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# City of Arlington USA

## City Branding Introduction

Conducted by Mindset, LLC. • January 2014



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Mindset, LLC. was engaged in August 2013 through a joint partnership between the City of Arlington and Experience Arlington to develop the marketing framework for Arlington's destination branding.

Arlington's branding initiative is different from typical destination branding programs. In this case, the initiative stems from the City first; not the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, which is routinely the case. The intention is that the brand will broadly serve the goals of the city, including but not limited to tourism and hospitality.

Research, which is a key step in the process of understanding what makes a city unique often takes an "outside in" approach in search for direction. In the case of Arlington's branding initiative we aim to determine and develop our brand from an "inside out" approach. The research and ultimate vetting therefore engages stakeholders, including its eight council members, the office of the Mayor and of the office of the City Manager in the creation of the City's brand.

Stakeholder commitment establishes an ideal foundation from which Mindset successfully builds city brands. Mindset uses a successful and proven method of inclusive and transparent qualitative research to gain an objective impression of a city. Thus, we aim to understand the totality of a city brand and intend that the strategy that unfolds will be relevant and serve the interests of all sectors.



During September-December 2013 more than 60 stakeholders from the following sectors participated in in-depth interviews or small group discussions, facilitated by Jeff Miraglia, who leads Mindset's creative and brand strategy. The interviews explored what the Arlington, experience is as a place to live, work, study and visit. Interviews are representative of the following interests:

- Arlington's Mayor and City Council
- Experience Arlington leadership
- City leadership
- Arlington Chamber of Commerce
- Tarrant County Commissioners Office
- Arlington and North Texas Region business leaders
- Arts & Culture
- Recreation & Entertainment
- Education – Higher Ed and Arlington Independent School District

It should also be noted that the City of Arlington worked with North Star of Nashville, TN to conduct research related to city branding a few years ago. This body of work was shared with Mindset. Thoughtful consideration to the findings determined that the demographic and psychographic data remains relevant and indicates consistency with Mindset's understanding of stakeholders' needs and interests. It is Mindset's opinion that Arlington's investment in the North Star research can be leveraged as Mindset's proprietary method of evaluating city brands and determining a brand strategy is deployed.



## We all must continue to ALIGN.

Through the process of information gathering two things became very apparent. First, there are many ways that the various interests in Arlington envision and work in partnership. Those we spoke with are brimming with innovative and smart ideas that have the potential to impact Arlington in meaningful ways: economically, culturally, educationally and so on. And second, they acknowledged over and over that Arlington is exceptional in its track record to actually bring all of the players together to make ideas become reality. The significance of Arlington's "can-do attitude" should not be underestimated. It is an asset.

Mindset has laid the groundwork in the adoption of an internal communication process, called ALIGN that leverages the collective effort of Arlington. ALIGN is a both a way of being and a practice that's authentically in our city's namesake, ARLINGTON.

ALIGN's intention is to become a continual practice of fostering communications and collaboration among all City departments and key stakeholders as it relates to the creation, launch and sustainability of the city brand. ALIGN should be considered as a mindset with the expectation that the branding initiative need not become a laborious process. As this communication process becomes routine, the stakeholders will invest their physical, financial and emotional resources into taking ownership of the City's brand. This paves the way for our city brand to perpetuate.



*“There is no question we have to align, we have proven we will.”*

*“Everyone has to take ownership. We need a framework because it does not exist presently.”*

*“In order to build up the city as a whole, all of components of the city have to be unified.”*

*“You don’t see the sort of inter-institutional conflicts you see in other cities.”*

*“When we align we accelerate and when we accelerate we are Arlington.”*

## Perspectives of Arlington's Brand

### No Consistent Brand Message

Stakeholders offered varying and inconsistent responses when asked to define Arlington's brand. This is revealing and may serve to establish a baseline of where we are starting.

### "Brand" Confusion

Arlington's brand is not perceived to be well defined, is perhaps limiting in focus and changes with regularity. It seems that advertising campaigns, that by their nature are refreshed from time to time, tend to be mistaken for branding, in absence of a clear brand.

For example, many perceived that "Fun Central" was Arlington's brand and further thought that "Experience Arlington" replaced it. This is compounded by Experience Arlington's tagline "and the crowd goes wild." To clarify, "Fun Central" was an advertising campaign aimed at leisure travelers. "Experience Arlington" is a name that replaced the Arlington Convention & Visitor's Bureau. "And the crowd goes wild" is Experience Arlington's current tagline. None of these are a city brand but represent slices of it. Arlington is more than Fun Central – that is not to say that visiting or living in Arlington is not fun.

Mindset often observes this phenomenon and concludes that it stems from individual assets operating in silos rather than working in partnership. ALIGN is designed to manage this.



## Expand Beyond Location as a Unique Attribute

Situating Arlington in the mindset of residents and visitors as being conveniently located between Dallas and Fort Worth is perceived to be outdated and limiting. This mindset results in Arlington inadvertently redirecting some of its light to shine on the neighboring cities and their assets rather than to communicate what Arlington is and what it has to offer in its own right.

AT&T Stadium has helped to redirect the spotlight on Arlington. The time is ripe to focus the brand squarely on Arlington. Unapologetically, but respectfully to its neighbors in the MetroPlex.

*“We happen to be in the best location in the MetroPlex but the brand should be about more than location.”*

## Serve All of Arlington’s Interests

While the city should be proud of the entertainment assets, stakeholders advised that the brand extend beyond this one aspect of Arlington. Those who speak from the economic development vantage point in particular noted that the brand’s message must be inclusive of the business community. Progressive education leaders from the Arlington Independent School District through the colleges and university point to the importance of education as a contributor to the culture of Arlington.

*“Fun Central doesn’t have enough depth and is limiting. From the inside out you have to consider what is beyond the entertainment district.”*

*“The brand needs to set stage for the hi-tech story to be told, around the Chamber’s Center for Innovation.”*

*“Arlington reflects America... (it is about) community, (being a) good place to live, civic pride, success, vibrant, diverse.”*





## Major Brands are Intertwined With Arlington

Stakeholders representing the Cowboys, Rangers, Six Flags, UT Arlington and General Motors in particular agreed that their brands and the Arlington brand have the potential to be intertwined to build the fabric of Arlington.

- **Cowboys brand stands for:**

America's team

Future oriented

Straightforward, simple, direct

Cutting-edge state-of-the-art entertainment

Armani suit and BMW of the NFL

At the core it is a family run operation despite being a globally recognized brand

- **Rangers brand stands for:**

A hometown team with loyal local and regional following

Value that attracts families

A winning team and World Series contender

Honesty as reflected by the tone set by Nolan Ryan

when he led the team

- **UT Arlington brand stands for:**

Evolving an innovative next-generation university

Working toward Tier 1 research institution

Diverse student population

- **General Motors' Arlington operations brand stands for:**

America's car

Diverse labor force

Built with pride with the Heartbeat of Texas

Committed partner to the local community

- **Six Flags brand stands for:**

Family fun

Creating memories that last a lifetime

Aspiring to become a full-scale destination resort



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## Guiding Principles

### Community

Arlington is a big city that retains its small, hometown feeling. While it has grown in population and density and faces the challenges of larger cities, the community is bound by the ideals of the American dream, team loyalty and civic pride.

### Diversity

Arlington's population<sup>1</sup> reflects the evolving diversity of America and has the potential to serve as an example of what can happen when diversity is acknowledged and celebrated.

- 44% White alone (not Latino)
- 19% Black or African American
- 3.3% two or more races
- 27% Latino
- 6.8% Asian
- .1% American Indian and Alaska Native

Overlaid on this is the student body of UT Arlington,<sup>2</sup> which represents all of the 50 United States and 123 countries. As of Fall 2013 it looks like this:

- 22% Hispanic
- 10% Asian
- 14% African American
- 9% International

### Opportunity

There are many aspects to the story that Arlington can tell about the opportunities ahead. It is a place where the American dream continues to inspire the present wave of immigrants who have come to Arlington in search of a better life.



<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/4804000.html>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.uta.edu/uta/about/fastfacts/index.php>

## Possibility

Arlington stakeholders agree that Arlington's unofficial motto is "can do." It is this underlying spirit that has made dreams reality in a big way in Arlington. Anything is possible in Arlington based on its track record.

## Education

While UT Arlington is a crown jewel, there is a solid educational infrastructure: Arlington Independent School District supporting education from K-12; Tarrant County College; and Arlington Baptist College.

Students come from all over the globe to study in Arlington. The University of Texas at Arlington is home to the second largest university in the UT system. UT Arlington projects that enrollment will continue to grow and is aggressively working toward achieving Tier 1 status.

## Entertainment

Arlington has some very substantial assets providing entertainment, recreation, sports, arts and culture. These assets are at the root of the experience of visiting and living in Arlington. The most prominent are:

AT&T Stadium, home to the Dallas Cowboys NFL team

The Ballpark in Arlington, home to the Texas Rangers MLB team

Six Flags theme park and Hurricane Harbor

Levitt Pavilion offering free music concerts

Arlington Museum of Art





## **Epicenter**

Arlington is geographically at the epicenter of the Metroplex, which puts it in reach of both Dallas to the east and Fort Worth to the west. When we view Arlington from the 50,000 foot perspective we see that it is at the epicenter of the thriving North Texas region, among the top economic engines in the United States.

## **Legacy**

Past city and business leaders have left a legacy in significant and enduring ways. In Arlington it is understood that the bold choices and can-do spirit we embody as city leaders, a business community, residents and students builds on this legacy.



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## Brand Direction

Arlington is a reflection and re-imagination of the American Dream. It's a true blue model city where its very fabric is woven into today's New America ideal. A fabric that is stitched by its visionaries, innovators, time, nature and a spirit that's rooted inside the hearts of its community. Arlington is part aspiration, achievement and amazement and reaches higher everyday. Arlington's brand goes beyond its North Texas locale, deserving its very own star on the country's map to shine bright.

There are a number of areas where Arlington's re-imagination of the American Dream particularly comes to life.

### Education

There is a commitment to investment fostering a seamless education pipeline setting the stage for a "culture of achievement." Arlington is as a place where students from America and beyond gather as they chart their future, dream, learn, contribute and thrive.

### Diversity

The population mix in Arlington puts it on the leading edge of what has long been predicted for America. In Arlington, our diversity of Caucasian, Latino, African American, Asian and others is embraced and leveraged as a true strength that enriches our collective cultural experience and reach.

### Density

Arlington is primed for strategic redevelopment that provides purposeful, urban housing that keeps Arlington in alignment with the modern world and the creative class.

### Mile stoning

Arlington's leaders and residents are keenly aware of the legacy they have inherited. We learned from our pioneers to think and act innovatively. It is on this guiding principle that we build on the legacy, setting Arlington apart from other cities. Arlington stands for something true blue. Our niche is being a place where the American worker and thinker shine as one.



The logo for 'mindset' is positioned in the top left corner. It features the word 'mindset' in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with the tagline 'brands destinations.' in a smaller font directly below it. The logo is set against a white triangular background that points downwards.

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# Detailed Feedback From In-Depth Interviews

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Views of Arlington, Texas

From the Stakeholders' Perspectives





## I. What Makes Arlington Unique – Arlington’s DNA

### **Arlington- From Suburb to the World’s Stage**

- Stakeholders are generally of the opinion that it is time to move beyond perceiving ourselves as a small city between two bigger cities, where our greatest asset is measured by proximity to what one can experience elsewhere. They cited that Arlington has steadily grown over the years and today is the fiftieth largest city in the U.S. and the 7th largest in the state of Texas.
- Stakeholders expressed that it is time to celebrate and tout what Arlington has to offer residents, visitors, current and prospective businesses and students in its own right.
- There was a strong call for Arlington to step out from the shadows of Dallas and Fort Worth and shine on its own accord.
- Initially during many of the interviews, stakeholders defined Arlington in terms of its status in the MetroPlex or Texas. Mindset proposed an idea that Arlington is more than Texas to see what the response would be. Several stated when viewing Arlington from an outside perspective that if Arlington was not in the MetroPlex and stood alone, it would be considered a well-rounded and significant city in its own right.
- The view of Arlington that began to emerge in the hearts and minds as the interviews unfolded was a model of a “New American” city that is worthy of recognition in the United States and beyond.



*“Arlington used to be a respite between the monoliths, but that is not a sustainable positioning.”*

*“Locals still think it is a cozy suburb and don’t realize it is not a suburb anymore.”*

*“Arlington is stepping up to be on the world’s stage.”*

*“It is not about communicating geography unless it is to put Arlington on the global map. Let’s get out of the local mindset.”*

*“We will be that star that will shine so bright – we’ll be our own city.”*

*“This is a brave city willing to take on challenges.”*



## Diversity – An Untapped Asset

- We heard from many that Arlington’s diversity might be one of the city’s greatest untapped assets and differentiators. Across the board there was enthusiasm about embracing diversity as a differentiator.
- The ethnicities, races and cultures of our residents and students are a model of 21st Century America. Cities that embrace their multi-culturalism, ethnic, age and socio-economic diversity tend to also be vibrant, inclusive, and appealing places to live, work, study and visit.
- Arlington’s residential population is diverse with large segments of Latinos, African Americans and Asians compared with other cities in Texas and the United States. Layered on top of this is the population of students that come to Arlington from across the globe representing a wide array of cultures including a large segment from the Middle East.

*“This is a place for everybody; respect for all regardless of who you are or where you came from.”*

*“TCC is the most diverse community college in the area - Asian, Middle Eastern, etc, yet we don’t celebrate how diverse Arlington really is.”*

*“Arlington is in fact a model and might be the most diverse in the Metroplex.  
We need to celebrate this!”*



## Education in Arlington's DNA: A seamless education pipeline.

- Being a city that is oriented to education contributes to the DNA of Arlington. A unique feature of Arlington is that it has a school district, community college, private college and a major university within its city limits. It is feasible for a child to enter kindergarten in one of the Arlington Independent School District elementary schools and then continue their education at Tarrant County College, Arlington Baptist College or UT Arlington.
- Tens of thousands of students from North Texas, the United States and around the globe come to Arlington to study each year. Dialogues with UT Arlington students revealed that an aspect they most appreciate about Arlington is that it is an environment where they can focus on their studies. This is a serious and committed student body.
- UT Arlington is the 7th fastest growing university in the nation and one of six designated as a Next Generation university by the New America Foundation.
- The university's Communications team reports that UT Arlington's agenda is squarely focused on becoming an "innovative, next-generation university with Tier 1 research status." Growing the research base at UT Arlington will impact the labor force and business enterprises in the surrounding area.
- High on the agenda of stakeholders representing various interests is to increase the percentage of UT Arlington students that choose to settle in Arlington after graduation to open businesses and start families. A major barrier that limits retention is limited apartment and condo type housing that is appealing and affordable for young professionals. While Arlington has options for families it is considered to be unattractive for young singles and couples.
- Despite the exciting story at UT Arlington, many stakeholders commented on the fact that Arlington has not fully embraced the university and that the university has not fully embraced Arlington. There was a call for strategic collaboration to build the relationship that presumably all wish to have.

*"Manifestation of TechComm...UTA a tier 1 university and the vision for city - Arlington becomes a place where students can stay and build their companies."*

*"Tying the cultural venues to UTA is necessary."*

*"We have opportunities to grow with UTA...to develop downtown ...that if we miss might not come back again in the future."*

*"UTA is seen as being separate from Arlington with separate rules. (suggesting the separation is not productive)."*



## Entertainment Destination

- Arlington is in an enviable position of having world-class sports and entertainment assets “right in our backyard.” It is home to the Ballpark in Arlington and AT&T Stadium where All-American heroes, the Texas Rangers and Dallas Cowboys, play.
- Additionally, the entertainment district is the site of the first Six Flags. Since its inception, this theme park has been a tremendous draw for families from the region and state to visit Arlington. When considering the Entertainment District, there is an assumption that at some point the full vision of that area will be realized.
- At full potential it was thought that the Entertainment District would secure Arlington as a perennial destination for big events that yield global attention.

*“Most people don’t remember the city without the Rangers - it is part of the city’s DNA now.”*

*“In a three year span we hosted two World Series and a Super Bowl that is significant. We’ve made ourselves the epicenter of professional sports...People are becoming conditioned to come to Arlington for great events.”*

*“Arlington truly is the sports capital of Texas.”*



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## Center for Innovation - An Economic Development Mine

- Arlington has a unique and exciting opportunity to seed business start-ups in Arlington, and of course the surrounding North Texas region. Arlington Chamber of Commerce's Center for Innovation's mission is to work as a conduit to match patent licenses from United States labs with the marketplace. When this mission is aligned with the skilled labor force coming out of UT Arlington the potential is sky-high.
- There is both an air of excitement about the potential and frustration that this vision is not unfolding faster. While there are pockets of excitement about this it seems that it is not as high on the agenda of the broad slate of stakeholders as one might expect. A few success stories can give it momentum.

*"Ten years from now Arlington has the potential to be like Silicon Valley...I see bi-tech companies located in downtown Arlington one day."*

*"Texas has become the 21st Century version of Ellis Island."*



## General Motors a Solid Asset to the Economic Base

- The GM plant in Arlington builds three out of every four SUVs on the road today. More than a thousand vehicles roll off the assembly line daily.
- The plant has evolved many times over. The most recent innovation is a state-of-the-art steel stamping operation that enables GM to make the structural components of vehicles in Arlington. This is significant because it reduces the manufacturing and shipment of components from other places and is projected to improve GM's efficiency dramatically.
- GM will be celebrating its 60th year in Arlington in 2014 which is a huge accomplishment given the tremendous shifts and challenges that have impacted the automobile manufacturing industry during that time.

*“The time is right for the (GM) corporation to see how important this plant is and how good of a relationship we have with the community.”*

## Enviably Parks System

- Not only are Arlington's park assets extensive, beautiful and well maintained, the Department of Parks & Recreation is making serious progress toward the goal of cost recovery.
- As the vision to expand the park system and connect the linear parks becomes a reality, this asset will grow in significance.

*“We have millions of dollars of assets in our parks system that we don't leverage enough.”*



## Arlington's Can-do Spirit

- Arlington's DNA is about conceiving big ideas and having the courage to make these ideas reality. This "can-do" city has a legacy of making really big ideas come to life: bringing General Motors to Arlington when it was still a small town in the 1950s; building the Ballpark in Arlington for the Texas Rangers MLB team in 1994. Followed by the AT&T Stadium which the Dallas Cowboys NFL franchise has called home since 2009; UT Arlington's vision to transition from commuter school to tier 1 university; and the establishment of the Great Southwest Industrial Park in the 1950s that continues to be a significant component of the economic landscape today.
- There is an overwhelming consensus that Arlington can and will continue to build on prior successes. Many said that "our best days are not behind us - they are ahead of us" indicating a profound optimism despite awareness of real challenges.

*"Our citizens want to have hope."*

*"Being a can-do city, we can be more effective, dynamic...nothing is going to rain on our parade. We believe that!"*

*"Arlington is the kind of city that gets it done."*

*"We are always moving forward."*

## Pride and Loyalty Persist

- Many described feeling deeply proud of and loyal to Arlington. They expressed this sentiment on behalf of their neighbors, friends and colleagues who have an interest in Arlington. The vestiges of the small-town values persist despite the fact that the city has grown to approximately 375,000 in population.



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## II. Stakeholders' Vision of Arlington's Future

- A good deal of time was devoted to hearing what the stakeholders believe is and should be on the agenda for Arlington as it relates to evolving the city. While some had a particular area of interest in this regard, it was interesting to observe that overall the ideas are complimentary rather than divergent.
- The picture they painted was of a continually evolving Arlington. Mindset proposes that an aspirational vision must be considered when defining the Arlington city brand. This will ensure that the brand is accurate and endures over time.

*"Our star is brighter. As is our future."*

*"Arlington stands for the abundance of opportunities to pursue all dreams."*



## Redevelopment

- Establishment of a cultural district in the heart of the historic downtown neighborhood anchored by Abram St. This district achieves its potential as a destination for arts and culture that seizes on the energy, spirit and diversity of the adjacent UT Arlington campus, while being purposely inclusive and appealing to residents and visitors.
- Real estate redevelopment aimed in particular at attracting and retaining the young, professional, creative class. Fill a market need for multi-family, dense housing particularly in the area around the UT Arlington campus and the cultural district.
- Attracting major hotel and convention properties to the entertainment district around AT& T Stadium, the Ballpark in Arlington and Six Flags that sets the stage for growing the meeting and convention business, increases the duration of leisure visits and bolsters the ability to compete for major sporting and political events.
- There is growing awareness of the importance of green, natural spaces for residents and visitors to unplug. Implementation of the vision to utilize existing parks and expand the linear park system were identified.

*“Arlington doesn’t have a vision for the younger people to make it attractive for them to live and work here.”*

*“The longer we wait the more expensive it will be to redevelop.”*

*“We are ready to urbanize and redevelop from within.”*



## Mass Transportation

- Building a purposeful and strategically scaled mass-transportation plan that links the entertainment district, downtown cultural district, college campuses and DFW Airport is on the radar for some.
- Mindset observed that resistance to mass transportation is rooted in skepticism that residents will “give up their cars and start riding the bus.” This fact is not disputed. However, this view of the objective of mass transportation is limiting.
- When the idea of mass transportation is refocused as a tactic to transport visitors it appears to shift the dialogue.
- Additionally, mass transportation is likely very appealing to the university graduate population that Arlington wishes to retain.

*“The game changer will be bringing in mass transit...”*

*“When I visit places like New York and San Francisco, it is fun to use the trains and trolleys.”*

*“Not having mass transit keeps Arlington feel small-town.”*





## **Quality Educational System That is a Pipeline to the Workforce**

- Leaders of the educational institutions starting with the Arlington Independent School District extending through the colleges and university painted a picture of an educational pipeline. As students progress through that pipeline they are guided in a direction that best serves them whether that is for skilled training to directly enter the workforce after high school or to higher education.
- Every educational institution has an agenda for elevating their offering and for integrating with one another to aid a smooth progression up the education career ladder.
- Additionally, the impact of UT Arlington's continued commitment to research and growth will undoubtedly set the stage for Arlington to be a magnet for business start-ups. Thus the educational system meets its ultimate objective of preparing individuals to contribute to the society.

## **Economic Development**

- Grow the North Texas economy and create jobs by leveraging the Chamber's Center for Innovation as a catalyst for technology led development in partnership with UT Arlington. Support GM's interests to attract automotive manufacturing related suppliers to Arlington.





## **Community Enhancement**

- Improve the city one block at a time from the inside by engaging the passion and pride of the residents. Effectively utilize the Arlington Tomorrow Foundation “to support the causes which benefit citizens and enhance the natural surroundings and lifestyle of our city.”

## **Arts & Culture**

- Representatives of the Arts community expressed their frustration that Arlington lags behind neighboring cities. It is neither a lack of ideas nor loss of enthusiasm for projects that limits progress. They are strongly supportive of a designated cultural district in the downtown area. Redevelopment and designation of the cultural district is viewed as the catalyst needed to establish a vibrant arts scene in Arlington. The importance of this should not be underestimated as it shapes the brand of a city.



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800.229.8200



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[mindsetinc.net](http://mindsetinc.net)

[jeff@mindsetinc.net](mailto:jeff@mindsetinc.net)