



2023-2028

Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Executive Summary 3

About TARCOG

Introduction 6

About TARCOG
What is a CEDS?
How to Use This CEDS
Process and Plan Development

SWOT Analysis 10

Strengths
Weaknesses
Opportunities
Threats

Stakeholder Survey 16

Key Themes

Strategic Framework 22

Regional Economic Vision
Tourism and Recreation
Education and Workforce
Business Development
Resilient Growth
Equitable Health and Wellness

Summary Background 36

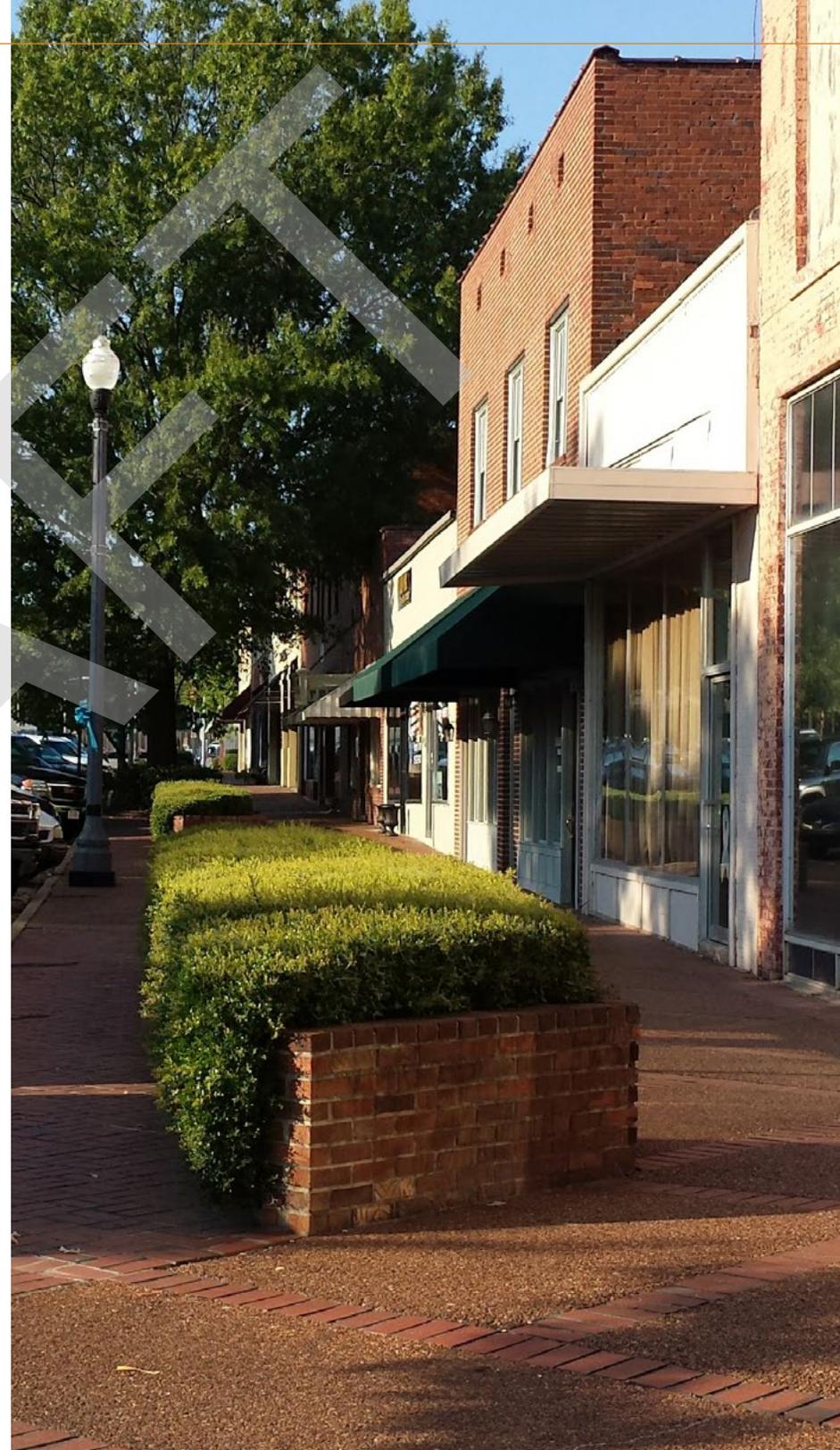
Geography
Natural Assets
Cultural and Tourism Assets
Infrastructure Overview

Opportunity Zones

Economic & Environmental Resilience

Community Profiles 43

Appendix 52



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About TARCOG

Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) serves as Sub-State Planning District Twelve and the Area Agency on Aging. The governments of five northeast Alabama counties: DeKalb, Jackson, Limestone, Madison, and Marshall, and the municipalities located in these counties make up TARCOG.

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a unified, regionally focused action plan that provides a framework for an area's economic growth and community development. A diverse working group of local representatives from private, public, and nonprofit sectors, developed this CEDS to identify regional opportunities and align stakeholder priorities to actualize goals and strategies. The TARCOG CEDS addresses the five main elements of a CEDS, including: Summary Background, SWOT Analysis, Strategic Direction, Evaluation Framework, and Economic Resilience.

The Summary Background provides information about the current economic conditions across the region. This section delivers context such as geography, natural assets, cultural assets, infrastructure, demographics, key industries, and employment. TARCOG was intentional in providing further context through equity indicators.

In June of 2022, stakeholders across the TARCOG region convened to identify the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (**SWOT**). The TARCOG CEDS details the results of the SWOT analysis. The key themes are outlined below:



STRENGTHS

- » Natural Beauty and Biodiversity
- » Growing Population
- » Diverse and Growing Industry
- » Presence of Educational Institutions
- » Affordability



WEAKNESSES

- » Aging Infrastructure
- » Limited Transit Options
- » Disorganized Development Patterns
- » Tax Revenue and Financing



OPPORTUNITIES

- » Emerging Arts Sector
- » Collaborative Regional Planning
- » Tourism and Recreation



THREATS

- » Public Perception
- » Urban Rural Divide
- » Unmanaged Growth
- » Environmental Degradation

The Strategic Direction for the TARCOG CEDS includes the economic development vision, focus areas, goals, and objectives for the region. It also contains a set of action steps to achieve the vision and goals and implement the strategies. The Strategic Direction was informed by the Summary Background information, the results of the SWOT analysis, and input from regional stakeholders.

Goal: Promote Regional Tourism & Recreation Features

- » Strengthen the Regional Brand
- » Enhance Business Services and Support for Arts, Culture, and Tourism Related Businesses
- » Increase Funding Opportunities for Arts, Culture, and Tourism Related Businesses
- » Work with Regional Communities to Create Healthier and More Vibrant Public Places
- » Prioritize the Conservation of Natural Assets and Preservation of Historic Assets

Goal: Promote Collaboration Between Local Higher Education Institutions & Leading Industries

- » Expand and Enhance Work-Based Learning Opportunities
- » Focus on Meeting the Needs of Regional Emerging Industries
- » Build Better Community Connections for University and Technical Training Students
- » Increase Pathways for Life-Long Learning and Upskilling

Goal: Foster & Maintain an Economically Competitive Region

- » Prioritize Business Retention and Expansion Outreach Programs
- » Develop a Regional Business Attraction Strategy
- » Cultivate an Environment that Fosters Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Goal: Promote Regional Collaboration Through Intentional Growth Strategies

- » Analyze Housing Market and Gaps in Workforce Housing
- » Pursue Opportunities to Invest in Infrastructure
- » Evaluate Existing Land Use Policy
- » Support Communities in Green Infrastructure Developments and Strategies
- » Establish Environmentally Sustainable Practices Across Regional Industries

Goal: Ensure Equitable Access to regional Health & Wellness Amenities

- » Advocate for Equitable Access to Healthcare
- » Advocate for Affordable and Accessible Childcare Services
- » Identify and Plan to Address Food Insecurity
- » Assist in the Implementation of Preventative Crime Reduction Strategies
- » Expand and Improve Services for Vulnerable Populations
- » Build Health Equity into Long-Term Planning

An Evaluation Framework was developed to guide implementation of these strategies. It outlines key partners, action steps, metrics, and funding sources. On an annual basis, TARCOG will use the evaluation framework to gauge success toward the region's goals and submit a CEDS Annual Performance Report to the EDA. The strategies and implementation plans may be updated as needed.

Economic Resilience is an important consideration for the TARCOG region as it looks to leverage environmental assets to promote tourism and recreation opportunities, ensure economic diversification, and continue to grow the region's economy in alignment with sustainability best practices. Disaster recovery and mitigation, industry diversification, land use efficiencies, infrastructure improvements, and more are considered when planning for a resilient region.

Summary

The TARCOG CEDS outlines an approach to cultivate a collaborative, competitive, vibrant, and resilient region. TARCOG will continue to provide leadership for region's annual CEDS as required by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration to qualify for its assistance programs.

DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

About TARCOG

Established by a local initiative in 1968, the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) aims to identify and address common regional issues, opportunities, and challenges of Northeast Alabama’s municipalities and counties. TARCOG serves as Sub-State Planning District Twelve and the Area Agency on Aging. The governments of five northeast Alabama counties: DeKalb, Jackson, Limestone, Madison, and Marshall, and the municipalities located in these counties make up the TARCOG region. TARCOG helps local governments by obtaining funding for local government assistance, coordinating local governments’ responses to regional issues, and providing a wide range of services to the region’s governments and residents. This document was prepared and designed by the TARCOG Department of Planning and Economic Development.

Department of Planning and Economic Development

Michelle G. Jordan, FAICP.....Executive Director
Sara James.....Director of Economic Development & Regional Planning
Leslie Wright..... Economic Development Specialist
Phoenix Robinson.....Principal Planner
James King.....Associate Planner
Marley Hicks.....Community Development Specialist
Del Schafer.....Grant Administrator

What is a CEDS?

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a unified, regionally focused action plan that provides a framework for an area’s economic growth and community development. The CEDS serves as an economic blueprint for the region and establishes a process to help create jobs, foster more stable and diversified economies, and improve living conditions. It is a continuous planning process that addresses the economic challenges and opportunities of an area. It provides measurable objectives to strengthen economies through regional strategies which focus on economic and workforce development, quality of life, transportation, and other vital infrastructure.

The following sections form the basis for the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Outlined by the Economic Development Administration, this CEDS will include:

- Summary Background** of the region’s economic conditions and demographics
- SWOT Analysis** to identify the region’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
- Strategic Direction** to incorporate tactics identified through the planning process, other plans, and stakeholder feedback to develop the priority strategies for the region
- Evaluation Framework** to identify and monitor performance measures associated with the plan.
- Economic Resilience** to assess and develop strategies for improving the region’s ability to prepare for and respond to economic shocks.

How to Use This CEDS

The purpose of this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is to plan a coordinated approach to the economic development of the region. More broadly, its purpose is to promote the overall economic prosperity of the area and its people while assuring the livability of its communities and the enduring quality of the environment that is so valued by the people who live here. More specifically, the purposes of this Strategy are to:

- » Bring together the public and private sectors to create an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen the regional economy and facilitate networks for partnership.
- » Relate the region's initiatives to the distinct competitive advantages that make it attractive for business and industry growth and retention.
- » Work together to leverage the regional strengths and resources in a holistic manner to maximize economic opportunities that would benefit the entire region.
- » Define the role of the region in encouraging job retention, growth, and economic prosperity, particularly in relation to the broadening of job opportunities, stimulating private investment, and balancing the regional economy; and
- » Foster a regional identity to not only encourage greater economic opportunity, but to strengthen community and commitment to place.

Process and Plan Development

The core project team, a diverse working group of local representatives from private, public, and nonprofit sectors, developed the CEDS to identify regional opportunities and align stakeholder priorities to actualize the community's goals and strategies. This working group will build on local partnerships to implement the action plan and meet performance measures for economic and community development at the regional, state, and federal levels.

Further, this CEDS was developed with regional collaboration in mind. In addition to regional data and document review, stakeholders from across the region convened to identify regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. These insights were used to develop the strategic framework intended to steer regional economic development efforts for the next five years. The effort began in spring 2022, with the three stakeholder engagement sessions taking place in June 2022. Participants in these sessions were asked to provide input into the CEDS SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) process and share insights to inform the plan's strategic framework.

TARCOG will continue to provide leadership for region's annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) as required by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration to qualify for its assistance programs. All input from stakeholder meetings were included in this 2023 CEDS document, which was then submitted for a thirty-day public review and comment period. Ultimately, this document represents TARCOG's effort to provide a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the five-county region.

THE BANK BUILDING



DRAFT

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT ANALYSIS

In June of 2022, stakeholders across the TARCOG region were invited to participate in in-person sessions focused on identifying the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Three sessions were held over the course of two days, and participants were divided into several groups and asked to identify their top five items in each category. Items were discussed in the larger groups, and all items were noted. Most commonly referenced ideas and themes were compiled to create the final SWOT, which is meant to represent assets celebrated and concerns held across the region.

Items were coded and categorized, with results being used to inform the strategic framework's focus areas and the design of the stakeholder survey.



Strengths

Natural Beauty and Biodiversity

The TARCOG region contains areas that are among the most biodiverse in the western hemisphere, with the Tennessee River and Lake Guntersville providing not only beautiful natural features but important economic assets in the form of cargo shipping, outdoor recreation, valuable real estate, etc. These assets provide the foundation for tourism and recreation opportunities in the region.

Growing Population

Population in the TARCOG Region grew by nearly 17% from 2000 to 2010 and is estimated to have grown an additional 5.2% from 2010 to 2016. This growth is primarily occurring in Madison County, although most counties have experienced a more tempered growth.

Diverse and Growing Industry

Home to Redstone Arsenal & NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, Huntsville Alabama has earned the nickname "Rocket City." These anchors draw residents from across the U.S., provide high-paying jobs, and contribute to the cultural landscape of the region. Cummings Research Park is located in Huntsville and houses Fortune 500 Companies, educational institutions, and other economic anchors. Mazda and Toyota operate a joint manufacturing plant, an example of the innovation occurring in the region.

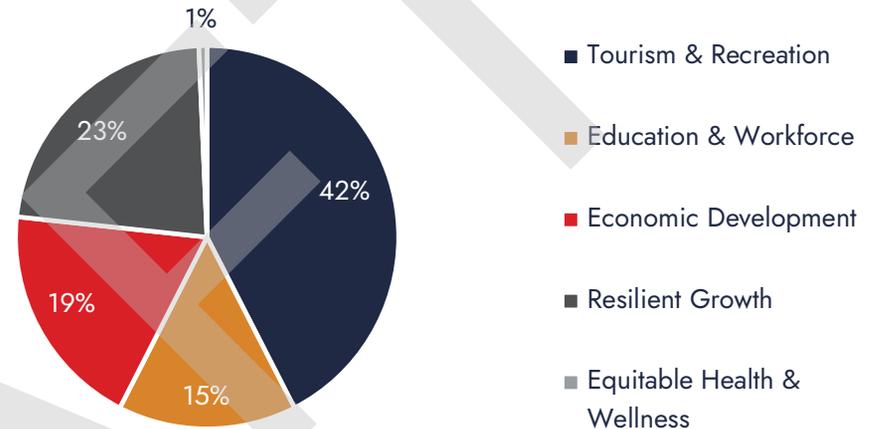
Presence of Educational Institutions

The TARCOG Region contains four 4-year institutions and a four 2-year institutions. These colleges and universities, along with the jobs available in the region, contribute to education rates that are higher than the State of Alabama. In the TARCOG Region, 33% of residents have a bachelor's degree, compared to only 26% in the state of Alabama.

Affordability

Cost of living in the TARCOG Region remains low relative to the State of Alabama, with the living wage in every county lower than the state figure of \$15.91. This could be an important draw for those wishing to relocate to an area with an established outdoor recreation and/or employment opportunities with established firms at a lower cost.

STRENGTHS



Weaknesses

Aging Infrastructure

Stakeholders reported that infrastructure in the region is aging and potentially unable to keep pace with a growing population. Wear & tear on roads, bridges, utility systems, and other public infrastructure contributes to inefficiencies and frustrations.

Limited Transit Options

Although there is a bus system in Huntsville, stakeholders shared that effectively navigating daily life in the region largely relied on access to a personal automobile. This, combined with the sprawling nature of the region’s urban center and the rural nature of the surrounding counties, stands in contrast to environmental preservation and quality of life goals that will be important for the region’s success.

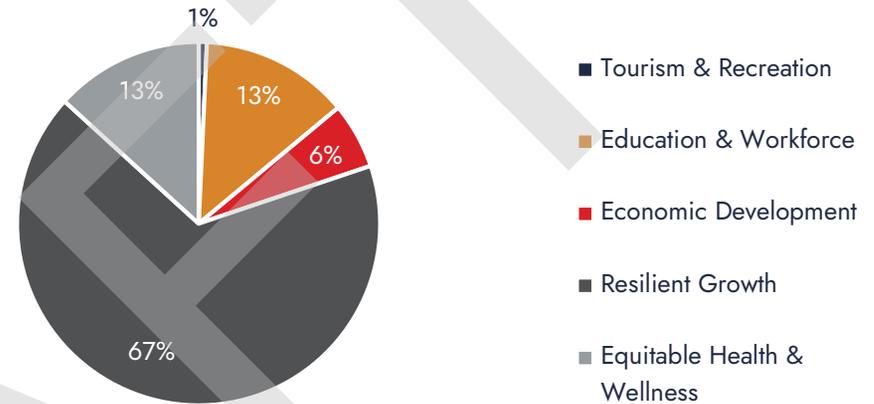
Disorganized Development Patterns

Stakeholders shared concerns that the region’s ongoing growth and development lacked a cohesive or organized strategy and could lead to sprawling and disorganized development patterns that produce fragmented neighborhoods, reliance on cars, and inefficient provision of public goods and services.

Tax Revenue and Financing

Nearly 60% of Huntsville’s revenue comes from Sales and Use tax, with the 21% coming from Ad Valorem taxes mostly allocated towards schools and public infrastructure. This means that in the event of an economic downturn, the city is at a much higher risk of being affected by a decline in consumer purchasing than if their revenue came from a more stable source.

WEAKNESSES



Opportunities

Emerging Arts Sector

The region is home to a growing arts and culture sector that could be leveraged to attract those less inclined to the region's science & technology base or improve quality of life for existing residents.

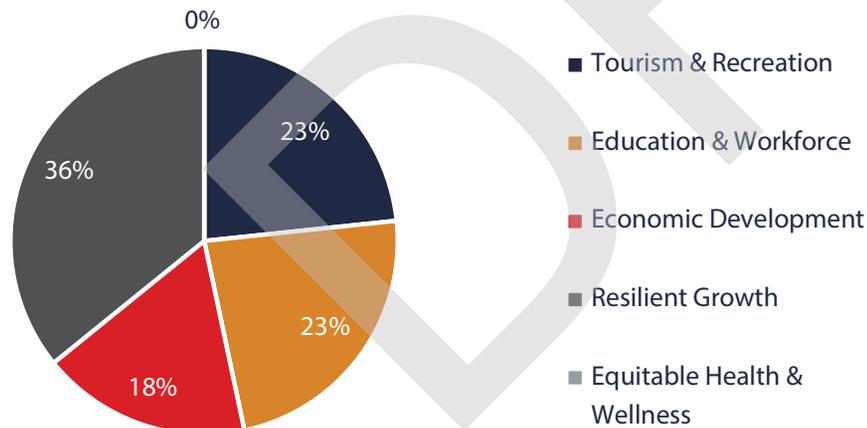
Collaborative Regional Planning

Given the varied assets among TARCOG counties, collaborative regional planning was seen as an opportunity to develop mutually beneficial strategies. Rural counties in the region want to leverage Huntsville's growth for additional economic investment, and those in Huntsville want to leverage the region's natural resources, workforce, developable land, and educational facilities to continue to grow as one of the State's primary metros.

Tourism and Recreation

The TARCOG region's natural assets can be leveraged to promote the region as a hub for outdoor recreation. With trail projects, state parks, waterways, and nature preserves, tourism could be a major draw to the region and an important piece of the region's growth.

OPPORTUNITIES



Threats

Public Perception

Stakeholders, primarily in Huntsville, felt that despite significant economic growth, the region is limited by perceptions of Alabama held by the rest of the nation. Stakeholders worry that this perception of Alabama as unprogressive may prevent those looking for a more socially and politically progressive place to call home from relocating to the region.

Urban Rural Divide

As Huntsville has experienced significant growth in the past decade, the divide between urban and rural parts of the TARCOG region has become more pronounced. Different development patterns, tax bases, demographics, etc. may strain relationships between local governments and damage feelings of unity throughout the region.

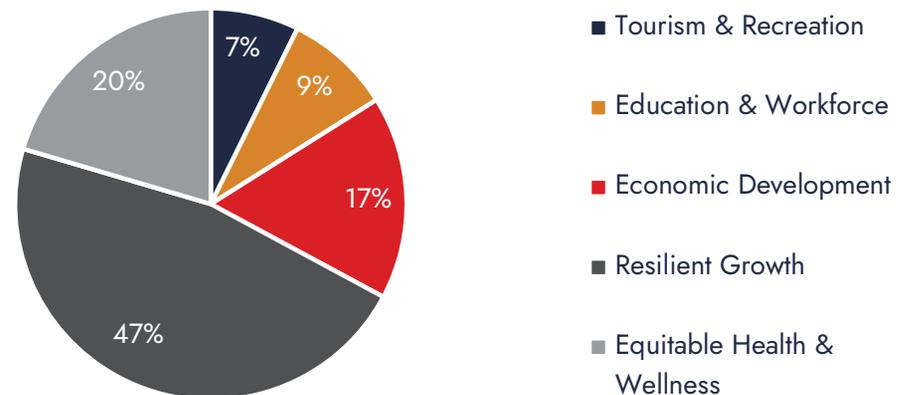
Unmanaged Growth

Stakeholders expressed concern that Huntsville's growth trajectory, if not thoughtfully planned, could lead to sprawl and urban design not conducive to efficient provision of public goods or preservation of the region's environmental assets.

Environmental Degradation

Protecting the TARCOG Region's impressive biodiversity is an ongoing concern. The region is home to 18 endangered species and has experienced drought in recent years that, if continued, could threaten the dense oak-hickory and oak-pine forests that the region's tourism and recreation aspirations depend on.

THREATS





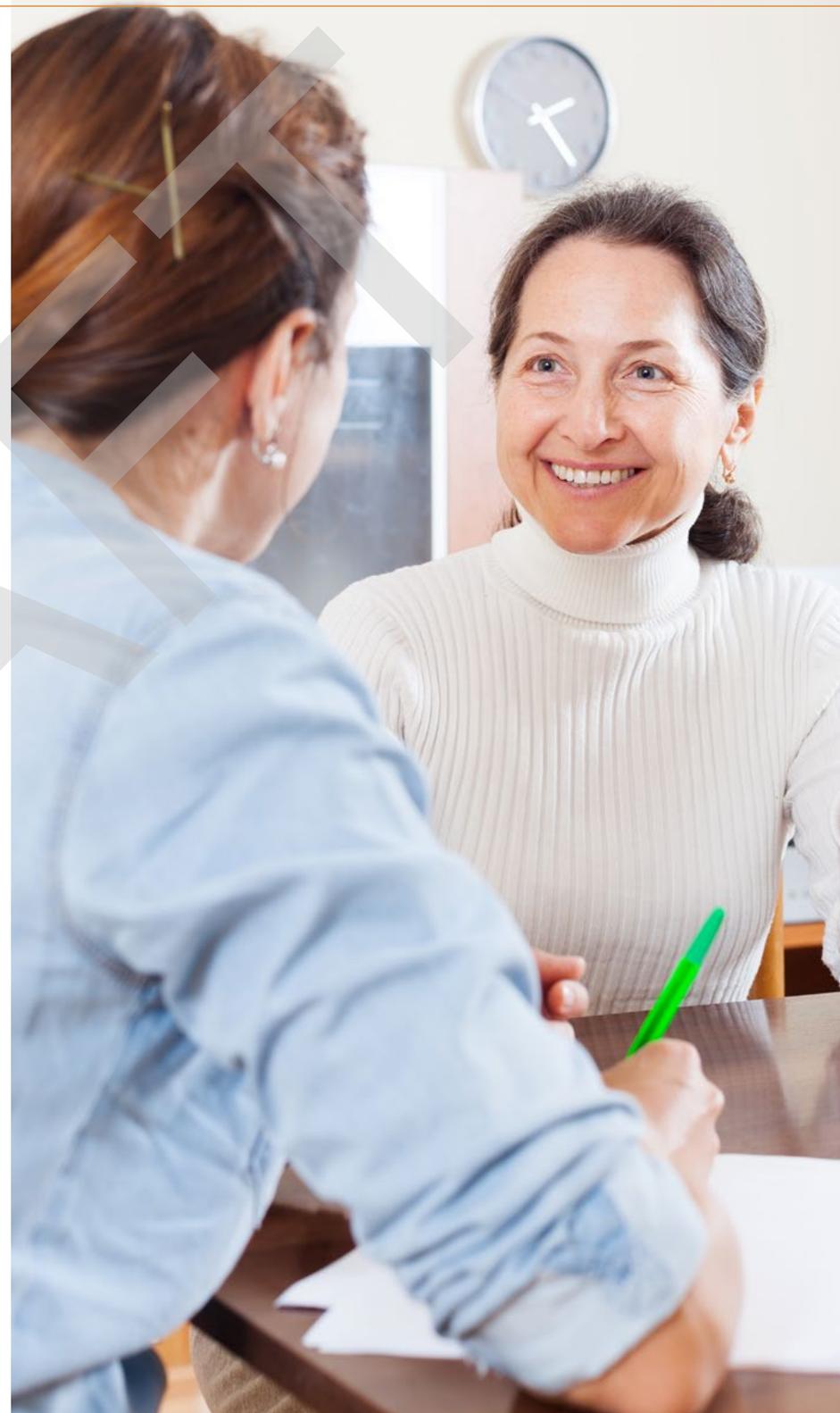
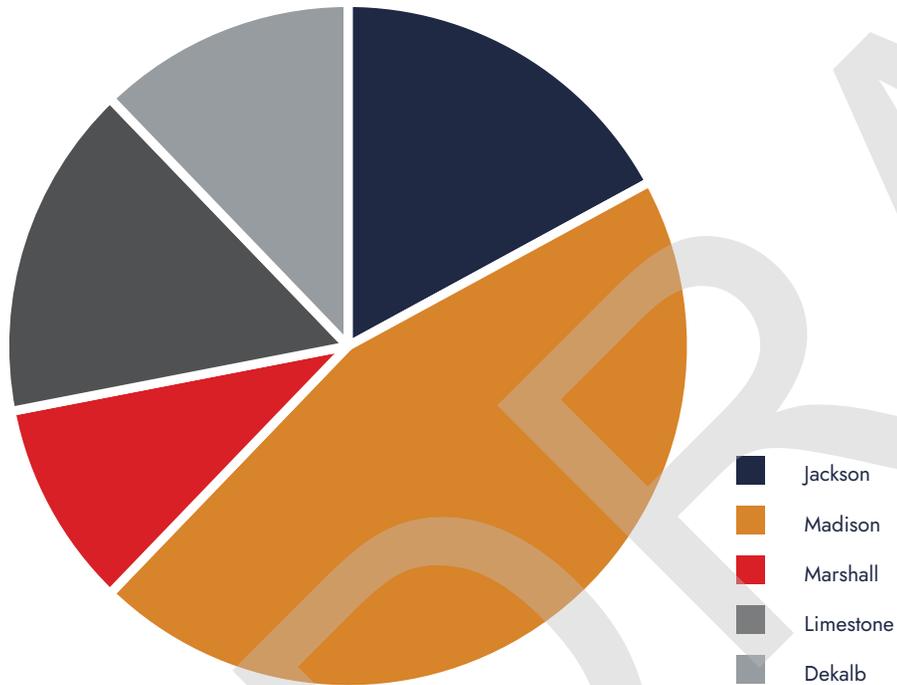
DRAFT

**STAKEHOLDER
SURVEY**

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

Following stakeholder engagement SWOT sessions, TARCOG residents and community partners were given the opportunity to participate in a survey to continue to probe key themes that emerged during the engagement. The survey was open and promoted for a limited time, during which 82 TARCOG residents participated. Participants represented every county, with 45% of respondents living in Madison County and representation from other counties ranging from 10%-17%.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY COUNTY

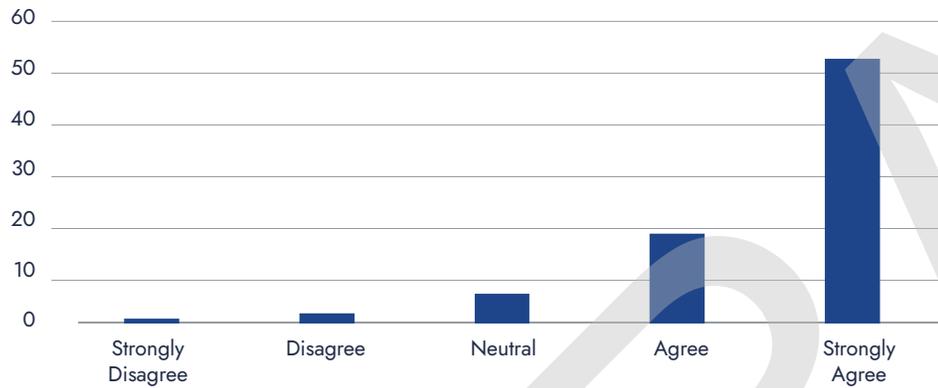


Key Themes

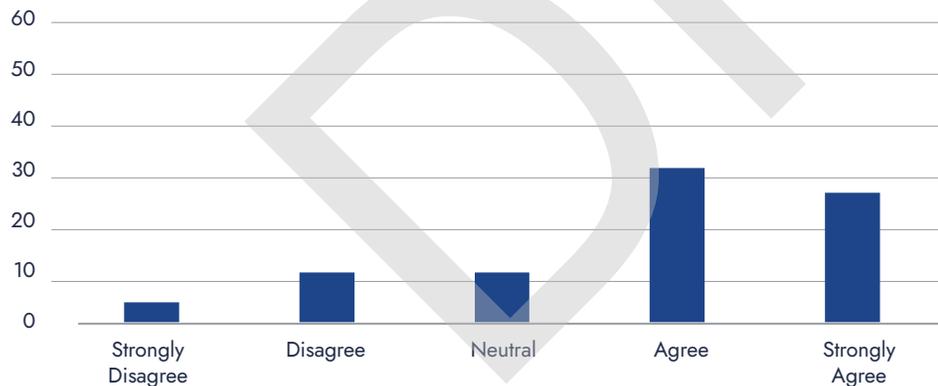
Strong Tourism and Recreation Assets

Questions regarding the region’s natural assets and access to culture and amenities elicited the most uniformly positive responses. Participants feel that their communities offer strong options for recreation and enjoy attending events in their communities.

I ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO VISIT OUR REGION.



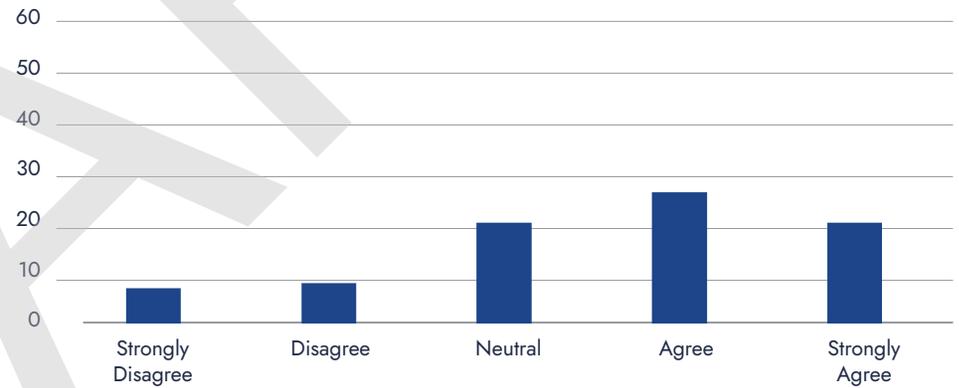
THERE ARE LOTS OF EVENTS AND AMENITIES IN MY COMMUNITY THAT I ENJOY



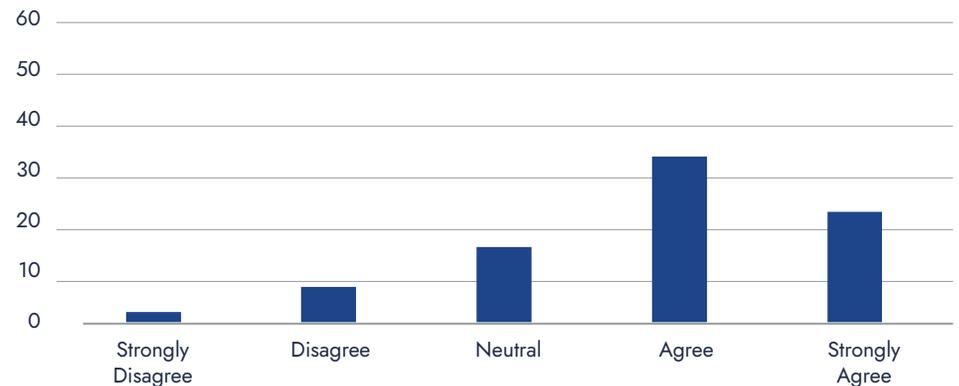
Positive Perceptions of Higher Education & Workforce Systems

Respondents perceive efficient collaboration between higher education institutions and industry in the region. Respondents also tended to feel that jobs in their community provided opportunities for advancement. These attitudes may support recommendations to expand collaborative career pathways between industry and higher education.

THE JOBS AVAILABLE IN MY COMMUNITY PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE



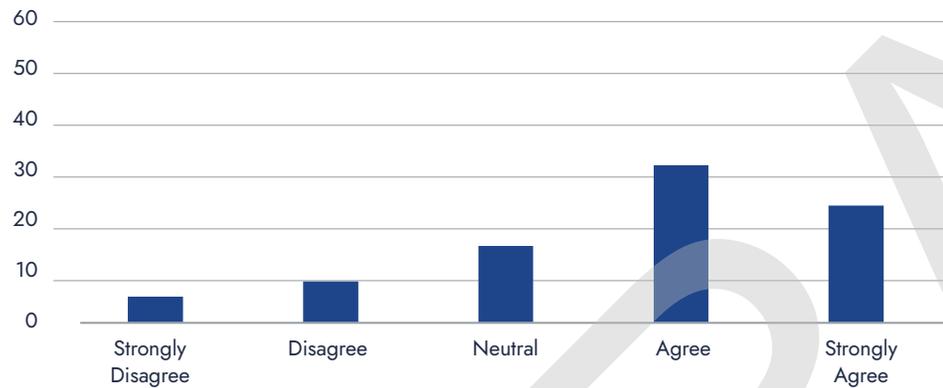
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS & TRAINING PROVIDERS COLLABORATE WITH BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRY IN OUR REGION.



Opportunities for Entrepreneurship and Business Attraction

Respondents tended to feel that their communities were attractive and desirable locations for new businesses to establish themselves and experience high rates of growth. This perception of a welcoming and friendly business environment may be used to support recommendations for business attraction and small business support programming.

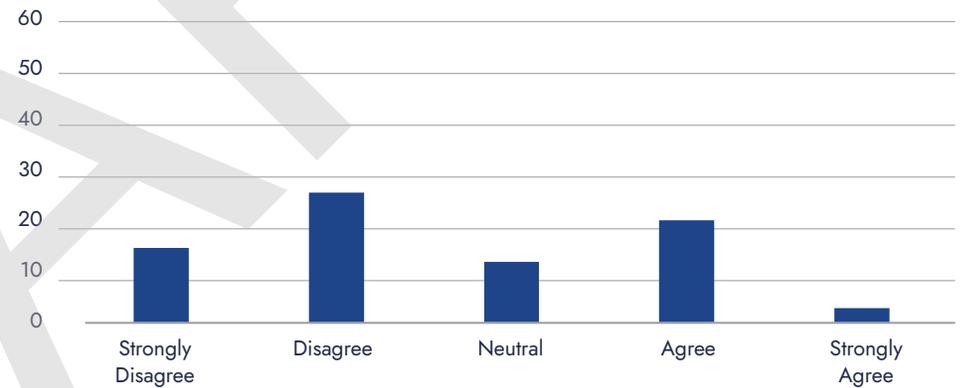
I BELIEVE NEW AND EXISTING BUSINESSES ARE RAPIDLY GROWING IN MY COMMUNITY



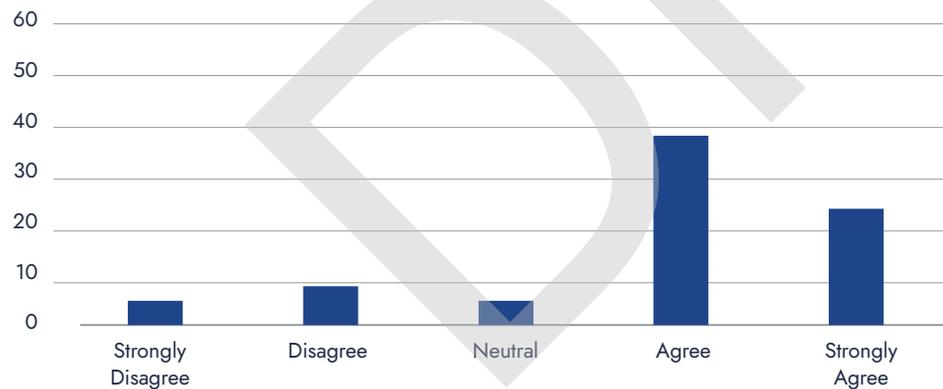
Public Infrastructure Concerns

Some respondents felt that public infrastructure in their communities is inadequate, and most believe that there is not access to public transportation in their communities. These responses may be used to support recommendations to improve transportation infrastructure or public infrastructure more broadly.

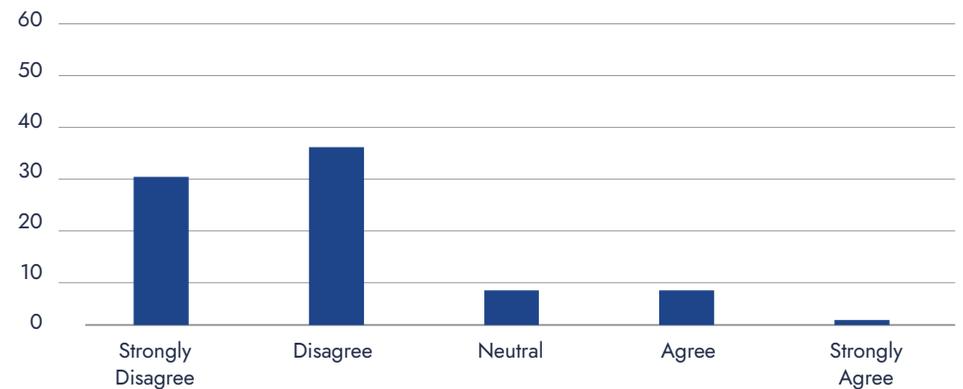
MY COMMUNITY HAS SUFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE (ROADS, WATER ACCESS, SIDEWALKS).



MY COMMUNITY IS AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE FOR NEW AND EXISTING BUSINESSES.



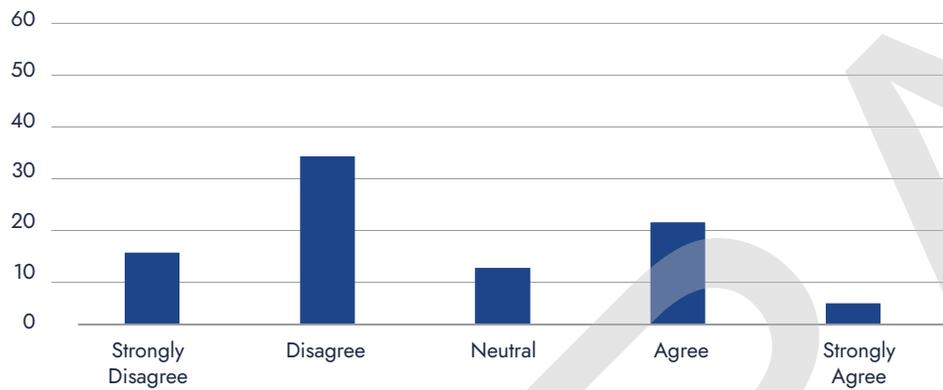
MY COMMUNITY HAS ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS.



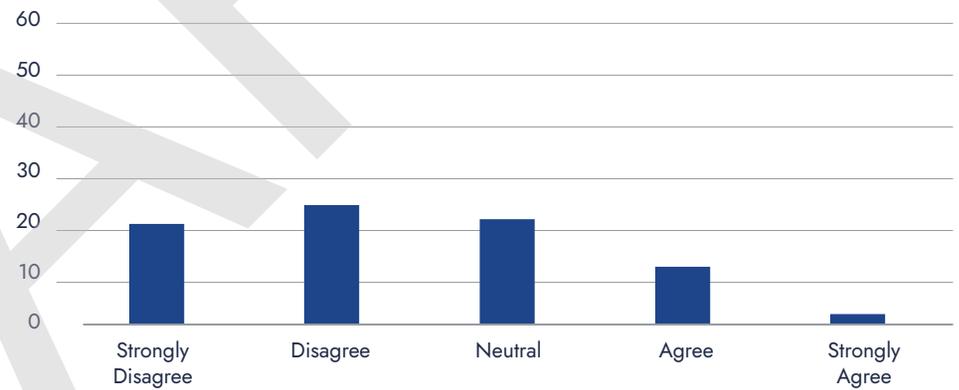
Resource Gaps for Low-Income Populations

Many respondents felt that low-income members of their communities may not be able to access housing or healthcare resources, and that health outcomes and individual wellbeing of those in poverty may suffer. These responses may be used to support additional programming for low-income populations or members of marginalized groups.

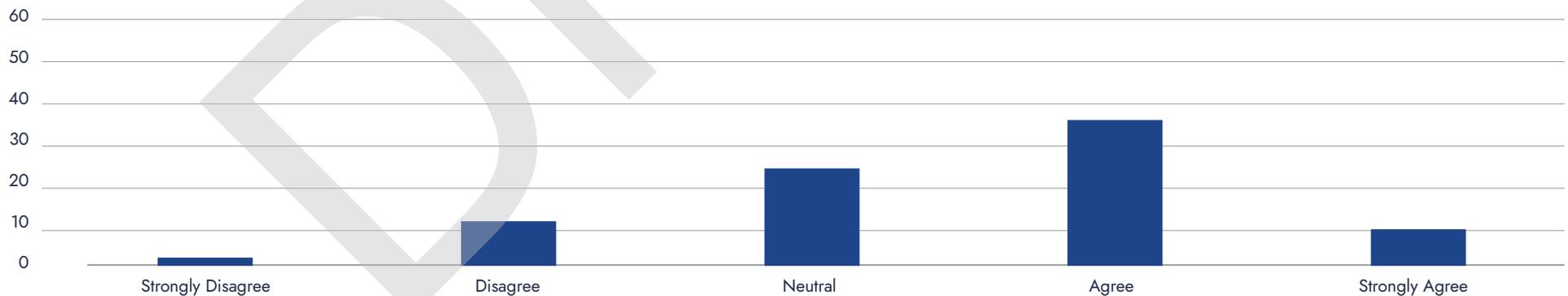
THERE ARE ADEQUATE HOUSING OPTIONS (IN VARIOUS PRICE RANGES) IN MY COMMUNITY



MEMBERS OF MY COMMUNITY HAVE ADEQUATE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND RESOURCES.



POVERTY IS A KEY THREAT TO THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF MY COMMUNITY MEMBERS.





DRAFT

**STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK**

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Framework for the TARCOG CEDS includes the economic development vision, focus areas, goals, and objectives for the region. It also contains a set of action steps to achieve the vision and goals and implement the strategies. The Strategic Framework was informed by the Summary Background information, the results of the SWOT analysis, and input from regional stakeholders.

Regional Economic Vision

“The TARCOG region envisions a collaborative economic environment in which existing and emerging industries are supported by a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem, sustainable infrastructure, and an innovative educational system, while prioritizing investment in the unique natural, built, and cultural assets that make Northeast Alabama healthy, vibrant, and attractive to residents, tourists, and talent.”





ANALYTICS SUMMARY

Estimated Upscale Revenue	25 : 1
Target of new customers Sales Potential	
Opportunities	2172
Negotiations	274
Proposal	252
Signed Contracts	175
	876

CHARTS & DETAILED



Sales department



Tourism and Recreation

Prior to COVID-19, the travel and tourism industry was a significant economic driver in the state of Alabama. It is estimated by the United States Travel Association that travelers were spending a combined \$11.6 billion dollars while visiting the state. This spending directly supported over 90,000 jobs, representing 5.6% of the state's total private sector employment. While this economic activity was negatively impacted during the height of pandemic, the travel and tourism industry in Alabama has rebounded at an exponential growth rate. The Alabama Tourism Department estimates that over 28.2 million people visited the state of Alabama during 2021, generating over \$19 billion in spending.

Given the state's prowess in the travel and tourism industry, and the rich natural resources, outdoor recreation opportunities, retail establishments, and cultural amenities across the TARCOG region, the project team encourages leadership at TARCOG to allocate resources to promote tourism and outdoor recreation across the six-county region.

The rich natural resources of the region provide a multitude of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Whether it's fishing, hunting, golf, watersports, hiking, or biking, TARCOG leaders and appropriate partners should leverage these assets and opportunities to generate increased economic activity. Additionally, the cultural, historical, retail, and accommodation assets contribute to and complement this growing industry sector and should serve as a core focus of future economic development strategy.

To better promote the regional tourism and outdoor recreation economy, the TARCOG team can implement several strategies. First, TARCOG should work with appropriate partners, including regional tourism organizations, to strengthen the regional brand and develop corresponding marketing campaigns. Further, TARCOG should work with and support regional partners to provide enhanced business services and increase funding opportunities for arts, culture, and tourism related businesses. Lastly, TARCOG should ensure the conservation of natural assets across the region and ensure preservation of historic assets in unique communities across the TARCOG footprint.

Strategies:

- » Strengthen the Regional Brand
- » Enhance Business Services and Support for Arts, Culture, and Tourism Related Businesses
- » Increase Funding Opportunities for Arts, Culture, and Tourism Related Businesses
- » Work with Regional Communities to Create Healthier and More Vibrant Public Places
- » Prioritize the Conservation of Natural Assets and Preservation of Historic Assets

Best Practices:

Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR)

SOAR is a regional nonpartisan nonprofit that champions local projects, programs, and advocacy for counties in Eastern Kentucky. SOAR works with regional chambers, parks, tourism boards, and nonprofits to draw residents and visitors alike to enjoy everything the region has to offer.

Funding Opportunities:

Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP)

The Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) offers grants with a one-to-one dollar match to assist in exploring new market opportunities for U.S. food and agricultural products, and to encourage research and innovation aimed at improving the efficiency and performance of the marketing system.

Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs | Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

The RTP provides grant assistance to State and Federal agencies and local units of government for the acquisition and/or development/improvement of recreational trails and trail related resources. Examples of eligible trail types include but are not limited to walking, jogging, cycling, skating, mountain biking, hiking, backpacking, off-highway vehicle, and equestrian.

Alabama Historical Commission

The Alabama Historical Commissions works to accomplish their mission through two fields of endeavor: preservation and promotion of state-owned historic sites as public attractions; and statewide programs to assist people, groups, towns, and cities with local preservation activities.

TOURISM & RECREATION



Goal:
Promote Regional Tourism & Recreation Features



Partners/Champions:
Singing River Trail, Local tourism boards & CVBs, Alabama Cooperative Extension, Regional small businesses, Regional economic development agencies, AIDT, Regional Small Business Development Centers

Objectives	Action Items	Timeline	Metrics for Success
Strengthen the Regional Brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Use findings from regional planning efforts to better understand the perspective and perception of the region from residents and outsiders » Increase collaboration between economic development and tourism related entities across the region » Establish a regional vision and corresponding marketing strategy to promote tourism related assets to both regional residents and potential visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ensure that the region is identified and contextualized geographically » Work with appropriate partners to develop branding and messaging to address reputational challenges 	Short (1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased number of visitors to regional attractions and amenities » Description of expanded regional social media presence » Number of events or meetings held between tourism & economic development stakeholders » Marketing strategy deliverable
Enhance Business Services and Support for Arts, Culture, and Tourism Related Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » To better understand their needs, focus business retention and expansion outreach and assistance efforts on small businesses engaged in arts, culture, and tourism related business » With appropriate partners, develop a strategy to better promote and market rural-based arts, culture, and tourism-based businesses in the region 	Medium (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Business outreach summary including listing of networking events, educational events, relevant survey results, marketing materials, business visits, or other efforts » Small business promotion strategy or marketing materials
Increase Funding Opportunities for Arts, Culture, and Tourism Related Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Work with regional partners to increase the access to capital for arts, culture, and tourism related businesses » Collaborate with SBDC's, Universities, and other business support organizations to assist small and emerging businesses engaged in arts, culture, and tourism related enterprises » Collaborate across the region to identify funding and incentive sources (federal, state, local, philanthropic, and other) to enhance arts, culture, and tourism related infrastructure, programming, and other resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Compile opportunities into a database for potential recipients 	Medium (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of businesses applying for funding and incentives related to arts, culture, & tourism » Database deliverable
Work with Regional Communities to Create Healthier and More Vibrant Public Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Allocate resources to enhance public spaces, public gathering spaces, multi-modal pathways, public art, public parks, and community events » Research best practices that connect rural food producers and increase the access and knowledge of locally grown food ecosystems » Engage regional farmers, producers, and business owners about the possibility of a rural food trail » Review existing community assets and infrastructure to assess current accessibility for disadvantaged and disabled populations 	Long (4-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Description of resources allocated to enhance public spaces » Rural food trail effort summary » Infrastructure and accessibility review deliverable
Prioritize the Conservation of Natural Assets and Preservation of Historic Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Utilize the AEMA Division F Hazard Mitigation Plan to understand targeted areas for conservation » Work with local partners to develop, review, or update historic property preservation plans 	Short (1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Summary of efforts to expand and improve protection of natural and historic assets » Map/catalogue of historic assets » Hazard Mitigation Plan updates

Education and Workforce

A qualified and skilled workforce is the lifeblood of any prosperous regional economy. To foster a pipeline of talent that meets the needs of 21st century industry, TARCOG needs to recognize and collaborate with appropriate partners to meet that need. One area of focus should be on collaboration with regional institutions of higher education. Higher-ed institutions are vital resources for economic competitiveness. Beyond education and talent cultivation, universities drive innovation, which drives the next generation of businesses and job opportunities.

Luckily, the TARCOG region has no shortage of higher educational institutions. The region is abundant in options for residents, including 4-year public institutions, community colleges, technical colleges, and non-profit independent institutions. Notably, the Alabama Community College system is a well-known pacesetter in workforce training in technical skills and trades. Analysis indicates these institutions have had a positive impact on current residents, as data presented earlier demonstrates the region holds higher levels of educational attainment than the rest of the state of Alabama.

To enhance collaboration between regional economic development organizations, institutions of higher learning, and leading industries, TARCOG leadership can employ several key strategies. First, to meet the needs of regional businesses, TARCOG and partners should allocate resources to expand and enhance work-based learning opportunities for students in the region. Additionally, these work-based learning opportunities should be expanded to the current regional labor force, to ensure opportunities for career pathways, life-long learning, and upskilling. Lastly, TARCOG should pay particular attention to emerging green industries, and work with training and education providers to cultivate talent for the next generation of businesses.

Objectives:

- » Expand and Enhance Work-Based Learning Opportunities
- » Focus on Meeting the Needs of Regional Emerging Industries
- » Build Better Community Connections for University and Technical Training Students
- » Increase Pathways for Life-Long Learning and Upskilling

Best Practices:

Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI)

CPI seeks to help modest-income parents gain workplace skills leading to economic self-sufficiency and reduced reliance on public assistance. It seeks to provide employers in key industries in Arkansas with skilled workers. The initiative accomplishes these goals by improving the level of engagement among educators and employers to generate work opportunities for students and serve private sector workforce needs.

Next Generation Sector Partnerships

The Next Gen Sector Partnership Community of Practice is an initiative of the Institute for Networked Communities, which is a nonprofit organization. Next Generation provides a free toolkit and resources for developing sector partnerships. Their training manual and step-by-step toolkit can help guide efforts in developing sector partnerships.

Resources:

U.S. Department of Labor | Federal Bonding Program

The U.S. Department of Labor established The Federal Bonding Program in 1966 to provide Fidelity Bonds for “at-risk,” hard-to-place job seekers. The bonds cover the first six months of employment at no cost to the job applicant or the employer.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE



Goal:
Promote Collaboration Between Local Higher Education Institutions & Leading Industries



Partners/Champions:
Regional colleges and universities, Local boards of education, North Alabama Works, Launch 2035, AIDT

Objectives	Action Items	Timeline	Metrics for Success
Expand and Enhance Work-Based Learning Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Create more efficient pathways for work-based learning opportunities for regional university and technical school students and graduates » Collaborate with the private sector to provide high-quality experiential learning opportunities across high growth industries 	Long term (4-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased number of registered apprenticeship programs » Increased enrollment in technical certification programs » Number of meetings or events held to convene industry & higher education
Focus on Meeting the Needs of Regional Emerging Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Engage employers in emerging industries to understand workforce and training needs » Educate students and workers about occupations and career pathways in emerging industries » Work with regional educational institutions on meeting workforce gaps in emerging industries and expand access to STEM curriculum 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of new or enhanced work based learning opportunities available » Summary of career pathway awareness activities and collaborations to increase access to STEM curriculum
Build Better Community Connections for University and Technical Training Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Work with partners to expand and improve networking events, lunch and learns, mentorship opportunities, and programming that connects industry and students » Work with transportation planning partners to ensure ease of access from campuses to regional amenities 	Short term (1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of events held to connect students with industry partners » Investment in transportation infrastructure and/or options for students
Increase Pathways for Life-Long Learning and Upskilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Collaborate with workforce development partners to engage and connect non-traditional learners with career res-skilling and up-skilling opportunities » Support expansion of professional development programming for English language learners, those recovering from substance use disorders, re-entering citizens, and other non-traditional workers. » Work with regional partners to offer Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training for regional employers 	Long term (4-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of programs or programming enhancements targeted to non-traditional learners » Number of DEI trainings coordinated by regional partners

Business Development

The TARCOG region can be characterized as a regional economy with a diverse industry mix. The data presented in this plan shows that the top industries in the region include government, manufacturing, professional, scientific, and technical services, and retail trade. Additionally, the region is home to major employers including Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Huntsville Hospital, and a variety of employment opportunities through the public sector. To sustain the regional economy and position it for growth in the next decade and beyond, TARCOG should consider a well-rounded business and economic development strategy.

Three major components of any economic development strategy include business retention and expansion, business attraction, and entrepreneurship and innovation. Business retention and expansion programs, which focus on existing companies, are designed to assist businesses and ensure they're able to survive economic difficulties, expand and create new jobs, and increase their competitiveness in the marketplace. Business attraction programs, on the contrary, are designed to attract new companies to the region, and require strategic efforts from economic development organizations to promote the region as a viable location for economic activity. Lastly, regional companies are comprised mostly of small businesses, which the SBA defines as companies with less than 500 employees. Economic development organizations can facilitate an environment that unlocks the potential of risk-takers, innovators, and those looking to start new enterprises.

To catalyze and sustain a competitive regional economy, the project team suggests several strategies. First, TARCOG should support regional partners with business retention and expansion programs. This could include developing resource and asset maps for businesses to navigate the business support ecosystem. Additionally, TARCOG should allocate resources to develop industry cluster and supply chain analysis to understand gaps and subsequent opportunities to drive potential business attraction campaigns. Lastly, TARCOG leadership should work with appropriate partners to ensure regional economies have the tools necessary to cultivate small and startup businesses, including the provision of professional services and access to capital.

Objectives:

- » Prioritize Business Retention and Expansion Outreach Programs
- » Develop a Regional Business Attraction Strategy
- » Cultivate an Environment that Fosters Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Best Practices:

Mountain BizWorks

Mountain BizWorks provides business loans and coaching to emerging and established small businesses in Western North Carolina. They have a particular focus on working with businesses unable to access financing from banks and other traditional sources, as well as low-income, minority, women, and immigrant entrepreneurs, and businesses that operate within the local food system.

Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada

The Greater Reno-Sparks-Tahoe area is a fast-growing region in the United States, and its economic development authority is focused on attracting the right industries to the region. To ensure its industry attraction efforts were appropriately targeted, they conducted a targeted industry analysis which resulted in the identification of eight target industries. These industries include renewable energy, technology, advanced manufacturing, and others with potential for benefitting the regional economy.

Funding Opportunities:

READY Appalachia

READY Appalachia is the Appalachian Regional Commission's new community capacity building initiative offering flexible funding to organizations in four key economic development pillars: nonprofits, community foundations, local governments, and Local Development Districts, and free training to the Appalachians that work for them.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



Goal:
Foster & Maintain an Economically Competitive Region



Partners/Champions:
Local Chambers of Commerce, Regional economic development agencies, Launch 2035, Innovate Alabama, Innovate Huntsville, North Alabama Industrial Development Association, Institutes of higher education, Regional Small Business Development Centers

Objectives	Action Items	Timeline	Metrics for Success
Prioritize Business Retention and Expansion Outreach Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Support regional partners with funding identification and capacity to conduct business retention and expansion outreach programs » Create a regional asset map of business support resources and services » Work with regional partners to determine high priority business outreach targets, including businesses that are vulnerable to economic downturns » Work with regional partners to develop business outreach programs for business owners from underrepresented populations » Work with regional partners to develop business outreach programs for rural businesses 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Asset map deliverable » # of business outreach programs developed or enhanced (by category)
Develop a Regional Business Attraction Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Conduct a regional target business analysis to determine cluster development strategies » Conduct a supply chain analysis of key clusters to identify gaps and barriers » Conduct a regional land and building analysis to determine suitable sites for potential business expansion and attraction opportunities » Collaborate with the Alabama Office of International Trade to develop an international business attraction strategy » Commit resources for business attraction trade shows and conferences » Develop a local network of site-selection advisors to 	Long term (4-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Targeted business analysis » Supply chain analysis
Cultivate an Environment that Fosters Entrepreneurship and Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Promote business networking and collaboration opportunities and events across the region » Promote regional economic gardening practices and support efforts underway to spur new business and innovation throughout the region » Collaborate with regional universities on tech-transfer and commercialization strategies » Develop a business outreach strategy focused on small businesses, entrepreneurs, and rural startup businesses » Promote workshops with federal, state, and local funding agencies that provide business assistance across the region 	Long term (4-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Summary of regional collaboration and networking efforts » Business outreach strategy » Number of business assistance workshops held

Resilient Growth

In today's rapidly changing world, regional economies in the best position for success are those that have detailed plans to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to economic disruptions. This approach, often termed economic resiliency, is paramount, and TARCOG is in prime position to convene partners to implement strategies that ensure resiliency is at the forefront of local and regional economic plans.

Per the Economic Development Administration, resilience in the context of economic development is inclusive of three primary attributes, 'the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid the shock altogether.' For the purposes of this plan, this focus area is focused on strategies that allow TARCOG and associated partners to prepare for and build an ecosystem that can best avoid and mitigate potential economic disruptions. This involves the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how potential risks can impact the regional economy, build capacity, and invest in modern infrastructure.

First, the project team suggests that TARCOG and local partners analyze the current housing market and identify housing gaps and develop a plan to facilitate appropriate housing developments and accommodations. Further, TARCOG should work with local partners to analyze and evaluate current infrastructure, including transportation, broadband, and utility infrastructure. Based on this analysis, TARCOG should work with state and federal partners to identify formula based and competitive funding opportunities to modernize infrastructure that can withstand potential natural and manmade disasters. To prepare for inevitable impacts of climate change, TARCOG supports communities with green infrastructure development strategies, and assists them with establishing environmentally sustainable practices. This could include developing strategies to support the transition to electric vehicles, enhancing the resiliency of regional electric grids, and focusing on conservation of natural assets.

Objectives:

- » Analyze Housing Market and Gaps in Workforce Housing
- » Pursue Opportunities to Invest in Infrastructure
- » Evaluate Existing Land use Policy
- » Support Communities in Green Infrastructure Developments and Strategies
- » Establish Environmentally Sustainable Practices Across Regional Industries

Best Practices:

Georgia Affordable Housing Coalition

The Georgia Affordable Housing Coalition is a trade association representing the multi-family affordable rental housing industry in Georgia. The Coalition provides a forum for information sharing, networking and advocacy for its member developers, lenders, syndicators, and other related parties who participate in the low-income housing tax credit program. The Coalition works to increase resources for affordable rental housing and monitors existing and pending legislation and public policy that affect the development and operation of affordable housing. The organization was instrumental in the passage of the low-income housing tax credit legislation that created the Georgia state credit.

Funding Opportunities:

U.S. Economic Development Administration | Planning and Local Technical Assistance Program

Through its Planning and Local Technical Assistance programs, EDA assists eligible recipients in developing economic development plans and studies designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region.

RESILIENT GROWTH



Goal:
Promote Regional Collaboration
Through Intentional Growth Strategies



Partners/Champions:
Local planning departments, ALDOT, Local EMAs, Tennessee Valley Authority, HSV Utilities, Land Trust of North Alabama, State and regional sustainability groups

Objectives	Action Items	Timeline	Metrics for Success
Analyze Housing Market and Gaps in Workforce Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Conduct a housing market analysis to determine priority improvements and address housing gaps » Review and evaluate resources for housing insecure residents » Work with partners to promote and increase access to resources for housing insecure residents 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Housing market analysis
Pursue Opportunities to Invest in Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Coordinate with ALDOT to analyze regional infrastructure improvement opportunities and identify funding sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Roads » Broadband » In alignment with the ALDOT Statewide Transportation Plan, work to better connect regional transportation planning between the MPO and RPO regions through the development of a regional Long Range Transportation Plan » Partner with state and regional sustainability authorities to establish sustainability standards for infrastructure improvements 	Long term (4-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Infrastructure improvement analysis » Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan » Infrastructure sustainability standards established
Evaluate Existing Land Use Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Work with regional partners to develop a regional greenspace conservation plan » Evaluate and promote best practices in zoning regulation to support/encourage managed growth » Evaluate existing environmental conservation policy and greenspace preservation, particularly in faster-growing communities 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Greenspace conservation plan » Summary of policy evaluation efforts
Support Communities in Green Infrastructure Developments and Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Prioritize and promote efficient public infrastructure buildout by encouraging coordination among agencies » Identify and pursue funding opportunities to support projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Enhancing the resiliency of the electric grid » Improving access to broadband » Supporting transition to electric vehicles 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Summary of infrastructure buildout efforts » List of relevant funding opportunities pursued
Establish Environmentally Sustainable Practices Across Regional Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Assist in developing environmental conservation commitments for new businesses and key sectors » Explore opportunities for rural communities to participate in the sustainability economy, such as green energy generation or data storage » Share resources to assist small businesses in efforts to develop disaster mitigation and emergency response plans » Pursue funding opportunities to facilitate transition to renewable energy 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of conservation commitments developed and executed » Summary of rural sustainability efforts

Equitable Health and Wellness

The Quality of Life in a community is distinctly tied to its economic success. Stakeholders raised a variety of important wellness concerns throughout conversation including the importance of healthcare, mental health and drug use, childcare, homelessness, poverty, food security, and overall safety. While comprehensive solutions to the issues discussed require concerted collective action, the CEDS can help organizations around the region collaboratively address these issues and put strategies in place to bring them to the forefront of conversation. A healthy and stable workforce is key to economic growth, and the importance of collaborating regionally on initiatives, while bringing inclusive services to those who are marginalized or underserved reflect what stakeholders believe is a comprehensive approach to promoting a healthy lifestyle. Incorporating strategies to enhance health, wellness, and quality of life in the region helps reinforce an environment that prioritizes wellness as a foundation for workforce growth, economy prosperity, and lifelong success and happiness for all residents.

In order to ensure equitable access to regional health and wellness amenities, the project team recommends that community partners across the TARCOG region advocate for the accessibility of a comprehensive array of healthcare services, including mental health care. Advocacy work should also include the affordability and accessibility of childcare services in communities across the region. Partners should also plan to address food insecurity and expand services for vulnerable populations in order to improve quality of life, and workforce participation. Safety partners should be engaged to develop crime reduction strategies that are preventative in nature and based on nationwide best practices. Finally, health equity should be considered in all long-term planning efforts in the region.

Objectives:

- » Advocate for Equitable Access to Healthcare
- » Advocate for Affordable and Accessible Childcare Services
- » Identify and Plan to Address Food Insecurity
- » Assist in the Implementation of Preventative Crime Reduction Strategies
- » Expand and Improve Services for Vulnerable Populations
- » Build Health Equity into Long-Term Planning

Best Practices:

Health Leads

Health Leads is an innovation hub that seeks to unearth and address the deep societal roots of racial inequity that impact health. Founded in 1996, Health Leads helps set the standard for health systems and clinics looking to integrate programs that connect people to essential resources like food, heat, and housing.

Funding Opportunities:

U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs

The Office of Justice Programs is a federal agency that provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance, and other resources to improve the nation's capacity to prevent and reduce crime, assist victims and enhance the rule of law by strengthening the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Its six program offices support state and local crime-fighting efforts, fund thousands of victim service programs, help communities manage sex offenders, address the needs of youth in the system and children in danger, and provide vital research and data.

EQUITABLE HEALTH & WELLNESS



Goal:
Ensure Equitable Access to regional Health & Wellness Amenities



Partners/Champions:
North Alabama Food Bank, Faith communities, Regional hospitals, Recreation boards, Thrive Alabama, Alabama Non-Violent Offenders Organization, Regional Health & Safety Agencies

Objectives	Action Items	Timeline	Metrics for Success
Advocate for Equitable Access to Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Partner with regional healthcare providers to determine healthcare gaps across the region » Advocate for equitable access to specialized healthcare, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mental health care ○ Substance use disorder recovery ○ Wholistic medicine 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Healthcare gap analysis » Advocacy/promotional activity summary and/or materials produced
Advocate for Affordable and Accessible Caregiving Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Conduct a caregiving gap analysis and plan to address identified gaps » Partner with local businesses to develop and advocate for benefits for childcare and other types of caregiving 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Caregiving gap analysis » Advocacy/promotional activity summary and/or materials produced
Identify and Plan to Address Food Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Identify food security gaps and plan to address those gaps » Offer support to newly forming Regional Food Policy Council 	Short term (1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Gap analysis deliverable » Commencement of Regional Food Policy Council activities
Assist in the Implementation of Preventative Crime Reduction Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Coordinate with regional health and safety agencies to plan and share resources » Convene local safety partners to identify crime-reduction strategies tied to socioeconomic interventions 	Short term (1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » List of crime reduction strategies identified » Number of health and safety partners engaged » Reduction in crime (long-term metric)
Expand and Improve Services and Amenities for Vulnerable Populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Convene regional nonprofit and social service partners to identify homelessness and poverty reduction strategies » Allocate resources for reentry services (for those returning from incarceration or recovering from substance use disorders), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Healthcare » Housing » Mental Health » Professional development » Ensure equitable access to recreational opportunities and public amenities for vulnerable populations 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Homelessness and poverty reduction strategies identified » Reduction in poverty levels and/or homelessness over time » Increased resources for re-entry services » Summary of accessibility improvements
Build health equity and residential wellness into long-term planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Work with regional health and wellness partners to convene workshops and promote best practices for facilitating natural exercise (walking, biking, etc.) » Promote outdoor activities to facilitate mental and physical health 	Medium term (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of wellness workshops held » Promotional activities and materials deliverable



DRAFT

**SUMMARY
BACKGROUND**

SUMMARY BACKGROUND

Geography

Located in the Northeast corner of Alabama, the TARGOG region consists of five counties and borders both Tennessee and Georgia. The region is within 100-200 miles of four major cities: Nashville, Chattanooga, Atlanta, and Birmingham. Additionally, the TARGOG region contains major metropolitan areas such as Huntsville, Scottsboro, Fort Payne, and Guntersville. The region is notably biodiverse, and natural assets are valued and leveraged for economic development, with conservation remaining a priority.

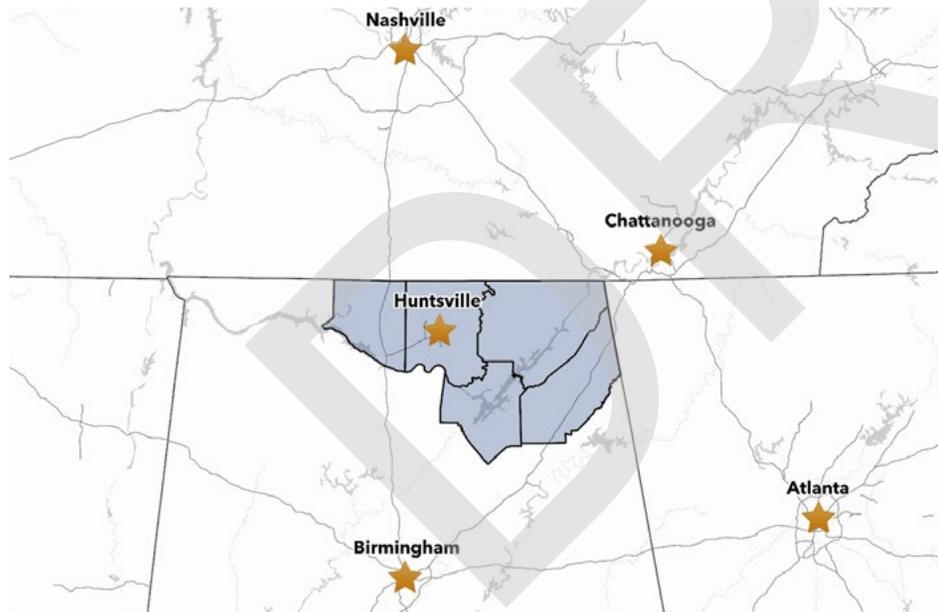
The Southern portion of the region is home to Guntersville Lake, which supports a state park, a lake community, and outdoor recreation opportunities enjoyed by residents and visitors. The Eastern portion of the region contains more rugged terrain, with Lookout Mountain extending into the Northeast corner, and Desoto State Park and Little River Canyon National Preserve furthering the outdoor recreation opportunities in the area. The Tennessee River's watershed, tributaries, and abundant wetlands enhance the vibrancy and identity of a region rich in natural beauty.

Natural Assets

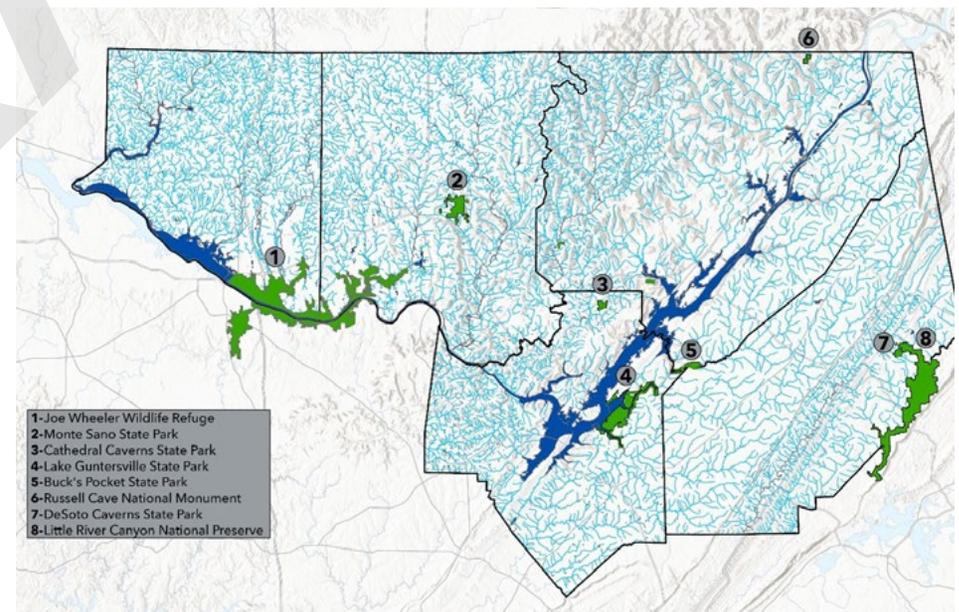
The rich natural resources found in the TARGOG region form the foundation of the region's history, culture, economy, and identity. Within the region, there are approximately 1.2 million acres of forests, reservoirs, and scenic areas (including 190,000 acres of designated park and recreation areas).

The Tennessee River is among the region's most cherished assets. Serving as an economic driver, the river provides food, water, power, transportation routes, recreation, relaxation, history, and culture. In addition to the Tennessee River, the five-county region also boasts notable natural assets including the Little River Canyon National Preserve, Desoto State Park, Lake Guntersville State Park, Cathedral Caverns State Park, the Walls of Jericho, among others.

GEOGRAPHY



NATURAL ASSETS



Cultural and Tourism Assets

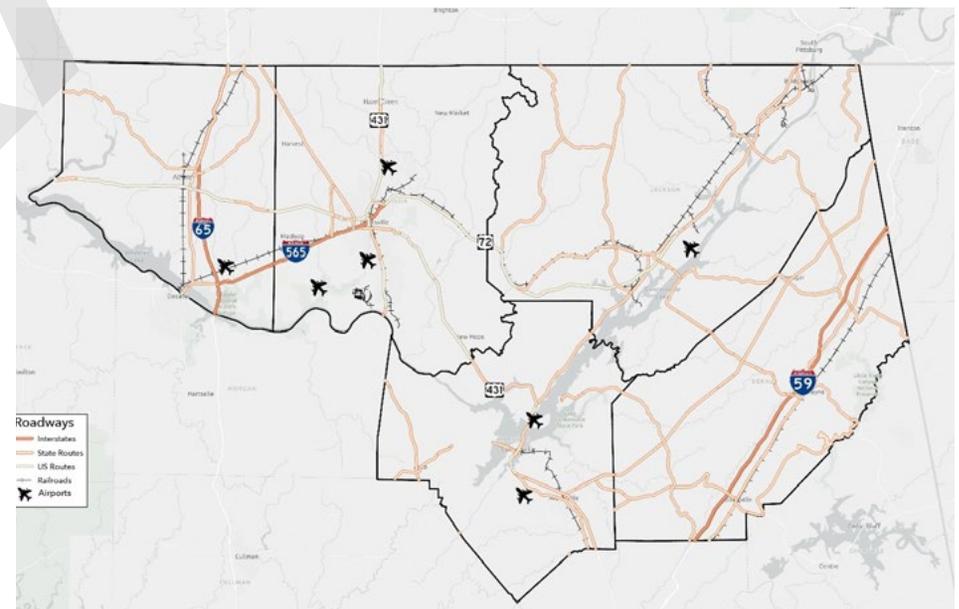
The natural beauty of the region provides residents and visitors with a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. Whether it is fishing, hunting, golf, watersports, hiking, biking, or taking in the many scenic views and outdoor spots, the region is a veritable paradise for outdoor enthusiasts. Beyond the robust natural assets, the TARCOG region offers residents the charm of small-town living without sacrificing the cultural and entertainment opportunities that larger, more fast-paced regions offer. Cultural assets include arts, historic neighborhoods, sports, festivals, and music offerings.

Fort Payne, the DeKalb County seat, is home to the Fort Payne Opera House and the DeKalb Theatre. In Jackson County, one can visit the Unclaimed Baggage Center, the largest retail tourist destination in the state of Alabama. Limestone County offers experiences at the Veteran Museum and beautiful historic Mooresville. For art lovers, Lowe Mill Arts and Entertainment Center and Huntsville Museum of Art in Madison County provide world-class art exhibits and programming. Lastly, Marshall County attracts thrill seekers with boat races on Lake Guntersville, as well as bass fishing, ATV trails, and a variety of mountain biking trails

Infrastructure Overview

The TARCOG region facilitates travel and connectivity within the region and between neighboring states and counties. Highways, railroads, airports, waterways, and broadband infrastructure ensure that the region maintains ties to other U.S. geographies and meets the needs of residents and visitors.

INFRASTRUCTURE



Equity Indicator

Access to reliable, high-speed internet is emerging as a key equity challenge of the coming decade. With legacy technologies such as cable and DSL providing speeds below federal standards and buildout costs in rural areas exceeding ROI calculations made by major providers, all levels of government are intervening to facilitate equitable access to broadband.

With educational and professional opportunities increasingly relying on or incorporating digital skills and access, reliable broadband connection and personal computers have become key to ensuring that rural and low-income (those most commonly without high-speed internet or personal devices) communities can access the same opportunities as those in urban areas (where high-speed internet has already permeated).



Opportunity Zones

The Federal Qualified Opportunity Zone (QOZ) program spurs economic development and job creation in low-income communities by offering tax incentives for investment into designated distressed census areas, known as Federal Opportunity Zones or QOZs. This investment program provides federal tax incentives for investors to use their capital gains into Opportunity Funds dedicated for investing within designated Opportunity Zones. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) defines QOZs as “low-income census tracts with a poverty rate of at least 20 percent and a median family income of less than 80 percent of the statewide or area median income.”

Currently, there are 158 designated Opportunity Zones, with at least one Opportunity Zone in each of the state’s sixty-seven counties. Of the 158 Opportunity Zones in Alabama, the TARCOG region has a total of sixteen distinct census tracts in the following counties: DeKalb (1), Jackson (1), Limestone (3), Madison (10), and Marshall (1). All Opportunity Zone areas are considered “low-income” communities.

In collaboration with the ADECA, Opportunity Alabama, and TARCOG, each Opportunity Zone community works with their perspective local champions and economic developers to leverage identified Opportunity Zone assets to maximize economic benefits for those living in these communities.

As the TARCOG region continues to thrive and develop, the outlined goals and objectives will impact all QOZs. More specifically, as the region strives to foster and maintain an economically competitive region (goal 3), it is imperative that these Opportunity Zones are considered priority communities for equitable investment. Goal 3, strategy 3 will address the gaps for local entrepreneurs and developers (particularly female- and minority-owned businesses) to gain access to capital, technical assistance, mentoring, and other resources to drive the local and regional economy.

OPPORTUNITY ZONES

County	Associated Census Tract(s)	Population	Labor Force	Land Area	Unemployment Rate	Per Capita Income	Poverty Rate
DeKalb	9609	3752	1402	51	1.5	19407	26.4
Jackson	9506	5761	2821	108	4.4	20724	19.2
	202.02	4957	2036	20	4.2	21065	24.8
Limestone	206	4743	2167	4	10.8	16626	24.3
	207	2283	1088	4	11.9	21487	33.7
	2.01	897	358	3	9.5	14582	35.7
	2.02	3893	1673	2	16.1	9095	39.3
	13.01	3189	1918	1	11.4	17086	42.1
	14.02	5216	3064	8	5.5	29961	17
Madison	15	4578	2528	2	11.5	17535	27.7
	21	3255	1239	1	12.7	12313	59.6
	25.01	3312	1731	2	2.3	12822	46.1
	30	2589	1160	2	17.1	15959	51.7
	31	5116	966	2	6.8	37276	28.1
	106.22	11467	6707	8	8.4	30496	27.5
Marshall	301	3415	1609	67	5.7	19386	31

Source: Stats America, ACS 5-year average data included here is for the 2014-2018 period.

Economic & Environmental Resilience

Economic and environmental resilience has emerged as a key concern for communities nationwide. Resilience is an important consideration for the TARCOG region as it looks to leverage environmental assets to promote tourism and recreation opportunities, ensure economic diversification, and continue to grow the region's economy in alignment with sustainability best practices.

Disaster recovery and mitigation, industry diversification, land use efficiencies, infrastructure improvements, and more will be considered when planning for a resilient region.

Economic Resilience

The TARCOG region is lucky to be incredibly diversified both biologically and economically. Communities of varying sizes and profiles support an industry mix that residents of all backgrounds can appreciate, including a world-class science and technology sector, a burgeoning tourism and recreation economy, and a robust education landscape. Collaboration among industry, education providers, and community groups is intentionally fostered to ensure that regional wins are celebrated together, and losses are shouldered as a whole.

To ensure that the region's economy is resilient to major shocks or disruptions, community members will work over the coming years to assist local businesses in the preparation of individual resiliency plans, identify resources for small businesses to develop foundations in their respective communities, and promote sustainable business practices. New and emerging sectors will be supported to reduce reliance on existing anchor employers should a major disruption occur, and an effort will be made to ensure that the region's most vulnerable populations have access to resources that improve stability at a populations level.

Disaster Recovery and Mitigation

Local actors finalized a regional Hazard Mitigation Plan for the Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) Division F in 2022, which serves to identify and evaluate prioritized hazards and present effective mitigation strategies. The plan should be viewed as complementary to the CEDS and consulted in conjunction – especially when considering land use and development-based decisions. AEMA Division F covers all the counties in the TARCOG Region along with five additional counties, although Marshall County was not included in much of the plan's analysis because the county recently completed an extensive hazard mitigation plan update independently.

HISTORICAL HAZARDS REGIONWIDE

Since the 1970s, 43 federally declared natural disasters have impacted AEMA Division F. Types of incidents include:

- » Tornadoes
- » Flooding
- » Severe storms
- » Drought
- » Severe snowfall
- » Winter storms
- » Freezing
- » Hurricanes
 - » Ivan, Katrina, Ian, Irma, and Sally
 - » Resulted in statewide evacuation or emergency declaration
 - » Hurricane Zeta impacted AEMA Division F but not the TARCOG Region
- » Straight-line winds
- » Severe thunderstorms

	Instances of Drought since 2005	Earthquakes since 1886	Number of flooding events 1990-2020	Number of Strong Wind Events 1996-2020	Number of Tornado Events 1950-2020
Dekalb	34	23	77	26	64
Jackson	35	38	57	14	46
Limestone	28	6	80	9	63
Madison	37	12	190	29	79
Marshall	Not included	4	Not included	Not included	Not included

DEKALB COUNTY

Action items for Dekalb County's hazard mitigation agenda include updating stormwater management regulations, developing easements to protect private property from hazards, sharing information on forest and vegetation management, replacing bridges, constructing storm shelters and more. These efforts will be led primarily by the County EMA, County Floodplain Manager, County Commission, and County VFA.

JACKSON COUNTY

Action items for Jackson County's hazard mitigation agenda include performing a land use study, revising subdivision regulations, developing stormwater management regulations, developing a hazard mitigation information center, acquiring portable power generators, and more. These efforts will be led primarily by county elected officials, local emergency response teams, the county department of public works, and community partners and anchor institutions.

LIMESTONE COUNTY

Action items for Limestone County's hazard mitigation agenda include developing a funding resource catalog, reviewing building regulations for protection from weather hazards, performing a utility study, installing emergency warning sirens, constructing scour and drift protection countywide, and more. These efforts will be led primarily by the county EMA, the county engineer, and local elected officials.

MADISON COUNTY

Action items for Madison County's hazard mitigation agenda include maintaining risk assessment data in GIS, evaluating building code standards for roof construction, promoting the purchase of flooding, earthquake, and sinkhole insurance, installing emergency power generators at critical facilities, and more. These efforts will be led primarily by the county EMA, MCE, HUDD, and local elected officials.

MARSHALL COUNTY

Marshall County did not participate many sections of the AEMA Division F Hazard Mitigation Plan because the county has undergone its own planning efforts. The county has mapped threat sectors for natural disasters and is continuously preparing to respond to a number of threats.

DRAFT

**COMMUNITY
PROFILES**

COMMUNITY PROFILES

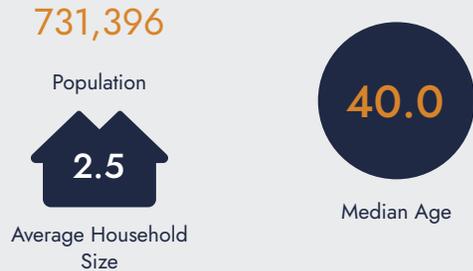
The following County Profile Summary Reports provide in-depth evaluations of each of TARCOG's five counties. Included in each County Profile is economic performance indicators and several demographic statistics. Specifically, population, employment, median household income, age and education distribution, top industries and occupation data, and top employer and job postings are highlighted. Information for the data comes from a variety of sources, including Emsi-Business Analyst, Census Bureau and the University of Alabama's Culverhouse College Of Business.

Socioeconomic, demographic, and labor information is benchmarked against the Region as a whole (all five counties). This comparison provides a greater context to each of the county's performance across a wide range of metrics.



REGIONAL INSIGHTS

KEY FACTS



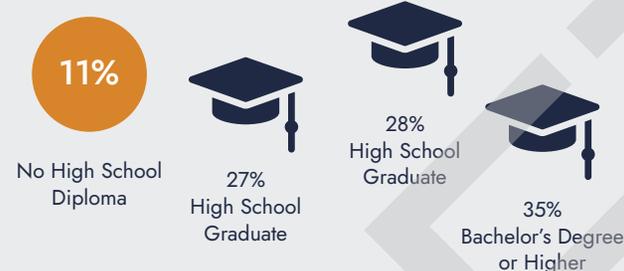
BUSINESS



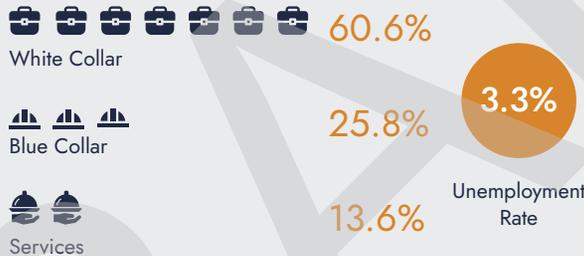
INCOME



EDUCATION



EMPLOYMENT



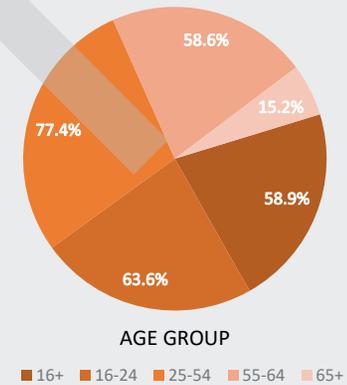
HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME

The largest group: \$100,000 - \$149,999 (17.4%)
The smallest group: \$200,000 (6.3%)

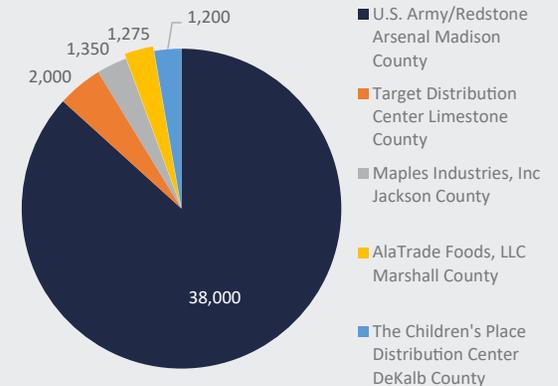
Indicator ▲	Value	Diff
<\$15,000	9.5%	-2.6%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	9.0%	-0.8%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	8.3%	-1.1%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	12.1%	-0.6%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	16.5%	-1.2%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	12.6%	+0.8%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	17.4%	+2.2%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	8.4%	+2.3%
\$200,000+	6.3%	+1.3%

Bars show deviation from Alabama

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE



LARGEST COUNTY EMPLOYERS

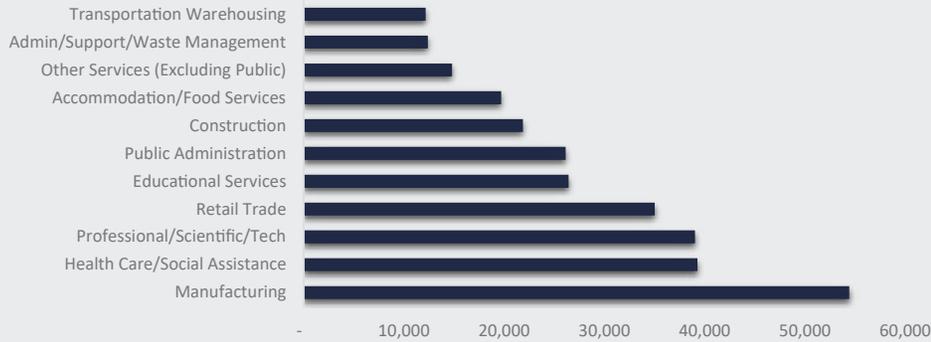


Equity Indicator: Persistent Racial Disparities

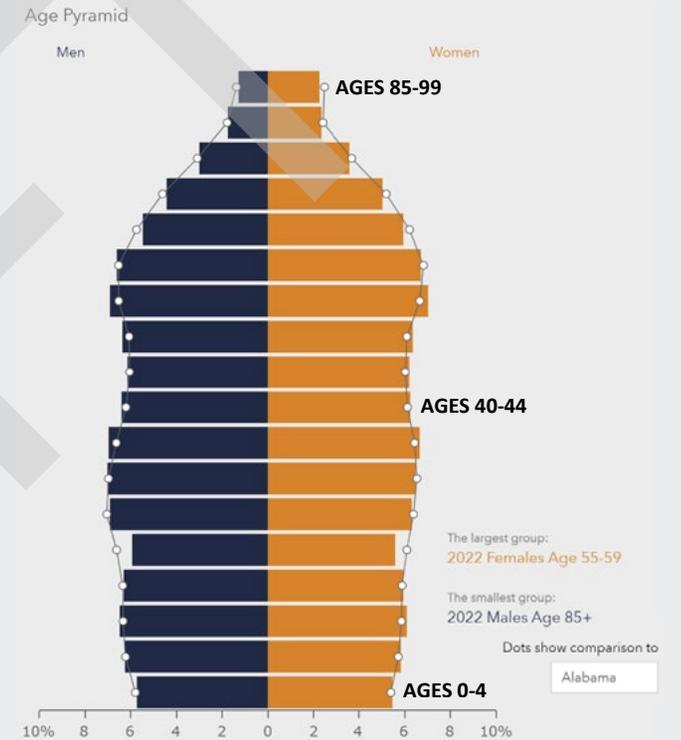
Racial inequities are also a national issue but prevalent especially in the Southeastern United States and the State of Alabama where the repercussions of historic injustices are still felt today. An analysis of the Region's racial diversity displays White residents make up 80% of the TARCOG Region, but less than 60% of the Region's unemployed population. Black residents, on the other hand, are overrepresented in the unemployment figures, making up 38% of the cohort and just 15% of the region's population.

This disparity suggests that Black residents in the TARCOG Region face disproportionate barriers to employment. These barriers are likely varied and compounded, but may include housing instability, educational inequity, lack of access to childcare, or an absence of generational wealth that may otherwise mitigate these barriers. Discriminatory hiring practices or hostile workplace cultures may also be behind Black residents' overrepresentation in unemployment numbers, even if implemented unintentionally.

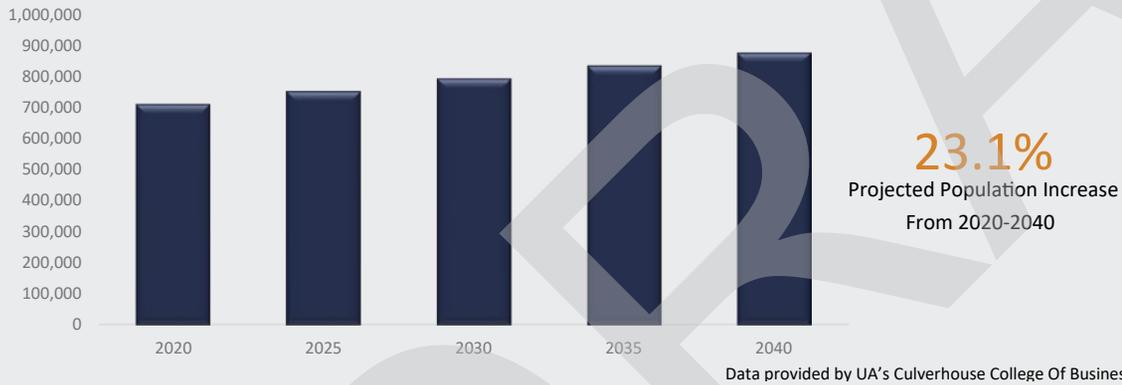
TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT



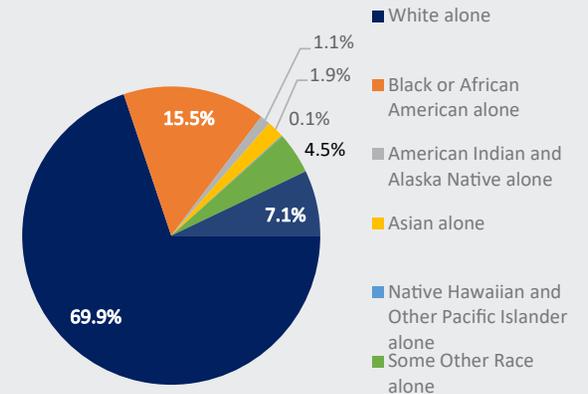
REGIONAL AGE DISTRIBUTION



PROJECTED REGIONAL POPULATION GROWTH



POPULATION BY RACE



REGIONAL HISPANIC POPULATION

47,459
Total Hispanic Population

25,017
Male Population

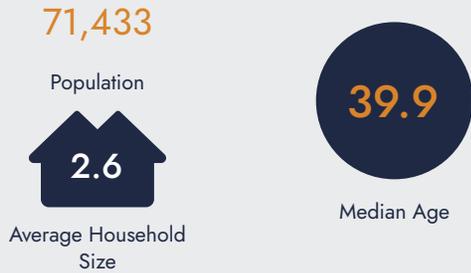
22,442
Female Population

6.5%

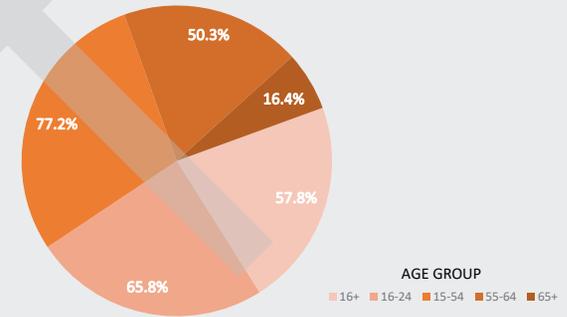
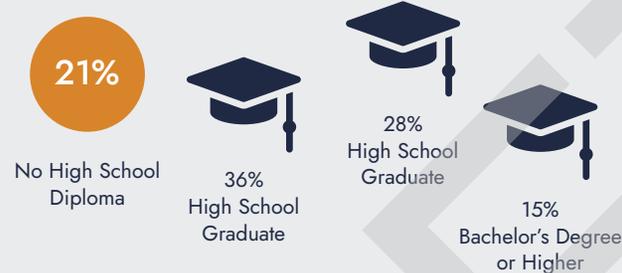
Of Total Regional Population

DEKALB COUNTY INSIGHTS

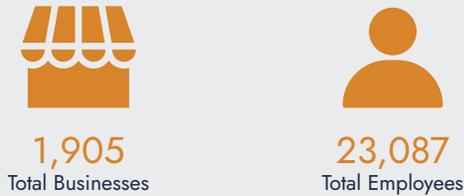
KEY FACTS



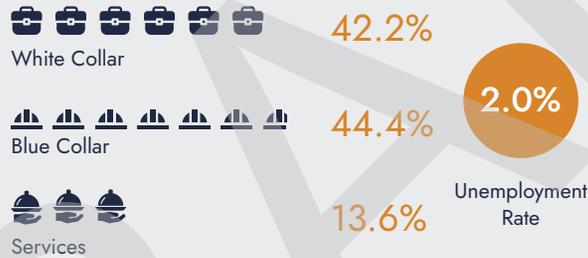
EDUCATION



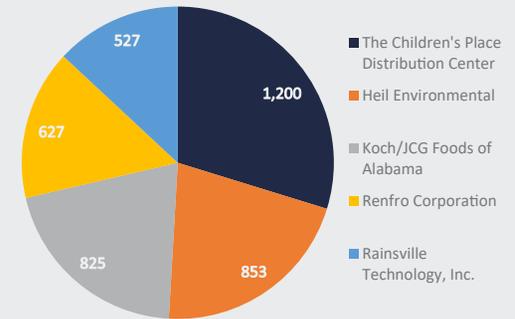
BUSINESS



EMPLOYMENT



LARGEST COUNTY EMPLOYERS



INCOME



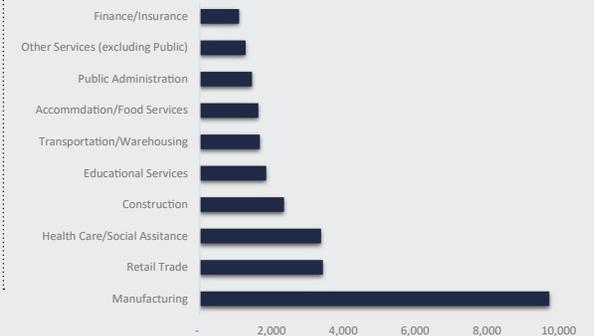
HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME

The largest group: \$100,000 - \$149,999 (17.4%)
The smallest group: \$200,000 (6.3%)

Indicator ▲	Value	Diff
<\$15,000	13.4%	+1.3%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	14.0%	+4.2%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	7.0%	-2.4%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	16.1%	+3.4%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	20.2%	+2.5%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	12.1%	+0.3%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	12.9%	-2.3%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	3.4%	-2.7%
\$200,000+	0.8%	-4.2%

Bars show deviation from Alabama

TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT



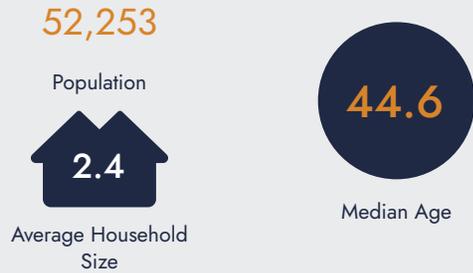
Equity Indicator: Persistent Racial Disparities

Racial inequities are also a national issue but prevalent especially in the Southeastern United States and the State of Alabama where the repercussions of historic injustices are still felt today. An analysis of the Region's racial diversity displays White residents make up 80% of the TARCOG Region, but less than 60% of the Region's unemployed population. Black residents, on the other hand, are overrepresented in the unemployment figures, making up 38% of the cohort and just 15% of the region's population.

This disparity suggests that Black residents in the TARCOG Region face disproportionate barriers to employment. These barriers are likely varied and compounded, but may include housing instability, educational inequity, lack of access to childcare, or an absence of generational wealth that may otherwise mitigate these barriers. Discriminatory hiring practices or hostile workplace cultures may also be behind Black residents' overrepresentation in unemployment numbers, even if implemented unintentionally.

JACKSON COUNTY INSIGHTS

KEY FACTS



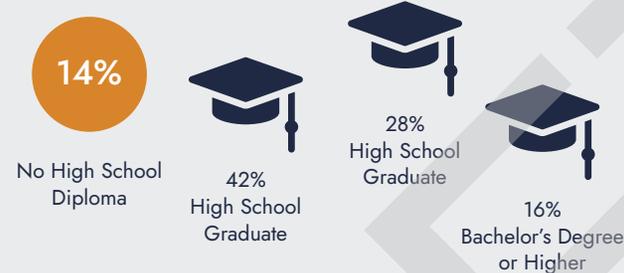
BUSINESS



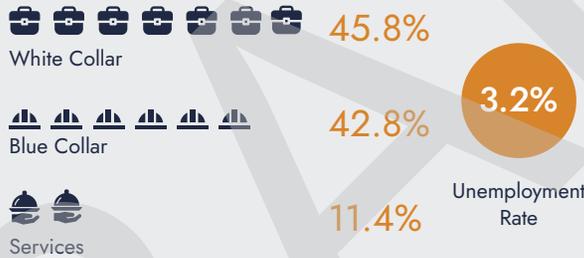
INCOME



EDUCATION



EMPLOYMENT

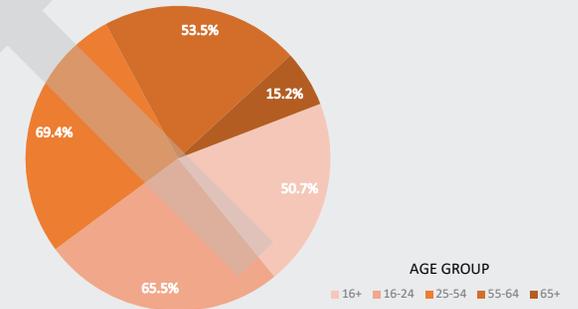


HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME

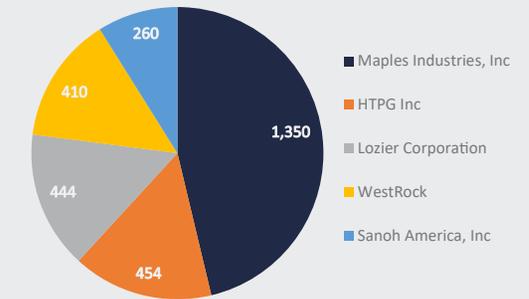
The largest group: \$100,000 - \$149,999 (17.4%)
The smallest group: \$200,000 (6.3%)

Indicator ▲	Value	Diff	
<\$15,000	13.5%	+1.4%	
\$15,000 - \$24,999	11.0%	+1.2%	
\$25,000 - \$34,999	10.9%	+1.5%	
\$35,000 - \$49,999	15.1%	+2.4%	
\$50,000 - \$74,999	21.0%	+3.3%	
\$75,000 - \$99,999	12.0%	+0.2%	
\$100,000 - \$149,999	11.5%	-3.7%	
\$150,000 - \$199,999	3.0%	-3.1%	
\$200,000+	2.0%	-3.0%	

Bars show deviation from Alabama



LARGEST COUNTY EMPLOYERS



TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT



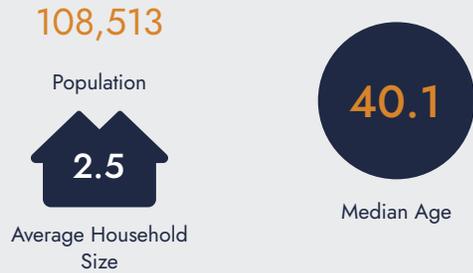
Equity Indicator: Persistent Racial Disparities

Racial inequities are also a national issue but prevalent especially in the Southeastern United States and the State of Alabama where the repercussions of historic injustices are still felt today. An analysis of the Region's racial diversity displays White residents make up 80% of the TARCOG Region, but less than 60% of the Region's unemployed population. Black residents, on the other hand, are overrepresented in the unemployment figures, making up 38% of the cohort and just 15% of the region's population.

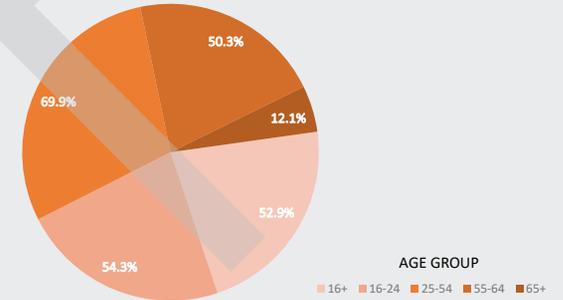
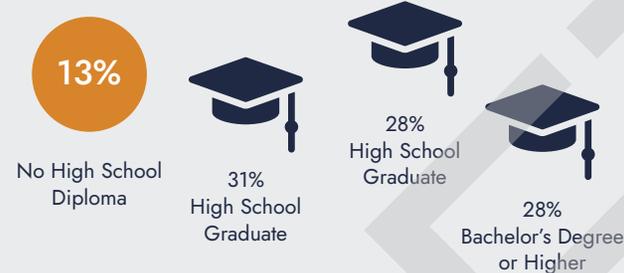
This disparity suggests that Black residents in the TARCOG Region face disproportionate barriers to employment. These barriers are likely varied and compounded, but may include housing instability, educational inequity, lack of access to childcare, or an absence of generational wealth that may otherwise mitigate these barriers. Discriminatory hiring practices or hostile workplace cultures may also be behind Black residents' overrepresentation in unemployment numbers, even if implemented unintentionally.

LIMESTONE COUNTY INSIGHTS

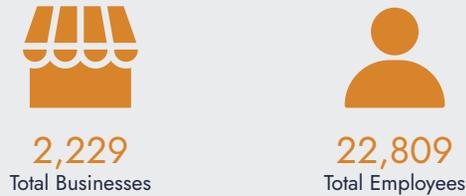
KEY FACTS



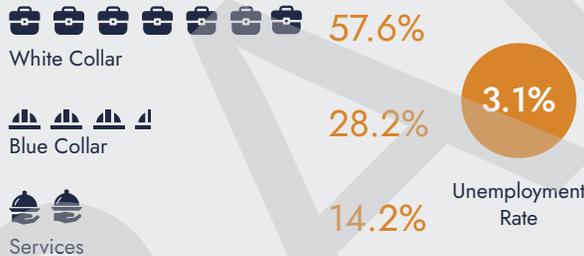
EDUCATION



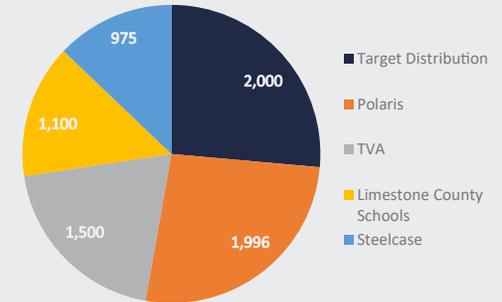
BUSINESS



EMPLOYMENT



LARGEST COUNTY EMPLOYERS



INCOME



HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME

The largest group: \$100,000 - \$149,999 (17.4%)
The smallest group: \$200,000 (6.3%)

Indicator ▲	Value	Diff
<\$15,000	8.4%	-3.7%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	7.4%	-2.4%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	10.9%	+1.5%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	9.4%	-3.3%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	16.3%	-1.4%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	12.1%	+0.3%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	21.1%	+5.9%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	8.1%	+2.0%
\$200,000+	6.3%	+1.3%

Bars show deviation from Alabama

TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT



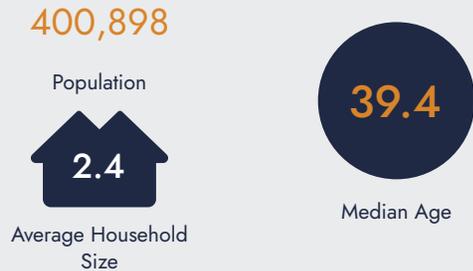
Equity Indicator: Persistent Racial Disparities

Racial inequities are also a national issue but prevalent especially in the Southeastern United States and the State of Alabama where the repercussions of historic injustices are still felt today. An analysis of the Region's racial diversity displays White residents make up 80% of the TARCOG Region, but less than 60% of the Region's unemployed population. Black residents, on the other hand, are overrepresented in the unemployment figures, making up 38% of the cohort and just 15% of the region's population.

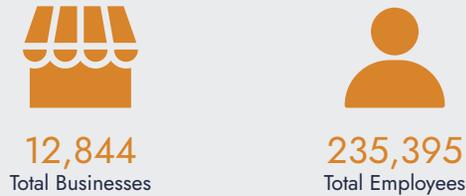
This disparity suggests that Black residents in the TARCOG Region face disproportionate barriers to employment. These barriers are likely varied and compounded, but may include housing instability, educational inequity, lack of access to childcare, or an absence of generational wealth that may otherwise mitigate these barriers. Discriminatory hiring practices or hostile workplace cultures may also be behind Black residents' overrepresentation in unemployment numbers, even if implemented unintentionally.

MADISON COUNTY INSIGHTS

KEY FACTS



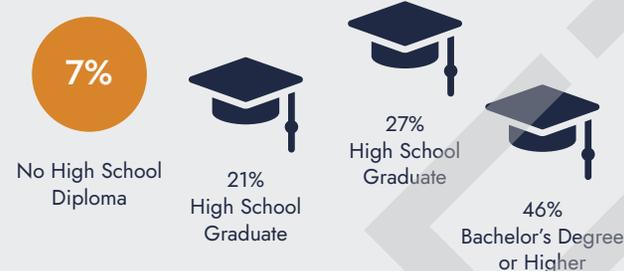
BUSINESS



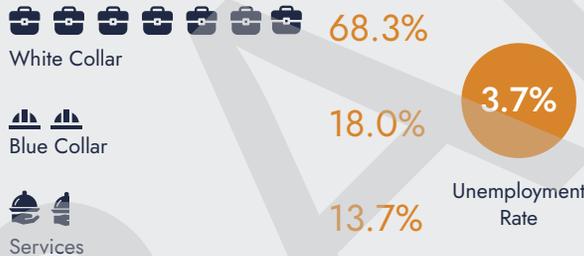
INCOME



EDUCATION



EMPLOYMENT

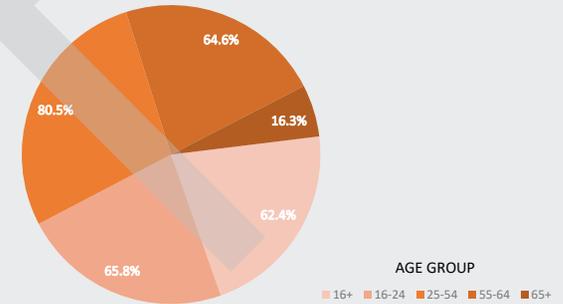


HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME

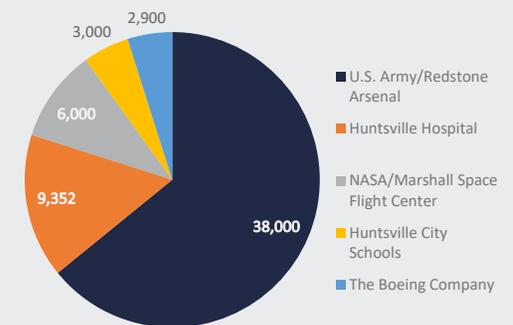
The largest group: \$100,000 - \$149,999 (17.4%)
The smallest group: \$200,000 (6.3%)

Indicator ▲	Value	Diff
<\$15,000	8.3%	-3.8%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	7.8%	-2.0%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	7.8%	-1.6%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	10.8%	-1.9%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	14.0%	-3.7%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	12.6%	+0.8%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	19.4%	+4.2%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	10.9%	+4.8%
\$200,000+	8.3%	+3.3%

Bars show deviation from Alabama



LARGEST COUNTY EMPLOYERS



TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT



Equity Indicator: Persistent Racial Disparities

Racial inequities are also a national issue but prevalent especially in the Southeastern United States and the State of Alabama where the repercussions of historic injustices are still felt today. An analysis of the Region's racial diversity displays White residents make up 80% of the TARCOG Region, but less than 60% of the Region's unemployed population. Black residents, on the other hand, are overrepresented in the unemployment figures, making up 38% of the cohort and just 15% of the region's population.

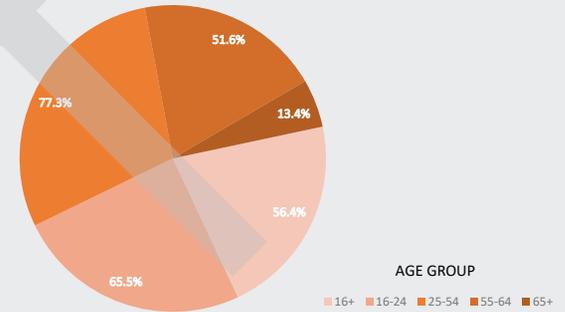
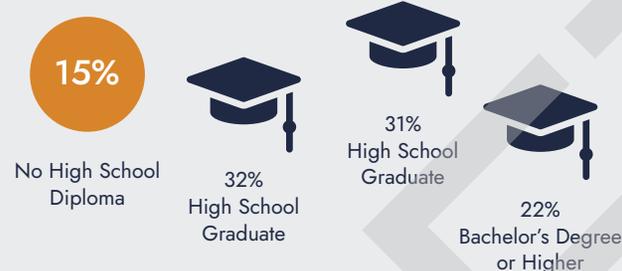
This disparity suggests that Black residents in the TARCOG Region face disproportionate barriers to employment. These barriers are likely varied and compounded, but may include housing instability, educational inequity, lack of access to childcare, or an absence of generational wealth that may otherwise mitigate these barriers. Discriminatory hiring practices or hostile workplace cultures may also be behind Black residents' overrepresentation in unemployment numbers, even if implemented unintentionally.

MARSHALL COUNTY INSIGHTS

KEY FACTS



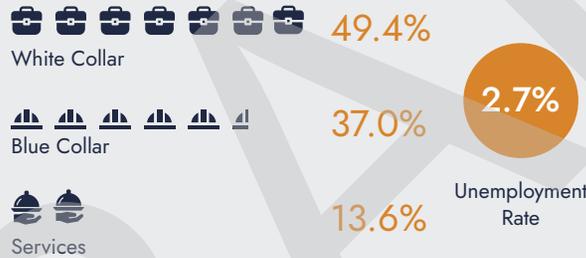
EDUCATION



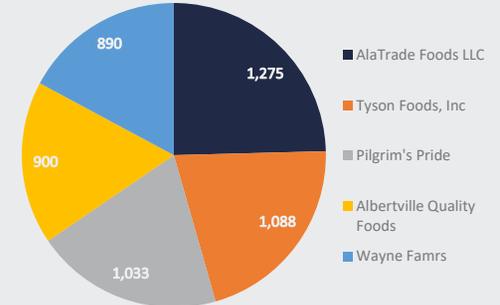
BUSINESS



EMPLOYMENT



LARGEST COUNTY EMPLOYERS



INCOME



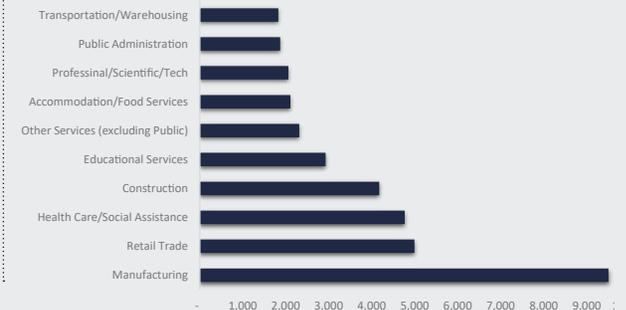
HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME

The largest group: \$100,000 - \$149,999 (17.4%)
The smallest group: \$200,000 (6.3%)

Indicator ▲	Value	Diff	
<\$15,000	10.6%	-1.5%	
\$15,000 - \$24,999	11.1%	+1.3%	
\$25,000 - \$34,999	7.3%	-2.1%	
\$35,000 - \$49,999	15.9%	+3.2%	
\$50,000 - \$74,999	22.3%	+4.6%	
\$75,000 - \$99,999	13.5%	+1.7%	
\$100,000 - \$149,999	11.5%	-3.7%	
\$150,000 - \$199,999	4.3%	-1.8%	
\$200,000+	3.5%	-1.5%	

Bars show deviation from Alabama

TOP INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYMENT



Equity Indicator: Persistent Racial Disparities

Racial inequities are also a national issue but prevalent especially in the Southeastern United States and the State of Alabama where the repercussions of historic injustices are still felt today. An analysis of the Region's racial diversity displays White residents make up 80% of the TARCOG Region, but less than 60% of the Region's unemployed population. Black residents, on the other hand, are overrepresented in the unemployment figures, making up 38% of the cohort and just 15% of the region's population.

This disparity suggests that Black residents in the TARCOG Region face disproportionate barriers to employment. These barriers are likely varied and compounded, but may include housing instability, educational inequity, lack of access to childcare, or an absence of generational wealth that may otherwise mitigate these barriers. Discriminatory hiring practices or hostile workplace cultures may also be behind Black residents' overrepresentation in unemployment numbers, even if implemented unintentionally.

DRAFT

APPENDIX

TARCOG CEDS 2023-2028 APPENDIX

Appendix A – Resolution to Adopt CEDS

RESOLUTION

ADOPTION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) FOR TOP OF ALABAMA REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS: 2023-2028

WHEREAS, The Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) developed a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in compliance with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) regulations for the TARCOG Region, which includes the Counties of DeKalb, Jackson, Limestone, Madison, and Marshall; and

WHEREAS, The CEDS recommends that economic development efforts focus on strengthening the Region’s economy through collaboration, inclusivity, innovation and entrepreneurship, economic place-making, talent development, infrastructure improvements, and enhanced public-private and interagency cooperation, economic resiliency practices, and includes a strategic action plan for the Region; and

WHEREAS, The Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments will develop and provide an Annual Performance Report as required by the US EDA; and

WHEREAS, the TARCOG CEDS Committee has approved the draft CEDS as the TARCOG region’s consensus for future growth and prosperity and recommends that economic development groups across the region’s five counties recognize and adopt the 2023-2028 South Central Pennsylvania CEDS.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the X PARTY OR SIGNATORY supports the strategies set forth in the CEDS and hereby adopts the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the TARCOG region for the period 2023 through 2028.

PASSED and ADOPTED this number day of month, year

Name of Signee

Title of Signee

Appendix B – List of CEDS Committee Members

CEDS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The TARCOG Board of Directors served as the CEDS steering committee, and the following members contributed their time and insights to ensuring that the region’s priorities are accurately reflected in the CEDS document:

- » Larry Chesser, Fort Payne, AL
- » Connie Spears – Councilwoman, Madison City Council District 2
- » James E. Lucas – Athens Board of Education
- » John Myers - Guntersville City Council District 3
- » Mike Ashburn – Councilman, City of Scottsboro, Scottsboro City Hall
- » Chuck Ables - Mayor, Town of Geraldine
- » Lester Black - Commissioner, DeKalb County Commission
- » Paul Cagle - Mayor, Town of Fyffe
- » Ricky Harcrow - Commission President, DeKalb County Commission
- » Philip Anderson - Citizen, Town of Dutton
- » Nancy Griggs - Mountain Lakes Chamber of Commerce
- » Jim McCamy - Mayor, City of Scottsboro
- » James O’Neal - Citizen, Town of Paint Rock
- » Danny Barksdale - Commissioner, Limestone County Commission
- » Helen Carter - Citizen, Town of Elkmont
- » Collin Daly - Chairman, Limestone County Commission
- » Tracy Honea - Mayor, City of Albertville
- » Bob Joslin - Mayor, City of Arab
- » Tommy Battle Mayor, City of Huntsville
- » Mary Caudle - Mayor, Town of Triana
- » Steve Haraway - Commissioner, Madison County Commission
- » Craig Hill, Commissioner - Madison County Commission
- » Mike Kirkland - Vulcan Construction Materials, LP
- » David Little - Councilman, Huntsville City Council
- » Jennie Robinson - Councilwoman, Huntsville City Council
- » Douglas Smith - Citizen, City of Madison
- » Thornton Stanley, Jr. - Stanley Construction Company

Appendix C – Summary of Public Comment Period

Members of the public were given the opportunity to comment on the CEDS document from DATE – DATE. The document was accessed through via the TARCOG website, and comments were submitted via e-mail to EMAIL ADDRESS.

Comments included the following:

SUMMARY

Comments were incorporated into the draft as follows:

SUMMARY

DRAFT



TARCOG