

# Northwest Georgia's Economic Development Strategy

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2023 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) ANNUAL  
UPDATE

Northwest Georgia Regional Commission  
NWGRC COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
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## Introduction

The Northwest Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a strategic plan for the economic development of the Northwest Georgia Region. The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission develops and implements this strategic plan with the assistance of the CEDS Strategy Committee. The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission receives funds from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to create this plan.

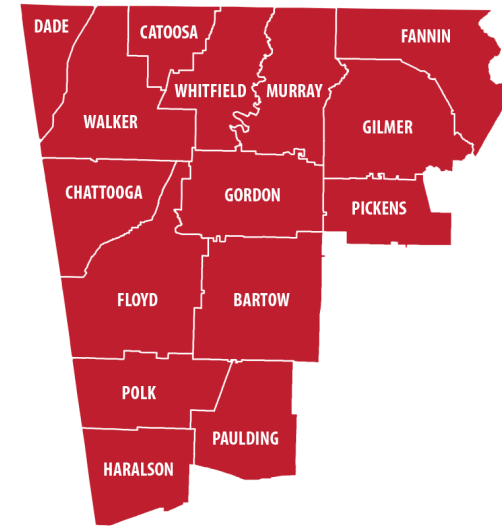
The Northwest Georgia Economic Development Strategy for the period of 2022-2026, was submitted in September 2022. The purpose of this annual update is to show our progress on the strategic plan, as well as discuss the general condition of the region.



## Northwest Georgia Regional Overview

### Overview

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission’s district consists of 15 counties (Bartow, Catoosa, Chattooga, Dade, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Gordon, Haralson, Murray, Paulding, Pickens, Polk, Walker, and Whitfield) and the forty-eight cities located within these counties. The region is predominantly rural but continues to see substantial growth due to its proximity to Atlanta and Chattanooga. The Interstate 75 corridor runs north-south through the eastern part of the Region connecting these two metropolitan areas.



### Geography

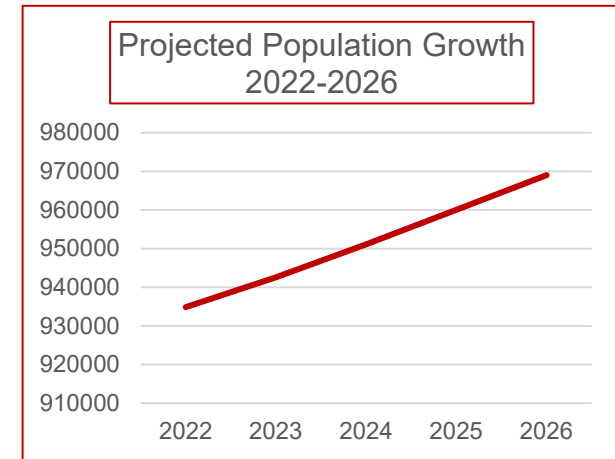
Northwest Georgia is located in the southern foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Georgia’s Ridge and Valley, Blue Ridge Mountains, and Piedmont geographical regions. The region consists primarily of rolling hills with valleys and tall hills, ridges, and mountains running primarily north-south.

### Demographic

The estimated population of Northwest Georgia is 942,597 (Governor’s’ Office of Planning and Budget). By 2025, this is estimated to be at 960,041, or a 12.6% change since 2010. The median age of northwest Georgia is 38.8 as of 2022. Our region is aging at a much higher rate than the rest of Georgia with a 37.9% increase in 60+ residents from 2000-2013. As of the 2020 census, the 65+ segment made up 16.5% of the population of the region.

### Industry Mix

The largest industry in the region remains the service-providing sector of the economy accounting for 56.9% of the jobs in the region (Q1 2023). This is followed by the good-producing sector accounting for 28.4% of the employment in the region. The single industry that is responsible for the most jobs though is the manufacturing sector, which accounts for 23.8% of all employment.



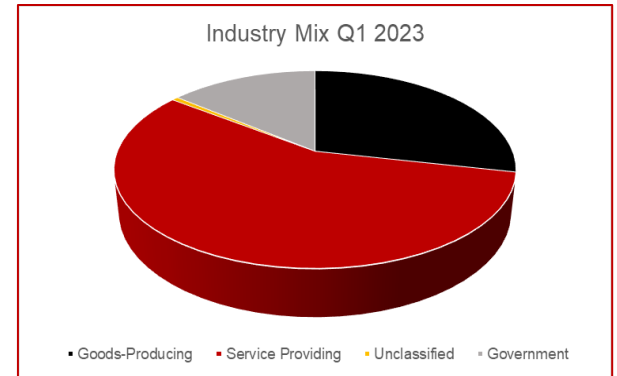
## Economy

Traditionally, the region’s economic base has depended upon the manufacturing sector (23.8% of the region’s employment in Q1 2023), dominated by floor covering industry. Although, the collapse of the housing industry in 2007 dramatically reduced demand for floor covering products and lead to several plant closings in the region. However, the floor covering industry still dominates the economy in several of northwest Georgia’s counties.

Manufacturing in northwest Georgia continues to change its production model. Moving from a highly labor-intensive, hands-on production system to an automated system, where skilled technicians guide machines using computer programming or perform manual tasks with robotic assistance. In this changing job market, prospective employees must have or be able to learn the required skill set including engineering, computer technology, and programming. Additionally, the labor market appears to be continuing to trend toward a more logistics and services focused economy.

The Georgia Department of Labor’s Area Labor Profile cites the ten largest employers in northwest Georgia. Of the ten employers listed, four are healthcare institutions (Floyd, Gordon, Hamilton, and Wellstar). The next largest industry is the floor manufacturing companies with three top-ten employers (Engineered Floors, Mohawk Carpet, and Shaw Industries.)

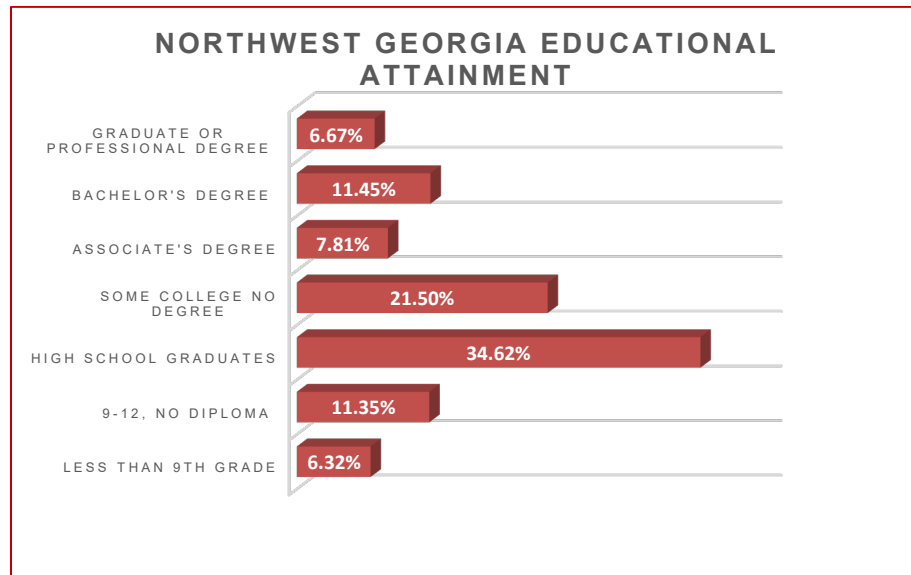
The 24-month unemployment rate for Northwest Georgia is 3.24%, which is 0.56% less than the national average of 3.8%. In 2021, the Per Capita Income in the region was \$43,636 as calculated by the Georgia Department of Labor. This is still below the national and statewide Per Capita Income of \$64,143 and \$55,786, respectively.



- Ten Largest Employers in Northwest Georgia**
1. Century II Staffing, LLC
  2. Engineered Floors, LLC
  3. Floyd Healthcare Man., Inc.
  4. Gordon Hospital
  5. Hamilton Medical Center, Inc.
  6. Mohawk Carpet Dist., L.P.
  7. Roper Corporation
  8. Shaw Industries Group, Inc.
  9. Walmart
  10. Wellstar Health System, Inc.

## Education

Improving high school graduation rates is an important first step in ensuring the region has a skilled workforce, but it is also essential for the labor force to have an ample number of workers with advanced training, certifications, and degrees. High school graduation rates are rising in the region with the average being 92.1% as of 2022, this is up 1.2 percent from 2021. 82% of individuals 25 or older in the region have a high school education or higher. Highschool graduate rates in our 25+ population are also up a little over 1 percent at 34.62%. 25.93% of the region's 25+ population has a college degree, with the largest segment of that being bachelor's degrees (11.45%). This is slightly down from our previous year which had the percentage of people with a degree at 27%.



Georgia Department of Education 2022 Four-Year Graduation Rate			
System Name	Graduation Class Size	Total Graduated	Graduation Rate
Bartow County	924	872	94.4%
Catoosa County	854	764	89.5%
Chattooga County	207	175	84.5%
Dade County	164	150	91.5%
Fannin County	198	179	90.4%
Floyd County	595	545	91.6%
Gilmer County	267	251	94.0%
Gordon County	456	438	96.1%
Haralson County	214	208	97.2%
Murray County	419	387	92.4%
Paulding County	2,423	2,191	90.4%
Pickens County	261	239	91.6%
Polk County	561	504	89.8%
Walker County	584	532	91.1%
Whitfield County	1,001	891	89.0%
Bremen City	185	181	97.8%
Calhoun City	301	300	99.7%
Cartersville City	373	333	89.3%
Chickamauga City	108	106	98.2%
Dalton City	698	548	78.5%
Rome City	457	416	91.0%
Trion City	90	89	98.9%
Northwest Georgia Region	11,340	10,299	92.1%

Source: Georgia Department of Education

## Regional Vision, Goals, and Strategies

### *Regional Vision*

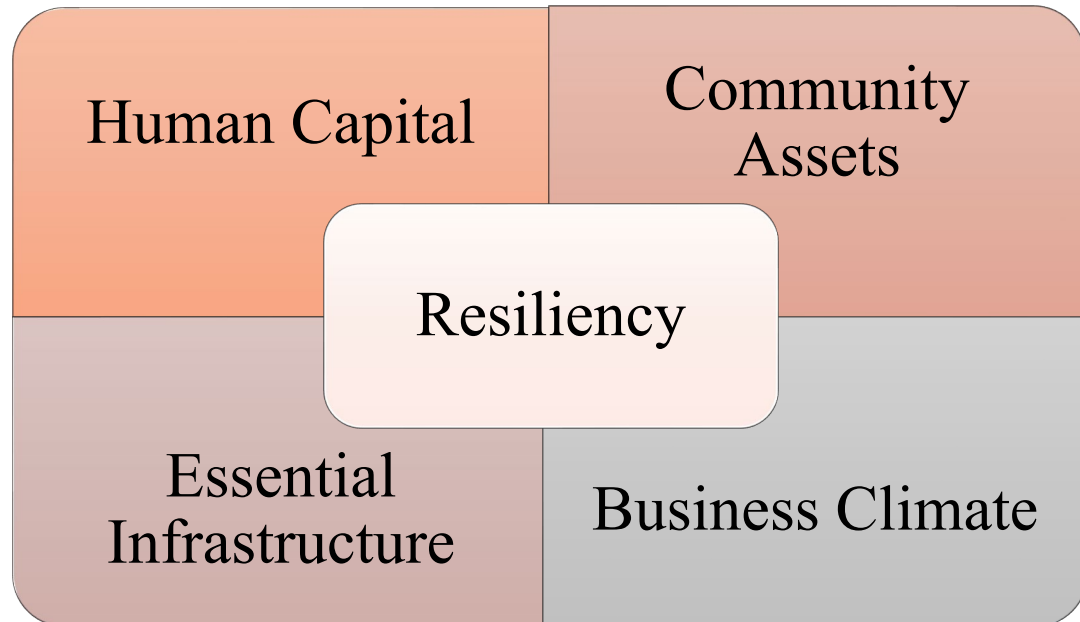
Northwest Georgia strives to become a region where economic opportunities are available for all citizens; where our natural resources are used wisely and conserved for future generations; where community facilities and services support the needs of everyone; where cooperation among the public, private, and non-profit sectors is commonplace, and where citizens have opportunities to enjoy a healthy and productive life.

### *Regional Goals & Strategies*

Matching the themes identified in the SWOT Analysis, the regional goals in Northwest Georgia's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy are organized into five broad categories:

1. Human Capital,
2. Community Assets,
3. Essential Infrastructure,
4. Business Climate, and
5. Resiliency

These categories are associated with regional goals and appropriate strategies in the following section of the document.



## *Regional Goals at a Glance*

### **Human Capital**

- **Workforce Skills:** Increase the number of residents skilled in advanced manufacturing to meet the current and changing needs of Northwest Georgia employers.
- **Educational Attainment:** Expand the number of students in the region that are prepared for future employment in skilled and professional positions through enhanced educational opportunities and active career counseling.
- **Human Services:** Ensure appropriate human services are available to meet the needs of the region's current and future workforce.

### **Community Assets**

- **Tourism and Film Industry:** Increase tourism, visitor spending, and revenue earned from the film industry in Northwest Georgia.
- **Quality of Life:** Enhance quality of life amenities in the region to retain talent, and to gain a competitive advantage when recruiting new business and industry.
- **Housing:** Ensure the availability of attainable, decent, and safe housing to meet the needs of the region's growing workforce.

### **Business Climate**

- Increase entrepreneurship and innovation by supporting business development in existing and emerging sectors.
- Increase access to capital for small businesses in the region. The CEDS allows use of Revolving Door Funds to supplement financial support to local businesses to ensure economic stability and growth in Northwest Georgia. These RLF funds are specifically designed to be low interest loans to sustain and stimulate job growth.

### **Essential Infrastructure**

- **Industrial Properties:** Ensure Northwest Georgia has sufficient, ready-to-develop industrial properties available to meet the region's current and future needs.
- **Transportation:** Advocate for transportation projects that are critical for regional economic development.
- **High Speed Internet:** Increase coverage and accessibility of high-speed internet for residential, commercial, and industrial areas, with a focus on rural areas.
- **Traditional Infrastructure:** Ensure Communities in the region have adequate, basic infrastructure to implement their community and economic development objectives.

### **Resiliency**

- **Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness:** Ensure that all communities have updated hazard mitigation plans and are prepared for natural disasters.
- **Communications During Economic Downturn or Emergency:** Ensure adequate communication infrastructure between local governments and economic development organizations during economic downturns.
- **Resilient Workforce:** Ensure that education and workforce training are suitable to allow workers to easily switch jobs and attain broader skill sets.
- **Industrial Diversity:** Achieve sufficient industrial diversity to minimize the impacts on the regional economy of a downturn in any given industry sector.
- Ensure adequate housing options are available to meet existing and future workforce demands.



## NWGRC Assistance Provided in 2023

Local Government	Project Description	Estimated Investment		Funding Sources / Program	Status
		Grant Funds	Local Funds		
City of Cartersville	City of Cartersville Downtown Master Plan	\$47,500	\$47,500	Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)	Funded
City of Cedartown	Downtown Cedartown Corridor Enhancement Project	\$1,000,000	\$769,956	ARC	Funded
Chattooga County	Tooga Theater Restoration – Master Plan	\$140,000	\$35,000	ARC	Funded
Dade County Water and Sewer Authority	Dade County WSA Vanguard Industrial Road and SR 299 Water Main Upgrades	\$595,700	\$595,700	ARC	Funded
City of LaFayette	Water Pollution Control Plant Improvements	\$750,000	\$1,917,000	ARC	Funded
City of Lookout Mountain	Trail Plan	\$37,500	\$37,500	ARC	Funded
City of Jasper	Perrow Park Redevelopment Project	\$1,000,000	\$1,056,960	ARC	Funded
City of Tallapoosa	Downtown Master Plan	\$47,500	\$47,500	ARC	Funded
Waker County	Battlefield Connector Multi-Use Trail	\$412,492.50	\$412,492.50	ARC	Pending
City of Rossville	City of Rossville	\$163,116.12	\$7,767.43	Assistance to Firefighter's Grant (AFG)	Funded
City of LaFayette	Invest in the Hive – LaFayette Litter Reduction Initiative	\$4,982.61	\$0.00	Keep Georgia Beautiful (BRACE)	Funded
City of Cedartown	Bert Wood Park Rehabilitation Project	\$500,000	\$513,000	Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	Pending
City of Cohutta	Cohutta Railroad Junction Park	\$285,000	\$285,000	LWCF	NF
City of Dalton	Mack Gaston Splash Pad Project	\$243,000	\$243,000	LWCF	NF
City of Ringgold	Ringgold Recreational Complex	\$468,700	\$468,700	LWCF	NF
Walker County	Walker Rocks Park – Phase III	\$283,000	\$283,000	LWCF	Pending

City of Dalton	Pentz and Cuyler Street Corridor Improvements Project	\$2,000,000	\$1,345,205	Improving Neighborhood Outcomes in Disproportionately Impacted Communities Grant	Funded
City of Rossville	John Ross Commons Playground	\$387,000	\$0.00	Improving Neighborhood Outcomes in Disproportionately Impacted Communities Grant	Funded
City of Cedartown	City of Cedartown - Equipment	\$377,899	\$0.00	Public Safety and Community Violence Reduction Grant	Funded
City of Cedartown	City of Cedartown - Personnel	\$610,521.54	\$0.00	Public Safety and Community Violence Reduction Grant	Funded
Catoosa County	Catoosa County w/ the Cities of Fort Oglethorpe and Ringgold	\$0.00	\$15,000	Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH)	Selected
Murray County	Murray County w/ the Cities of Chatsworth, Cohutta, and Eton	\$0.00	\$15,000	GICH	Not Selected
City of Lafayette	Educating residents through various and evens and door to door meetings.	\$4,982.61	\$0.00	Keep GA Beautiful BRACE	Funded
Greater Dalton Chamber Foundation	Development of a 60 x 90- foot mini soccer pitch.	\$100,000	\$132,320	GA 100 Initiative	Pending
Cedartown	Installation of a poured-in-place recycled tire surface at the Peek Park Playground.	\$245,337	\$21,195	GAEPD Tire Derived Product	Funded
City of Dalton	Infrastructure Development for housing needs.	\$1,500,000	\$0.00	Rural Workforce Housing Initiative (RWHI)	Pending
City of Eton	Infrastructure Development for housing needs.	\$2,500,000	\$0.00	RWHI	Pending

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