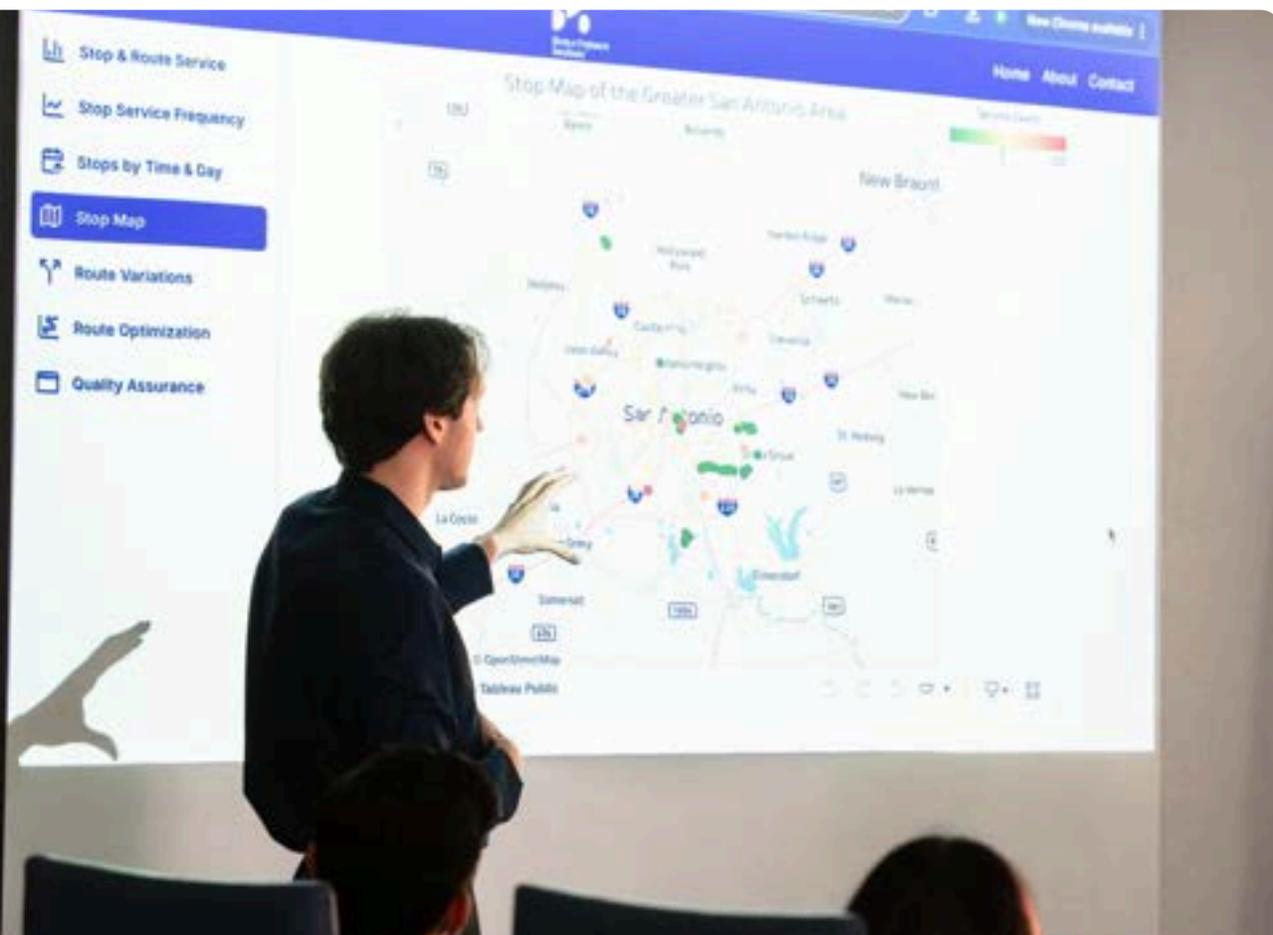
Ranked Quality of Life as the Top Priority. Students proposed initiatives such as a four-day work week, downtown light rail, and stronger company culture programs to enhance regional retention and overall livability.

Paola Fernandez, Director of Urban Planning at Urban Alchemy Collective led the policy lab workshop, where students shared their priorities.

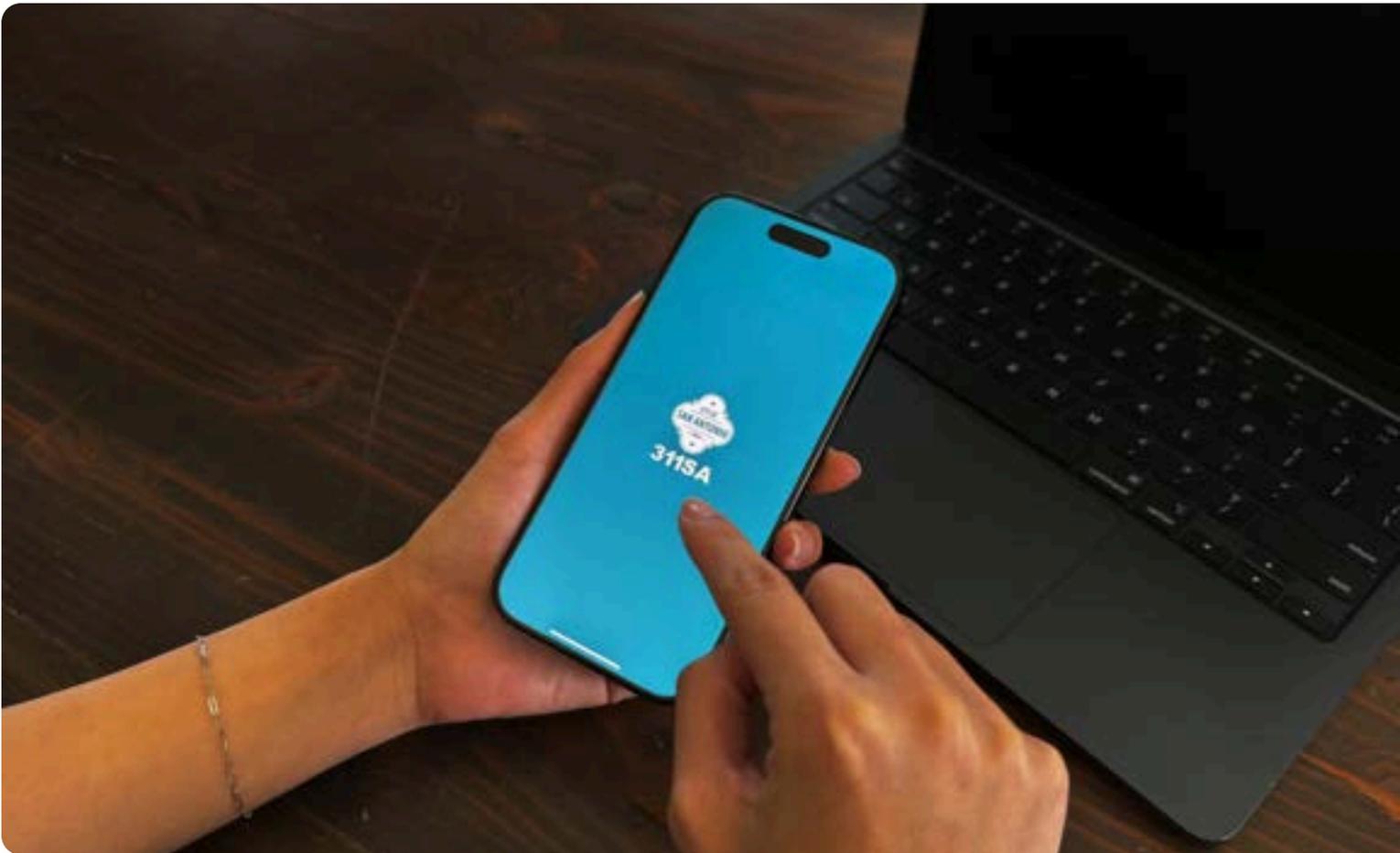
At the conclusion of the event, attendees participated in small group discussions with 30 designated mentors from across the San Antonio area. Discussions centered around career paths, perspectives on today's job market, and practical advice for young people preparing to enter the workforce.

Read the full event report: <https://www.bfinstitute.org/workforce-of-the-future-policy-civic-lab-2025>

Civic Technology: Social Impact Through Technology



Civic technology represents the use of data, digital tools, and human-centered design to strengthen public systems and improve quality of life for communities. It is both a practice and a mindset, rooted in collaboration, equity, and public purpose. Through projects like enhancing the 311SA App, advancing South Texas Triangle research, and the Better Futures Series, our scholars learn to apply civic tech principles to real challenges, gaining the skills to design solutions that are informed by community research and grounded in social impact. For BFI, civic technology is ultimately about empowering emerging leaders to build more sustainable and resilient cities.



311SA

The 311SA app, now operating for nearly a decade, has become one of San Antonio's most impactful civic tools, with almost 1 million service requests addressed and a user base of over 150,000 residents. This sustained level of engagement significantly improves the city's ability to detect and resolve issues early, saving municipalities hundreds of thousands to several million dollars annually by preventing small problems from escalating into major infrastructure failures. For San Antonio, 311SA delivers substantial economic value through more efficient city operations, extended lifespans of public assets, reduced emergency repair costs, and higher overall satisfaction and trust in public services.

The BFI in partnership with the City's Public Works and 311 departments, developed a predictive model that uses historical maintenance and weather data to forecast where pothole issues are likely to emerge, saving the city time and resources.



“The collaboration with the Civic Tech Scholars program has been instrumental in refining our approach to roadway maintenance and repair. The research team’s data analysis helped us reassess how we allocate resources and optimize repair schedules. By leveraging their insights, we’ve been able to improve response times, ensure that our teams are more effectively deployed, and ultimately enhance the quality of our road infrastructure. This partnership has been a prime example of how data-driven decision-making can lead to meaningful operational improvements, and we look forward to continuing this work to make our processes even more efficient.”

Anthony Chukwudolue, Director of Public Works, City of San Antonio

Public-Purpose AI // POC Agent

At the Better Futures Institute, Public-Purpose AI means building artificial intelligence that strengthens, not replaces, public institutions. Our approach focuses on responsibly applying AI to improve service delivery, enhance resilience, and expand local government's capacity for data-driven decision-making, in line with community feedback.

BFI is developing applied AI projects with multiple agencies, including Public Works, where scholars helped prototype models that analyze 311 request patterns to support more proactive maintenance, and VIA, where teams explored predictive tools to understand ridership trends, service reliability, and community-identified transit barriers. These projects mirror emerging Tier-3 use cases identified nationally—complex problem-solving that leverages AI for planning, resource allocation, and improved public service outcomes.

In collaboration with local public agencies, BFI built an AI agent trained on localized public-agency data and direct community feedback. This agent demonstrates how government-ready AI can summarize policies, surface insights, and support decision-making while maintaining human oversight, an approach recommended for safe and effective AI adoption in local governments



For Scholars, Fellows, and public partners, these projects provide hands-on experience with ethical, community-centered AI while generating tools that can improve transparency, responsiveness, and long-term planning for the city.

3

Public Agency Collaboration

70x

Improvement in Data Analysis & QA Processes

400–500

Staff Hours Saved Annually per Agency

\$50K–\$150K

Estimated Annual Operational Savings

99%

Accuracy in Forecasting Operational Demand

72–77%

Accuracy Identifying High-Risk Assets

47,000+

Roads Analyzed

18,000+

Segments Integrated Across Multi-Source Datasets

1,700–2,200

High-Priority Targets Identified

\$40K–\$100K

High-Priority Targets Identified

30–40%

Service Demand Concentrated in Priority Zones

60%

Potential Reduction in Reactive Emergency Responses

30+

Students Trained Annually

Why it matters: San Antonio and the South Texas Region need to leverage AI and other emerging technologies to make sure we build systems through programs and initiatives that support our communities to upskill, reskill, and utilize these technologies to improve government services and ultimately, our quality of life.





South Texas Triangle Series

The South Texas Triangle research is central to BFI's mission because it positions San Antonio within one of the most strategically important emerging mega-regions in the United States. Through our widely read San Antonio Express-News Op-Ed series, the release of our Op-Ed book, and research contributions from Civic Tech Scholars, BFI has elevated public understanding of the region's economic, demographic, and cross-border dynamics. Our work highlights the Triangle's potential as a driver of national competitiveness and its critical role in shaping the future of Texas.

Our sessions in the Rio Grande Valley and Laredo deepened this regional perspective by grounding students and partners in the realities of border economies, inland ports, talent flows, and community needs.

As we expand the program, BFI aims to build a long-term research initiative that informs policymakers, strengthens regional collaboration, and supports a more resilient and prosperous South Texas Triangle for decades to come.

Published as an Op-Ed Series in the *San Antonio Express-News*, reaching 15,000+ online readers and 342,709 weekly for print subscribers.

Learn more: <https://www.bfinstitute.org/south-texas-triangle-op-ed>

“We've seen immense growth in the ecosystem and in entrepreneurship, helping us catalyze Brownsville – and the entire Rio Grande Valley – as a place where anything is possible. If the largest OEM can take a barren piece of land and develop a rocket that's going to Mars...you can build anything that you want in the region.”

Nathan Burkhart, Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation

“Look at what's happening across our region. Brownsville is becoming a space and research powerhouse, with new university infrastructure and real momentum. Monterrey is attracting global capital at record levels. The San Antonio–Austin megaregion is scaling at historic speed. We are standing at the center of a once-in-a-generation opportunity. The question isn't whether growth is coming — it's whether we have the vision and alignment to lead it.”

Alberto Gomez, CEO, Better Futures Institute during San Antonio Startup Week '25

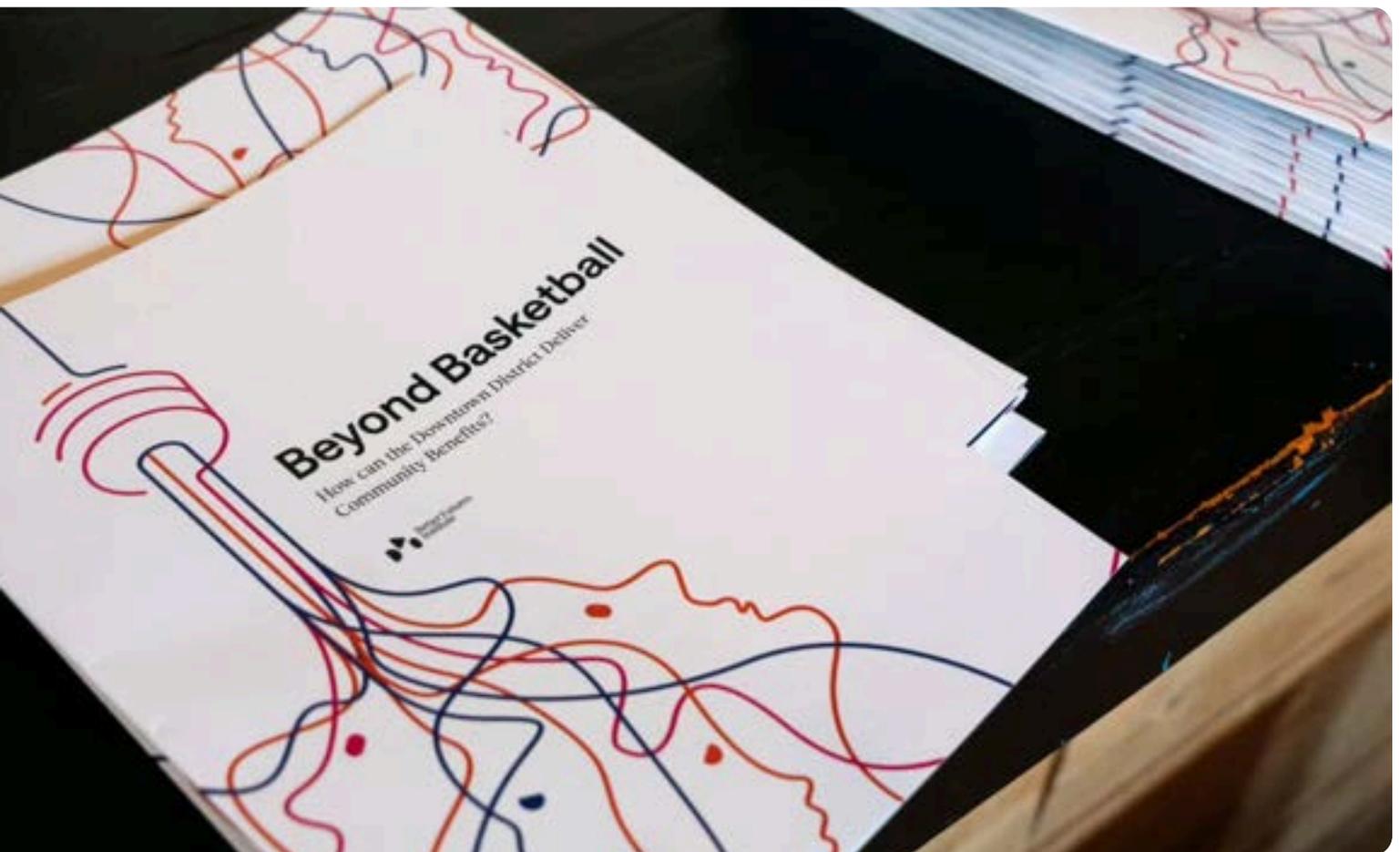


Beyond Basketball: How Can the Downtown District Deliver Community Benefits?

Authored by BFI Fellow Eddie Romero ('24-'25), this report outlines a policy framework to ensure San Antonio's proposed Sports & Entertainment District advances transparency, accountability, and resilient development. In collaboration with BFI scholars, Eddie connected data, governance strategy, and community insight to translate complex public investment questions into actionable recommendations.

To highlight his work, the Better Futures Institute, together with Tech Bloc and CNTR/CTY, hosted a community conversation on San Antonio's Westside upon completion of the report. The event brought together civic leaders, developers, and innovators to discuss the proposed Sports and Entertainment District and its potential impact on our urban core. The panel, moderated by Beto Altamirano (Tech Bloc), featured a powerful conversation with Trish DeBerry (Centro), David Robinson Jr. (Weston Urban), Liberty Swift (Spurs Sports & Entertainment), and Susan Strawn, attorney and former board member of the River Road Neighborhood Association.

Through his mentorship, research, and leadership, Eddie embodies our mission: transforming ideas into action and shaping more inclusive, resilient cities for the future.





Better Futures Series

The Better Futures Series honors San Antonio residents by fostering a “doing” culture through ingenuity and innovation. Harnessing the power of media, we spotlight outstanding individuals in dynamic communities, sharing diverse visions of better futures and the impactful actions transforming them into reality.

300,000+

Total cross-platform views and impressions.

134,000+

Instagram view (2025).

75,290 +

LinkedIn Impressions (2025).

47%

Audience growth in one year

Impact & Stewardship

About Better Futures Institute

Better Futures Institute (BFI) is a San Antonio-based think tank dedicated to advancing a culture of innovation, civic technology, and social impact. Through paid internships and fellowships, BFI empowers emerging leaders in STEAM—Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics—to build the resilient and inclusive cities of the future.

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Welcome Tech
Frost Bank

Agency Partners

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