



BROWNSVILLE
COMMUNITY
IMPROVEMENT
CORPORATION

**FY 2022 & 2023
ANNUAL REPORT**

ON THE BORDER, BY THE SEA, AND BEYOND BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS

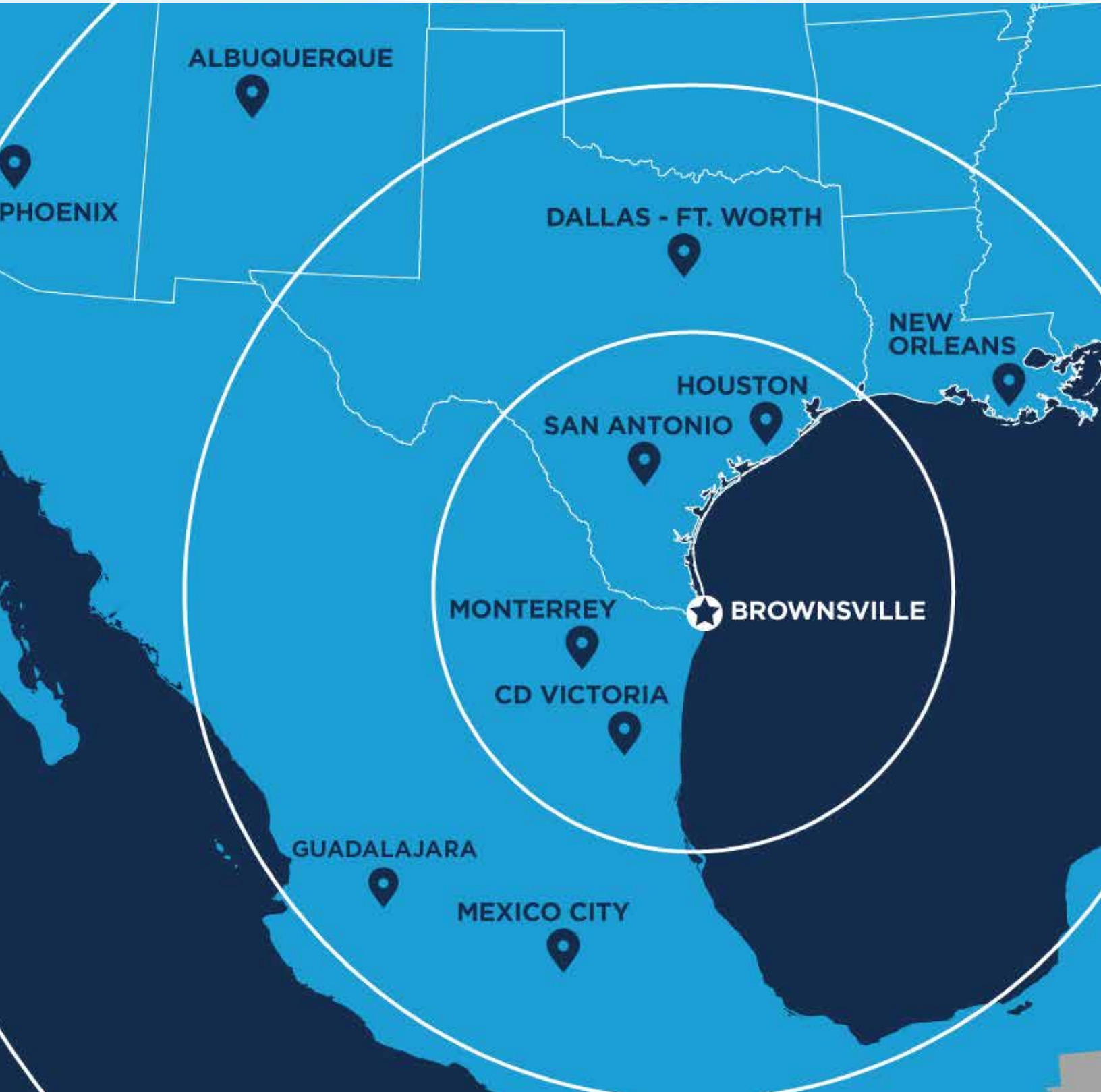


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BCIC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Cori Peña

President & CEO

Dear Friends and Partners of the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation,

Welcome to BCIC’s Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023 Annual Report, a narrative journey through our collective experiences and aspirations. This edition marks a milestone emerging from a period of unprecedented challenges. In these times of change, we confirmed that the heart of our success lies in the people and partnerships that define us. We’ve crafted this report to be community-centric, letting the voices of our staff, businesses, and community members weave the story of our shared achievements.

At the core of our mission is the commitment to enhancing the quality of life through innovative and equitable economic development initiatives. You will witness how this mission is not only stated on paper but has transformed into impactful actions, leading to substantial improvements in Brownsville’s business landscape, the birth of new ventures, and the advancement of education and training opportunities.

Brownsville stands at the transition point of a new era; our efforts are geared towards making our city an ideal place to live, work, invest, and play and the primary engine of opportunity and growth for all. The stories you will explore in this report are real-world examples of the Brownsville community’s resilience, creativity, and dedication. They are stories of triumph and tenacity, highlighting the efforts and successes of businesses and individuals who contribute to our city’s vibrancy and prosperity.

Guided by our core principles of integration, sustainability, collaboration, human investment, and transparency, we navigated through these years’ challenges and opportunities. These principles have been our guiding light, directing our strategies and initiatives.

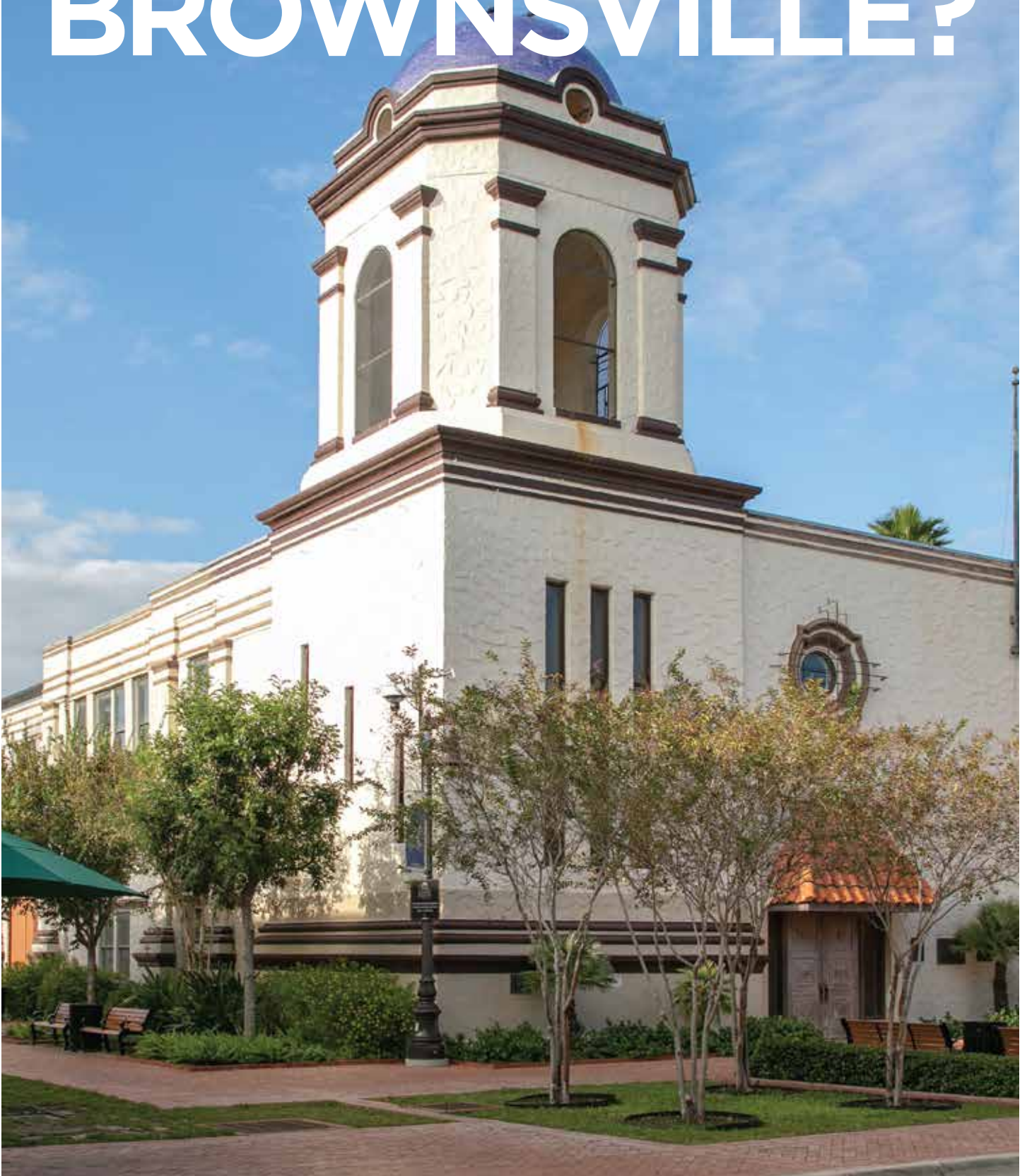
Thank you for walking this path with us.

Together, we are forging a stronger, more dynamic Brownsville where everyone is welcome.

—Cori Peña,
BCIC President & CEO

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WHY BROWNSVILLE?



ABOUT BROWNSVILLE

Crossroads of the Hemisphere

On the border, by the sea, Brownsville, Texas, is the largest city in the Rio Grande Valley. It is known as the Crossroads of the Hemisphere due to its proximity to the United States border with Mexico. Brownsville has **four established methods of international trade, including air, sea, road, and rail**; this makes Brownsville the perfect gateway for intermodal access to, North America, Mexico, Latin America, and beyond. In addition, since almost a decade ago, Brownsville has been home to Space X, opening up the potential of **adding interplanetary travel to its list of trade methods.**

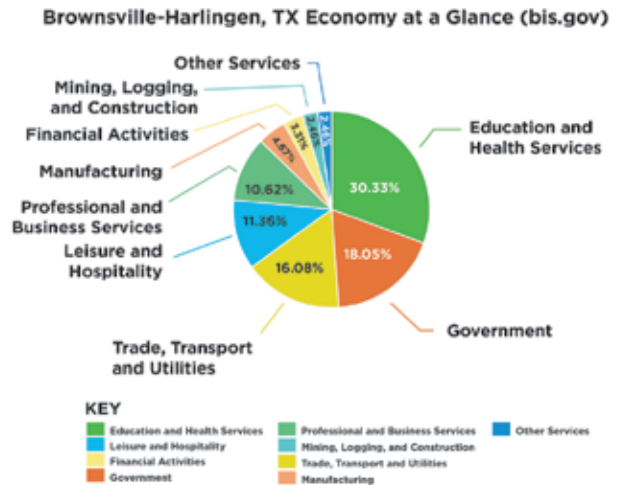
Home to the Largest Projects in the Nation

SpaceX conducts launches from our beaches, while our Port is currently home to the largest greenfield energy project in the history of the United States. **The Rio Grande LNG project is a significant economic milestone, with a historic record-breaking investment of \$5.9 billion.**¹
²This initiative is aimed at creating a modern gas liquefaction and export hub, spread over an area of more than 750 acres, to process and export liquefied natural gas globally. This project has emphasized the strategic importance of Brownsville in the energy market while offering numerous economic opportunities.



Pictures courtesy of Brownsville Convention & Visitors Bureau and City of Brownsville Communications and Marketing

Our Economic Pillars



Brownsville's employment landscape is based in the **Education and Health Services sector, which claims the largest share of the city's workforce. In October 2023, this sector alone accounted for a substantial 30.33% of employment.**³ Institutions like the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, along with the UT Health Science Center at Houston's local campus, are not just academic hubs but major employment drivers.

Following closely, the Government sector is another vital pillar of Brownsville's economy, comprising 18.05% of the employment pie as of October 2023. This significant employment share highlights the city's role as a central administrative and services hub, reflecting its importance in public administration and community services.

The Trade, Transportation, and Utilities sector is a significant employer in Brownsville, providing jobs to 16.08% of the workforce. Brownsville's strategic location at the crossroads of trade routes between the US and Mexico, along with its well-developed transportation and logistics infrastructure, makes it an ideal hub for trade. The Port of Brownsville is a vital part of this ecosystem, facilitating the movement of goods and contributing to the city's vibrant economy.

The average commute time in Brownsville, Texas is only 20.1 minutes,⁴ which is 6.7 minutes less than the national average. Compared to other cities in Texas, Brownsville has a relatively short commute time. This allows its residents to have more time to enjoy the rich cultural and recreational options available in the city.



Leading the Rankings on the Border by the Sea and Beyond

Brownsville's quality of life is remarkable. It was **ranked the 8th best place to live in Texas** by U.S. News and World Report in 2023.⁵ Additionally, it was **ranked 16th safest city in the United States** by SmartAsset Advisors in 2022.⁶ Residents can enjoy a fuller life, with savings on essentials that translate into stronger community roots and broader personal and family growth opportunities. In fact, **Brownsville was ranked #2 out of the top 10 low cost-of-living cities in America.**⁷

Brownsville is up to 61% more affordable than the major cities in Texas like San Antonio, Dallas or Austin;^{8,9} comparatively, when assessing cities with similar or smaller population sizes, Brownsville continues to demonstrate an advantage in affordability. Cities such as Carrollton and Midland in Texas, despite having similar or even smaller populations, present higher costs of living by about 39.52% and 9.38% respectively.

Tradition meets a Dynamic Future

The city has a youthful vibe with a **median age of 31,**¹⁰ showcasing a blend of traditional and

modern experiences. It offers a unique investment opportunity as tradition and progress converge. The city's vibrant cultural scene further enhances its dynamic, with festivals celebrating arts, local crafts, and performances that attract visitors and locals alike, strengthening the sense of community and belonging.

Brownsville dynamism is enriched with Hispanic heritage due to its fortunate border location. **Over 94% of the residents identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino, primarily of Mexican descent.**¹¹ The community is bilingual, **with 85% of the people speaking a language other than English at home.**¹² This showcases a dynamic blend of cultures that can be best enjoyed at the annual binational fiesta that celebrates Mexican heritage on both sides of the Rio Grande Valley. This almost century-long fiesta is known as Charro Days, and it is a celebration between two border cities, Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas. **More than 50,000 attendees**¹³ from across our borders visit Brownsville every year to participate in this fiesta, which includes daily parades, food, music, contests, and the traditional Sombrero Fest.

A Haven for Nature, Recreation, and History



Brownsville benefits from its unique four-season weather and geographic location. The city is known for having more than **9 trails covering a total of 41 miles** part of a larger planned route for the 428-mile Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Plan multi-use trail network.¹⁴ These trails, which include the trail in the **557-acre wildlife refuge,** Sabal Palms, and the trails in Resaca de la Palma State Park with a bird checklist featuring **284**

¹NextDecade makes final investment decision on Rio Grande LNG Phase 1 | Reuters

²Final Investment Decision on Rio Grande LNG | Bechtel

³Brownsville-Harlingen, TX Economy at a Glance (bls.gov)

⁴Living in Brownsville, TX | U.S. News (usnews.com)

⁵10 Best Places to Live in Texas in 2023-2024 | U.S. News (usnews.com)

⁶Safest Cities in America - 2022 Edition - SmartAsset | SmartAsset

species,¹⁵ offer a unique blend of natural beauty and cultural heritage.

In addition to these, initiatives like the Monte Bella Trails Park, with its 21-disc golf course and 7-mile bike trail, reflect Brownsville's dedication to natural spaces and outdoor recreation, enriching the community and drawing visitors alike. Whether you're a seasoned hiker or a casual stroller, these trails provide diverse landscapes, from lush wetlands to serene beachfront.

The Gladys Porter Zoo is a popular attraction in Brownsville, adding to the city's dedication to nature and outdoor recreation. The zoo officially opened in 1971 and is a vast zoological and botanical park that spans over 31 acres of lush tropical plants. Renowned for its success in breeding endangered species of wildlife, it is home to around 1,600 animals and **attracts more than 424,000 visitors annually**.

Boca Chica Beach is an almost untouched shoreline located east of Brownsville, within the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. It offers a perfect blend of natural beauty and outdoor activities. The beach faces the Gulf of Mexico and boasts a variety of ecosystems, including mangrove marshes, tidal salt flats, and clay dunes. The clear emerald waters are ideal for swimming and water sports. Additionally, it is home to various endemic wildlife species and many birds of prey, making it a popular destination for birdwatchers, too.

As you explore the beautiful paths of Brownsville, you will experience the region's diverse wildlife and its many historical landmarks. The city is rich in culture and history, which is evident in its numerous museums. The Brownsville Museum of Fine Art showcases artwork by both local and international artists. The Historic Brownsville Museum, situated in the former Southern Pacific Railroad Depot, narrates the city's vibrant history

through various exhibits and artifacts. The Stillman House Museum is another historical gem that takes you back in time, providing a glimpse into life in the 1800s.

Something for everyone

While the heart of Brownsville offers a rich tapestry of culture, history, and natural beauty, the city's vibrancy is not confined to its center. Shoppers can also take advantage of the major retailers at Sunrise Mall and the massive Main Event location, which covers over 53,000 sq. ft. and is one of the largest in the country.

The retail and nightlife scene in North Brownsville is thriving, just like in the south, especially in Historic Downtown. Recent private investment of \$25 million has fueled over 50 projects, enhancing the area's rich heritage of 19th and 20th-century architecture. **Over 349 Downtown buildings have been recognized as historically significant, making Brownsville the second most historical urban center in Texas.**¹⁶

Bienvenidas todas las personas

Brownsville shines as a prime example of growth, diversity, and opportunity. This city celebrates its binational heritage but also looks forward to a future of innovation and connectivity. From educational and healthcare excellence to embracing its role in global trade and space exploration, Brownsville proves the strength of unity and progress. It's a place where community, culture, and opportunity meet, offering a compelling invitation to those who seek to be part of its ongoing story and history.

⁷[2024 Cities with the Lowest Cost of Living - Niche](#)

⁸<https://livingcost.org/cost/united-states/tx>

⁹[Cost of Living in Texas State, US: 130 cities compared \(livingcost.org\)](#)

¹⁰[Brownsville, TX Population by Age - 2023 Brownsville, TX Age Demographics](#)

¹¹[Brownsville, TX Population by Race & Ethnicity - 2023 | Neilsberg](#)

¹²[U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Brownsville city, Texas](#)

¹³<https://visitbtx.com/charrodaysfestival/>

¹⁴[Hikes, Bikes and Trails - Visit Brownsville Texas \(visitbtx.com\)](#)

¹⁵[Brownsville Birding - Visit Brownsville Texas \(visitbtx.com\)](#)

¹⁶[Central Brownsville Now a National Historic District \(rgvmod.com\)](#)

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION



**BROWNSVILLE COMMUNITY
IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION**
AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



The Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation (BCIC) is a Type B Economic Development Corporation that operates actively to promote Brownsville, Texas, as a premier regional competitor and strategic hub for statewide economic growth. BCIC is committed to enhancing the overall quality of life through innovative and equitable economic development initiatives.

BCIC's vision for Brownsville is to represent the country as an innovative leader in fostering business development, enhancing the quality of life, and promoting unique local experiences in dining, retail, leisure, and recreation.

We understand the importance of responsible economic development and are committed to achieving it through transparency, collaboration, and sustainable practices. Our team at BCIC is passionate and dedicated, working closely with non-profits, businesses, and city departments to set a standard for responsible and sustainable economic development that is open to everyone.

Our ultimate goal is to enhance socio-economic mobility and establish Brownsville as an innovative leader in business development, providing its residents with enhanced quality of life initiatives. We're passionate about paving the way for innovation and prosperity and are eager to see Brownsville thrive with our support.

The primary beneficiaries of BCIC's efforts are the entrepreneurs, small businesses, and community members of Brownsville.

Thanks to our public and private partnerships, we can cater to often overlooked and diverse demographics, including women and minority-owned businesses, startups seeking market entry, and legacy businesses aiming for expansion. Our initiatives also indirectly benefit the broader community by fostering job creation, economic stability, and a vibrant local economy.

Team

Cori Peña

President & CEO

Nathan Burkhart

Vice President of Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Victoria Padron

Chief Operations Officer

Nelson Ivan Amaro

Director of Marketing & Communications

Lizeth Villarreal

Senior Operations Specialist

Rodolfo Hinojosa

Content & Marketing Specialist

Samantha Morales

eBridge Program Specialist

Board (2023)

Jill Dominguez

Chair of the Board

Mark Horowitz

Vice Chair of the Board

Cesar Lopez

Secretary

Linda Macias

Treasurer

Murad Abusalim

Zoraima Diaz

Traci Wickett

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BCIC IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS FY 2022 & 2023

QUALITY OF LIFE
PROGRAM
INVESTMENT

\$2,817,245

FULL & PART TIME JOBS
CREATED + RETAINED **682**

Through our Quality of Life Grants, BIG Grants, eBridge Fund,
and Recovery Fund Programs

BUSINESS
FINANCING
FUNDS
DISBURSED

\$2,973,950

BUSINESS PROJECTS
FUNDED **162**

Through our StartUp Texas, BIG Grants, eBridge Fund, and Recovery Fund Programs

PROPERTY
IMPROVEMENT
INVESTMENT

\$2,336,039

RENT SUBSIDY
PROGRAM
INVESTMENT

\$110,408

Through our Business Improvement and Growth Grants (BIG) Programs

PRIVATE
INVESTMENT
FOSTERED

\$27,376,163

As direct owner/partner contributions due to
our BIG Grants and eBridge Fund Programs

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HERITAGE & HORIZON

Community Development Programs





Miriam Suarez

Former, Community Development Manager

Downtown Brownsville, which is affectionately known as ‘El Centro’ in our Spanish-speaking community, has always been the hub of commerce, community, and transit. This area has a rich historical legacy that has been preserved over the years thanks to the dedication of various parties. One of the defining moments in Brownsville’s commitment to safeguarding this legacy was the 1975 Ellen Beasley’s Historical Survey and Preservation Plan. This document was groundbreaking at the time, and it served as an important call to action. It urged us to protect and enhance the essence of our city and laid the foundation for a long-lasting commitment to preserving our rich architectural and historical heritage.

As a history enthusiast, I find learning about the milestones that have helped preserve our architectural heritage fascinating. The year 2019 was particularly notable, as it saw the National Register Historic District Designation recognize 232 buildings as historically significant, including 47 that were constructed using Border Brick, a unique material made with mud and water from the Rio Grande.

Improvement and Growth Grant (BIG) program was born as an essential incentive to rehabilitate and preserve buildings and as a rental support mechanism contributing to Historic Downtown Brownsville’s rejuvenation. Describing it with words it’s not enough, to fully appreciate the transformation, you should visit El Centro on any day of the week or at night on a weekend. Through partnerships with community entrepreneurs, the program has revitalized the commercial and cultural vibrancy of the area, attracting people to the heart of our economic development, just as Ellen Beasley envisioned over 50 years ago.

As we reflect on our past accomplishments and set our sights on the future, we must recognize the crucial role of Quality of Life Grants in our community. Restored buildings alone are not enough if the people living, working, and shopping in the area are not happy. Over the past two decades, these grants have helped various sectors, including improving public parks and open spaces, enhancing entertainment, museums, and tourism, and supporting critical infrastructure development.



Every step we take, every building our residents restore, and every business and community project we support is more than just an effort to preserve physical structures or improve public spaces. We are also paying tribute to the spirit of Brownsville, which we must keep alive and thriving as we move forward with solid foundations. By understanding where we came from and having a strong sense of belonging and ownership of our public spaces, we can confidently advance toward the future. So, as we turn the pages of this report, let us remember the importance of our efforts to sustain and enhance our community’s quality of life.

Quality of Life Grants

Quality of Life Grants

Since its inception in 2003, the Quality of Life Grants program has been a cornerstone of BCIC's efforts to enhance Brownsville, Texas's appeal as a vibrant place to live, work, invest, and visit. The program aims to support a broad range of local organizations by offering grants for projects that will create conditions and opportunities for our community members to live fulfilling lives. BCIC has invested in over 270 projects, totaling 60.2 million dollars through grants and self-directed projects. These projects have improved public parks and open spaces, and supported entertainment, museums, tourism, and infrastructure development. All projects must foster economic development within the Brownsville city limits. After board approval, a 60-day public comment period is triggered, which ultimately results in the City Commission's approval.

Projects that are eligible for consideration include:

- Infrastructure and equipment assistance to promote or develop new or expanding business enterprises. Infrastructure includes sewer, water, electrical and gas utilities, drainage, streets and roads, and 5G technology. E.g., Distribution Centers and Small Warehouse Facilities serving as decentralized storage and distribution centers, manufacturing and industrial facilities, recreational tourism, regional or national Corporate Headquarters facilities, research and development facilities, retail development (infrastructure only), and workforce development training.
- Downtown revitalization projects that support increased sales tax revenue and foster investment opportunities.
- Recreational and Community Facilities that support cultural, sports, and entertainment that will contribute to the sustainability and growth of Brownsville's sales tax revenue, improve an area's appearance, and/or address an identifiable community need. E.g., Entertainment, tourist and convention centers, professional and amateur sports, parks, and open space improvements.

- Job incentives that will develop or expand business enterprises that create or retain primary jobs. A primary job is defined as a job that is available at a company for which a majority of the products or services of that company are ultimately exported to regional, statewide, national, or international markets, infusing new dollars into the local economy and is included in one of the nearly (16) NAICS sector codes.

Children's Museum of Brownsville Phase I Expansion Project



The Children's Museum of Brownsville (CMB) was awarded a grant of \$118,245 to aid the Phase I Expansion Project. The grant allowed CMB to hire a consultant group to create plans for expanding the Children's Museum of Brownsville and the new Brownsville Science Center. These plans included evaluating current operations, concepts for each space, important themes, and educational elements for various topics. The architectural proposal for both locations and the design concepts were also included in the plans. These plans will aid the museum's fundraising efforts and enhance engagement on the museum campuses.

Space and Technology Economic Cluster Project



The Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation has successfully fulfilled its three-year commitment to assist Expanding Frontiers (ExF) in establishing a thriving “New Space” ecosystem in Brownsville. ExF has been promoting space exploration and development while utilizing resources and tools to create essential programs that inspire and train local talent in space exploration. To continue supporting the Astropreneurship Community Education, Outreach, and Development programs, a grant of \$600,000 was provided. This will also help establish five (5) startup companies focused on New Space and related technologies.

Brownsville Community Health Center Ophthalmology Expansion Project



The Brownsville Community Health Center Ophthalmology (BCHC) is a healthcare facility located in Brownsville, TX. Its primary focus is providing medical care to uninsured and medically underserved populations. Recently, the facility received a grant of \$159,000, which was used to purchase state-of-the-art medical equipment and create a “Vision Care Clinic.” This expansion offers education and job training opportunities to K-12 and higher education students who aspire to pursue a career in optometry or ophthalmology.

Virtual Banking Project

First National Bank Texas (FNBT) has been awarded a grant of up to \$220,000 to help Brownsville establish its first virtual bank services. Using this grant, the bank will purchase and install equipment to ensure operations continuity during power failures. Additionally, FNBT has committed to hiring and retaining at least 113 full-time employees by year 3, with a minimum wage of \$15 per hour. This initiative is expected to promote business development in the area.

Brownsville Sports Park



The Brownsville Sports Park is a vital community space that offers recreational activities, sports leagues, and cultural arts events to residents and visitors of all ages. These opportunities promote physical fitness, social interaction, and community unity. The park also attracts visitors, tournaments, and events to the city, generating revenue for local businesses like hotels, restaurants, and retail establishments. BCIC recognizes the importance of investing in facilities like this to foster a sense of belonging and well-being among Brownsville’s residents and contribute to the overall economic vitality of the city. To assist the City of Brownsville with the park’s maintenance and operations, BCIC has been providing an annual amount of \$500,000.

Brownsville South Padre Island Airport Debt Service



BCIC has made a commitment to contribute \$360,000 annually towards the debt service of the expansion project at the Brownsville South Padre Island Airport until 2027. This investment is a part of BCIC’s strategic focus on fostering economic growth, tourism development, regional connectivity, and improving the overall quality of life in the community. BCIC aims to create long-term benefits for Brownsville and the surrounding region by investing in airport infrastructure. This will help position the region for sustained prosperity and success in the future.

Enrich the Brownsville's cultural, recreational, and aesthetic attributes. Apply to BCIC's Quality of Life Grants



**Julia C.
Brownsville Resident**



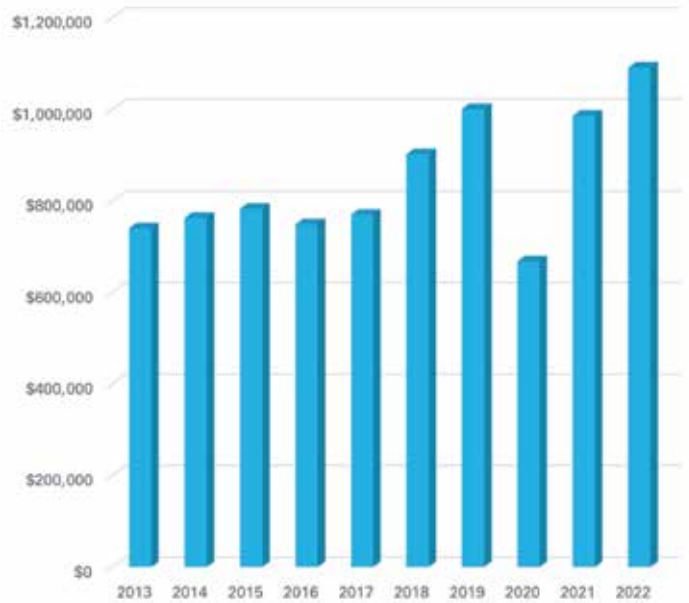
Scan the QR code to apply for the Quality of Life Grants or visit the link below
www.brownsvilleedc.org/communitygrants

The grant had reached its 5th iteration due to its success. In the latest phase of this grant, its benefits had been extended to cover a broader territory that had recently flourished with commercial and cultural projects. The program aimed to pave the way for more comprehensive rehabilitation efforts, fostering connectivity between these evolving areas and enhancing the region’s overall appeal and functionality.



Downtown Sales Tax Data

Downtown Sales Tax (2022): \$1 million
 Downtown Sales Tax (As of October 2023): \$740,000



In 2022 & 2023 Business Improvement and Growth Grant (BIG) was a program that provided reimbursable 50/50 matching grants to property owners and tenants in Downtown Brownsville. The grant supported various improvement projects such as facade restoration, and mechanical, electrical, and plumbing upgrades and provided rent assistance in the area’s densest commercial sector.

The BIG grant was initiated in 2019 to rejuvenate and preserve Historic Downtown Brownsville, a region rich in history with buildings dating back to 1850.

BIG Numbers

	Fiscal Year 2022	Fiscal Year 2023	Lifetime (Since 2019)
Total Property Improvement	\$1,930,360	\$405,679	\$2,856,549
Total Rent Subsidies	\$69,640	\$40,768	\$165,285
Total Private Investment	\$21,933,939	\$1,123,480	\$25,562,019
Total Projects Supported	20	15	53
Historic Structures Preserved	15	6	33
Completed Projects	13	3	34
Ongoing Projects	7	12	19
Full & Part-Time Jobs Created	58	17	139

BIG Grants Success Story:

CHILMOLI MEXICAN STEAKHOUSE



1001 E Washington St, Brownsville, TX 78520 | (956) 518-7000 | www.chilmolimexsh.com

After a decade of closure, the doors of a once-bustling flower shop in Downtown Brownsville were reopened, marking the beginning of a new era. The space, which appeared to be frozen in time, was soon to be transformed into a culinary haven called Chilmoli Mexican Steakhouse. The visionary entrepreneurs behind this project, Alberto Vazquez, Alfredo Ramirez, and Ricardo Cisneros, were committed to bringing a unique dining experience to the city's heart.

Downtown Brownsville has been gaining momentum, largely fueled by the passion of entrepreneurs like the founders of Chilmoli. Their culinary journey began with a familiar tradition in the Rio Grande Valley - carne asada weekends, which inspired their innovative menu. "Setting up Downtown felt like extending our culture and flavors into the heart of Brownsville," shares Alberto. "Chilmoli, meaning 'salsa de chiles' in Nahuatl, is a celebration of Northeastern Mexican cuisine, offering a unique taste and service experience."

At Chilmoli, guests are offered an exceptional dining experience. You will be welcomed with an amuse-bouche of homemade salsas and grilled tostadas as soon as you arrive. The menu features a range of familiar and unique dishes, each crafted with artistic flair. The chef and kitchen staff frequently present and finish dishes tableside, adding to the immersive experience.

Transforming the old flower shop into something new was a challenging task. "Our initial plan was to open the shop in April, but we could only manage to do it in December. The entrepreneurship journey was a steep learning curve for us," reflects Alfredo. However, this journey became smoother with the support of the BIG Grant. "The funding we received was crucial in advancing our project, as it helped us cover the essential costs of façade enhancements, electricity, and plumbing systems," says Ricardo with gratitude. "BCIC's support was invaluable, as it allowed us to focus on the creative aspects of the project and make Chilmoli as beautiful as it is today."

The Chilmoli team is feeling extremely proud and optimistic about the future. “I am proud of my family and the family I have chosen in business,” says Alberto, expressing his emotions. Alfredo echoes this sentiment, saying, “Our collaboration is what makes us strong. To other entrepreneurs, my advice is to pursue your vision relentlessly.”

Chilmoli Mexican Steakhouse is a celebration of perseverance, community, friendship, and the vibrant spirit of Downtown Brownsville. A visit to Chilmoli, located at 1001 E Washington St, is not just about having a meal; it’s an experience that truly represents the essence of 956.



BIG Grants Success Story: BÚHO BOOKSTORE AT THE CALDERONI BUILDING



1140 E Washington St, Brownsville, TX 78520 | (956) 346-4323 | www.buhobtx.com

In the heart of Downtown Brownsville, the Calderoni Building stands as a monument of revitalization and historical preservation. Today, thanks to a unique collaboration between a visionary entrepreneur, Gilbert Hernandez, and a dedicated building owner, Enrique Solorzano, this storied structure is home to Downtown Brownsville's first bookstore, Búho, also to the elegant Ella Bridal Boutique, and a third vacant spot looking for a special kind of entrepreneur as passionate as the individuals that we're about to get to know through the following paragraphs.

Enrique Solorzano, the owner of the historic Calderoni building, has been in the business long enough to become a known character by people all around the city who share similar passions. One of these people is Héctor Zavala - another fellow serial entrepreneur and BCIC's grant recipient. During lunchtime on a sunny summer evening, Mr. Solorzano and Héctor were working together on a renovation for one of the liveliest spots on Washington Street, Mainstreet Deli. Across from the street, a dusty and almost forgotten structure was embedded into Enrique's brain. Enrique couldn't take his eyes off the Calderoni building. He couldn't take it off his mind. He saw potential in the abandoned structure. How can one ignore those beautiful, unique bricks and transom windows?

After months of negotiations, a couple of hurdles, and tragic situations, Mr. Solorzano finally got the keys to the building. "When I bought the Calderoni building, it was in poor condition, but I fell in love with it at first glance, so I took care of it with my own hands and with the help of people who care about it as much as I did," Enrique recalls, reflecting on the year-long labor of love to restore the building.

As the renovation neared completion, Enrique was particular about the type of businesses he wanted in his building. He sought tenants who shared his passion for community and understood the significance of their location in Downtown Brownsville. This is where Gilbert Hernandez comes into the picture - in his own words, a "once introverted young man whose life was transformed by the power of books," Gilbert knew his destiny lay in Downtown Brownsville and nowhere else.

As a classic resourceful entrepreneur, Gilbert had already started Búho as a pop-up shop, traveling around town with a truck full of books. His efforts did not go unnoticed by Enrique. "I saw Gilbert with his cart of books everywhere and thought it was impossible he didn't have a proper space," says Enrique. Without Gilbert's knowing, Enrique began remodeling a vacant space in the Calderoni Building, envisioning it



as the perfect spot for a bookstore, hoping that one day someone like Gilbert – but secretly rooting for Gilbert to be the one – would be the tenant of that space. Mr. Solorzano leveraged BCIC’s BIG façade improvement, plumbing, and electrical system grants to complete his mission in no time. “I went looking for resources because I knew such a beautiful space couldn’t be wasted. I knew BIG grants existed because I’ve seen what other people have been doing with them Downtown; it was my turn to give back to the community, too,” Enrique commented when asked about the support BCIC provided for his project.

and the perfect house for Búho, Historic Downtown Brownsville’s first modern-time bookstore.

“I wanted Búho in a historic building as close to Market Square as possible,” shares Gilbert, whose ambition for Búho was to create a space for community well-being and literary exploration. The Calderoni Building now hosts Búho Bookstore, a dream realized by Gilbert and Enrique. Their efforts were supported by the BIG Grants, which were instrumental in both the restoration of the building and the establishment of Búho. Gilbert expresses his gratitude, “I’ve built this place with the backing of BIG Grants and a \$5,000 credit card. The push from BCIC allowed me to acquire things that made Búho truly feel like a bookstore.”



Today, both Gilbert and Enrique look towards the future with pride. Búho Bookstore and the Calderoni Building are more than mere business ventures; they embody the spirit of community support, perseverance, and the revival of Downtown Brownsville’s historic core.

Not much longer, the paths of Enrique and Gilbert crossed outside another Downtown restaurant, where Enrique approached Gilbert with the story that you just read about how he renovated the space, thinking of one day meeting him face-to-face in hopes that he would say yes to the proposal of becoming a tenant. With an almost comical introductory line, Mr. Solorzano said to Gilbert, “Buen día ¿Es usted ‘el búho’?” Needless to say, tears of joy almost rolled from Gilbert’s eyes when they crossed the street and entered the now-remodeled building. The rest is history. It was a labor of love for the community, dedication to historic preservation,





WELCOME TO



BÚHO
/'BOO-oh/'
"Brownsville's Newest, Littlest Bookshop"

 = \$1	 = \$5
 = \$2	 = \$7
 = \$3	 = \$10+

\$10 card minimum

 @buhobtx  \$buhobtx

  
@buhobtx



Scan the QR code to apply for the BIG Grants or visit the link below
www.brownvilleedc.org/big2024



INVESTING IN IMPACT

Finance Programs

@todonaturalrestaurant



Victoria Padron
Chief Operations Officer

I am extremely proud of how our initiatives have evolved this year. We have refreshed and rebranded our COVID-19 business relief program to reflect its mission accurately. We are helping entrepreneurs recover from the remnants of challenging times. The joy and satisfaction I feel seeing our local businesses rebound and thrive with our support is beyond words.”

The eBridge Fund is committed to being a pillar of progress and success for entrepreneurs. We strongly believe that every business owner deserves equal opportunity to access financing. Our efforts have been recognized and rewarded with a Bronze Award for Best Use of Federal Economic Development Resources at the 2023 International Economic Development Council Awards.

More than \$350,000 in funding is currently available in the Recovery Fund until the end of 2024. Additionally, applications for the eBridge Fund are open throughout the year for all business owners and entrepreneurs who have difficulty accessing traditional bank financing.

It has never been easier to start, grow, or strengthen your business in Brownsville, and hearing directly from entrepreneurs is what motivates us. We hope that by reading the following success stories, you will be inspired too.

In response to the economic challenges small businesses faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation (BCIC), in partnership with the City of Brownsville, launched the Brownsville Small Business Recovery Fund. Formerly called the ReOpen for Business Assistance Program, this initiative offers 0% interest forgivable loans. The FY 2022 and FY 2023 cycles provided up to \$20,000 for businesses with up to fifty employees and \$10,000 for companies with five or fewer employees, including low to moderate-income owners. To qualify for this job retention and business stabilization effort, eligible retail, food, and personal services businesses must have experienced at least a 15% loss in gross revenue due to the pandemic.

Brownsville Small Business Recovery Fund
A ReOpen for Business Assistance Program

Recovery Fund Numbers

	Fiscal Year 2022	Fiscal Year 2023	Lifetime (Up to FY 2023)
Beginning Balance	\$295,000	\$721,667	\$431,667
Businesses Assisted	20	36	79
Total Funding Disbursed	\$155,000	\$290,000	\$650,000
Jobs Retained	122	102	337
Ending Balance	\$140,000	\$431,667	\$431,667

Recovery Fund **Success Story:** **GABRIELLA'S MEXICAN DETAILS**



2390 Central Blvd Ste K, Brownsville, TX 78521 | (956) 295-5807

If you're looking for a place outside of Mexico where Mexican culture is celebrated and integrated into the local lifestyle, you should explore the Rio Grande Valley. In the heart of this region, specifically in Brownsville, Texas, the lively Charro Days fiesta spreads a sense of belonging and appreciation for Mexican traditions and culture.

Gabriella's Mexican Details is a business located in a vibrant community known for its festivals and hardworking people. Its founder, Gabriella, used to be a nutritionist but became an entrepreneur inspired by the memories of helping her grandmother at a fruit and vegetable market in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Gabriella's stores, including one in the Sunrise Mall, offer a carefully curated selection of handmade Mexican clothing and accessories that showcase the country's rich heritage.

However, things took a turn for the worse in late 2019 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Gabriella's stores were hit hard, and sales dwindled, leaving their future uncertain. Fortunately, Gabriella was able to adapt to the situation by expanding her online presence. By reaching out to customers from all over the world, she was able to keep her business alive and thriving.

"If I could advise my past self during the pandemic, it would be to embrace each day with empathy, care, and balance. The pandemic taught us the importance of connecting with others and ourselves, reminding us that resilience is born out of compassion and understanding."

Gabriella had a strong online presence and community support, but her business model relied on annual traditions and outdoor events, which had limitations. During these challenging times, the Brownsville Small Business Recovery Fund provided crucial support to Gabriella's Mexican Details. The fund's 0% interest forgivable loan helped the business retain employees and reinvent strategies, proving that every business deserves a chance to thrive. Today, Gabriella's Mexican Details is a testament to overcoming adversity, with flourishing locations and a vibrant online presence. Gabriella's stores serve as cultural hubs, celebrating the diversity and richness of Mexican traditions.

The Brownsville Small Business Recovery Fund, still available for part of 2024, remains a resource for businesses still grappling with the pandemic's aftereffects to get out of the month-to-month cycle. This initiative symbolizes a shared journey toward recovery and success, with ongoing support for those in need.




“Looking ahead, I see Gabriella’s Mexican Details growing beyond its current borders, becoming a leader in celebrating and sharing Mexican heritage. Our future is one where innovation meets tradition and where every product tells a story of cultural richness and artisanal excellence.”

As Gabriella reflects on her journey, she takes pride in her family, personal growth, and the relationships she has built. Her advice to entrepreneurs echoes her

resilience and optimism: “Adapt, evolve, and embrace the power of community. Your dream deserves every chance to flourish, and you are not alone in your journey.” This philosophy, born from her experiences during the pandemic and her grandmother’s legacy, motivates Gabriella to envision expanding her business, embracing innovation, and continuing to share Mexican culture with the world.





“The Recovery Fund was more than financial aid; it was a lifeline that gave us the confidence to weather the storm. It enabled us to keep our dream alive, maintain our connection with the community, and continue celebrating the rich heritage of Mexican Culture.”

— Gabriela Fernandez
Owner, Gabriella’s Mexican Details



Scan the QR code to apply for the Recovery Fund or visit the link below
www.brownsvilleedc.org/recovery

eBridge Fund

The eBridge Fund is a financing program that operates as a revolving loan fund (RLF). It was created as an economic development tool to help businesses in Cameron County obtain financing at a more competitive rate than current market rates or when they

cannot obtain conventional bank financing. One of the unique features of the RLF is its self-sustaining model, where borrowers repay their loans, and both interest and principal replenish the fund. This cyclical funding mechanism ensures a profound and lasting impact on the community, as the fund can provide financing for future business ventures. The program encourages business retention, expansion, and relocation, which will create and maintain job opportunities and catalyze investment in the local community.



eBridge Fund Numbers

	Fiscal Year 2022	Fiscal Year 2023	Lifetime (Up to FY 2023)
Businesses Funded	8	6	14
Disbursed in Loans	\$1,478,950	\$815,000	\$2,293,950
Private Investment	\$759,169	\$441,575	\$1,200,744
Jobs Created/Retained	75	448	523
Income Generated	\$138,904.20	\$276,153.01	\$395,632
Interest Earned on Bank	\$180.53	\$11,794.66	\$12,814.16

eBridge Fund Success Story:

CERO GRADOS



995 W Ruben Torres Blvd, Brownsville, TX 78520 | @cerogradoss

Who could have thought that frozen yogurt could fill our hearts with such warmth? Cristina Guillén and Cristina Muñoz are a dynamic mother-daughter duo fueled by their shared passion for culinary creativity. Their vision of a place where flavor and happiness converge is now a delightful reality with Cero Grados, a frozen yogurt emporium in Brownsville. At Cero Grados, the options are endless, with an abundance of frozen yogurt flavors, each designed to delight every palate - from the health-conscious to the traditionalist. Customers are also encouraged to embark on a fun-filled adventure by mixing and matching toppings innovatively.

In August of 2023, during our first conversation with the founders of Cero Grados, we asked them a simple question: How can we bring your dream to life? The solution was found in the eBridge Fund. Cristina and Cristina have vivid memories of their initial encounter with the BCIC staff, who were just as enthusiastic about their vision as they were. With guidance, support, and financial backing from the eBridge Fund, they took the significant step of renovating the building that now serves as the home of Cero Grados. The transformation was more than physical; it was a realization of their vision, revealing a world of rich and delightful possibilities.

“We had an excellent experience with eBridge Fund. Their highly trained and accessible staff showed great enthusiasm in providing us with support. They guided us through the quick and straightforward application process, making it easy for us to get the funding we needed to start and expand our business. We highly recommend eBridge Fund to anyone who is looking for a reliable funding source. We assure you that your experience will be excellent!”

As time passed, Cero Grados flourished. Each scoop of ice cream was a unique story in itself, as the store offered a variety of toppings to cater to the diverse needs of their community. Every serving of frozen yogurt was always different. Both Cristina’s learned to listen - not only to their own ideas and aspirations but also to their customer’s feedback. Quality and service became their guiding principles, leading them through the bustling world of entrepreneurship.

If they could send a message back in time to those early days of anticipation and apprehension, they would whisper, “Keep your eyes on the hearts of your customers.” During our visit in December, they told us that the smiles, contented sighs, and sparkle in their customers’ eyes truly measured their success. Today, the future of Cero Grados holds endless possibilities for growth, recognition, and sweet success. Cristina




and Cristina envision a brand synonymous with quality and an example of excellent customer service in the heart of Brownsville.

Their journey, paved with challenges and triumphs, is a source of deep pride. From a spark of an idea to a thriving business, they've journeyed far, fueled by the support of the eBridge Fund and their transformative renovation project.

Cero Grados is making a name for itself as a vital part of Brownsville's business community. Its success demonstrates the power of having a dream, the importance of support, and the impact a strong community can have. Through their delicious frozen yogurt and exceptional service, Cero Grados shares a tale of perseverance, inspiration, and triumph.



A photograph of two women standing in a kitchen. They are both wearing dark-colored aprons with white vertical stripes. The woman on the left has brown hair tied back, and the woman on the right has red hair. They are both smiling at the camera. The background shows a kitchen setting with a hanging light fixture and a window.

“Begin now. Embrace the journey, no matter how challenging it may be. Aim high, but remain grounded in reality.”

— Cristina Guillén & Cristina Muñoz
Cero Grados, Owners



Scan the QR code to apply for the eBridge Fund or visit the link below
www.fund.ebridgecenter.org



START UP SCALE THRIVE

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION
PROGRAMS



Nathan Burkhart
Vice President of
Entrepreneurship and Innovation

It is an honor to share the stories of the eBridge Center and the StartUp Texas program – two interconnected foundational pillars of our thriving innovation ecosystem. From its inception, our collective vision for the eBridge Center was to build a hub for creativity, collaboration, and growth to catalyze our community’s entrepreneurship. Thanks to the support of multiple key partners, we have turned this vision into a reality. Today, our center serves as a hub for entrepreneurs across the valley, offering a wide range of resources, from collaborative workspaces to expert guidance, all designed to unlock the entrepreneurial spirit of our community. Our center is for the community by the community.

The year 2023 was a remarkable year for us. We achieved a significant milestone in our journey with the opening of the eBridge Center. However, this was only the beginning. In this section of the report, the Success Stories highlight the impact of the eBridge Center, including the lives it has touched and the businesses it has helped. We also launched our inaugural StartUp Texas pitch event at the center, which celebrated the potential of our entrepreneurs and laid the foundation for future innovation. Our initiatives demonstrate our commitment to building an inclusive and sustainable ecosystem where every idea has the opportunity to flourish, and every entrepreneur receives the necessary support to succeed.

A NEW CHAPTER IN BROWNSVILLE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THE EBRIDGE CENTER GRAND OPENING



On March 9th, 2023, the entrepreneurial landscape of Brownsville underwent a transformative change with the grand opening of the eBridge Center for Business & Commercialization. This event was the unveiling of a new era for business innovation and community collaboration in the heart of Downtown Brownsville. The grand opening marked the culmination of over three years of meticulous design and construction efforts by a partnership that reads like a roll call of community and economic leaders, including the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation (BCIC), the City of Brownsville, and several other pivotal organizations.

The eBridge Center, housed in the historical Casa de Nylon building, stands as a testament to the city's dedication to fostering an environment where entrepreneurship can flourish. This 36,000 square foot facility is designed to be the proverbial bridge for startups and established businesses alike, offering the resources needed to grow, scale, and break into new markets.

"It's important that emerging entrepreneurs and early stage startups have a place to go to eliminate barriers to growth and help them turn their dreams into reality. The eBridge Center mobilizes the next generation of entrepreneurs and equips them with the skills and resources they need to create jobs, access capital and scale commercially."

- Cori Pena, President and CEO of BCIC

The eBridge Center's approach to economic development is inclusive and far-reaching.

Nathan Burkhart, Vice President of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at BCIC, highlighted the center's focus on empowering women and minority-owned small businesses to scale their operations and enhance their access to capital. The synergy between city leaders and entrepreneurs envisioned by the center aims to nurture a vibrant local economy where businesses of all sizes can thrive.

"We can create communities with vibrant local economies - where startups thrive. That's exactly what we're doing in Brownsville with UTRGV. I think it's safe to say we have a true regional approach to Economic Development."

- Nathan Burkart

Vice President of Entrepreneurship and Innovation of BCIC

Open house events preceding the official launch provided the community, potential members, and collaborators with a firsthand look at the center's offerings. These included the opportunity to register for membership with the UTRGV ECC Incubator, further illustrating the center's commitment to inclusive growth and support for entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey. The center is en route to significantly impact the entrepreneurial ecosystem, supporting a diverse range of businesses and aspiring business owners across the community.

The eBridge Center's strategic location next to the historical Charles Stillman House—where the city's past began—symbolizes a bridge between Brownsville's rich history and its promising future. The spaces are thoughtfully designed for productivity, offering various

work solutions, including conference and training rooms. Members benefit from top-tier facilities, a vibrant professional community, and expert guidance by eBridge Center partners, all aimed at nurturing business success, to name a few: BCIC, UTRGV ECC, the City of Brownsville, US Economic Development Administration, Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, InBIA Soft Landing Designation, US Patent Trade Resource Center, Small Business Development Center, Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center, Procurement Technical Assistance Center, Veterans Business Outreach Center, and Nonprofit Resource Center.

As the eBridge Center embarks on its journey, its doors are open to the pioneers of tomorrow, ready to write their own success stories. With a vibrant calendar of

events, programs like the bilingual Kauffman FastTrac cohorts, and the StartUp Texas Accelerator Program, the center is a standing proof of entrepreneurial spirit and community growth in Brownsville and beyond.



eBridge Center Numbers

36,000sq ft.
14 Private Offices
8 Dedicated Desks

Total Construction Cost:
\$5,255,000

Construction EDA Grant:
\$900,000

Musk Foundation Donation:
\$355,000

BCIC Funding:
\$4,000,000

Entrepreneurship by the Numbers

950 Businesses Served
(since partnership in 2019)

1500 Jobs Created
(since 2019)

80+ Companies Launched
(since March 9, 2023)

Programs & Events



2022 Kauffman FastTrac Program:
23 Graduates

2023 Kauffman FastTrac Program:
80 Graduates

Legalize It Tax Workshop (2022):
32 Attendees



Insights Unplugged (2023):
55 attendees

Brandcore Branding Workshop (2023):
24 Attendees

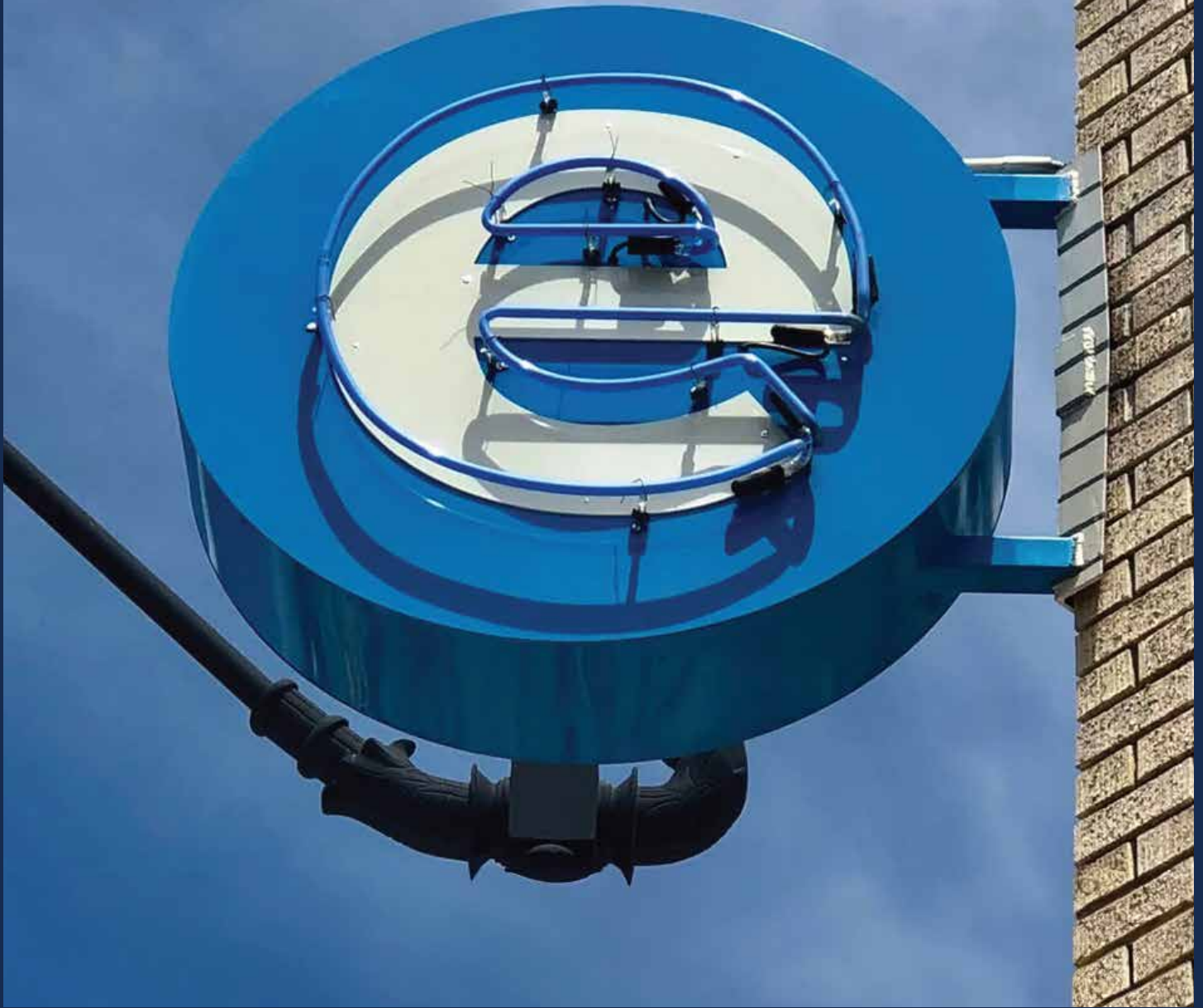
Failure Institute (2023):
120 Attendees



1 Million Cups (2023):
+1450 Cups of Coffee Served
30 Avg. Weekly Attendees



Start or grow your business here.



Our mission is for every individual in South Texas to realize their potential as entrepreneurs, to empower innovators, and to fuel business growth together.



Scan the QR code to book a tour at eBridge Center or visit the link below
www.ebridgecenter.com

The first StartUp Texas event **AT THE EBRIDGE CENTER**



In August 2023, the eBridge Center for Business & Commercialization marked a significant milestone in the entrepreneurial journey of Rio Grande Valley. The center hosted the inaugural Quality of Life Demo Day, which was a pitch competition and a vibrant demonstration of the region's dedication to nurturing innovation. This event marked the successful conclusion of the first fully-fledged cohort of the StartUp Texas Accelerator Program. The event provided a staggering \$70,000 in seed funding to propel local businesses forward.

StartUp Texas began as a basic pitch summit and has now grown into an extensive accelerator program that hosts three cohorts on a yearly basis. This advancement marks a significant milestone in Brownsville's journey toward growth and innovation, with the program now serving as a key driving force in cultivating the entrepreneurial spirit within the community.

The Quality of Life Demo Day was a remarkable display of the entrepreneurial spirit in the Rio Grande Valley. It showcased the remarkable talent and ambition of local business owners. The event featured the likes of TXQ Rubs, La Pale, and f10 Casting & Management, each of which won seed funding. They were among a group of entrepreneurs who received intensive preparation through UTRGV's AdvanceUp curriculum. The event

attracted nearly 200 attendees and highlighted the overwhelming interest and support of the community for local innovation.



TXQ Rubs was declared the first-place winner for their exceptional blends that perfectly capture the essence of Texas grilling traditions. La Pale was awarded second place for their delicious and refreshing frozen fruit paletas and ice cream made with simple, high-quality ingredients. f10 Casting & Management secured third place for breaking barriers in the fashion industry by prioritizing talent from marginalized backgrounds.

The recent Quality of Life Demo Day held at the eBridge Center and the positive feedback received for the first StartUp Texas cohort demonstrate the program’s effectiveness. StartUp Texas aims to overcome the significant challenge of access to capital by offering a complete support system, including mentoring, workshops, and pitch practices, instead of just financial assistance. This comprehensive approach ensures that companies not only receive funding but also gain the necessary skills to utilize it effectively, leading to scalable success.



The StartUp Texas program, embedded within the supportive environment of the eBridge Center, is Brownsville’s commitment to creating an equitable playing field for all entrepreneurs. The program offers three diverse tracks - Quality of Life Ventures, Emerging Industries, and the SBIR STTR Innovation Program - catering to the varied needs of startups. This demonstrates the program’s adaptability and inclusivity.

In 2023, the program formed a strategic partnership with the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station to strengthen its commitment to innovation. As a part of this collaboration, the program provides financial support and mentorship for projects that are seeking SBIR/STTR research funding. This partnership expands the opportunities for innovative projects and demonstrates the program’s commitment to supporting entrepreneurs across various industries. StartUp Texas is gearing up for its upcoming cohorts and competitions, and it represents a shining light of hope, a driver of economic growth, community development, and inclusive progress. This program not only provides support to entrepreneurs but also fosters a flourishing ecosystem that transcends borders and enriches lives. It embodies the shared vision of a prosperous future for all entrepreneurs in the Rio Grande Valley.

Traditional venture capital and business development spaces often fail to address the needs of certain populations, such as people of color, women, and rural entrepreneurs. The eBridge Center programs supported by BCIC and its partners provide a crucial resource that aims to bridge the wide disparities in funding between these groups and the more privileged, elite coastal metro areas. Our partnerships with both the public and private sectors have been instrumental in advancing our mission of promoting equitable economic development. We believe that there are still many opportunities to forge new alliances, discover groundbreaking businesses, and help bring innovative ideas to life. We are committed to driving forward this mission, both on the border by the sea and beyond.

StartUp Texas Numbers

Fiscal Year 2022

Total funding disbursed:
\$25,000

Businesses funded:
1

Businesses accelerated:
N/A

Fiscal Year 2023

Total funding disbursed:
\$210,000

Businesses funded:
9

Businesses accelerated:
19

Lifetime (Up to FY 2023)

Total funding disbursed:
\$415,000

Businesses funded:
20

Businesses accelerated:
19

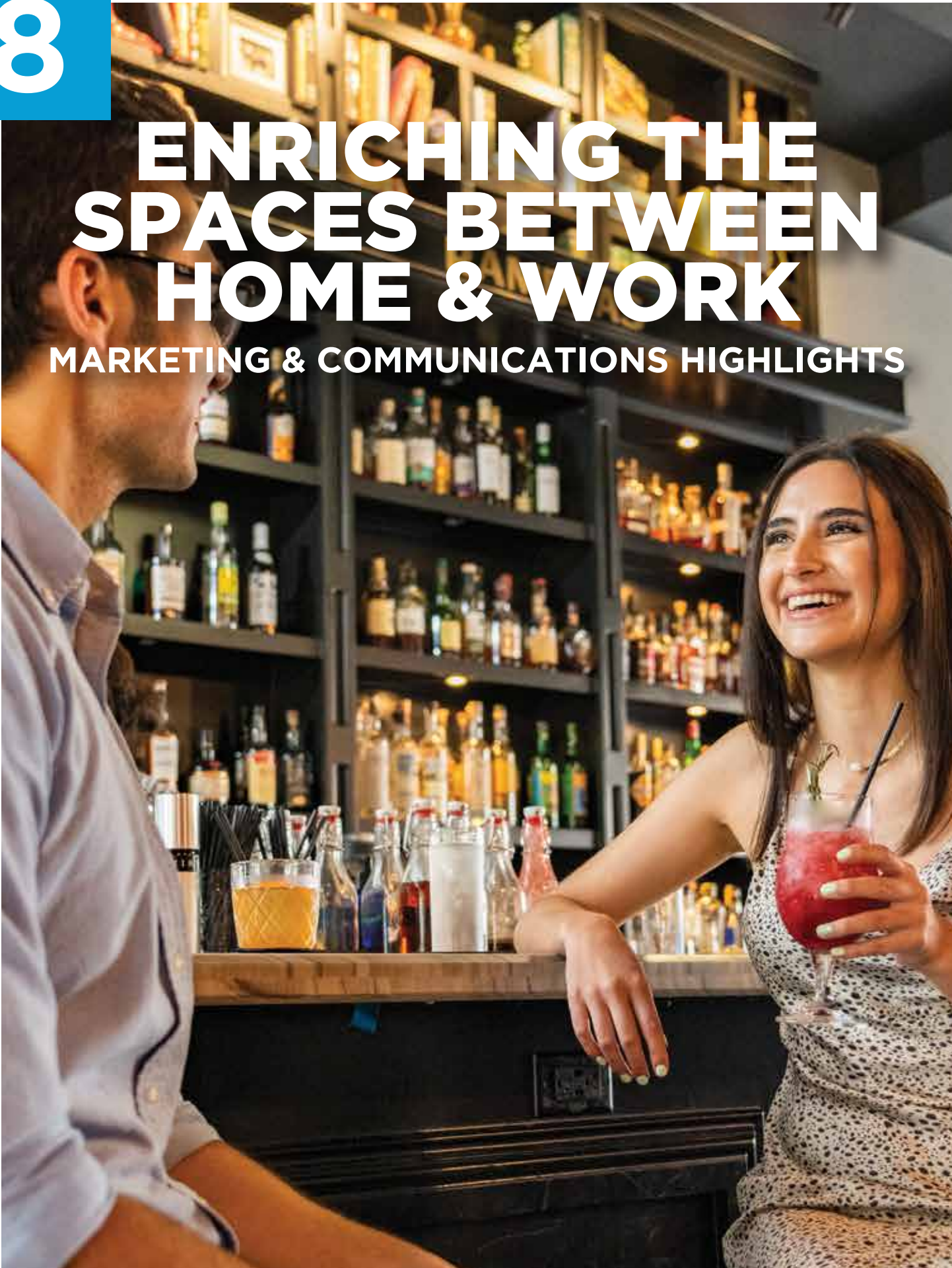
We support entrepreneurs on the border, by the sea, and beyond.



Scan the QR code or visit the link below to apply for StartUp Texas
www.startuptexas.com/accelerator

ENRICHING THE SPACES BETWEEN HOME & WORK

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS





Nelson Iván Amaro,
Director of Marketing & Communications

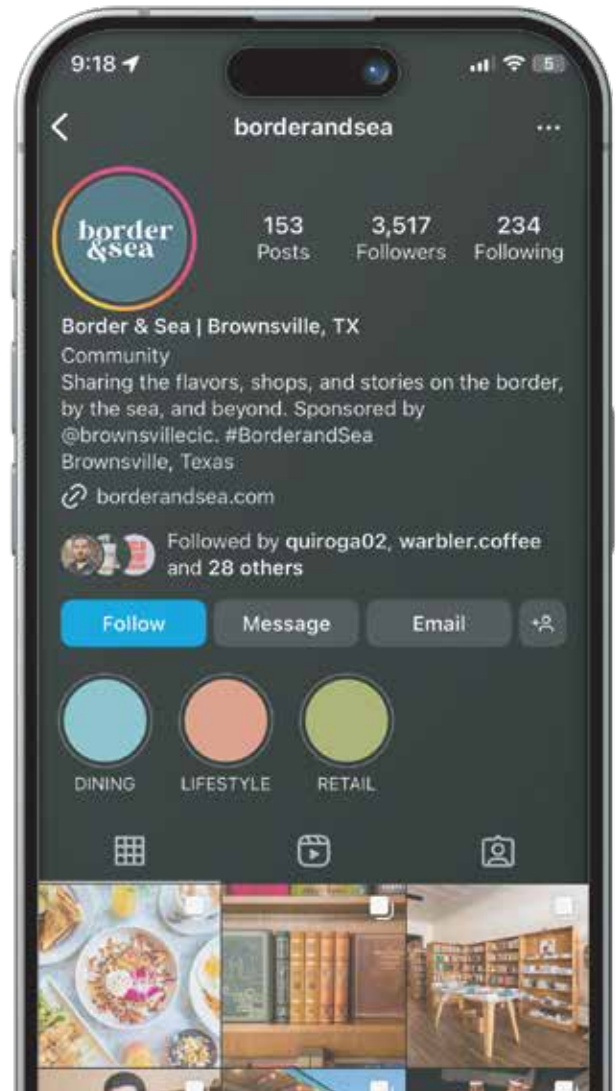
I often describe BCIC’s role in the economic landscape of Brownsville as a catalyst for happiness in your second and third places. This idea invariably sparks curiosity—everyone seeks happiness; still, the concepts of second and third places often need clarification.

We often hear the saying, “Home is where the heart is.” Your home is your primary place - a sanctuary where you feel safe and comfortable. The second place is where you earn your living - your workplace. However, for entrepreneurs and business owners, the boundary between the first and second places might blur a little, and that’s where the third places come in. Third places refer to the social spaces beyond our homes and workplaces, where we find happiness and fulfillment in life. These spaces can include parks, trails, downtown areas, recreational spaces, museums, etc. We are committed to ensuring that third and second places have the necessary resources to exist and flourish, providing joy and a sense of community beyond work and home.

After going through the stories shared by our community in this report, I hope that you end your day feeling happy seeing the progress made by Brownsville. I also hope you feel inspired to become an active part of the community in any way you like. You can visit a park, shop locally, start your own business, attend workshops, and so on. I’m sure you have some ideas by now. When you do that, we at BCIC feel that we are succeeding in our job.



Border & Sea is a marketing and social media project that aims to highlight the unique dining, retail, and leisure experiences in Brownsville without any cost to the businesses being featured. The program emphasizes Brownsville’s rich cultural heritage and boosts local establishments by promoting their offerings. This initiative drives economic growth, elevating the visibility of the city’s dynamic business community and attracting visitors from the RGV and the Mexican side of the border. By showcasing Brownsville’s diverse attractions, smaller businesses will have equal opportunities to compete with larger companies with marketing and advertising support. Border & Sea is a crucial driver of the local economy, turning Brownsville into a destination for unique experiences by attracting outside interest.



Border & Sea Numbers

Fiscal Year 2023

Total Businesses
Featured
17

Total Unique
Individuals Reached
176,040

Total Impressions
1,026,123

Fiscal Year 2022

Total Businesses
Featured
17

Total Unique
Individuals Reached
346,093

Total Impressions
439,241

Lifetime (Since 2021)

Total Businesses
Featured
48

Border & Sea Success Story: CHIRINA'S FISH TACOS



722 E 12th St, Brownsville, TX 78520 | (956) 443-0104 | @chirinasfishtacos

Chirina's Fish Tacos is a restaurant situated in a shiny red building on the corner of 12th Street in Downtown Brownsville. It's not just any restaurant but rather a celebration of family, community, and the fusion of border culture with the sea's bounties. The restaurant has quickly become a local favorite since its opening in October of 2022, thanks to its simple yet irresistible

menu. Daniel Gonzalez, the owner of Chirina's, named the restaurant after his mother. This reflects his deep-rooted family heritage and love for the community.

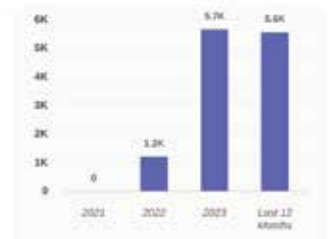
Daniel considers the restaurant to be a manifestation of his mother's life teachings, embodying values and lessons learned. At Chirina's, the focus is on perfection and simplicity. Their signature dish, fish tacos, is fried until golden and served in fresh, locally-made corn tortillas, showcasing Chirina's culinary philosophy. Topped with crunchy red cabbage and dressed in a creamy Cajun sauce bursting with flavor, these tacos harmonize textures and tastes.

“When people ask me, ‘What is in here? It’s such a simple taco.’ We say, love.”

Through Placer.ai software we could measure the impact of our Border & Sea campaign.

The visits to the restaurant spiked to its highest levels in a 7 months period.

Visits Trend



Weekly | Visits | Apr 1st, 2023 - Mar 31st, 2024
Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. (www.placer.ai)

Placer.ai



Featured on @borderandsea

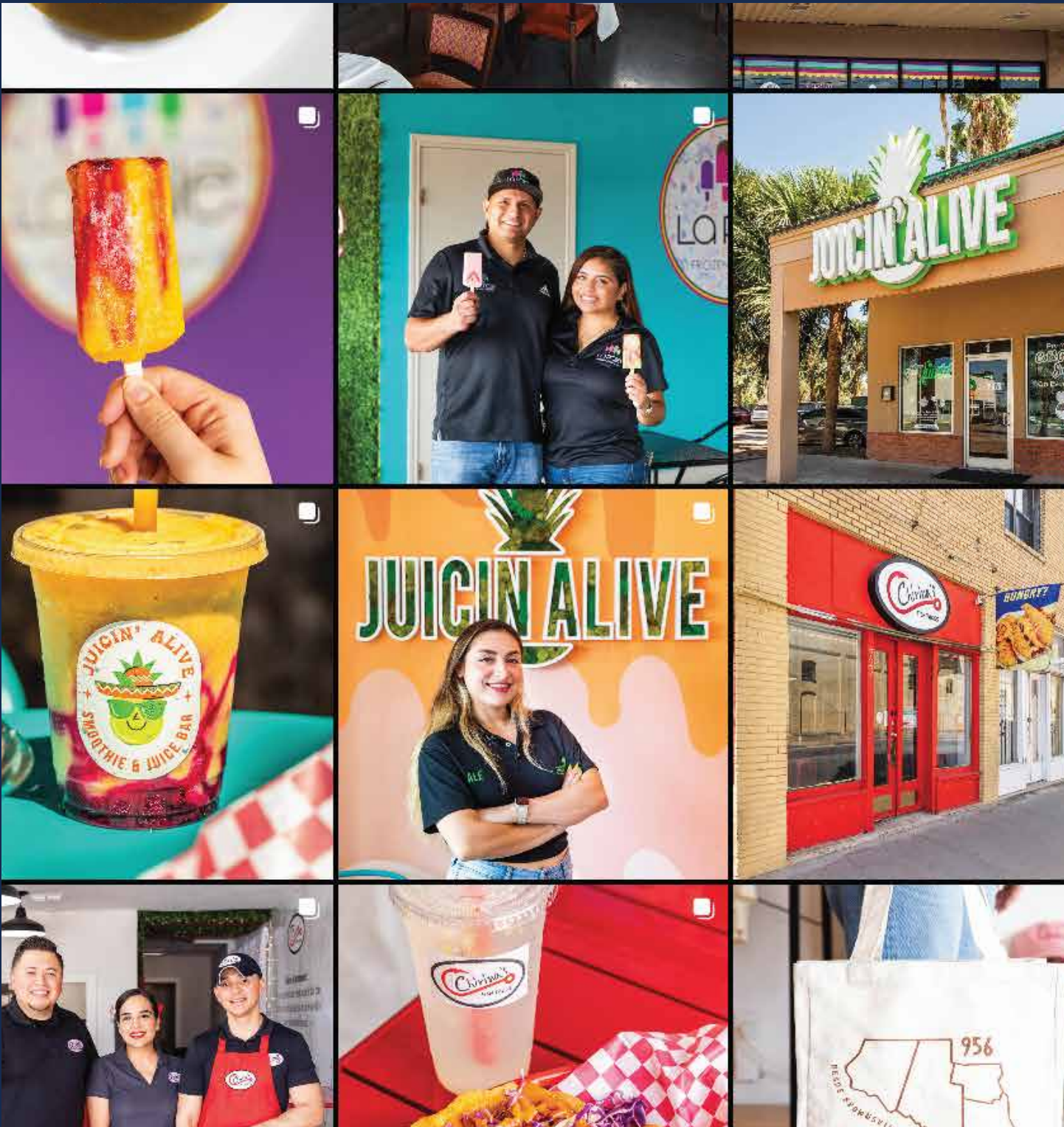
Being a unique business in our city, we couldn't miss the chance to feature them on our Border & Sea account last July. The graphic provided by Placer.ai clearly shows a surge in visits to their venue in the days following our post on July 18.

We reached out to Daniel for his perspective, and he shared, "I was genuinely surprised by the response, not only from Brownsville but also from Harlingen, San Benito, and beyond. The buzz about our tacos at Border & Sea attracted a diverse crowd from across the Valley. This unexpected influx was a pleasant surprise. Sales-wise, we experienced around a 40% increase compared to the previous year, which is remarkable considering we were in our initial phase, celebrating our inauguration during that period. We were caught off-guard in the best way possible."

Chirina's connection to Brownsville runs deep. The city embodies the American dream, where aspirations are nurtured and dreams are realized. Chirina strives to symbolize this spirit by providing a platform for new dreamers, just as Brownsville has been for so many. With plans to expand from Brownsville to San Diego, Chirina's aims to take its unique flavors and the essence of its border roots to new horizons.

"Our biggest goal is to better people's lives, and if fish tacos are the way to do it, we will keep doing it."





Scan the code or visit the link to discover more unique dining and shopping spots, and experiences in Brownsville.

www.borderandsea.com

9

TRIUMPHS FOR BROWNSVILLE ACCOLADES & AWARDS

Looking back at the years 2022 and 2023, it's clear that our efforts to revitalize the economy of Brownsville have been successful. We have not only made significant progress but also received recognition from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). Our innovative initiatives, such as the BIG programs and the eBridge Center for Business and Commercialization project, have been particularly noteworthy during this period.

Our staff's efforts through the Business Improvement and Growth (BIG) programs in FY 2022 were recognized at the International Economic Development Council's (IEDC) Annual Conference. We are proud to have received the IEDC's Silver Excellence Award in Neighborhood Development for our work in rejuvenating Downtown Brownsville's historic area. This project has been close to our hearts and integral to our mission, as highlighted throughout this report.



In the same year, our initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship and assist new businesses in Brownsville were acknowledged and appreciated. The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) awarded us the Bronze Award for Entrepreneurship for our ambitious eBridge Center for Business and Commercialization project. This recognition highlights our commitment to not only supporting existing businesses but also establishing a strong foundation for budding entrepreneurs to flourish in Brownsville. Moreover, IEDC also recognized our efforts in 2023 by awarding BCIC with the Gold Award for Partnerships with Educational Institutions and the Bronze Award for Best Use of Federal Economic Development

Resources, highlighting the organization's commitment to improving the economic landscape and overall quality of life in the Brownsville community through the eBridge Fund program.

As we approach the conclusion of this biennial annualbiennial's annual report, we do so with a deep sense of pride and accomplishment. The recognition we received from IEDC in both fiscal years is not just an accolade for BCIC; it affirms our collaborative spirit and the positive changes we are fostering in Brownsville.

I am grateful for the valuable role played by diverse opinions and a varied board in our success. The perspectives brought in by our board members from different backgrounds and expertise have been crucial in driving solutions and inclusive economic growth. The diversity at the decision-making table ensures that our strategies and actions reflect our community's multifaceted needs and potential. As we continue on our path, we remain committed to embracing diversity in our leadership, fostering a culture of open dialogue, and collectively striving for a prosperous and vibrant future for Brownsville.



- Jill Dominguez
BCIC Board Chair

FY 2022

Musk Foundation \$74,000 Downtown Facade Beautification Pilot Program - BCIC & City of Brownsville

IEDC Bronze Award for Entrepreneurship
eBridge Center for Business and Commercialization

IEDC Silver Award for Neighborhood Development
Business Improvement and Growth Program (BIG)

Woman2Woman Magazine (July/August 2022)

Women on the Rise in the RGV - Cori Peña

FY 2023

PNC Grant for eBridge Opening - \$10,000

IEDC Gold Award for Partnerships with Educational Institutions - BCIC & UTRGV ECC

IEDC Bronze Award for Best Use of Federal Economic Development Resources - eBridge Fund

Partnership A&M SBIR/STTR - \$330,000

House of Representatives of the 88th Texas Legislature Recognition | Rep. Gamez
for eBridge's contributions to the RGV Community

10

BUDGET COMPARISON

Revenues	Fiscal Year 2022	Fiscal Year 2023
Sales Tax Revenue	\$6,933,598	\$7,293,885
eBridge Fund RLF payments	\$138,904	\$276,153
eBridge Center Income and Funding	-	\$21,409
Interest	\$104,505	\$623,432
Grants and Private Sector Contributions	\$74,000	-
Miscellaneous/Sponsorships	\$1,053	\$27,554
	Total	Total
	\$7,252,060	\$8,242,403

Expenditures	Fiscal Year 2022	Fiscal Year 2023
BCIC Operations	\$1,110,922	\$973,175
eBridge Center - Operations	-	\$253,048
Community Development Programs	\$1,574,570	\$645,806
Entrepreneurial & Innovation Programs	\$3,225,667	\$783,010
Finance Programs	\$1,511,562	\$636,822
Discretionary Programs	\$268,268	-
City Service Contracts	\$274,000	\$524,000
BCIC Debt Service	\$1,899,000	\$1,898,926
	Total	Total
	\$9,893,989	\$5,714,787

*Funds have been committed but nor yet funded due to project completeness.



eBridge Fund



Border & Sea



BIG Grants



Recovery Fund

Brownsville Small Business Recovery Fund

A ReOpen for Business Assistance Program

Addax Locksmith Company

2825 Riviera St.
Brownsville, TX 78523
addaxlocksmith.com

AF Construction and Remodeling

(956) 351-3446

Angelitas Casa de Café

2200 Boca Chica Blvd., Ste. 116
Brownsville, TX 78521
@the_angels_cup

BEMI Transport LLC

Bugambilias Adult Day Care

325 Mexico Blvd., Ste. B
Brownsville, TX 78520
956-541-5000

Creaciones Odissey

1209 E. Washington St.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@creaciones_odissey

Cupcakes by Cory

943 N. Exressway, Ste. 11
Brownsville, TX 78520
@cupcakesbycory

Dream Travel Agency RGV

1575 US Military Hwy. 281, Ste. 107
Brownsville, TX 78526
(956) 466-9598

Europa Love

2675 E. Price Rd.
Brownsville, TX 78521
@europalove

Gabriella's Mexican Details

2390 Central Blvd Ste K,
Brownsville, TX 78520
@gabriellasmexican

GV Service

3238 Michaelwood Dr.
Brownsville, Tx. 78526

Jaime's Tuxedo Rental

3000 Tulipan St.
Brownsville, TX 78521
jaimestuxedorental.com

JC Landscaping

2684 Clover Red.
Brownsville, Tx. 78521

IQ's Juice Bar

800 Frontage Rd. 77/83 17,
Brownsville, TX 78521
iqjuicebar.com

L & M Dry Cleaners

934 E Adams St,
Brownsville, TX 78520
956-544-0057

La Catalana Spa and Wellness Center

1625 W Price Rd Suite A-2,
Brownsville, TX 78520
lacatalanaspa.com

La Catrina on 12th

533 E 12th St, Brownsville, TX 78520
@lacatrinaon12th_

La Regia Restaurant Taqueria

645 E Price Rd,
Brownsville, TX 78521
@laregiarestauranttaqueria

Brownsville Small Business Recovery Fund

A ReOpen for Business Assistance Program

Loop Services

1407 E Jefferson St,
Brownsville, TX 78520

Louie & Eric's New York Pizzeria

3380 E Ruben M Torres Blvd #107,
Brownsville, TX 78526
@louie_ericnypizzeria

Lupitas Adult Day Care

467 Regal Row,
Brownsville, TX 78521
956-504-3370

Morales Insurance Agency

425 Paredes Ln Rd Suite A,
Brownsville, Texas
956-357-1267

My Dream & More

1152 E Washington St,
Brownsville, TX 78520
956-408-9296

Quality Crab

2606 Calle Calmada,
Brownsville, TX 78526

Reyes Notary Services & Income Tax

356 W Elizabeth St #109,
Brownsville, TX 78520

Ricky's Tuxedo Rental

3516 Jaime J. Zapata Ave,
Brownsville, TX 78521
956-544-1700

Rio Valley Stitch

247 Frontage Rd Suite B,
Brownsville, TX 78520
956-404-6822

Saira's Alta Costura

538 Villa Verde Dr,
Brownsville, TX 78521
956-908-9820

Sasi's Thai Restaurant

937 Frontage Rd Suite 2,
Brownsville, TX 78520
@sasi_thai_restaurant

Sima Fitness LLC

4202 Ruben M Torres Blvd,
Brownsville, TX 78526

Somos Brownsville

142 Paredes Line Rd C,
Brownsville, TX 78521

Somos Produce

15 Oriente Dr,
Brownsville, TX 78526

Super Teachers

2494 Central Blvd B,
Brownsville, TX 78520

Tere Garcia Notary Public

812 E 14th St,
Brownsville, TX 78520
956-801-6183

Tumbaburros Azteca

315 Azteca Dr,
Brownsville, TX 78521

Veggie del Sol

536 E 12th St,
Brownsville, TX 78520
@veggiedelsol



(Open to the Cameron County)



Amor y Pan

800 N. Expressway, Ste. 16
Brownsville TX 78521

Body Fuel Fitness

0747 E. Expressway 83,
San Benito, TX 78586

Faith Family Friends PHC

222 E. Van Burenm Ste. B
Harlingen ,TX 78552

Hare and Holly, LLC

1018 E. Washington St., Ste. B
Brownsville, TX 78520

Pluton Brewery Company ●●

805 Elizabeth St.
Brownsville, TX 78520

Warbler Coffee CO.

540 E. Monroe St.
Brownsville, TX 78520

Abasolo Investement Inc.

901 E. Elizabeth Street

Casa Tijerina

333 E. Adams Street

Karla Postma

1150-1152 E. Washington Street

Juan Richer

1201 E. Washington Street

La Reve

1105 E. Washington Street

Morning Glory

1049 E. Washington Street

Nolita NY Pizza

915 E. Elizabeth Street

OrigoWorks

024 E. Adams Street

Petite Jolie

1101 E. Adams Street

Pingus Pop

1121 E. Elizabeth Street

Pluton Brewing Company ●●

805 E. Elizabeth Street

Solaris Management Solutions

1005 E. Levee Street

The Roast House

1254 E. Washington Street

Urban 8 Properties

1018 E. Washington Street



border & sea

Antica Gastrobar

3230 Pablo Kisel Blvd., Ste. F-101
Brownsville, TX 78526

Boqueron

3230 Pablo Kisel Blvd., Ste. F-101
Brownsville, TX 78526
@boqueronwinebar

Breathe Hot Studio

800 N. Expressway 77/83, Ste. 20
Brownsville, TX 78521
@breathehotstudio

Café Canasto

4008 Paredes Line Rd.
Brownsville, TX 78526
@cafe_canasto

Chirina's Fish Tacos

722 E. 12th St.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@chirinasfishtacos

City Tortas

1175 E Alton Gloor Blvd., Ste. D
Brownsville, TX 78526
@thecitytortas

Crepe Town

660 E. Ringgold St.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@crepe_town_brownsvilletx

Dodici Provisions

1375 Palm Blvd.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@dodiciprovisions

El Último Taco

938 N. Expressway
Brownsville, TX 78521
@elultimotacotaqueria

Ice Cream Rolls Factory

2835 E Price Rd., Ste. H
Brownsville, TX 78521
@icecreamrolls_factory

IQ Juice Bar

800 Frontage Rd. 77/83, Ste. 17
Brownsville, TX 78521
@iq.juicebar

Juice Us

3090 Pablo Kisel, Ste. A
Brownsville, TX 78526
@juiceus_

Juicin Alive

74 S. Price Rd., Ste. 1
Brownsville, TX
@juicinalive

JZD

800 Frontage Rd., Ste. 12
Brownsville, TX 78520
@shopjzdbrownsville

Kailiani Poke Bowl

500 Morrison Rd Ste. C
Brownsville, TX 78526
@kailanipokehouse

Kuyashii Ramen

1237 E. Adams St.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@kuyashiijapanesekitchen

Dodici Provisions

1375 Palm Blvd.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@dodiciprovisions

La Barra del Taco

800, 77 Frontage Rd. 83, Ste. 40-41
Brownsville, TX 78521
@labarradeltaco.tx

La Catrina on 12th

533 E. 12th St.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@lacatrinaon12th_

La Pale

3340 Pablo Kisel Blvd. Ste. B-105
Brownsville, TX 78521
@lapalefrozenfruitbar

Layer Boutique

3231 Pablo Kisel Blvd., Ste. B
Brownsville, TX 78526
@layertheboutique

Lettuce Eat Salad

3341 Pablo Kisel Blvd. Ste. R
Brownsville, TX 78526
@lettuce_eatsalad

Lullaby Baby & Child

800 Frontage Rd., Ste. 46
Brownsville, TX 78521
@lullabybbc

MELT

3001 Pablo Kisel Blvd., Ste. L
Brownsville, TX 78526
@melt.tx

Mercato & Company

2300 N. Expressway
Brownsville, TX 78521
@mercatoandcompany

Metanoia Kitchen

1554 E. 7th S.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@metanoia_kitchen

My Body Pilates

915 W. Price Rd.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@mybodypilatesstudio

Nerve Coffee

800 Frontage Rd. Ste. 10
Brownsville, TX 78520
@nervecoffee

Rutledge Hamburgers

1126 E Washington St.
Brownsville, TX 78520

Sovereign Coffee

1160 E. Alton Gloor Blvd., Ste. C
Brownsville, TX 78526
@sovereign.coffee

Space Dog Station

605 E. 14th St.
Brownsville, TX 7852
@spacedogstation

The Library Bar

1135 E. Washington St.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@librarybar1135

The Master's Barber Shop

018 E Washington St.
Brownsville, TX 78520
@themastersbarbershop

The Oyster Bar

1057 E Levee St.
Brownsville, TX 78520

STARTUP TEXAS INVESTMENTS

Quality of Life Cohort

TXQ Rubs

\$40,000 Grand Prize

TXQ Rubs take the traditions and flavors from the Rio Grande Valley and other areas of Texas and puts them in a bottle. These expertly curated blends, meticulously crafted using premium ingredients, elevate the grilling game to new heights. • txqrubs.com

F10 Casting & Management

\$10,000 2nd Runner Up

South Texas-based casting and modeling agency that prioritizes talent from marginalized backgrounds and signs clients to bigger representation in the fashion industry to help them reach their desired job in the modeling world. • f10casting.com

La Pale

\$20,000 1st Runner Up

A local frozen fruit bar, offering frozen fruit paletas, ice cream, and other snacks in locations around the Brownsville and Los Fresnos area • lapaleicecream.com

SBIR/STTR Cohort in Partnership with Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station

iBed by APYCO

\$40,000 Grand Prize

Advanced healthcare technology solutions that prioritize comfort and care for older adults, blending technology with human-centric design.

Hemp Lime Homes

\$20,000 1st Runner Up

Leader in sustainable construction, offering eco-friendly alternatives that promise to redefine the building industry with their groundbreaking hemp-based materials.

BuildCo.

\$10,000 2nd Runner Up

A visionary approach to project management that sets a new standard in the construction industry, facilitating cost estimation efficiency through its unique real-time platform.

Emerging Industries Cohort

Aetherworks

\$40,000 Grand Prize

Utilizing direct air carbon capture technology to reduce the total CO2 emissions on earth, as well as directly serving mid-size and large indoor farms.

Pisharodi Electronics

\$20,000 1st Runner Up

Creators of patented, non-invasive vibration device which provides a method to control and manage pain through vibration therapy pisharodielectronics.com

Embedded

\$10,000 2nd Runner Up

Creators of fitted bedsheets using wireless RFID technology to create a comfortable, non-invasive solution for elderly patient monitoring.

DeCON Environmental

\$2,500 Honorable Mention

Extending the lifespan of septic tanks, eradicating reliance on bacteria and enzymatic treatments that often lead to backups and failures, all while avoiding costly repair and harmful chemicals.

MerLion Advisory Group

\$2,500 Honorable Mention

Establish proven maritime security operations and maritime domain awareness to keep logistics moving in support of company objectives • merlionadvisory.com

Accelerated Business

GreenZone Enterprises

At the intersection of technology and sustainability leading the charge in waste management innovation, utilizing blockchain technology to promote recycling and a circular economy.

www.greenzone.eco

Meet! Texas

An application creating a new paradigm in social interaction, leveraging technology to encourage meaningful, real-world connections with a mission to counteract digital isolation.

[@meettexas](https://www.instagram.com/meettexas)

The Partnership Institute

Addressing the evolving needs of healthcare education by making significant strides in enhancing training and communication methodologies within the medical field.

www.thepicorp.com

Velox Global Solutions

Pioneering in the logistics sector, Velox Global Solutions is revolutionizing the trucking industry with its innovative approach, aiming to enhance operational efficiency and profitability for independent carriers.

www.veloxglobalsolutions.com

Juices by Trisha

Juice popup specialized in creating natural juices using hand-picked, fresh, locally grown fruits, and vegetables that are perfect for those who prioritize healthy living.

[@juicesbytrisha](https://www.instagram.com/juicesbytrisha)

MyFluence

Transforming the influencer marketing landscape, offering a platform that brings brands and local influencers together for more effective and strategic collaborations.

www.myfluence.app

Rizome

Making charitable giving more impactful and community-focused, integrating innovative software solutions to strengthen philanthropic efforts and local business engagement.

Al Chile Salsa

Salsa 100% made locally. Unique blend that pairs as good with chips as it does with cooked dishes.

www.alchilesalsa.com

Go Create Microfarms

Organization that develops microgreen farm kits, allowing anyone to curate an emporium of premium microgreens for personal or commercial use. Embracing the power of miniature wonders as they redefine fresh and healthy greens for everyone.



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www.brownsvillic.com