

## **Award of Excellence**

### **Category: Economic Development Promotions**

**Applicant: City of Salinas**

**Partner: Development Counsellors International (DCI)**

**Project: City of Salinas “Grow in Salinas” National Marketing Campaign**

**Synopsis:** The City of Salinas’ “Grow in Salinas” National Marketing Campaign commenced in 2012 in an effort to correct negative misperceptions, capitalize on the city’s world-renowned agriculture industry to position Salinas as a global AgTech hub, and elevate Salinas’ profile. The ongoing program has far exceeded goals and objectives put forward. To date, Salinas has secured 116 positive articles in local, regional and national media, and in July 2015, Salinas hosted the first-ever “Forbes Reinventing America: The AgTech Summit,” shining a spotlight on the city for attendees, including more than 400 of some of the smartest minds in agriculture and technology.

1. Describe project or program (when it began & finished & list multiple phases if any):

Salinas, Calif. launched its “Grow in Salinas” national marketing plan, campaign and website ([www.businessinsalinas.com](http://www.businessinsalinas.com)) in June of 2012 in an effort to solve serious economic challenges the city faced after Capital One closed its credit card processing center in May of 2012 and eliminated 869 local jobs. At the time, Salinas was also seeing overwhelmingly negative news coverage, much of which focused on crime and immigration issues in Salinas, and thus was fueling negative perceptions of the city.

National media relations is a key element of Salinas’ marketing plan. The main goals of the campaign are to correct misperceptions about Salinas; position the city as a global AgTech hub by capitalizing on the city’s world-renowned agriculture industry and geographic proximity to Silicon Valley; and elevate Salinas’ profile locally, regionally and nationally as a great place for business and investment.

The first phase of the Salinas marketing campaign began in 2012, with the implementation and March 2013 launch of an upgraded website ([businessinsalinas.com](http://businessinsalinas.com)), including a new logo and updated website content. The “Grow in Salinas” marketing plan was officially launched in March 2013 to a crowd of more than 150 local business and community leaders and received resoundingly positive feedback.

Since the launch, the program has focused largely on media relations and business development through targeting site selector consultants. Program goals through 2015 include:

- a. Garner at least 12 positive articles in regional, national and trade media outlets over the course of a three-year period, with a particular focus on business and Silicon Valley media outlets.
- b. Bring in at least three trade reporters to see Salinas firsthand, with a particular focus on agriculture and technology trade reporters and publications.
- c. Assist in bringing new business to the city by building relationships with at least 15 site selectors, bring in at least nine to see the community firsthand and drive at least one to two inquiries into the Capital One building.
- d. Land a major business event in Salinas that attracts senior-level executives and decision makers, such as the Forbes Reinventing America Summit.

The City of Salinas economic development marketing program is led by Salinas City Manager Ray Corpuz, in partnership with Development Counsellors International (DCI), a national PR and marketing firm retained by the city of Salinas. DCI wrote and executed the marketing plan and strategy, with leadership, oversight and input from the City of Salinas.

**2. What impact has the project/program had on employment, expansion of local tax base & diversification of the area's economy?:**

Thanks in part to Salinas' efforts to brand itself as a global AgTech Hub, which stem from the city's strategic economic development plan, the city is seeing a major resurgence in the Old Town area downtown.

And the world is taking notice. Salinas – and particularly its AgTech sector - has been prominently featured in Forbes, Huffington Post, San Francisco Chronicle and Financial Times.

These third-party endorsements are read by high-level business executives locally, nationally and globally. This overwhelmingly positive press on Salinas has helped to ultimately raise the city's profile and prime the city for new investment.

Below are several examples of major milestones that have happened since the launch of the marketing campaign.

In August of 2014, Taylor Farms – Salinas' largest employer and the world's largest producer of fresh-cut vegetables - opened a more than \$40 million, 100,000-squarefoot, five-story headquarters office in downtown Salinas. It's the first major investment of its kind in Oldtown Salinas, and demonstrates a confidence in Salinas' future. It's also anticipated to inspire other companies to locate downtown – and it's already working.

The new building also houses the new Western Growers Association (WGA) Innovation Center, which had its grand opening in December 2015, and is backed by a \$4 million seed investment from the WGA. The WGA is a 90-year-old trade association of produce farmers in California, Arizona and Colorado.

The WGA investment is a boon to the entrepreneurial future in Salinas. The Innovation Center will focus on providing access to technical assistance and support for AgTech entrepreneurs and serve as a home for new businesses. What's more, it's expected to attract additional capital that will far exceed WGA's initial \$4 million investment.

The Thrive Accelerator is a second incubator in Salinas that's working to launch new businesses, and the program produced its first 10 graduates last year. The program offers a highly selective mentorship and investment program for technology-enabled startups in AgTech. More than 40 companies from around the globe applied for 10 spots in the Thrive Accelerator in 2014 and those selected received mentorship direct access to some top agricultural companies based in Salinas.

Another major investment in downtown Salinas is by California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB), which is opening a new location inside the National Steinbeck Center in the Oldtown area. This is a testament to the real world value of the educational and governmental components of the AgTech strategy, which CSUMB supports.

### 3. How has the project demonstrated innovation/creativity & what aspects of it could be replicated in other communities?

Salinas, Calif – a city of about 155,000 – has been highly innovative in its “Grow in Salinas” marketing campaign, making a name for itself as a global AgTech hub, demonstrating success through extensive media coverage and hosting the “Forbes Reinventing America: The AgTech Summit.”

The *Forbes* AgTech Summit was a major game-changer for the city, and the Summit, coupled with ample positive media coverage, has redefined the city’s image, righting misconceptions and erasing negative perceptions. Most importantly, Salinas showed so well that Forbes has decided to make the Summit an annual event, and plans to hold another AgTech conference in Salinas, July 13-14, 2016.

Should other communities wish to replicate what Salinas has done, it's important to choose one sector to focus on, and work to “own” that sector. Salinas has truly owned the “AgTech” concept. In the time since the launch of the campaign, Salinas leaders have developed a sound economic development strategy, including cohesive messaging that aligns with all of the city's future goals. And people have noticed. Visiting site selectors comment on the depth and breadth of the AgTech strategy, national media outlets have produced front-page articles to tout Salinas as an AgTech hub, and 116 media placements have resulted from these efforts.

Additionally, communities should stop thinking like traditional economic developers, because what was once the “norm” is not necessarily what is going to help

communities succeed. Salinas demonstrates how to think outside of the metaphorical “economic development box” to use the region’s innovative AgTech stories to successfully pitch Forbes Media on hosting a “Reinventing America” conference there.

Salinas, a city that was once known for poverty, crime, and immigration issues, hosted the July 2015 “Forbes Reinventing America AgTech Summit,” drawing a soldout crowd of more than 400 high-level ag professionals and industry influencers – including many of the brightest minds in agriculture and technology.

The summit was the first of its kind, and Salinas was the smallest city to ever host such an event. Similar Forbes summits had previously been hosted in major metros such as Chicago or Detroit, but that didn’t stop Salinas from creating a proposal strategy to build a unique AgTech event. Leaders worked for months to pitch Forbes, and even met with the Forbes executive team – including CEO Michael Perlis – in New York City in December of 2014 to ensure the Summit’s success. Convincing Forbes to host the AgTech Summit in Salinas was a truly innovative concept, and something that took ample creativity by Salinas leaders. It is this type of big thinking that could be replicated by other cities.

The dividends for such an innovative idea also paid off, drawing more than 400 people into the city, making a name for Salinas as a global AgTech hub, and providing extensive media coverage in Forbes, as well as coverage by several local, regional and national media outlets. Since Forbes is read by some of the world’s most affluent business leaders, the event helped Salinas reach a key target audience, which could ultimately lead to more business investment.

#### 4. What are the project/program's noteworthy contributions to the field of Economic Development?:

In conjunction with the wildly successfully media relations component of the program, the city of Salinas has also created a unique AgTech economic development strategy and accompanying AgTech ecosystem to help attract and grow new business, and foster AgTech innovation. The strategy is a smart bet, and one that benefits businesses and the community alike. The strategy established a fertile environment for businesses to flourish by drawing on the best expertise in regional economic development and working to get the best minds in the field to play a role. Salinas realized early on that technology is going to radically transform agriculture in order to increase efficiency and boost food production. Leaders in Salinas sought to partner with others in the community to embrace the changes, and to make a name for the region that boasts an agricultural industry that generates more than \$8 billion annually.

This AgTech ecosystem combines a wide range of elements, including education and research partnerships, workforce development, investors, business incubation, marketing, and supportive government policies, as well as leveraging existing assets

such as land, climate, workers and knowledge.

For these efforts, the City of Salinas won the 2015 Helen Putnam Award for Excellence from the League of California Cities in the Community Services & Economic Development category. The award recognizes outstanding achievements by California's cities and innovative solutions by city governments, and the category recognizes innovative programs that enhance the community, as well as programs that advance the economic vitality of the community.

Salinas, Calif. also serves as an exceptional turnaround story. Prior to the launch of this campaign, Salinas' economy was in dire straits. A major employer had closed, eliminating 869 local jobs. The media was focused on negative news, covering issues like crime, poverty and immigration.

Economic development leaders came together to correct these misperceptions and position Salinas as a global AgTech hub, as well as elevate the city's profile locally, regionally and nationally. It was a tall order for a racially diverse, low-income city of about 155,000. But Salinas succeeded, hugely surpassing original goals.

This small city's story has appeared on the front pages of the Financial Times and the San Francisco Chronicle. Salinas hosted the sold-out "Forbes Reinventing America: The AgTech Summit," which was a major coup for economic development leaders. This event brought together 400 of the smartest minds in agriculture and technology to discuss how to address some of the world's most critical challenges. These leaders are now familiar with Salinas, and recognize the city as a global AgTech hub. Additionally, Forbes Media has already locked in dates for a second AgTech Summit in Salinas July 13-14, 2016. Thanks to the economic development efforts and creative thinking to get Forbes to Salinas, the conference has become an annual event, and Forbes is anticipating a larger turnout, with upwards of 600 attendees.

Lastly, the work that Salinas economic development leaders are doing is clearly evident to anyone who drives through Old Town Salinas – an area that is in the midst of a major resurgence.

##### 5. Describe program/project's achievement in obtaining its stated objectives & cost effectiveness:

Over the course of a three-year period, the city of Salinas has spent \$472,950 on the "Grow in Salinas" national marketing campaign and the results have far exceeded the goals set forth by the program outlined above in question number one. The cost of the program includes DCI professional fees, outbound media missions to San Francisco and New York City, three inbound site selector FAM tours, a site selector luncheon in New York City, building a new economic development website and creating an economic development brochure.

Some impressive results the campaign has generated include:

1. The campaign has garnered 116 positive articles in regional, national and trade media outlets, reaching an audience of more than 567 million. These articles translate to an advertising equivalency of \$3.3 million (calculated by the cost of an ad of the same size within the given publication), and a 12.7 : 1 return on investment for the media relations element of the campaign alone.

Key media placements include:

- A front page story in the Financial Times, titled “Silicon Valley meets Salinas Valley in partnership to make farming 'smart'” – June 29, 2013
  - An additional feature article in the Financial Times, titled “Robots rising in 'salad bowl of the world'" - June 29, 2013
  - A front page article in the San Francisco Chronicle, titled “Salinas, Silicon Valley Plant Seeds of Technology” – July 11, 2013
  - A story on NPR, titled “A City Turns To Lettuce Fields To Grow High-Tech Startups” – Dec. 19, 2013
  - A feature in Fast Company, titled “Why The World's Salad Bowl Wants To Go High Tech” – Jan. 21, 2015
  - Several features on Forbes.com, highlighting the AgTech Summit – 2015.
2. Five reporters from several agricultural trade publications have visited Salinas to date, producing seven articles.
  3. City leaders have met with more than 20 site selection consultants, 12 of whom have visited Salinas during familiarization tours. This resulted in inquiries from three of the visiting site selectors, who were considering Salinas as a potential location for an upcoming client project, including two inquiries into the Capital One building.
  4. The Salinas campaign reached a momentous milestone in July 2015, when Salinas hosted the “Forbes Reinventing America: The AgTech Summit,” drawing a sold-out crowd of more than 400. Having one of the biggest names in media host a summit in Salinas was a true game-changer for the community – which was the smallest city to ever host a Forbes Reinventing America Summit. The summit showcased the city’s assets to hundreds of C-level executives, entrepreneurs, investors and industry leaders in agriculture and technology and put the city on the map as a global AgTech hub. It is truly a groundbreaking result that has come from this economic development campaign. Salinas’ work with Forbes also generated extensive media coverage in local, regional and national outlets. To help put into perspective the cost effectiveness of Salinas working with Forbes, a one-page color ad in Forbes would cost \$155,631.
6. Please attach up to 3 web site links which are relevant to your project/program (optional):

[www.businessinsalinas.com](http://www.businessinsalinas.com)

<http://steinbeckinnovation.org/>

7. Please attach up to 3 photos or power point slides (no more than 8 slides) which are relevant to your project/program (optional):

Please see [dropbox](#) link containing “City of Salinas ‘Grow in Salinas’” Powerpoint, available to be viewed online or downloaded.

Dropbox link/Powerpoint can be viewed/downloaded by clicking link above, or clicking here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/z0bzxnah4nq8570/AAAGzQKOqSAIZDgPeE2iq42Ma?dl=0>