



2021-2025

Strength in Numbers

2025 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 balanced 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, 2024 to September 30, 2025.

* 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 Opportunity. All strategies and action plans include an emphasis on 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 many economic successes. However, such growth also brings unique challenges, such as capacity constraints at the local government level, inadequate inventory of viable and updated infrastructure to meet demand, and scarcity of human services and essential basic needs.

Additionally, one of the region's greatest challenges continues to be our widening income, wealth, and health gap. This gap was 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 in the region, and the CEDS can be used as a supplemental tool to help the region respond both intentionally and responsibly.



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CPRC did not receive an updated grant agreement with EDA until late August 2025. As a result, from January to August 2025, CPRC did not charge any staff time or report any deliverables under CPRC's partnership with EDA. However, our 2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Interim Report still highlights other efforts that CPRC leverages for support to local and regional community and economic development initiatives. We have listed these projects in alignment with EDA's five investment priority areas.



EDA Investment Priority Area #1 - Critical Infrastructure

Under this EDA investment priority area, CPRC has leveraged our following programs to instill community and economic development planning or implementation projects that support development and/or maintenance of public facilities and public infrastructure.

- Facilitation and peer exchange opportunities related to education around regional water/sewer efforts.
- Facilitation of regional water partnerships that focus on water quality and water capacity to support current and projected growth patterns.
- Current and long-range planning services, which has an impact on development patterns that include recognizing the need for updated and/or new infrastructure.
- Coordination of urban and rural transportation planning with our region's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs).
- Administration of a Regional Brownfields Consortium, which can be leveraged to encourage development on underutilized land.



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EDA Investment Priority Area #2 - Workforce

Under this EDA investment priority area, CPRC has leveraged our following programs for community and economic development projects related to workforce.

- Oversight of home repair programs in six counties, improving quality of homes to a safe and livable standard. Safe and affordable housing is necessary to be able to retain and attract workers in communities of various sizes.
- Continued partnerships with workforce development boards and human services partners in the region who support job skills training and opportunities for well-paying jobs among various industries.
- Development and implementation of local digital opportunity plans, including solutions related to inventory of viable broadband infrastructure, which is critical to employment and education access.





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EDA Investment Priority Area #3 - Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Under this EDA investment priority area, CPRC has leveraged our following programs to support innovation-related efforts. We do not have tangible data if this support leads to entrepreneurship, but we can make reasonable assumptions that education and implementation in the innovation space, does have some direct correlation to entrepreneurship in the region.

- CPRC launched a regional Human Resources Consortium, to take an innovative approach to create a shared-service solution to strengthen local government workforce strategy. The Consortium addresses persistent, region-wide challenges in local government workforce recruitment, retention, and compensation strategy. Collaborative solutions are critical for local governments to overcome, to have adequate capacity and efficiencies to provide essential services and manage community resources.



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EDA Investment Priority Area #4 - Economic Recovery Resilience

Under this EDA investment priority area, CPRC has participated in economic development planning or implementation projects that enhance the ability of our region to withstand and recover from adverse short-term or long-term changes in economic conditions - including economic impacts from natural disasters. These include:

- Providing grant administration services for various projects on behalf of our local governments. This includes administration of projects from state and federal programs that span various topic areas such as downtown revitalization, sidewalk development, construction of community service buildings, flood mitigation tools such as culvert replacement, among others. Many of CPRC's communities do not have the capacity to administer projects awarded through grant funds, and CPRC plays a vital role within this area. Therefore, our communities can receive and compliantly administer funds to assist with economic recovery resilience.
- Additionally, CPRC manages a robust Grant Assistance program, supporting communities of all sizes. CPRC has supported an equal split of grant applications that assist small, mid, and large-sized communities. Through this program, CPRC performs the following tasks:
 - tracking funding programs
 - developing project concepts and proposals
 - writing and/or reviewing grant applications
 - assisting with reporting and administration of awarded grants
 - engaging funding agencies and conducting proactive outreach on programs
 - evaluating application successes and longer-term trends
 - facilitating internal prioritization and coordination of grant processes



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EDA Investment Priority Area #5 - Manufacturing

Under this EDA investment priority area, CPRC leverages current programs that support the manufacturing industry and contribute to the economic competitiveness of our region. These include:

- CPRC is the grantee and program administrator for Foreign Trade Zone #93 (FTZ). Although CPRC's work in this space is not supported by our partnership with EDA, we market this economic development tool to communities of all sizes.
- CPRC has published a data dashboard that includes public facing data on a local and regional scale. The data dashboard includes interactive maps; local, regional, and statewide data and their sources; and blogs that can provide educational content around data quality, CPRC projects, among other topics. The dashboard serves as a valuable resource to CPRC staff and our external partners - illustrating economic-related data, and amplifying the competitiveness of grant applications throughout the region.

05 Evaluation of Progress

The evaluation process allows CPRC and the region to reflect on implementation of the CEDS in FY 2025. Evaluation allows for adjustments to be made for improvement, and to continue to build momentum where able. CPRC leverages our 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 48-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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05 Evaluation of Progress

Evaluating progress completed this year is difficult, since we did not have EDA funding for the majority of the federal fiscal year. CPRC looks forward to conducting a more thorough and comprehensive evaluation process next year.

06 What's Next?

Next year we plan to do a full rewrite of the region's CEDS, ensuring its alignment with current regional plans already adopted, and leveraging our programs and resources mentioned throughout this report. With this full update, we imagine some of the strategies looking different, and creating a process to track performance metrics in a more intentional and measurable way.

CPRC will also continue to engage with local governments and regional partners to acquire greater public investment, which will undoubtedly spur additional private investment. Because of our partnership with EDA, we are able to significantly expand capacity throughout our region, which is deemed as critical support for our smaller, rural communities.



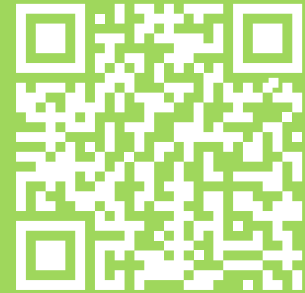
07 Let's Stay Connected



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



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 the future. A special thank you to EDA for their investment in our partnership and region.



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