The Texas A&M University System is quietly compiling a team that will work to lure a major national research laboratory to Aggieland that could alter the economy of Brazos County, people familiar with the plan said.

The team, which is composed of officials from Texas A&M, local governments, a major pharmaceutical company and more than a dozen smaller organizations, will submit a bid for a multi-billion dollar federal Health and Human Services project designed to better prepare the nation for a pandemic flu or other disease outbreak.

Several other communities across the country -- including Pittsburgh and Raleigh-Durham, N.C. -- are also vying for the highly competitive project and it is far from a sure thing to land in Bryan-College Station. But A&M System officials and other people involved in the project said that they hope that the emerging bioresearch corridor being developed along the two cities' shared border can be an effective lure.

The economic implications for the area could be staggering.

"This could be the biggest economic development engine we have had come to our community since they let girls into Texas A&M," said Dennis Goehring, economic development director for the city of Bryan.

Goehring declined to give any details about the plan, saying he is "not at liberty" to discuss them. Other officials have been equally tight-lipped, but an announcement about the team being developed to court the project could come as soon as this week.

In the meantime, local officials are working quietly to prepare.

The A&M System confirmed Monday that it has created a new company, Kalon Biotherapeutics, that hopes to work closely with the project. System General Counsel Andrew Strong will step down from his current position to be president and CEO.

Kalon will be based out of A&M's National Center for Therapeutics Manufacturing and focus on helping researchers produce small amounts of vaccines and cancer therapeutics for clinical trials. Most therapeutics manufacturers only produce bulk amounts, making it difficult and expensive for researchers to test their discoveries, Strong said in an interview.

The system is investing $2.5 million into the company with hope that it will eventually be sold to the private sector.

Strong said he will officially leave the Office of General Counsel on June 1. Deputy General Counsel Scott Kelly is expected to oversee the office until a replacement is hired by the A&M System Board of Regents.

Kalon's success isn't specifically dependent on Bryan-College Station landing the project, officials said, but it would likely play a role if it does.

Multiple people familiar with the project say they hope the A&M System and the biotech corridor can be a unique selling point. A&M's prominent agriculture school can provide researchers and technology needed to grow plants used to make the vaccines. The College of Veterinary Medicine can assist in the testing of the therapeutics on animals. And the Health Science Center can provide medical expertise and talent.

Bryan and College Station city officials hope their low cost of living and high quality of life will be a draw. Bryan owns the 147-acre tract of land, some of which is in College Station, that would house the project. The two cities' mayors have been negotiating for months to reach an agreement in which they would share both the cost of providing infrastructure to the site and the new tax revenue that the project would bring to the area.
The College Station City Council approved that agreement last week, and the Bryan City Council is expected to do the same on Wednesday.

"I think this is a great opportunity for Bryan and College Station and the entire Brazos Valley," said Bryan City Councilwoman Ann Horton. "I think this can change the entire economic landscape of this area."

If the team lures the federal project to Brazos County, it would be by far the most lucrative investment made in the biotech corridor, which A&M System officials have been working to develop for years.

The corridor has largely been developed by Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives Brett Giroir, who has pushed A&M and the A&M System as ideal organizations to serve a growing need for fast and flexible therapeutics manufacturing in an age of deep concern about pandemic threats. Giroir, who is leading the effort to win the federal project, declined to comment for this article, saying that A&M System officials aren't ready to discuss the plans.