

# OVERVIEW

***These guidelines have been developed to assist economic development practitioners with the development or update of a CEDS. As a collection of tools and examples, they are intended to be aspirational in nature and should not be construed as additional requirements.***

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) contributes to effective economic development in America's communities and regions through a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process. Economic development planning – as implemented through the CEDS – is not only a cornerstone of the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) programs, but successfully serves as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration. The CEDS provides the capacity-building<sup>1</sup> foundation by which the public sector, working in conjunction with other economic actors (individuals, firms, industries), creates the environment for regional economic prosperity.

Simply put, a CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. A CEDS is the result of a regionally-owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region.<sup>2</sup> It is a key component in establishing and maintaining a robust economic ecosystem by helping to build regional capacity (through hard and soft infrastructure) that contributes to individual, firm, and community success. The CEDS provides a vehicle for individuals, organizations, local governments, institutes of learning, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in the region. The CEDS should take into account and, where appropriate, integrate or leverage other regional planning efforts, including the use of other available federal funds, private sector resources, and state support which can advance a region's CEDS goals and objectives. Regions must update their CEDS at least every five years to qualify for EDA assistance under its Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs. In addition, a CEDS is a prerequisite for designation by EDA as an [Economic Development District \(EDD\)](#).

This guidance is primarily intended to assist in efforts to develop the *content* of a CEDS document. It suggests how to develop the document's format and substance to make the strongest, most useful and effective CEDS possible. The focus on content in these guidelines does not diminish the importance of the process used to develop a CEDS. A well-led, broadly inclusive process is vital to the creation of a relevant and effective document. It also serves to build leadership, enhance cooperation, and foster public ownership and enthusiasm. While the high-level steps required to prepare a CEDS can be found in the [Preparation section](#) of this document, EDA suggests contacting the appropriate EDA regional office (specific points of contact can be found on EDA's website at [www.eda.gov](http://www.eda.gov)) to learn more about the overall CEDS process and additional resources and guidance available.

From the regulations governing the CEDS (see 13 C.F.R. § 303.7), the following sections *must* be included in the CEDS document:

- *Summary Background*: A summary background of the economic conditions of the region;
- *SWOT Analysis*: An in-depth analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (commonly known as a "SWOT" analysis);
- *Strategic Direction/Action Plan*: The strategic direction and action plan should build on findings from the SWOT analysis and incorporate/integrate elements from other regional plans (e.g., land use and transportation, workforce development, etc.) where appropriate as determined by the EDD or community/region engaged in development of the CEDS. The action plan should

also identify the stakeholder(s) responsible for implementation, timetables, and opportunities for the integrated use of other local, state, and federal funds;

- *Evaluation Framework*: Performance measures used to evaluate the organization's implementation of the CEDS and impact on the regional economy.

In addition to the sections noted above, the CEDS must incorporate the concept of economic resilience (i.e., the ability to avoid, withstand, and recover from economic shifts, natural disasters, the impacts of climate change, etc.). The EDD or community responsible for the CEDS can address resilience as a separate section, distinct goal or priority action item, and/or as an area of investigation in the SWOT analysis. It may be most effective, however, to infuse the concept of resilience throughout the CEDS document. As a baseline, EDA suggests regions undertake a two-pronged approach to help identify and counter the vulnerabilities that each region may face.

This document provides recommendations on what should be included in each of the sections required by EDA's regulations, and suggests tools, resources, and examples to help in each section's development. As a collection of tools and examples, it is intended to be aspirational in nature and should not be construed as additional requirements. This guidance stresses the importance of linking the sections (e.g., using background information that is relevant to the SWOT) to improve the CEDS focus and impact. Moreover, the guide emphasizes strategic approaches based on regional visioning, goals, measurable objectives, and prioritized actions – rather than the CEDS serving as an inventory of programs and projects already in process in regions. In addition, this guidance underscores the need to think beyond traditional job creation and embrace capacity building and broad-based wealth creation when developing goals, measurable objectives, actions, and performance measures. It also highlights the need to undertake an asset-based approach (i.e., efforts that focus on the strengths of a community or region) while considering the interdependencies between regional economic prosperity and other topics such as job-driven workforce development, natural resource management and development and sustainable land use. Finally, this guidance provides practical recommendations about formatting a CEDS that will result in an engaging, technically-sound strategy for guiding regional development.

**Please note, however, that the CEDS examples recommended in this document are intended to be informative and a source of inspiration, and should not be replicated wholesale for the CEDS section or area referenced.** Each region's unique assets and challenges may make the use of another region's section structure and/or content ineffective.

1 The terms "capacities" and "capacity building" refer to the public sector's role in investing in new ideas, knowledge transfer, and infrastructure to build a foundation so that the private sector can flourish (i.e., enable economic development to promote regional prosperity).

2 For the purpose of these Content Guidelines, the terms "area," "region," and "community" are often used interchangeably to refer to an appropriate political, economic, or geographic entity for addressing economic development.