

UCPCOG CEDS 2024 Annual Update



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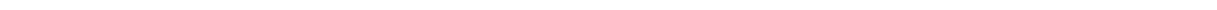
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SUMMARY

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a locally based, regionally driven economic development process and document that involves community leaders, private sector partners, and other stakeholders in planning and action for the future. The CEDS is crafted to identify regional and local priorities for economic, community, and human development. Every five years, UCPCOG comprehensively updates this plan for the region. The current CEDS delineates primary visions and strategies to advance the UCPCOG region from 2023 to 2027, alongside strategic initiatives and activities to fulfill these visions and strategies.

Following its adoption by the CEDS Advisory Committee and under the oversight of UCPCOG staff and the CEDS Strategy Development Group, the strategy is annually updated. This Annual Update primarily addresses the strategic initiatives and activities specified in the CEDS 2023–2027, emphasizing prioritization, progress, accountability, and the metrics to measure impact.

The CEDS 2023–2027 outlines three initiatives per vision, totaling nine initiatives, and consists of 91 strategic activities. During the 2024 CEDS Workshop, the Strategy Development Group collaborated with UCPCOG staff to prioritize activities and strategize methods to ensure the region's CEDS remains measurable, accountable, and data-driven, enabling the tracking of progress and outcomes.

The results of this workshop and partner input, updates to strategic activities, planned strategic activities and evaluation of the adopted CEDS 2023 - 2027, are encapsulated in the subsequent pages of this update. This 2024 update will be presented for adoption to the CEDS Advisory Board at the UCPCOG Board of Directors Meeting in October 2024.

PRIMARY VISIONS FOR CEDS 2023-2027

The CEDS 2023–2027 outlines three initiatives per vision, totaling nine initiatives, and consists of 91 strategic activities.

01 **Social Foundation**

Vision: All residents of the Upper Coastal Plain region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life.

02 **Education & Advancement**

Vision: The region enhances its capacity to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population.

03 **Thriving Economy**

Vision: Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region.

ADVANCING STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

Activities that are moving toward achievement.

1. Social Foundation

- WODA Cooper Housing Co., Downtown Wilson (Pender Crossing)
 - Strategy/Activity: Develop a 48-unit Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) project.
 - Status: Under Construction (open Fall, 2025)
 - Partners: City of Wilson, North Carolina Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA), TQUIST
- UCPCOG administered community development needs focusing on affordable housing, parks, and recreation using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding.
 - FY 23-24 CDBG grants: \$3,070,887 for projects in Conetoe, Gaston, Macclesfield, and Severn.
 - New Neighborhood Revitalization program enables upgrades to the community center and parks.
- UCPCOG, in partnership with Halifax County, administered Choanoke HOME Consortium for housing development in five counties.
- UCPCOG implemented a Regional Disaster Resilience program:
 - Disaster finance funding training for 55 county and municipal participants.
 - Local resilience planning for 10 local governments.
 - EV infrastructure needs analysis and evacuation corridor modeling.
 - Digitization of local government infrastructure maps for five municipalities.
 - Microgrid feasibility studies for two municipalities.
- UCPCOG, with Kerr-Tar and Central Pines Regional Council, completed the Tri-COG Food Ecosystem Economic Development Strategy (Tri-COG FEEDS):
 - Funded by EDA to provide a macro-level economic picture of the food landscape of the region, developed an inventory of existing food systems work, and compiled policy, program, and system development recommendations.
- Coordination support to the Just Foods Collaborative (UCPCOG).

- Coordinate the implementation of the Action Plan, including urban agriculture, support of childcare food access programs, community garden support, food policy training and more.

1. Education and Advancement

- The Down East Partnership for Children studied the need for overnight child and dependent care centers.
- Edgecombe County Public Schools are developing AI policies for more efficient use of time.
- Disaster Recovery Training hosted by UCPCOG on FEMA Public Assistance funds management.
- Area Agency on Aging launched a Purrfect Connections program using robotic pets for emotional support in exceptional children's classes.
- UCPCOG continued the Clean Fuels & Advanced Transportation program to promote alternative fuel vehicle technologies with NC State University.

1. Thriving Economy

- Natron Energy plans to build a \$1.4 billion sodium-ion battery facility in Edgecombe County, creating 1,062 jobs.
- Upper Coastal Plain Brownfields Coalition revitalizes contaminated properties through a \$1.1 million EPA grant in redevelopment and public health protection 85 million in economic redevelopment.
- UCPCOG provided water, sewer, storm water infrastructure assistance:
 - FY 23-24 new projects totaling approx. \$25.3 million.
 - UCPCOG is administering over \$109 million in water and wastewater projects for member governments.
- Urban & Community Forestry Program Development (UCPCOG)
 - Obtain grants for public tree assessment, maintenance, and planting to create tree equity and mitigate flood and heat in underserved communities.
 - Partners: NC Forest Service, UCPCOG Local Governments, Inflation Reduction Act, and U&CF grant
- Strategic Twin-Counties Education Partnership (STEP) (Subsidy program) in Nash County
 - Subsidize worker certifications and increase retention
 - Partners: Nash Community, NCPS, Down East Partnership
- Nash Community Workforce Skills Training (Nash Community, NCPS): Teach workforce skills to students

- Work and Play Initiative in Nash County (Nash Co. Economic Development, WRAL): Promotion for living, working, and thriving in Nash County
- Nash Co. Economic Development Childcare Feasibility Study
- YouTube Channel Promotion for New Business (Nash Co. Economic Development, Carolina Gateway, Nash Co. Communications Director)

Summary & Implications:

In summary, these initiatives are aimed at addressing housing, dependent care, digital inclusion, workforce training, and economic diversity to enhance community wealth, equity, and regional economic resilience. Related areas of interest might include regional economic development strategies, comprehensive zoning plans, and public-private housing partnerships.

CEDS's initiatives drive substantial community development, resilience planning, educational advancements, infrastructure improvements, and economic growth across its region. Focus on community-centric programs like housing, education, technological adoption, and disaster preparedness displays commitment to comprehensive regional enhancement. Topics of potential interest include sustainable funding models for public sector projects, best practices for community resilience, and advanced transportation infrastructure developments.

Key Points for Consideration:

- Digital inclusion and AI literacy remain critical and must be integrated across multiple visions and strategies.
- Needs for flexible and specific child care solutions highlight economic challenges in attracting and retaining residents.
- Sustainable community infrastructure, including the repurposing of old buildings and creating walkable, healthy environments, is essential.

Further Exploration:

- Best practices for implementing digital literacy programs.
 - Strategies for integrating flexible child care and eldercare services within community planning.
 - Examples of successful multi-use facility conversions and community engagement.
-

INITIATED STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

Planned activities that are in the beginning stages of advancement.

1. Social Foundation

- Regional Housing Study:
 - Seeking funding from NC Office of Recovery & Resilience.
 - Development of a regional housing task force.
- Choanoke HOME Consortium:
 - Expected to release its first round of applications in January.
 - Funding consideration for affordable housing development/homebuyer assistance in Halifax, Northampton, Bertie, Hertford, and Martin counties.

1. Education and Advancement

- Digital Champions: Digital Economy Training Effort:
 - Initiative to train job seekers across the 5-county region in Digital Literacy.
 - Goal to provide the first 575 graduates with refurbished devices.
 - Use of Northstar digital training platform.
 - Leadership and guidance from a regional Digital Literacy Coalition.
 - Digital Skills Credential: Working with the Turning Point Workforce Development Board to establish an employer-recognized credential.
- AI Policy Development:
 - Creation of an internal AI policy (UCPCOG).
 - Aim to develop a system usable by member governments.
- Childcare Needs Study:
 - Collaboration with the Down East Partnership for Children.
 - Assessment of second and third shift childcare needs, linked to the new battery plant at Kingsboro.
 - Consideration of elder care needs.
- Elder Care AI Study:

- The Area Agency on Aging studying AI applications to support elder care givers.

1. Thriving Economy

- Weldon Riverfront Park Development:
 - Seeking funding to develop the riverfront park.
 - Aims to attract visitors to the historic downtown from I-95.
- UCP Brownfields Coalition Funding:
 - Planning to seek additional funding from the EPA.
 - Application deadline in November 2024.

New Areas of Interest:

Activities reflect a multi-faceted approach to regional development, focusing on housing, digital literacy, workforce advancement, childcare and elder care, economic revitalization, and environmental resilience. Suggested areas for further exploration could include detailed AI policy and implementation strategies, community engagement methodologies for task force developments, and funding mechanisms for regional infrastructure projects.

MEASURING PROGRESS

During the 2024 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Workshop, the applicability of [Results Based Accountability \(RBA\)](#) for CEDS was a primary focus. Participants, from the Strategy Development Group, agreed that RBA is a robust tool for tracking metrics, coordinating with partner agencies, and demonstrating our regional collective impact. UCPCOG staff acknowledges the necessity of monitoring and potentially adjusting current performance measures, especially the strategies already articulated, as part of the RBA development process. [Scorecard](#) is an all-in-one performance tracking software that helps track performance of programs, develop improvement strategies, evaluates impact of funding, and reports the success of our mission to community stakeholders. The implementation of Scorecard under RBA will streamline our performance tracking and demonstrate our commitment to transparent and effective regional economic development.

RBA will help facilitate:

Data Integration: Using the RBA Scorecard to facilitate data sharing and comparison of annual metrics against baseline data, highlighting regional economic development trends.

Transparency: Enhanced transparency in how regional partners' collective efforts contribute to overall regional advancement.

Regular Updates: Emphasis on the importance of regular updates and technological use to improve accountability and track progress effectively.

Collaborative Customization: The importance of customizing RBA in collaboration with partner agencies to maximize its effectiveness for tracking CEDS metrics.

Additional Considerations:

To further refine our approach, we should consider:

- **Data Governance:** Developing robust data governance strategies.
- **Metric Examples:** Identifying specific metrics for economic strategies.
- **Advanced Analytics:** Integrating advanced analytics tools for deeper insights.

Reactions from the Strategy Development Group:

“Yes, great way to track CEDS metrics and coordinate with partner agencies!”

“It sounds like the plan is on the right track with Results Based Accountability.”



NEXT STEPS

Where do we go from here?

01

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has agreed to fund UCPCOG with the unlimited use of Scorecard, along with technical assistance, for the COG and its partners through the Duke Endowment for at least 2 years.

02

The EDA continues to support UCPCOG Counties, with funding opportunities. Concrete steps should be taken to secure funding and local government buy-in for priority strategic initiatives identified at the CEDS Workshop.

03

Continue to build community engagement and capacity through Public-Private Partnerships amplification, fostering stronger collaborations among UCPCOG, municipal staff, private partners, and community organizations to maximize initiative outcomes.

Empowering communities with innovation and collaboration, we chart a future where resilience meets opportunity, paving the way for the Upper Coastal Plain to thrive with purpose and prosperity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We appreciate all who joined us for the 2024 CEDS Workshop and who have continued the work of the CEDS in their communities throughout the year.

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to the CEDS.

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