



2021-2025

Strength in Numbers

2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Interim Report



CENTRAL PINES
REGIONAL COUNCIL

01 What is Strength in Numbers?



Central Pines Regional Council (CPRC) 2021-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Strength in Numbers, has three main objectives:

- Build regional capacity;
- Guide economic prosperity & resiliency; and
- Encourage regional collaboration through partnerships & investments.

Due to rapid growth that spans across the region's communities, a coordinated economic strategy is essential to ensure sustainable and equitable growth for all communities in the Central Pines region. Strength in Numbers is strategy-driven and is critical to maintain a robust, regional economic ecosystem.



As the region's Economic Development District (EDD), CPRC is tasked with overseeing the strategy's maintenance and implementation. Strength in Numbers is an important prerequisite to receive recognition as an EDD and strengthens applications for funding and investments in the region. The strategy is updated on a five-year cycle with annual progress reports published during interim years. Strength in Numbers was created digitally on Arc GIS Story Map and may be viewed at [CPRC 2021-2025 Strength in Numbers](#). The following interim report highlights key activities performed over the past federal fiscal year, extending from October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023.

* Central Pines Regional Council was formerly Triangle J Council of Governments.

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02 Framework

Strength in Numbers has five goals centered around one common theme – Fostering Economic Inclusion. All strategies and action plans are inclusive of equity and resiliency, amplifying the economic growth of the region, while being sensitive to areas experiencing disinvestment and their varying socioeconomic and geographic needs.



Goal 1: Business Retention, Expansion & Innovation



Goal 2: Robust Infrastructure



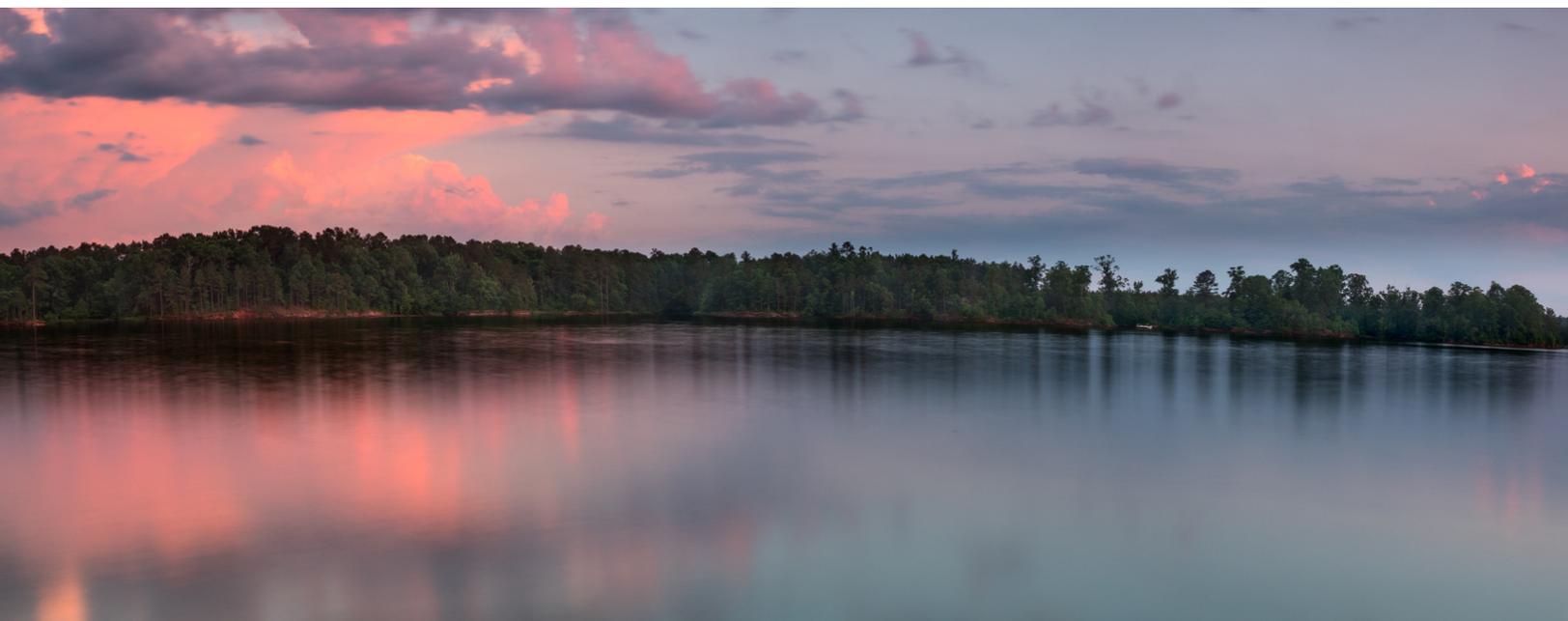
Goal 3: Workforce Development



Goal 4: Connected & Vibrant Places



Goal 5: Economic Resiliency



03 Economic Activity



The Central Pines region continues to be recognized as one of the fastest growing regions in the country. Rapid growth is experienced among urban, suburban, and rural areas alike, resulting in lots of economic successes. However, such growth also brings unique challenges, such as capacity constraints at the local government level, inadequate inventory of viable infrastructure to meet demand, and scarcity of human services and essential basic needs.

Additionally, one of the region's greatest challenges continues to be its widening income and wealth gap. This gap has been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the welcoming of newcomers to the region, playing an influential role in raising the standard of living. Such population and economic growth are not projected to slow down, and the CEDS can be used as a supplemental tool to help the region respond both intentionally and equitably.





04 2023 Implementation



Home Repair & Energy Efficiency/Weatherization

CPRC continues to administer multiple grants to implement home repairs related to health and safety in low-income, senior, and disabled households. In FY2023, CPRC began identifying ways we can increase investment related to energy efficiency and weatherization in households across the region. This includes working with local governments to pursue grants and with other organizations to identify how to utilize successful collaborative models across the region - to better streamline the intake process and deployment of funding. **We anticipate FY2024 presenting many more opportunities and gaps for us to fill as they relate to energy efficiency and weatherization of residential units.**



Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Lead Capacity Building Program

In partnership with Rebuilding Together of the Triangle (RTT), CPRC was awarded a Lead Capacity Building grant award from HUD. This effort will allow CPRC to build a more robust pipeline to abate lead in households with children under six, and build longstanding partnerships with local public health departments, schools, and other related community-based partners.





04 2023 Implementation



Public Workforce Initiative

CPRC continues to work on the implementation of practices to help build a more robust, equitable, and sustainable pipeline for newcomers and incumbent workers in the public workforce. By working with the region's HR directors, universities and community colleges, and private sector partners, we continue to identify potential gaps and seek funding opportunities and additional partnerships to enhance our capacity and capabilities.



American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Support

CPRC continues to be instrumental in helping local governments navigate the compliance that comes with federal funding received through ARPA. This includes working with communities to strategically identify how to best leverage and deploy allocated funding and fulfill reporting requirements.

- CPRC continues to track opportunities related to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), including grants, incentives, and priority areas.





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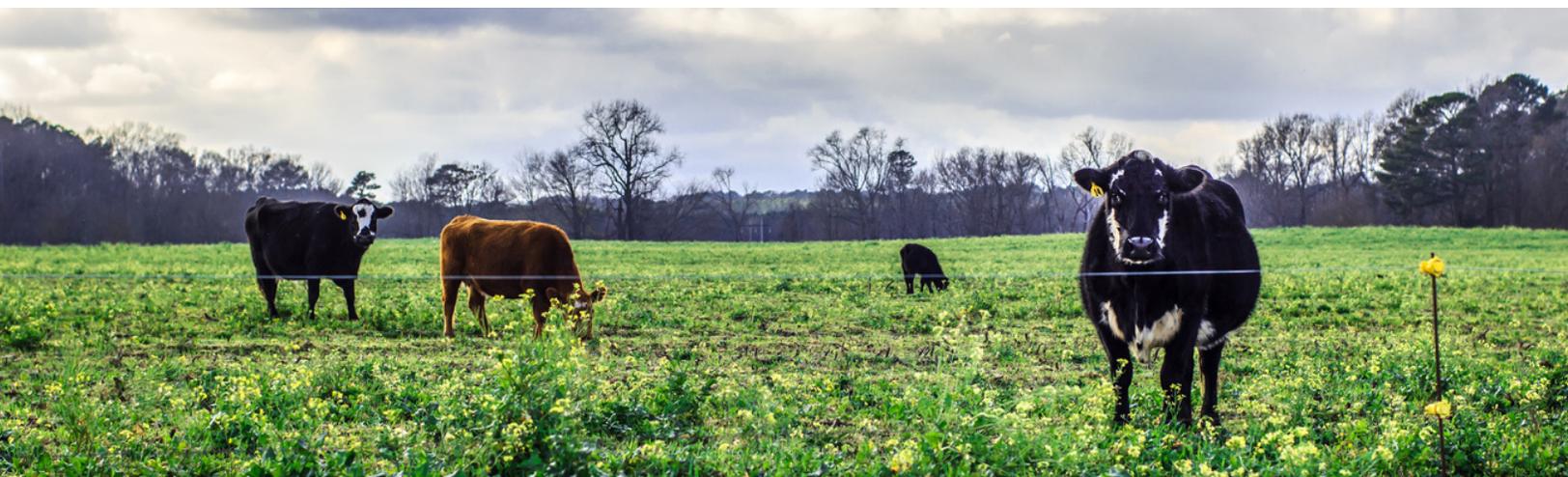


Grant Assistance

Through CPRC's Grant Assistance Program, staff have been able to increase internal capabilities, in addition to external capacity. Roles include researching grants, strategic project development, partnership building, grant writing, grant administration, and working with funding partners.

Additional benefits from the program that have transpired include:

- Providing increased capacity at the local government level has allowed CPRC to be extremely successful in an array of grant awards for member governments in federal fiscal year 2023. This includes awards from Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Energy (DOE), among other funding sources.
- Support from CPRC's Grant Assistance program also afforded increased investment in many rural communities under the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Rural Transformation Grant Fund program. Awarded projects were in Cameron, Carthage, Sanford, and Vass for downtown revitalization, construction of sidewalks, and development of an Agricultural Marketplace. All projects are currently underway.
- CPRC has been able to improve research and messaging around available funding opportunities by cataloging federal, state, local, and philanthropic grant programs, and increasing competitiveness by encouraging regional projects where able.





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Grant Administration

Through grant administrative services, CPRC continues to play an integral role in increasing capacity for member governments and regional partners. This includes administration of federal and state grant awards, local and regional projects, among other administrative-related services.



Connected Triangle +

CPRC is working with the City of Raleigh, who is spearheading an effort around smart city technology, formalizing the common goal of integrating new technology into public life. Participating communities are signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), defining the collaboration's importance and purpose, scope of work, and responsibilities of each party. This conversation led to CPRC submitting an EDA proposal under their new Tech Hubs program, related to advanced communication and immersive technology - with the hopes of increasing resources, connectivity, and use of smart city technology throughout the region and state.



CPRC Strategic Framework

CPRC adopted its first ever strategic framework, which will serve as an essential tool to ensure we can respond to local and regional challenges in a forward-thinking and dynamic way. The framework outlines a vision and priorities that relate to Community and Economic Development, which align with CPRC's CEDS. This will allow for improved tracking and messaging related to the CEDS.



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Connected Region Guide

CPRC has begun planning efforts around the development of a **Connected Region Guide** and process. The **Connected Region Guide** will build on successful regional plans developed across the country to create a shared vision, goals, and success mechanisms and metrics in the CPRC region - that can guide local implementation of transit, housing investment, and land use equitably and seamlessly. The **Connected Region Guide** will focus on issues of crucial importance while relying on critical inputs of expertise from world-class anchor institutions, the community voices, and lived experiences of those traditionally under-represented in the challenges and choices of the region, all through a lens of equitable and sustainable engagement and investment.



Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ)

CPRC administers the deployment of FTZ #93, and this year led to the development of an FTZ marketing video. The video can be used by CPRC staff and economic development partners to incentivize businesses to locate and/or expand in the 15-county region. This messaging will be critical in increasing the zone's usage, which in return can create jobs and enhance our region's foreign direct investment (FDI), while increasing our competitiveness.



Brownfields

CPRC continues to work with our environmental consultant to complete Phase I and Phase II assessments and brownfield-related planning projects under our Environmental Protection Act (EPA) grant award. In partnership with Piedmont Triad Regional Council and West Piedmont Planning District Commission, located in Virginia, the tri-county region began deploying funding for brownfield cleanup work, under a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). The funding can be used as a financing gap tool, to help developers and local governments get projects across the finish line.

05 Evaluation of Progress

The evaluation process allows CPRC and the region to reflect on implementation of the CEDS in FY 2023. Evaluation allows for adjustments to be made for improvement, and to continue to build momentum where able. CPRC leverages their partnership with EDA and other federal and local programs to build upon the five themes below.



Partnership Building:

Utilized to reduce duplication, leverage investment, and execute greater intentionality with implementation efforts.



Strategic Planning & Foresight:

Instilling proactivity can establish a more unified sense of direction and improve responses to changing environments.



Capacity Building:

Processes and implementation derived from the CEDS result in building internal and external capacity, strengthening local and regional communities and economies.



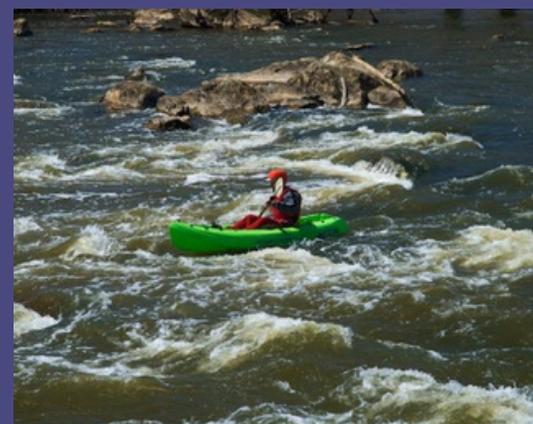
Member Government Support:

The CEDS aligns with the regional plans and the needs of our 47-member governments and regional partners, to define locally-driven, regional strategies.



Data-Informed:

Measurement of performance metrics helps to guide the CEDS process, focusing on quantitative data and impactful experiences uncovered through storytelling.



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06 What's Next?

- Continue to acquire greater investment into the region by tapping into the influx of federal, local, and state dollars and technical assistance opportunities afforded by the American Rescue Plan Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and Inflation Reduction Act.
- Address workforce needs by pursuing opportunities related to clean energy and green infrastructure, public sector workforce needs, and striving to improve the needs of historically underinvested populations and communities.
- Leverage the Triangle Trends Report as a tool to be used throughout the region.
- Align the work of the Community and Economic Development, Housing, Transportation, and Aging Focus Areas to meet the demands of the growing aging population and increased need for human and social services.
 - Increase home repair investment dollars and programs related to home modification efforts in homes of older adults and decrease energy-burdened households by implementing energy efficiency upgrades and weatherization.
- Continue to increase the dedication of staff time to regional food system education, support, and implementation.

Areas of Improvement

- Update performance metrics to be more reflective of the region with quantitative measurements.
- Increase storytelling to highlight successes of CEDS implementation and local accomplishments.
- Update county profiles to be utilized for grants, reports by CPRC, and member governments.
- Instill the CEDS more seamlessly within conversations and projects of other focus area leads at CPRC.
- Increase resources and ability to provide additional support to member governments related to planning and zoning.

07 Let's Stay Connected



For more information about CPRC's Economic Development District (EDD), scan the QR code to the right or visit our website [HERE](#).



Want more information on Strength in Numbers or interested in becoming a partner? Want to host an engagement opportunity or have ideas on how we can broaden representation for our region's CEDS?

Contact Lindsay Whitson, Community & Economic Development Director

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Development of Strength in Numbers would not be possible without participation from a broad range of stakeholders, elected officials, and members of the public. CPRC would like to thank all those involved and is excited to continue to create and maintain robust partnerships throughout the region to help build capacity, guide economic resilience and prosperity, and strengthen collaborative efforts as we plan for a more equitable regional economy. A special thank you to EDA for their investment in our partnership and region.



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