

# Northwest Georgia's Resiliency Plan

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NORTHWEST GEORGIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Northwest Georgia Regional Commission  
NWGRC COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
1 JACKSON HILL -- ROME, GEORGIA 30161

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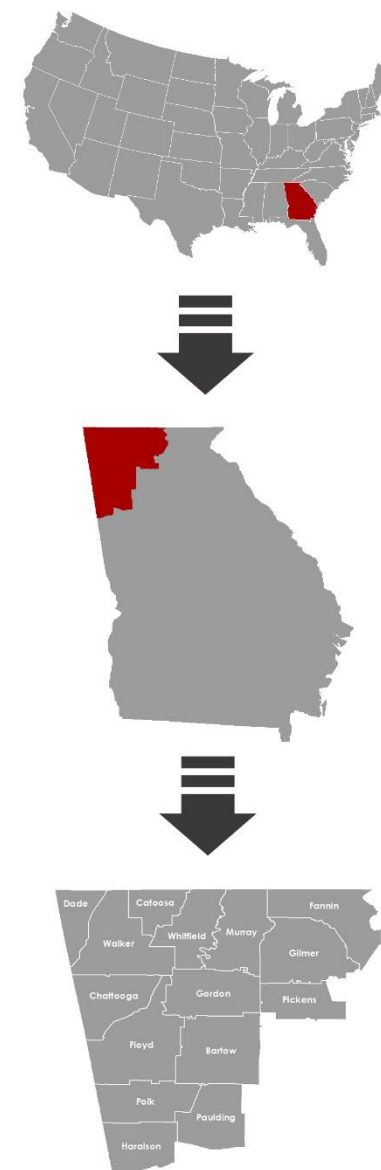
# Executive Summary

## Purpose and Scope of the plan

The plan aims to increase the region's resilience against future economic downturns and natural disasters. Preparation of the plan was funded utilizing an EDA Cares Act Grant awarded to the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission. The plan is intended to last 5-10 years and is designed for the fifteen-county area that the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission assists.

## Process to develop plan

Northwest Georgia Regional Commission developed this plan based on the findings of the Economic Impact Assessment, the stakeholder meetings and the survey held for the Recovery Plan, the Community Economic Development Strategy, and general best practices for resiliency. The Economic Impact Assessment influenced the development of this plan due to its indications of the continued importance of manufacturing, especially textile manufacturing, for the region. This dependence is shown by the fact that five of the counties that experienced the highest u6+ unemployment during the March 7 – June 13 period when the pandemic had the greatest economic harm had manufacturing as their largest sector according to the Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States and by the fact that of those five counties, four had Textile Mills as the three-digit NAICS Code industry subsector that experienced the greatest losses during that time, and the fifth had Textile Mills experiencing the second-most losses.



The stakeholder meetings and the survey for the Recovery Plan influenced the development of this plan due to their emphasis on the importance of affordable housing and workforce training. Every stakeholder meeting mentioned affordable housing as one of the things needed for recovery from the pandemic, and 10.53% of respondents to the survey listed affordable housing as something that local governments and NWGRC could do to help the region recover from the pandemic. A skilled workforce was mentioned during 33.33% of meetings for individual counties as one of the things needed for recovery from the pandemic, 15.79% of survey respondents listed workforce development as something that local governments and NWGRC could do to help the region recover from the pandemic, 52.38% listed workforce development as something that NWGRC could do to help the government, chamber of commerce, or development authority the respondent worked for, and 23.08% listed workforce development as one of the other forms of assistant the government, chamber of commerce, or development authority that the respondent worked for needed to recover from the pandemic.

### Key takeaways of plan

- Resiliency is about the ability of a region to bounce back from stressors and is achieved through planning, developing a diverse industry base and by training a flexible workforce.
- The key goals of the plan are:
  - Ensure that all communities have updated hazard mitigation plans and are prepared for natural disasters
  - Ensure adequate communication infrastructure between local governments and economic development organizations during economic downturns
  - Ensure that education and workforce training are suitable to allow workers to easily switch jobs and get broader skill sets.
  - Ensure sufficient industrial diversity.
  - Ensure that have adequate housing.

## Northwest Georgia Regional 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-nine 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 region's eastern part 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 was 898,355 in 2019, which is on par with the projected population of 919,120 by 2021. The median age in the region was 38.1 years in 2018, which is also on par with the projection of a median age of 39.1 by 2021.

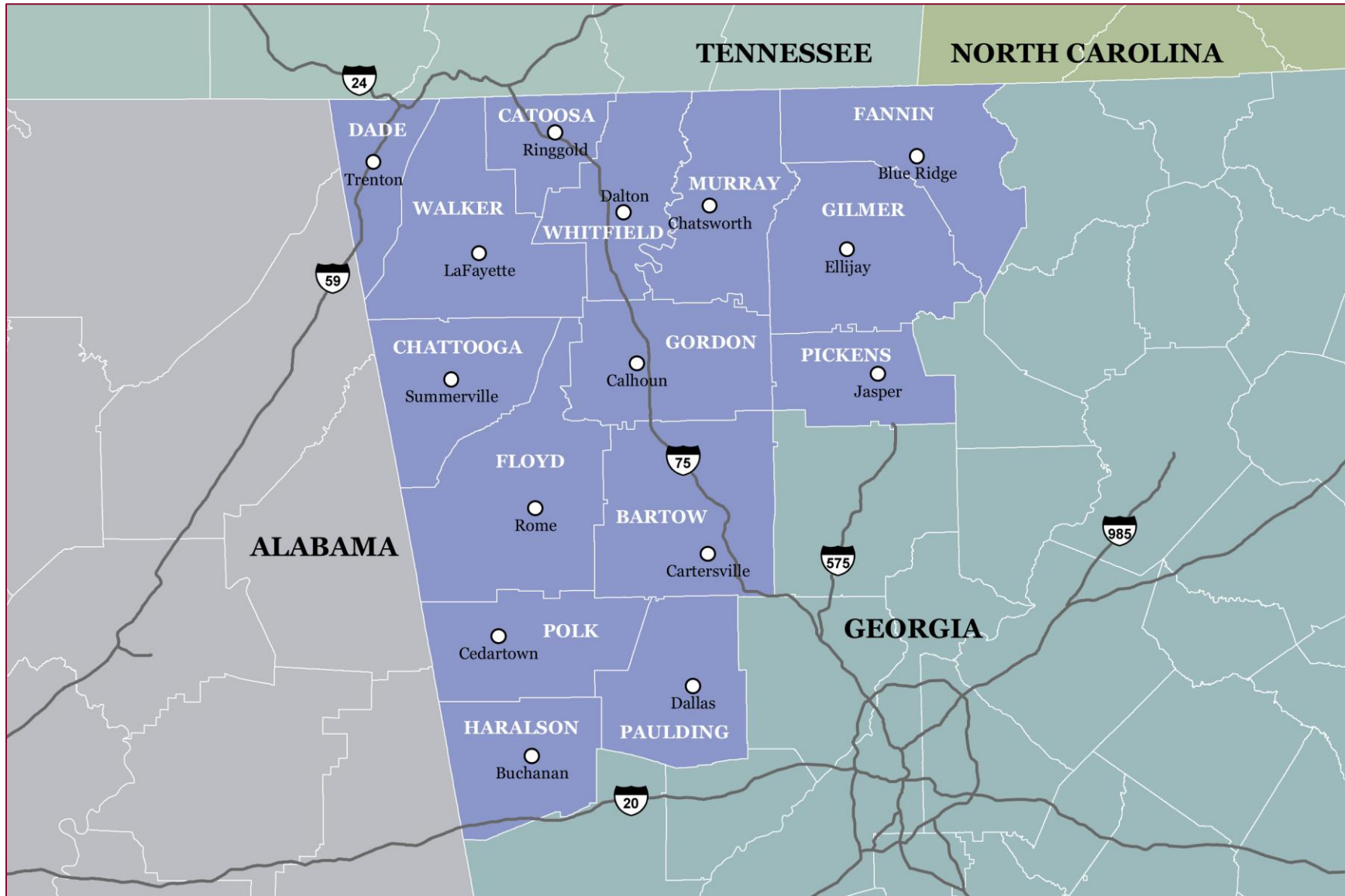
### Industry Mix

In 2020, the service-providing segment of the economy accounted for 56.4% of jobs in the region, the goods-producing segment accounted for 27.9% of jobs, and the government segment accounted for 15.5 percent of the jobs in Northwest Georgia. However, manufacturing was the largest single industry sector in the region, making up 23.4% of all jobs.

### Education

Improved high school graduation rates is an important first step in ensuring the region has a skilled workforce. However, it is also essential for the labor force to have many workers with advanced training, certifications, and degrees. Educational attainment has been up for the region since 2015. The region's 25 year and older population who have obtained a high school diploma or higher in 2019 is just over 81%. Graduate or professional degrees rose 0.03% to 6.70%, those with a bachelor's degree rose 0.9% to 11.60%, Associate Degree and Some College rose 0.7% to 7.60% and 21.80%. High School Graduate dropped -0.5% to 33.90%.

## Map of Northwest Georgia



## Regional Vision, Goals, and Strategies

In 2017, NWGRC adopted a five-year comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) that establishes a regional vision and regional economic development goals for northwest Georgia.

### 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 common-place, and where citizens have opportunities to enjoy a healthy and productive life.

### Regional Goals & Strategies

Matching the themes identified in the SWOT Analysis, Northwest Georgia's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy organized the regional goals into four broad categories: human capital, community assets, essential infrastructure, and business climate. The goals for each category are listed below.

#### Regional Goals at a Glance

### Human Capital

- **Workforce Skills:** Increase the number of residents skilled in advanced manufacturing (and other middle- skill, living wage occupations) in order to meet current and changing needs of northwest Georgia employers.
- **Educational Attainment:** Increased number of residents that have high school diplomas, have graduated from College and Career Academies, and have received post-secondary certificates or degrees.
- **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:** Unfortunately, tourism and the film industry took hit during the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Many of the counties in the region depend on tourism for economic development. While tourism and film are slowly starting to come back to the State and region, the impact on the economy has been vast.
- **Quality of Life:** Enhance quality of life amenities in the region to retain talent and gain a competitive advantage when recruiting new businesses and industry.
- **Housing:** Ensure adequate housing is available to meet the needs of the northwest Georgia workforce, which is

## 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.

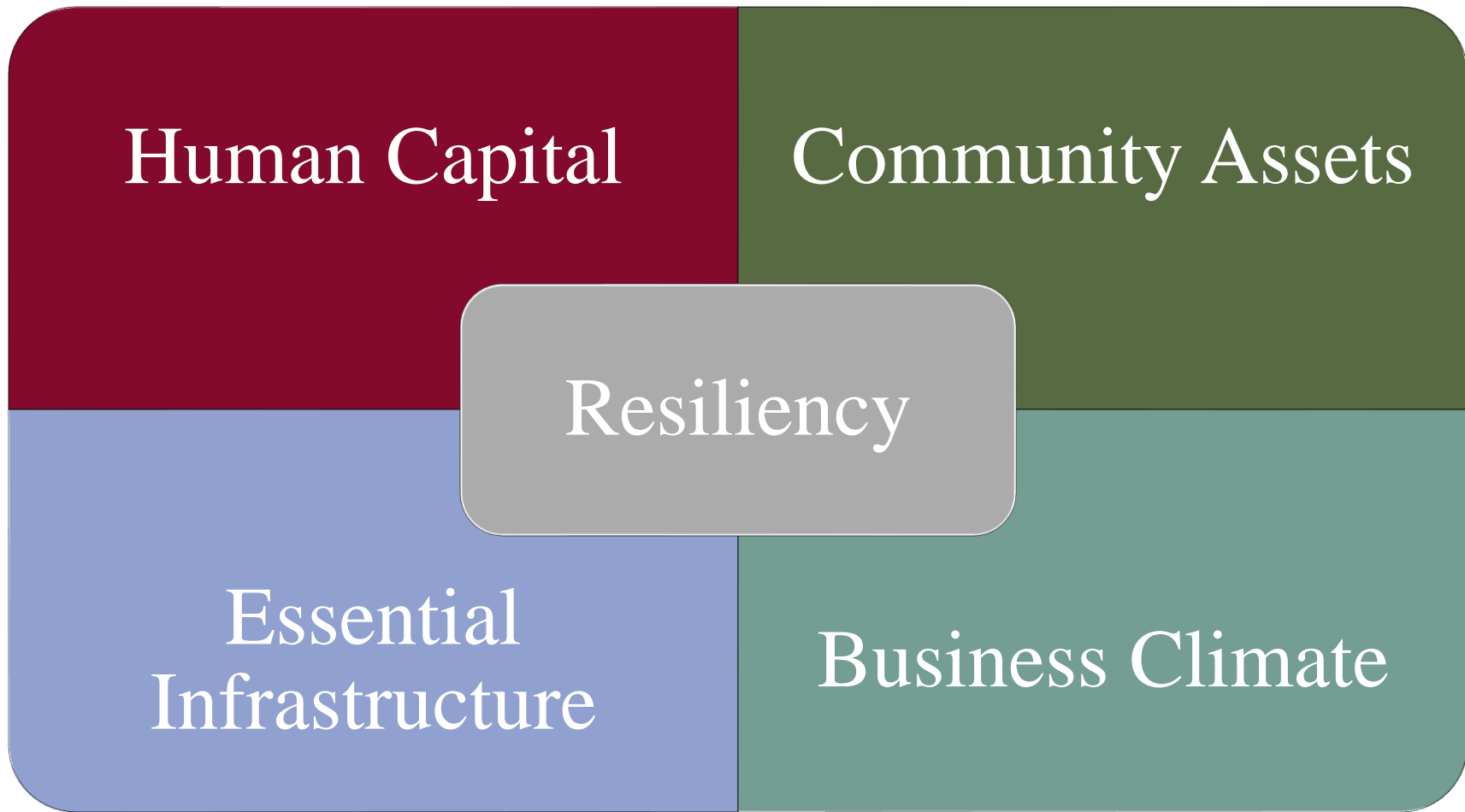
## Business Climate

- **Improved Business Climate:** Increase entrepreneurship and innovation by supporting business development in existing and emerging sectors.



## Resiliency and the CEDS

Members of the CEDS committees were encouraged to consider economic resiliency throughout the SWOT analysis and during the development of the region's goals and strategies. However, the COVID-19 Pandemic highlighted a need for a more detailed approach to addressing the long-term economic resilience of Northwest Georgia. This plan addresses this need by examining resiliency as a fifth, central category in our economic development strategy.



## Economic Resiliency

The Economic Development Administration defines economic resiliency as "the ability of a region or community to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stressor." This definition includes not only natural disasters and hazards such as hurricanes and tornados, but also man-made economic disruptions such as widespread layoffs or quarantines due to an infectious disease. Economic resiliency is important because it allows for quicker recovery from economic downturns, reducing the harm caused to the community.

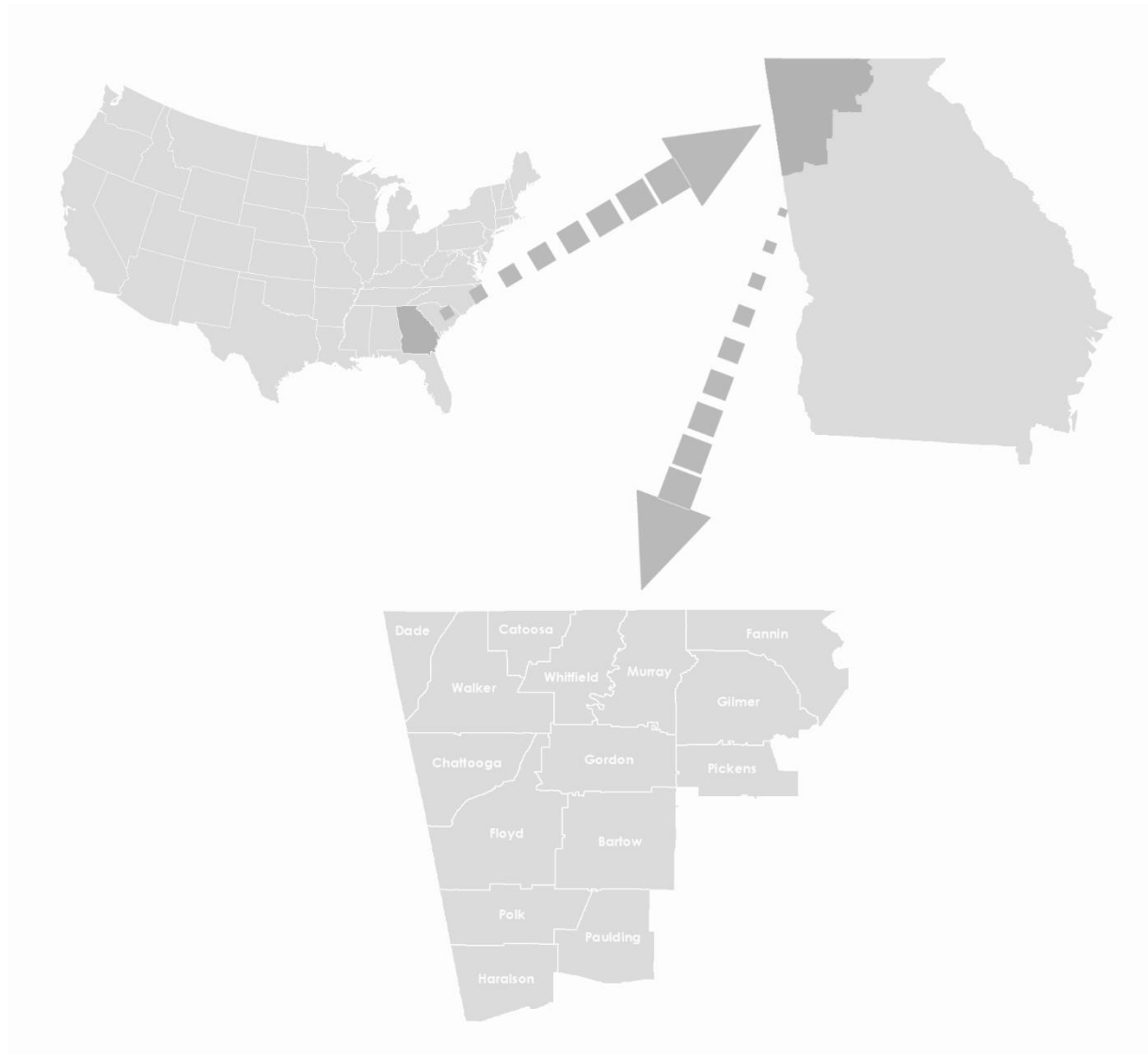
There are several common methods for achieving resiliency. Some of these methods include plans and strategies to define and implement a collective vision for resilience, preparing for natural disasters, broadening the industrial base so the regional economy is not over-reliant on any one industry sector, and building a workforce that can easily shift between different types of jobs.

### Resiliency Goals at a Glance

#### Resiliency

- Ensure that all communities have updated hazard mitigation plans and are prepared for natural disasters.
- Ensure adequate communication infrastructure between local governments and economic development organizations during economic downturns.
- Ensure that education and workforce training are suitable to allow workers to easily switch jobs and get broader skill sets.
- Achieve sufficient industrial diversity to minimize the impacts to the regional economy of a downturn in any given industry sector.
- Ensure adequate housing options are available to meet existing and future workforce demands.

## Resiliency Goals, Strategies, & Action Items



## I. Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness

*Goal: Ensure that all communities have updated hazard mitigation plans and are prepared for natural disasters.*

Disaster preparedness and hazard mitigation are important because hazard mitigation plans and resilient public infrastructure help with ensuring that communities can recover quickly from disasters. This goal will help with resiliency because it will allow communities to get back to normal economic function faster since the hazard mitigation plans will help the community know what to do, and the resilient public infrastructure will help reduce the amount of infrastructure that needs to be repaired or replaced.

### *Strategies:*

1. Update hazard mitigation plans where necessary
  
2. Ensure public infrastructure is reliable and resilient

### *Action Items:*

- a. Examine county hazard mitigation plans to ensure they are current and address all likely disasters
  
- b. Develop a strategy for implementing projects listed in local hazard mitigation plans
  
- a. Investigate current infrastructure for reliability and resiliency and improve any deficiencies found
  
- b. Ensure water and wastewater systems are resilient and interconnected when feasible.
  
- c. Install backup generators on all critical infrastructure

## II. Communications during Economic Downturn or Emergency

*Goal: Ensure adequate communication infrastructure between local governments and economic development organizations during economic downturns.*

Communication infrastructure is important because it will help ensure that cooperation between local governments and economic development organizations occurs as quickly as possible. Adequate communication infrastructure will help with resiliency because it will allow quicker action during economic downturns to begin the recovery process.

### Strategies:

1. Ensure that local governments and economic development organizations are familiar with each other
  
2. Ensure that local governments and economic development organizations have an easy way of getting together and communicating

### Action Items:

- a. Meet with local economic development organizations to introduce yourself (if necessary)
- b. Continue meeting with local economic development organizations on a regular basis to ensure familiarity
  
- a. Collaborate to determine the most effective way of communicating during emergencies
- b. Arrange to have the chosen methods available for when emergencies happen.

### III. Resilient Workforce

*Goal: Ensure that education and workforce training are suitable to allow workers to easily switch jobs and get broader skill sets.*

Education and workforce training are important because economic downturns involve large numbers of laid off workers who need to find new jobs, often in new areas, which requires obtaining new skillsets for those areas. Ensuring sufficient education and training are available will help with resiliency because allowing workers to switch jobs more easily will enable workers to find work quicker when laid off during an economic downturn, especially when the downturn is concentrated in specific sectors.

#### *Strategies:*

1. Work with local schools and organizations on retraining programs.
2. Advertise existing programs (such as those run by WIOA)
3. Focus on high demand careers.

#### *Action Items:*

- a. Work with local schools and organizations to develop retaining programs.
- a. Market programs run by the WIOA and other agencies.
- b. Promote programs and degrees offered by local technical colleges.
- a. Provide incentives for students to enter high demand fields.
- b. Promote existing incentives that encourage students to enter high demand careers.

#### IV. Industrial Diversity

*Goal: Achieve sufficient industrial diversity to minimize the impacts to the regional economy of a downturn in any given industry sector.*

The reason industrial diversity is important is that it ensures that the region's economy is not dependent on any one area, and diversity reduces the economic damage during downturns that emphasize one industry. This goal will help with resiliency because it will enable the economy to withstand better damage dealt to specific industries during economic downturns.

##### *Strategies:*

1. Incentivize industries not commonly represented in the local area that would be a suitable fit.
2. Market industrial parks and available properties to industries that synergize with existing industries or broaden the industrial base

##### *Action Items:*

- a. Determine industries that would synergize with current industries
- b. Incentivize such industries to come to the region
  
- a. Create a list of available industrial parks and available properties (if necessary) and keep the list up to date
- b. Determine the industries that synergize with existing industries or broaden the industrial base.
- c. Market these parks and properties to the industries that synergize with or broaden the industrial base

## V. Adequate Housing Options

*Goal: Ensure adequate housing options are available to meet existing and future workforce demands.*

Adequate housing is important because workers are reluctant to work in an area they cannot afford to live in. Ensuring affordable housing will help with resiliency because affordable housing is necessary to attract the diverse workforce needed for resiliency.

### *Strategies:*

1. Incentivize affordable housing construction
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Participate in programs that assist communities with improving their housing stock.

### *Action Items:*

- a. Determine barriers to affordable housing construction (i.e., restrictive zoning and land use regulations) and mitigate these barriers.
  
- b. Create incentives to encourage affordable housing construction
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- a. Identify local housing needs
  
- b. Identify and apply for participation in state and federal programs that assist communities with addressing these needs.



## Implementation

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, northwest Georgia cities and counties, and local/regional/state economic development organizations are all responsible for implementing the goals and strategies in this resiliency plan. NWGRC, utilizing Economic Development Administration Planning Investment funds, will assist and guide responsible parties in the implementation of the plan and in identifying possible funding sources.

In addition to EDA grant funds, responsible parties may employ the following tools in meeting the identified goals and strategies: Georgia Department of Community Affairs Business Development Funds, Appalachian Regional Commission Grant Funds, U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development Economic Development Programs, OneGeorgia Authority, Georgia Recreational Trails Program, U.S. Land and Water Conservation Fund, and local and statewide initiatives such as Freeport Exemption, Job Tax Credits, Enterprise Zones and job training programs.

Local governments and authorities, who may need assistance with implementing local resiliency strategies, are encouraged to contact NWGRC's community and economic development staff. The primary point of contact for help is Delmos Stone, Community and Economic Development Manager, at [dstone@nwgrc.org](mailto:dstone@nwgrc.org) or call (706) 295-6485.

## Performance Measures

### Resiliency

- Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness: Number of projects completed to implement hazard mitigation plans and number of projects completed to ensure that public infrastructure is reliable and resilient
- Communications during Economic Downturns: Number of meetings between local economic development organizations and presence of an implemental plan for local economic development organizations to get together during economic downturns
- Resilient Workforce: Number of laborers assisted through worker training and/or retraining programs
- Industrial Diversity: Number new and expanding industries (identified as synergizing well with current industrial mix) locating in Northwest Georgia and number of projects to develop or market industrial parks and available properties in the region
- Adequate Housing Options: Percentage increase in number of new houses built, percentage increase in housing units at affordable prices made available, and number of federal and state affordable housing programs applied for

## Appendix