

# **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy**

## **COVID-19 Pandemic Response Addendum**

### **Executive Summary**

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resurgence of the virus through the delta and omicron variants, the Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments (COG) is taking action to support communities and governments by improving the regional response, resilience, and recovery. As an initial step, the COG hired Withers Ravenel to update its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) focused on the COVID-19 pandemic. The COG's purpose in taking this path is to continue to improve the quality of life for its citizens by building a robust and healthy economy that is both diversified and sustainable. Twenty business, government, and regional/state leaders assisted in generating feedback and advice. In addition, the COG Project Oversight Committee played an indispensable advisory role throughout this update process.

This update to the existing CEDS describes the initial and lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across the COG region, statewide, and nationally. Though the regional economy is recovering, the pandemic's impact on workforce has created supply chain bottlenecks that are limiting business and industry capacity, raising consumer prices, and forcing companies to attempt creative workforce strategies like increased wages, extra benefits, automation, and flexible work schedules. So far, these strategies have had limited benefits.

During this project, the region's stakeholders and leaders were interviewed to gather direct, first-person accounts about how COVID-19 impacted the region and how citizens responded. People shared a wide variety of opinions and commentary and the relevant sections in this report should be read closely. In general, interviewees noted that organizations had to pivot quickly to a virtual environment and that communication, coordination, and networking were essential to managing and surviving the crisis. To anticipate the next shock, organizations plan to rely on regional networks, capacity building, and increased training.



**Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments  
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:  
Pandemic Response Addendum**

Response | Recovery | Resiliency

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This pandemic response is not a static document, but rather a methodical and interactive strategy guide that will help the COG region navigate shocks throughout the next five years. It represents the synthesis of research, conversations, data collected through various in-person

and electronic means, and information derived from strategies that have been previously developed by the COG and other municipalities and communities in the five-county COG region. Building on the strong foundation of the existing CEDS, this update adds critical new information related to the pandemic's impacts and opportunities for recovery and resilience. For this project, regional leaders were interviewed and their valuable and insightful comments have been included in this document and form the basis for additional CEDS strategies. Although some new strategies and actions have been added to the existing CEDS goals, this update should be viewed as a supplement and extension of the previously completed work.



[1]

## Introduction

The Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments (COG) is a voluntary association of local governments which is designated by the State of North Carolina to serve as the lead regional planning organization for the Kerr-Tar area. [2] It serves 21 member governments in a five-county area. Working under the direction of locally elected officials of these member governments, the staff plans and administers a variety of federal, state, and local programs and services. The COG assists constituents to:

- Share information and make joint regional decisions to solve common problems;
- Work through a single agency which enables more effective utilization and administration of federal, state, and local grant funds, as well as, private funding;
- Avoid duplication of efforts and better coordinate services;
- Promote cooperation between the public and private sectors;
- Promote regional issues and cooperation among members.

The COG also benefits the greater region and state by:

- Planning, coordinating, and overseeing the administration of state and federal programs;
- Assisting local governments in handling tasks set by state regulations;
- Providing a flexible network for effective regional action;
- Fostering cooperation that helps avoid duplication of efforts and takes advantage of economies of scale.

The Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments (COG), was established in 1970 to promote intergovernmental cooperation by developing and formalizing policy recommendations concerning matters having area-wide significance. Areas of interest and concern to the members organizing the Council of Governments were: solid waste, health services, regional water system, family planning, programs for the elderly, and manpower. Today the COG has the following programs: Aging, Economic and Community Development, Economic Development Administration, Business Loans, Planning, Transportation, and Workforce Development. It also provides Administrative Services for the Region K Community Assistance Corporation and Kerr-Tar Regional Economic Development Corporation.[3]



[1]

The COG strives to create new jobs, retain existing jobs, and stimulate economic and industrial growth in the region. Because of the financial need for projects such as public facilities and infrastructure, the COG assists its member county governments with project development necessary for the solicitation of grant funding from the Economic Development Administration. As required by the EDA, the COG completes a regular Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Completing the CEDS process maintains the District's eligibility for EDA funding, which is a major source of infrastructure grants. The CEDS covering the period of 2017-2022 was submitted in September 2017 and a full list of the strategy committee members is included at the end of this addendum in Appendix A.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the COG five-county region are still emerging and being understood, which requires a cohesive response, recovery, and resiliency strategy. To ensure that the five-county region can prepare and recover from future impacts, WithersRavenel (WR) was hired to update a disaster recovery and resiliency economic development plan, focused on the COVID-19 pandemic. The content of this addendum incorporates stakeholder input, state, and regional information, analysis of relevant data, and professional observations of the COG and WR staff. The process was advised by the Project Oversight Group listed in Appendix B. The purpose of this document is to present additional or modified strategies to aid in the region's COVID-19 pandemic response, recovery, and resiliency efforts.

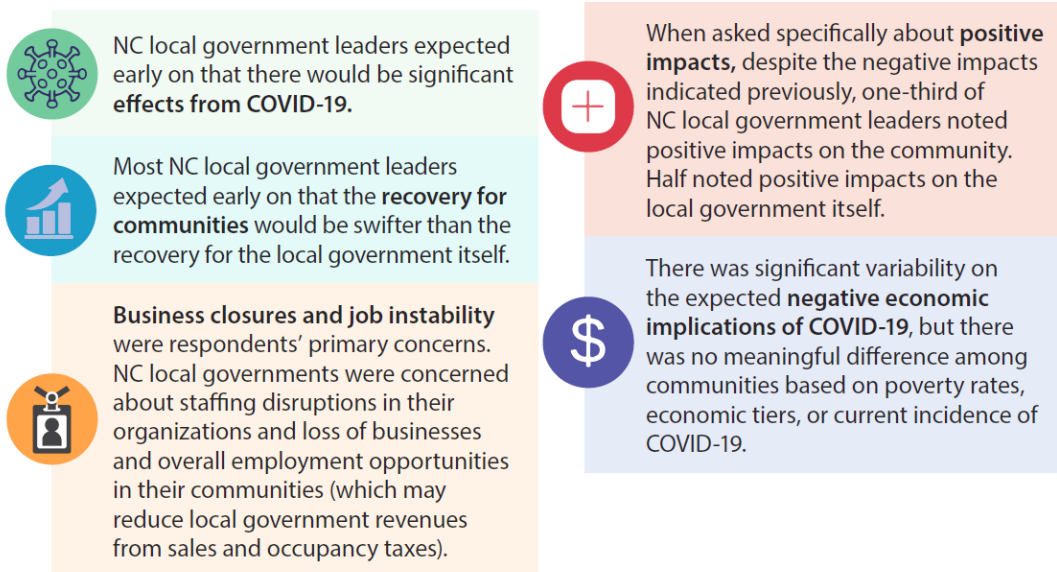




[1]

### Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the UNC School of Government, the pandemic's initial impacts were significant.[4] For instance, the May 2020 unemployment rate in North Carolina was higher than at the height of the 2009 Great Recession, particularly in the retail, tourism, and service industries. A Spring 2020 report by the UNC School of Government's nclIMPACT Initiative included the following information:



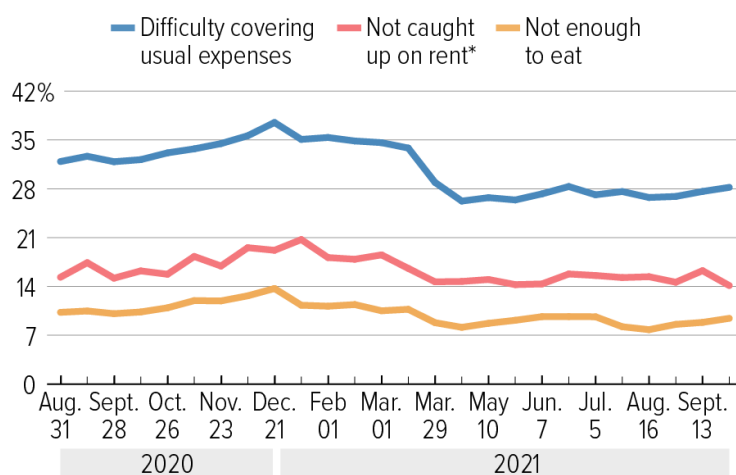
**Figure 1. nclIMPACT Initiative Spring Survey 2020 – NC Local Government Early Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic [5]**

Key hardship indicators like the ability to cover expenses, maintain rent, and have sufficient food, show that the USA is slowly recovering, aided by job growth and government intervention. Evident in Figure 2, hardship rates reversed course after the enactment of assistance measures in Fall 2020 and the American Rescue Plan. Food hardship among adults with children also fell after the federal government began issuing monthly payments of the

expanded Child Tax Credit, along with improvements in food assistance. However, it is estimated that 20 million adults live in households that do not get enough to eat, 10 million adult renters are behind on rent, and some of the initial progress from late March 2021 appears to have stalled. In North Carolina, it is estimated that 26% of adults in renter households have difficulty covering household expenses, which is in line with the national average.[6]

### Hardship Is Below December 2020 Peak, Yet Still Widespread

Share of adults



\*Percent of adults in renter households.

Note: Dates shown are the last day of each 13-day data collection period. Data collection was paused between December 21, 2020 and January 6, 2021, between March 29 and April 14, 2021, and between July 5 and July 21, 2021. Percentages exclude individuals who did not respond to the question.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey tables

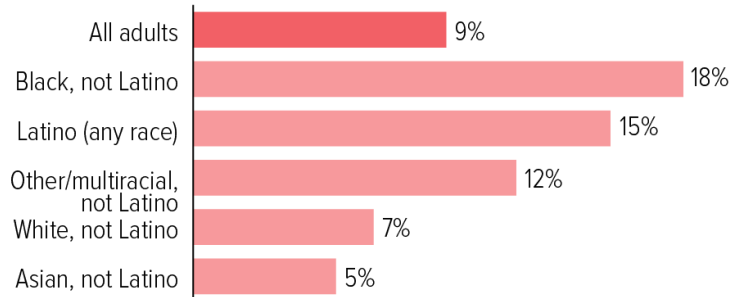
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**Figure 2. Hardship Trends [6]**

Figure 3 indicates that the pandemic impacted minorities to a greater extent than their white counterparts. Black and Latino adults were more than twice as likely as white adults to report that their household did not get enough to eat: 18 percent for Black adults and 15 percent for Latino adults, compared to 7 percent of white adults. American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or multiracial adults [6] were more likely than white adults to report that their household did not get enough to eat. In North Carolina, it is estimated that 8% of adults in renter households lack sufficient food. Nine percent of those adults with children report that they lack sufficient food. These numbers are in line with the national average. [6]

### Households of Color Likelier to Lack Sufficient Food During Pandemic

Share of adults saying that their household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the last 7 days



Note: Other/multiracial, not Latino = people identifying as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or more than one race. Percentages are based on reporting distributions and do not include individuals who did not respond to the question.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey tables for September 15-27, 2021

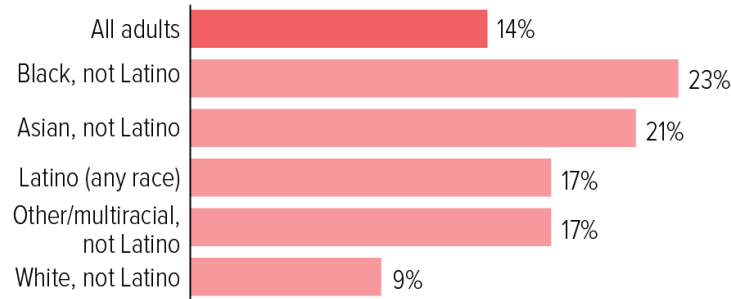
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**Figure 3. Food Sufficiency [6]**

Millions of Americans are having difficulty paying rent. An estimated 10.3 million adults living in rental housing (14% of adult renters) were delinquent with their rent payments in 2021.[4] Figure 4 shows that minority renters were more likely to report that their household was behind on rent. Nine percent of white renters were delinquent compared to 23 % of Black renters, 17 % of Latino renters, and 21 % of Asian renters. American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and multiracial adults equaled 17% of the total. In North Carolina, 14% of adults reported being behind on rent which is in line with the national average. [6]

## 1 in 7 Renters Not Caught Up on Rent During Pandemic, With Renters of Color Facing Greatest Hardship

Share of adult renters saying their household is not caught up on rent



Note: Other/multiracial, not Latino = people identifying as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or more than one race. Chart excludes renters who did not respond to the question.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey tables for September 15-27, 2021

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**Figure 4. Ability to Pay Rent [6]**

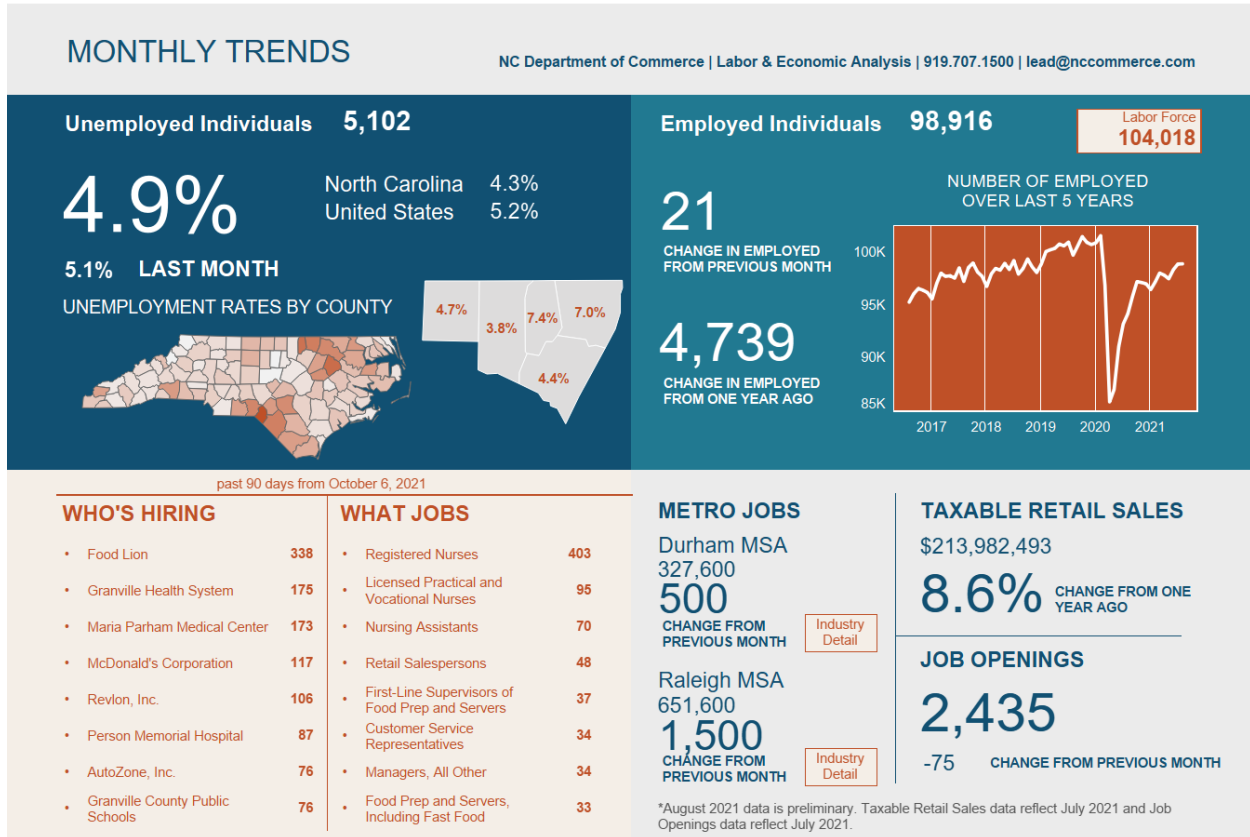
Like other areas of the state and country, employment in the five-county COG region dropped sharply in March 2020 but recovered throughout 2020 and 2021. These trends are displayed in the following regional labor market overview for the Kerr-Tar Workforce Development Board. [7]



## REGIONAL LABOR MARKET OVERVIEW

» Kerr-Tar WDB | August 2021 Data\*

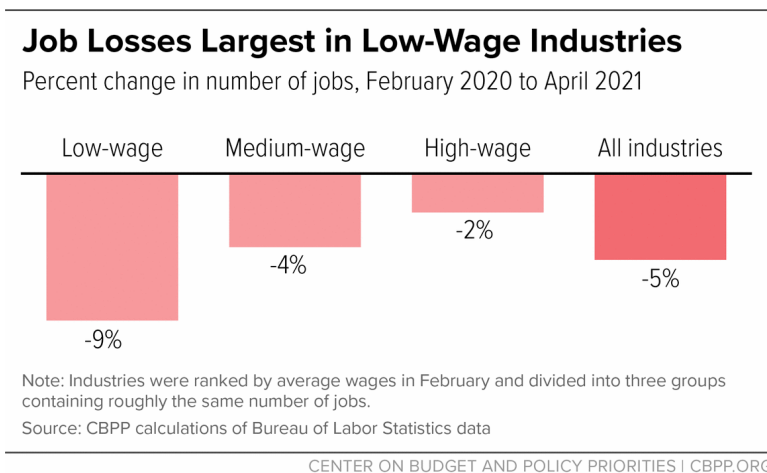
**Kerr-Tar** Regional Council Of Governments



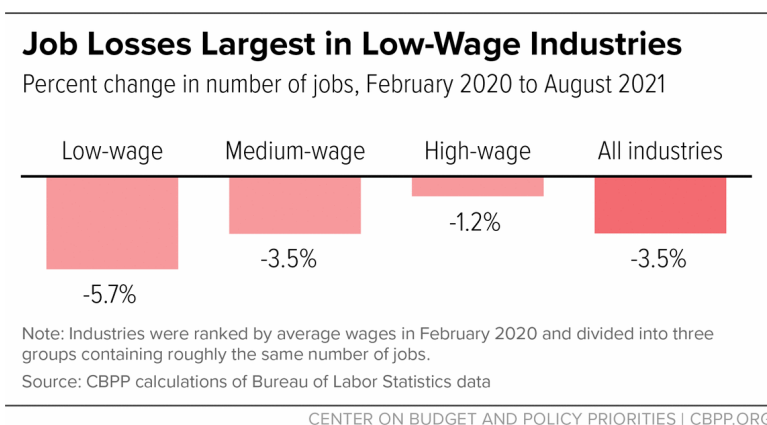
**Figure 5. Kerr-Tar Council of Governments Region Labor Market Overview**

Evident from Figure 5, employment dropped precipitously in March and April of 2020, but started to recover shortly thereafter, forming a “v-shaped” recovery. Despite the recovery, regional employment has not fully recovered to its pre-pandemic levels and is similar to the rate during Fall 2018. As of August 2021, the Kerr-Tar region had some of the highest unemployment in NC. Vance County (7.4%) and Warren County (7.0%) exceeded the state and nationwide rates of 4.3% and 5.2% respectively. However, unemployment in Franklin (4.4%), Granville (3.8%), and Person (4.7%) counties were in line or better than the state and nation.

As illustrated by Figures 6 and 7, national unemployment trends varied depending on the industry. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, low-wage industries nationwide lost the most jobs in 2020.[8] By August 2021, job losses had improved, but low-wage industries still lagged medium and high-wage ones.

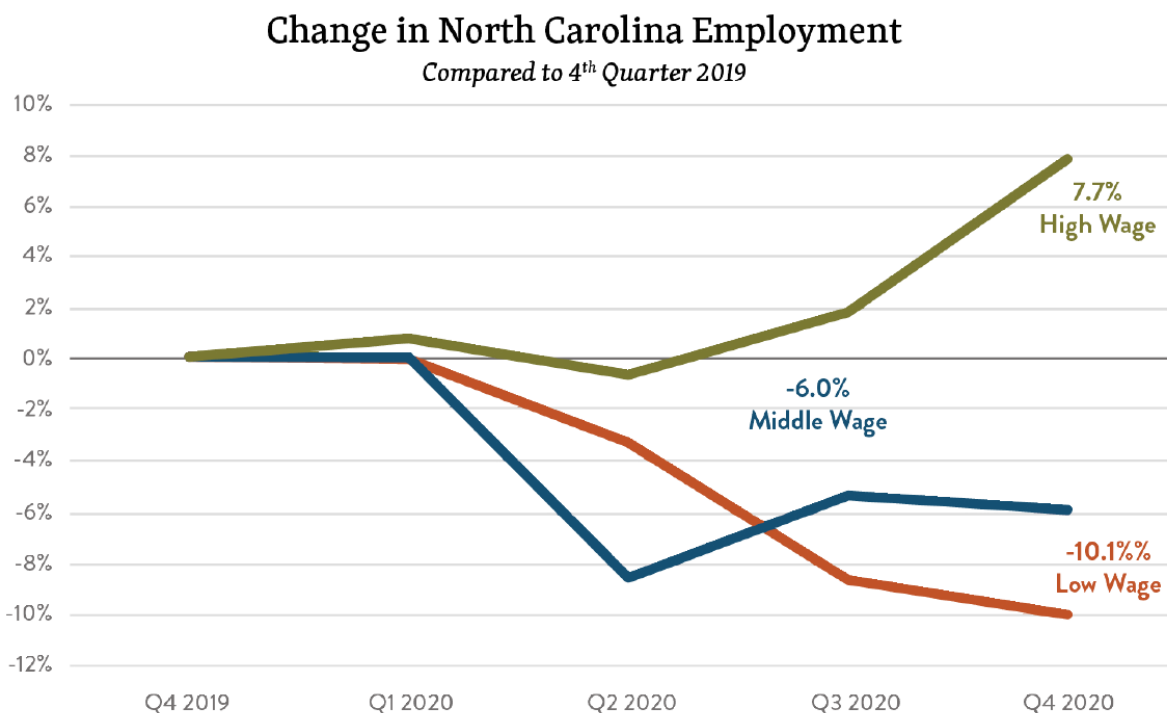


**Figure 6. Job Losses by Wage**



**Figure 7. Job Losses by Industry Wage**

Figure 8 demonstrates that the recovery has been uneven across NC, similar to nationwide trends. In the figure, 2019 wages are split into thirds, yielding high, middle, and low levels. Low-wage and middle-wage employment declined over 2020, while high-wage employment grew. Individuals earning high wages pre-pandemic experienced only a small decrease in employment during 2020. By the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2020, low-wage and middle-wage employees were much less likely to be employed. Additional data suggests there is racial disparity as well. While white non-Hispanic employment has returned to its February 2020 level, Black non-Hispanic employment is still down more than 10%.<sup>1</sup> [9]

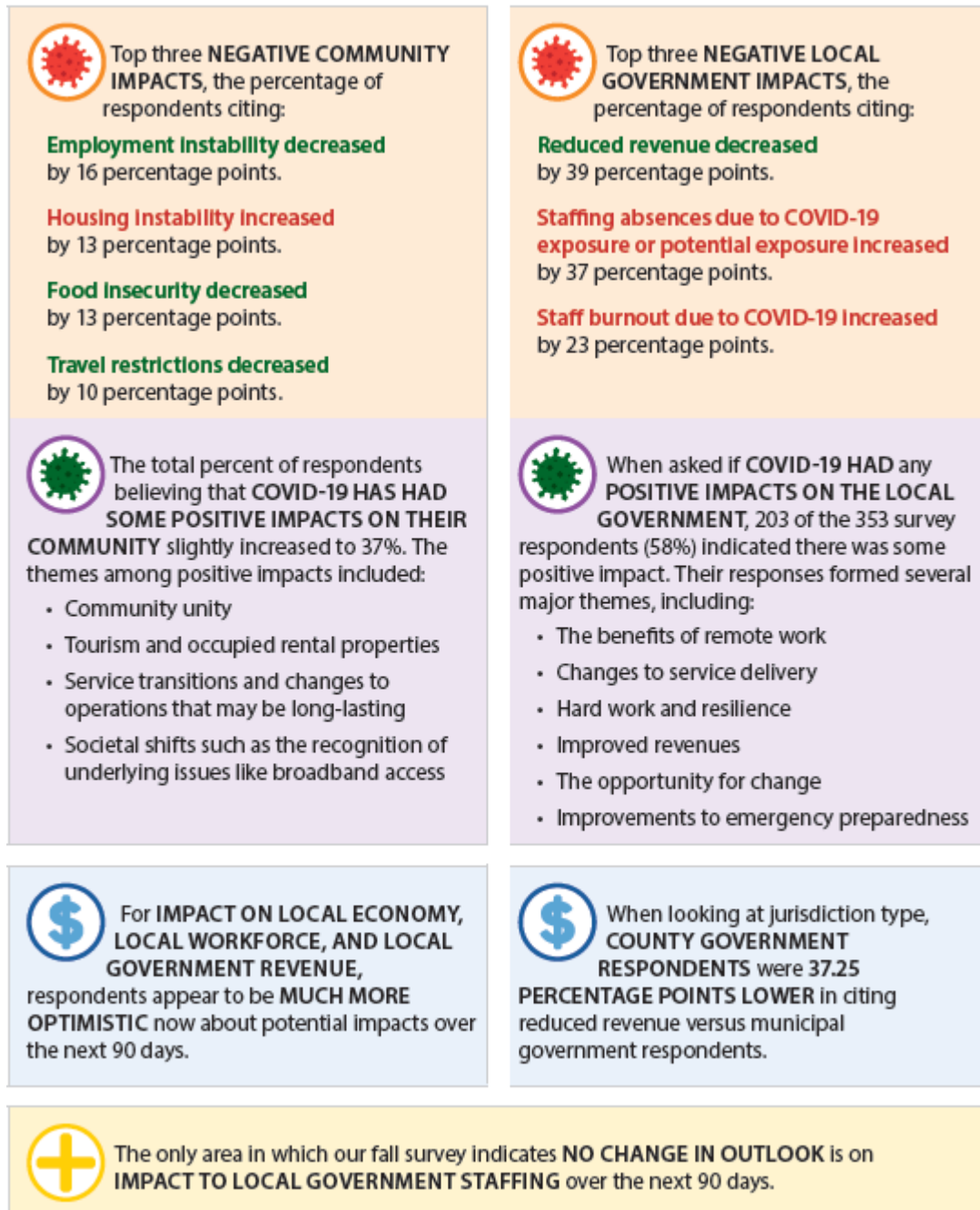


Source: NC Department of Commerce, LEAD. Analysis of NC Common Follow-Up System (CFS data). Seasonally adjusted

**Figure 8. Change in NC Employment 4th Quarter 2020 vs 2019 [9]**

As of November 2020, data indicated that the hospitality industry was impacted more than most sectors. [10] Across the five-county COG region, the Leisure and Hospitality sector, which often includes businesses that pay the lowest wages, was initially impacted but was able to regain employment by August 2021. Conversely, the Trade, Transportation, and Utilities sectors, which often pay higher wages, increased employment over the entire period. [11] A recent article in the Wall Street Journal cited a recent ZipRecruiter survey which found that 70% of job seekers who last worked in the leisure and hospitality industry say they are now looking for work in a different industry. [12] It also states that 55% of job applicants prefer remote jobs. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas conducted an April survey of U.S. workers who lost jobs during the pandemic and found that 30.9% didn't want to return to their old jobs, up from 19.8% last July. [12]

A Fall 2020 follow-up statewide survey (353 respondents) by the UNC School of Government's NCImpact Initiative found the following changes compared to a similar Spring 2020 report:



**Figure 9. Summary of Key Findings and Insights Fall 2020 vs Spring 2020 [13]**

Though survey respondents believed that the pandemic had positive impacts in many cases, the recovery has been uneven. Not only did the pandemic unevenly affect the COG district geographically and by industry sector, but its impacts also varied demographically. According to work done by the NCImpact Initiative, adults left the workforce to care for children and elderly relatives. [14] Many workers reduced hours to manage their children's education because of

school closures and remote learning. As of January 2021, the following statewide trends were reported [15]:

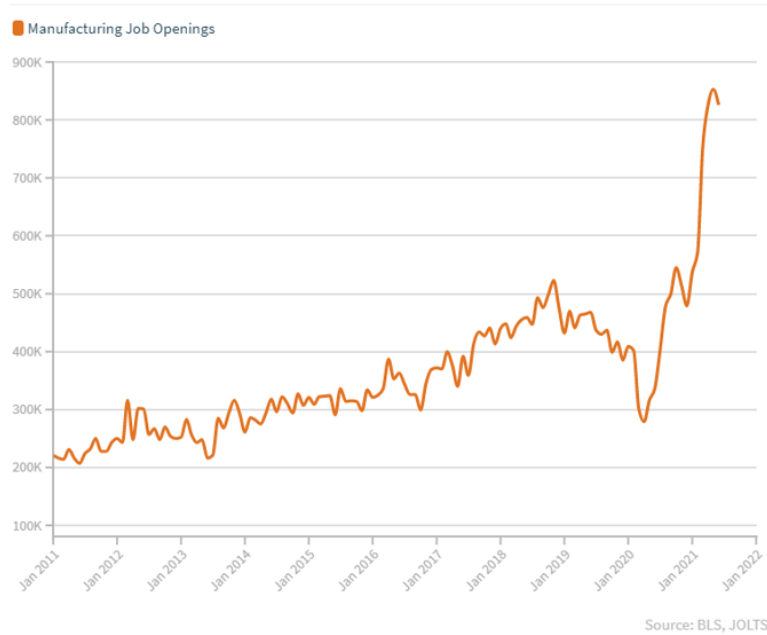
- Black women bore the brunt of the initial spike in unemployment, from which they have mostly recovered.
- White women were more likely to leave the labor force entirely in the early stages, a trend that has only partially reversed.
- Black men experienced a dramatic decrease in total employment during the second half of 2020, which was caused by both increased unemployment and increased non-participation in the labor force.

In addition, the region had not fully recovered from the impacts of the Great Recession with unemployment rates consistently at or above the state average. During the pandemic, low-income households lost income at greater rates than wealthier households, which created widespread effects that are not yet fully realized.

### **Supply Chain Effects**

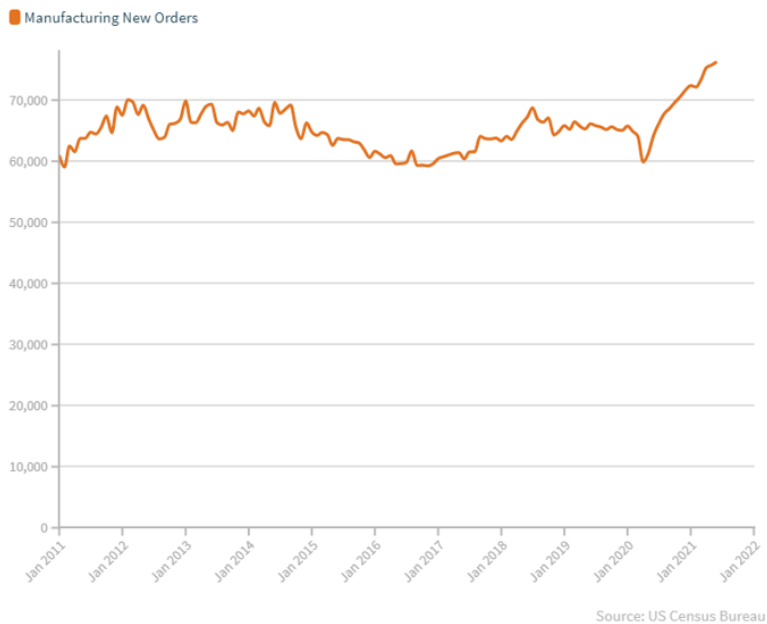
In addition to increasing unemployment and hardship, the pandemic had dramatic effects on the economy, specifically impacting supply chains and labor which are tied to inflation and rising consumer prices. The pandemic shut down many industries like retail, accommodations, food-service, and manufacturing in 2020. But demand for a variety of products like electronics, food, automobiles, and houses greatly exceeded expectations. Industries reacted to increasing consumer demand by hiring workers. Job advertisements greatly accelerated in 2021, which can be seen in the following figures.





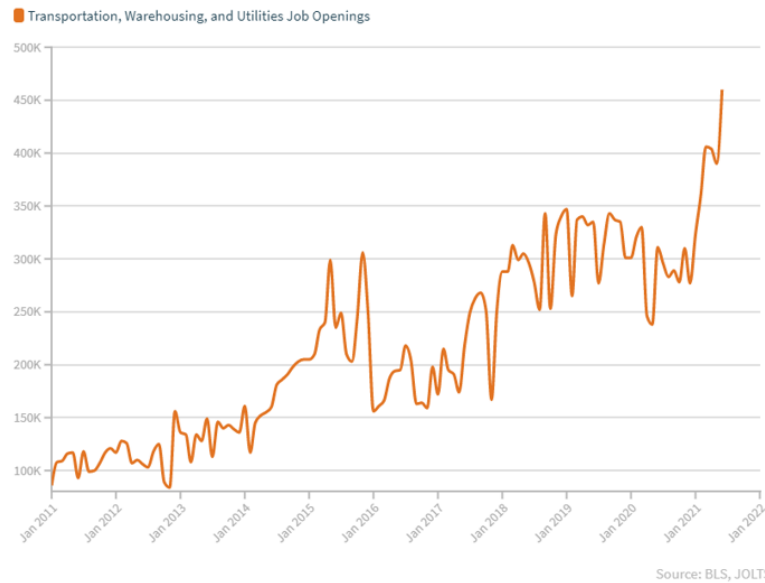
**Figure 10. Manufacturing Job Openings [16]**

In 2021, manufacturing job openings increased over 100% from the 2018-2020 period and tripled versus the 2020 recession.

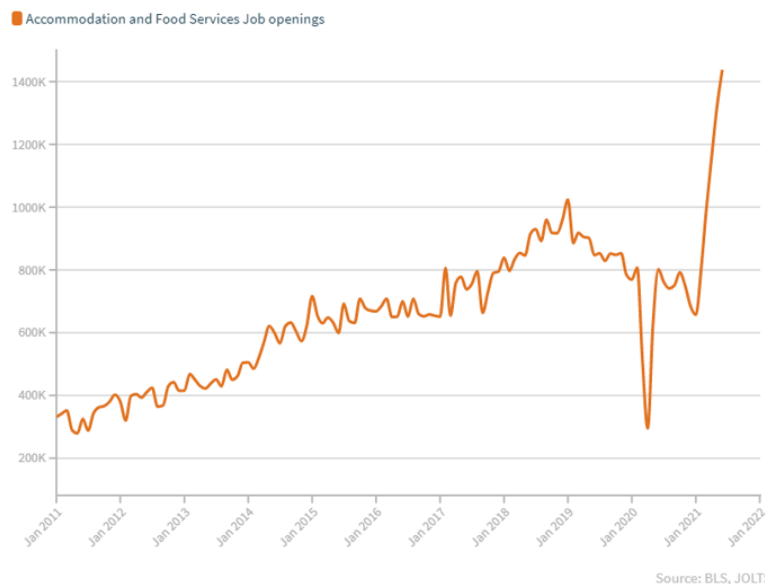


**Figure 11. Manufacturing New Orders [16]**

As seen in Figure 11, orders initially dropped during the 2020 recession. After federal interventions supplied funds to businesses and individuals, pent-up demand drove increased spending which caused a sharp spike in manufacturing orders. Other industries are attempting to find more workers. For instance, trucking, warehousing, and utilities and accommodation and food service job openings have rapidly increased.



**Figure 12. Trucking, Warehousing, and Utilities Job Openings [16]**



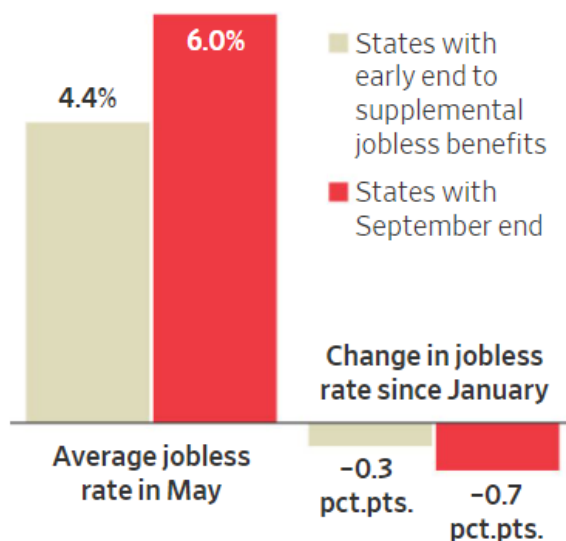
**Figure 13. Accommodations and Food Service Job Openings [16]**

Though industries are trying to hire workers and are even increasing wages, the labor force has not responded. Labor shortages are regarded as one of the main reasons for current supply chain bottlenecks, rising inflation, and a rocky path to economic recovery. Many of those who lost employment have not re-entered the workforce and have relied on unemployment insurance or used the opportunity to upskill or find a different career.[17] Tom Barkin of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond recently stated that current labor challenges have various reasons. *“Part is a drop in participation, particularly from parents with elevated care responsibilities and from three times the normal level of retirements. ... Perhaps additional stimulus payments and reduced spending are giving workers the financial wherewithal to be selective — on pay, industry, working conditions or health risks.”* After COVID cases started to subside in March 2021, many of those employers suddenly were trying to rehire people they laid off previously. Unfortunately, those workers *“had moved on, some to Amazon distribution centers and Walmart distribution centers, which are opening up,”* Barkin said. *“People went back to school and retrained in technology and other places.”*

In addition, Figure 14 shows that unemployment assistance may have impacted workforce shortages.

### Parsing the Payouts

Generous benefits could be slowing down job searches. May unemployment rates in states that set a September end to benefits were higher than states that ended benefits earlier.



Source: Labor Department

**Figure 14. Unemployment Benefits and Unemployment [12]**

Labor shortages and the abrupt shutdown in Spring/Summer 2020 raised material prices, disrupted supply chains, and extended wait times. These factors have led many to expect rising inflation. Because there are not enough workers to handle increasing imports and exports, freight is piling up at America's ports, which increases storage and inventory costs for companies. These costs are passed on to consumers. A recent report stated that *"manufacturers reeling from shortages of key components and higher raw material and energy costs are being forced into bidding wars to get space on vessels, pushing freight rates to records and prompting some exporters to raise prices or simply cancel shipments altogether."* [18] In addition, the cost of sending freight from China to Los Angeles is six times higher than in May 2020. Freight is heavily impacted by the trucking industry, which is responsible for moving 72% of the US's freight tonnage. Unfortunately, *"the truck driving profession has been battling a shortage of its own for years in the U.S., with the industry currently experiencing a shortfall of an estimated 61,000 drivers, according to the American Trucking Association."* [19]

Labor shortages have impacted other industries too, driving up the prices of building materials, aluminum, food, and computer chips. After the 2009 recession, 40,000 workers left the construction industry. [20] Ron Hilgart, principal at HilgartWilson Construction said that *"not only did people leave, but for about five years we weren't hiring either. That means people weren't getting trained. After the recovery, there's been a big gap in the workforce of people with five to seven years of experience. It's not going to get better anytime soon either, in part because baby boomers are retiring,"*. In many areas of the country, the lack of supply has not kept up with exploding demand. Building costs have skyrocketed and project timelines have been severely exacerbated.

**Stakeholder Interviews in the Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments District**

The Kenan Institute identified seven forces that are currently reshaping the U.S. economy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which ultimately impact the economy within the five-county Kerr-Tar region. [21]

1. Changes in work, travel, and migration patterns
2. Accelerating shifts toward on-demand and at-home retail
3. On-shoring and widening of supply chains
4. Renewed focus on diversity and dismantling systemic racism
5. Upending of education and childcare
6. Shocks to health care and pharmaceutical demand
7. Risk reassessment by capital providers

WithersRavenel staff felt that it was important to understand how these seven forces manifested locally and we also wondered what other trends might be specific to the COG region. To that end, approximately thirty regional stakeholders were contacted to discuss COVID-19 impacts and their recovery progress during 2021. Twenty regional leaders representing education, community and economic development, and government organizations responded and were interviewed virtually or via phone. Conversations were transcribed and left unedited as much as possible. Interviewees are listed in Appendix C. A representative summary of responses can be found in the following tables. The following questions were discussed:

- What is your organization's mission or goals and how does your organization implement those?
- How did the COVID pandemic impact your organization or the region?
- What resilience lessons did your organization learn from experiencing the pandemic?
- Is your organization recovering and how?
- What adaptations did you make, and will those adaptations remain part of your standard operations going forward?
- What does your organization plan to do in the future to navigate a similar shock, opportunity, or challenge?
- What resources does your organization need to ensure that your organization is resilient and able to navigate a future shock, opportunity, or challenge?

A variety of leaders representing diverse organizations were interviewed. Organizational missions were unique but in general, they prioritized community and economic development, small business support, education, and improving citizens' lives throughout the COG region.



When asked how COVID-19 impacted their organizations or the COG district in general, respondents noted that organizations had to pivot quickly to a virtual environment. This was a significant hardship because some people were limited by a lack of childcare, broadband, or their jobs could not be accomplished remotely. Unemployment, lack of staffing, and insufficient capacity were common themes. Several commented about staff turnover, job losses, retirements, and vacancies. Communities that lacked broadband were at a severe disadvantage which affected their access to healthcare, education, and remote work options. Stakeholders from the education sector were most vocal about the need for broadband, but they were not alone. Several respondents appreciated the federal and state responses but noted that new programs and their requirements created confusion and complexity too. Support organizations had to communicate and collaborate quickly to ensure that communities had expertise and resources. These collaborations are still developing. Additional responses can be found in the following table.

*“There’s so much unemployment because people are socially and economically depressed”*

#### How did the COVID pandemic impact your organization or the region?

It pretty much shut us down, we didn’t transition well and only met once in the past fifteen months; difficult to interact with new staff and get to know; poor communication caused staff turnover

We had to completely revise operations because we depended on in-person events and fundraising

Some businesses had their best year ever while some had to close

The staffing/employment crisis started before the pandemic but worsened after

Massive job losses, particularly in the service industry (25% employed in the service sector but when COVID hit those jobs went away); service was poised for growth

Lack of preparation, no broadband, and no support; Our students had to stay home with their children; revealed the inequities in how broadband is distributed

The workforce is down because many tested positive; our staff is very tired; we see a lot of burnout

We shifted to appointment only or virtual customer interactions

The pandemic is creating more community divisions (over masks and vaccines)

Folks are staying closer to home to shop/eat

Created opportunities to get better

The pandemic forced people to form coalitions especially in African American communities; the county was already down, poor health and the pandemic compounded the devastation

There’s so much unemployment because people are socially and economically depressed

Partnered with our local community college to use their computer lab for training clients; we’ve had very successful programs virtually; we’re reaching an international audience

Lost revenue but remained open the whole time despite some staff getting the virus
Worked from home and learned how to use Zoom
Loss of learning over the last 18 months; most parents who could stay at home did but many did not have internet access
Lots of retirements, lots of vacancies, a real crisis
For local government, we had to stay full-service – can’t pick up garbage remotely, can’t telecommute fireman, first-responders, garbage pickup, etc; only one job could be done remotely
Hit hard initially but opened summer camps in 2020 and have had more kids involved than pre-pandemic; parents are trusting us and kids get to form relationships and interact with each other
Outside of the organization, having to deal with the fact of business shutdowns, stay at home orders, a lot of people not working or working less, food insecurity; normally nonprofit networks and churches addressed these issues but the county had to supplement or replace services to sustain people; nobody thought about this before
All indoor activities shut down for 18 months; we use school facilities, but all that shut down
When the pandemic first hit, nobody knew what to expect; we quickly realized it would be long-duration, but not the latter half of 2021!
Our organization saw revenue decrease 27% in 2020 which was not as bad as neighboring areas; even though people didn’t travel they could quickly visit our area and we’re off I-85
A big staffing challenge – there is an incredible amount of price pressure, external influences driving up rates, folks do what they can to staff, would be nice if government agency could provide price relief

When asked about “lessons learned”, respondents shared many positive anecdotes about how they are recovering. They realized their organizations’ value to communities, their ability to be creative and pivot, and their desire to learn new skills and be patient with each other. Some organizations were still recovering from the impacts of recent hurricanes. Many already had a “resilience” mindset but COVID-19 was an additional hardship. People were able to adapt quickly to remote work as their jobs

permitted. The pandemic revealed how interdependent people and organizations are and there is a renewed emphasis on collaboration and engaging diverse voices. The

*“The lesson we learned was that we weren’t asking the right questions: do you have access to the internet? do you have a device?”*

pandemic’s impacts and communities’ recoveries were uneven. For example, organizations that were well-networked pre-pandemic were able to recover more rapidly than those that were not. The pandemic revealed that the “just in time” business strategy may have to be replaced since businesses struggled with their supply chains and often lacked sufficient inventory. Additional responses can be found in the following table.

**What resilience lessons did your organization learn from experiencing the pandemic?**

We developed a way to meet virtually to continue operations

Businesses and industries looked to us for guidance, showed we were valuable

We learned we could survive; we did have value

The community was willing to get creative - churches and hotels shared wifi to enable parking lot instruction (40 businesses)

The lesson we learned was that we weren't asking the right questions: do you have access to the internet? do you have a device?

We reassured our staff they were ready; we had been planning readiness

We had to reiterate to staff that no matter how much they feel need to be at work they need to take time for themselves; we told staff to take time off

Getting used to working short-staffed; mindset is good but the job market is hard

We're trying to partner and collaborate with other groups

Don't live in the pandemic, live above it

Quickly transitioned to virtual, from nothing to fully online which was remarkable

We found out we all had to learn new skills, but now we might not have the capacity to do other things

Farmers got creative to distribute vaccines; pipelines were open and weren't clogged because of politics

We learned we could work anywhere; learned zoom; board figured out to call in by phone; it felt good that we could carry on and keep doing what we were doing

We learned we are resilient, adaptable, and can carry on, which are important lessons to know; we can respond to the needs of the moment

How to use digital tools to provide instruction was a good example of "ready, fire, aim"

We're proud of our response and getting through last year; we did a wonderful job serving students; we were flexible, tried and failed, and not afraid to try new things; we got out of status quo thinking

We have learned to give grace, to be more forgiving of one another; what happens outside of the job matters, we don't need a wall between the two

We need to do a better job cross-training certain positions; make sure there is redundancy; we've been trying to come up with a work plan for folks to be cross-trained, succession planning; we were already preparing new training manuals

Need to be always planning for resilience; we have some gaps, we figured it out but we need to adjust policies and procedures to anticipate the unexpected

We learned that we had to be innovative, create more outside activities; we started virtual run challenges and disc golf activities during the pandemic, which have blossomed for everyone in our area

We did a good job engaging staff in conversations, asking, what can we do better? what are your concerns?

To be effective in tourism you need to include the residents in your region; we're usually focused on folks outside of the area but we had to depend on our locals to keep restaurants,

shops, and businesses afloat; we helped locals discover what's in their back yard  
Setting clear expectations when there is no endpoint

When asked about how organizations were recovering, respondents noted that virtual collaboration tools were rapidly adopted and will be standard practice going forward. Virtual and augmented reality is being used increasingly in the real estate, economic development, and healthcare industries, and adoption of those new tools for other industries is anticipated. Several respondents believed that their organizations have improved the frequency and scope of their communication, citing better information sharing as an important part of their recoveries. Lastly, communities expected reductions in revenue, but some have realized higher sales and property taxes as a result of increased local goods purchased and a strong real estate market. Most importantly, communities are recovering together, creating support networks and opportunities to help each other. They are being flexible, creative, and learning from mistakes to better anticipate challenges. Staffing is still a formidable hurdle for some. Additional responses can be found in the following table.

*"We don't know if we have fully experienced the maximum amount of pain yet, we're not sure if we're out of the woods"*

#### Is your organization recovering and how?

Yes, we are meeting face to face which is helping to get new staff settled and improving communication

Our area created a Human Resources Council so HR professionals can learn from each other – how to handle the workforce shortage

Had it not been for federal, state, and private assistance, many doors would have closed  
Businesses received a lot of assistance from the Vance/Granville Small Business Center

Over the summer, trends were good, cases were down for a month and we got back to normal; we looked at our strategic plan and did things to keep the organization running; the staff did a good job planning and asking what could we do differently? What did we learn?

Learning how to work differently; getting used to working short-staffed

Learning the value of testing; now we send the whole department to get tested - we find people who are asymptomatic so they can't spread

Yes, we came through the pandemic in good order; law enforcement and first responders stepped up; really struck that students and instructors were adamant about continuing classes throughout the pandemic

PPP helped pay workers

It's been very rewarding; we've funded a lot of food programs and after school enrichment; providing internet service for a housing project; helped people work from home and learn from home; over 200 families now have internet; it's been a phenomenal experience to provide safety nets

There are still a lot of unmet needs out there; organizations are still struggling because they have not had access to fundraising, which is hard when you can't meet or see people.

Our staff learned how to shift gears and recalibrate

Students have really learned how to adapt; students are happy to be back but some need support and counseling

We definitely are; there's a real sense of urgency catching students up; really focused on the essentials of research-based instruction; trying to prepare students for their plans and goals, listening to constituents, tuned into the immediate and future needs

Never lost major tax revenues but did lose businesses, unfortunately; we don't know if we have fully experienced the maximum amount of pain yet, we're not sure if we're out of the woods

We've all seen a lot of deaths, spiritual and physical, but these are opportunities to minister and give people hope

We're trying to pull resources into one place; we started the community collaborative, we meet once per month so that we can better serve our communities

I think the organization is recovering because we never shut down operations; we still kept county business open

Yes, virtual events and expanding leagues like youth volleyball; adult volleyball and men's basketball have been very popular

We were prepared for hurricanes and snowstorms - we have measures in place and exercised and drilled for those issues, but Covid was unlike all other emergencies; we don't think this is the last pandemic so we have revisited all our policies and procedures

Yes, we have a lot of support from the board; we trust each other

Yes, we're having more events and smaller ones; our community has really supported our local businesses and the events have been well-attended and creative

Not recovering yet; the last 3 months have been the most difficult of the whole 18 months; tougher because of price pressures, staffing, perceptions on the value of staff, perceptions of vaccines, staff are very tired

When asked about what adaptations organizations made, respondents noted that they spent more time checking on employees and colleagues and offering counseling and other support services. Several mentioned that they communicated and listened to stakeholders more readily. Educators moved courses and assignments online and provided technology to improve access and ensure success. Most organizations created more open spaces to facilitate social distancing and to reduce illness transmissions. They also became more understanding with remote work requests, especially for childcare-related accommodations. Most noted that PPE and safety protocols will remain in place indefinitely. Additional responses can be found in the following table.

*"I learned to publish in Spanish"*



**What adaptations did you make, and will those adaptations remain part of your standard operations going forward?**

Videoconferencing will continue to be used; we resisted too long and paid the price

We pre-ordered inventory so we were ready when clients needed our services

We just had to tell our story; we realized we need to brag, put articles in news; going forward we want to be more proactive

When the pandemic hit, we started the Community Collaborative with the health foundation and salvation army to help with housing and community assistance

Business after hours is not well-attended because people think in-person events are too risky; we hope to resume at some point

With events, we learned to make it easy

Trying to get more degree programs 100% online to fit working adults; every program needs a hybrid element so that programs don't completely shut down

We are now more open to new ideas like outside amphitheater learning spaces

We implemented exhaustive cleaning services

The county government allowed telework where possible, allowed flexibility, adaptability; we minimized people in the building; installed plexiglass, and increased our cleaning

We've seen a lot of ransomware attacks but we have been fortunate; concerned because with many employees it only takes one click on a bad link; doing more education on cybersecurity; always "top of mind"

Pushed many courses virtually and will continue moving forward; made remote wifi a reality for students and helping those without service; we realized that faculty/staff can teach or work remotely, 60% of their week

Transitioning to 8 week instead of 16 week semesters

Our mantra is "talk together; work together"

I learned that social media was important

Continuous changes need flexibility, a plan a, b, c...

I learned to publish in Spanish

Started a regular column in the local paper so we maintained visibility

To maintain technology, we ensured that students had devices and distributed 900 wi-fi hotspots to families

You usually come to school for the service but we flipped that on its head; we went out to families, created sites for meals, delivered meals to homes, created a book bus for traveling literacy, porch visits, etc.

We are considering creating a public information officer position

Sanitizing, cleaning, keeping open lines of communication with the public

Provided money to food banks to purchase food items; paid another nonprofit in town to store additional food for the food bank; used local farmers, local restaurants

Did virtual activities where people tracked their own progress like miles ran or minutes of exercise per day; disc golf is here to stay

Recently moved county administration and human services to a new location but we remodeled it to have a large window with a voicebox and small slot for documents; pre-Covid there would be an open window and a more compact space, but not now, so we can distance and don't have a loss of services

We used to be 80/20 external/local but now we're 60/40; we created 'fans' – they are our ambassadors so promotion is sustainable and ongoing; external folks can see the area through a personal point of view - people share things from their perspective; we say "we're a step away from you" not far from the triangle, but we are different, we have lakes, downtown shops, etc

Had to focus more on infection prevention, initial concerns about the pandemic turned out to be less important but other things were missed early on that had lasting effects

When asked about what organizations plan to do in the future to navigate a similar shock, opportunity, or challenge, stakeholders stressed that at some point NC and the Nation will need to review the effectiveness of pandemic-related actions and policies. Most agreed that NC and the Federal government reacted well to an uncertain and novel challenge, particularly with financially supporting individuals and businesses. Some believe that the region will be better prepared for the next threat, but several interviewees think that more work is needed. They suggest investing in leadership programs, building community networks, helping people to advocate for themselves, and taking a regional approach to economic and community development. There was an emphasis on adding training and redundancy, improving quality, staying up-to-date with technology, and being proactive with resources. Additional responses can be found in the following table.

*"Whatever we're facing, if we move together, we'll be successful if we peddle at the same pace and direction"*

### What does your organization plan to do in the future to navigate a similar shock, opportunity, or challenge?

I hope new leadership will plan and communicate better

I really want to do something here so our organization will be seen as an important resource "[our organization] can solve that, or teach that, or lead that"

Students can help childcare providers

Build hybrid and engaging classrooms; got a grant for an innovation lab

Improve quality, which matters, and improve student learning

Continue training, assessing what worked well and didn't; adapt and improve

We feel like we're not doing enough because we can't work virtually for some departments like the jail, emergency management services, etc

We are better equipped because we have gone through it

Public relations and communications – important to stay in contact with media and

stakeholders, especially about policies because government and health officials are constantly changing rules

Find ways to make our resources sustainable

We need to make sure to stay on top of technology so we have the needed skills

Work guidelines and policies are not etched in stone, they can change to meet needs as they arise

Teachers have platforms where students can access resources digitally; realized virtual access is a necessity; moved away from packets of work and went to more digital; got devices in hands of students so every student has a device; continue with hotspots because families that don't have internet are at a severe disadvantage

Trying to remember lessons that we've learned, stay agile and adaptive

We're trying to be proactive in spending the federal money; don't squander it, position to be responsive, lots of strings attached; find ways money can be used for long term shifts; we're spending more time thinking about that

We evaluated work plans and how our teams interact; we limited cross-contamination by siloing work functions (physically) and implemented measures to keep folks apart (you can eat with your squad but not with other squads)

We are purchasing additional vehicles to help people/kids distance; ensuring kids are in separate classrooms

Make sure we learned the lessons

We would love to have our own facility, which would alleviate a bunch of problems

We're continuing to experiment with space and schedules to minimize the pandemic spread and keep services going

We're building a program with local residents to promote festivals, restaurants, keep them engaged, show their pride, creating an ambassador program/fan club; when people travel they want to know what locals are doing and what they like

Focus on communicating and listening to stakeholders, remove ultimatums, make decisions together that are beneficial; we did a good job, our culture invites that; whatever we're facing, if we move together, we'll be successful if we peddle at the same pace and direction

When asked about what resources organizations need, some stakeholders noted that people are thinking about this question for the first time. They are still considering what other changes need to occur to maintain business continuity and how to adapt and anticipate new challenges. Common needs included money, staff, capacity, broadband, equipment, and stakeholder patience. Some organizations seem very positive about their preparation whereas others are still trying to figure out the next steps. This makes sense because the COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented. Federal and state aid is still being

*"We just need folks at the bedside who care about their neighbors – this is the way to build stronger local communities and spur economic development"*

deployed and organizations and communities are still evaluating how to invest current resources while they anticipate the additional aid. In general, stakeholders believed that diversifying suppliers, products, services, and maintaining flexibility will be crucial to their preparedness, resiliency, and ability to withstand a future shock. Additional responses can be found in the following table.

**What resources does your organization need to ensure your organization is resilient and able to navigate a future shock, opportunity, or challenge?**

We need equipment to operate in a hybrid model

We need funding; before, when we had textile companies, banks, and other businesses, we did not have funding challenges

Too many procedures/processes are informal; we are doing a comprehensive review of policies and procedures to outline a clear place to go when we need to act

Need better data about students and how to track and support them to determine what works well and what does not

Still not using technology to better serve students; we use it as a delivery method but it needs to serve and be strategic for students

We need people; we're not fully staffed; thankfully the state has stepped up with contract labor and we have some local volunteers; the community college here that we partnered with allowed us to use their space

It helps us to have federal and state mandates to force local governments to adopt policies uniformly so all community leaders are on the same page

Funding from the state helped us make changes during the pandemic; flexibility and patience  
More staff and capacity

A big one that exceeds our budget is that we really need internet infrastructure so that we're not creating differences; it's an essential utility that everyone needs

There's a shortage of human capital (bus drivers, child nutrition, teachers); even with funding we still don't have people; we can't fill all the vacancies

Mental health resources for the community - when a child has issues, it's a systemic family issue

In addition to workforce, which is priority number 1, we need broadband infrastructure, brick and mortar infrastructure (old buildings, outdated, just the same traditional schools built in 1960s); we need to invest in our youth

We used our first set of money by the state to give grants for water bills (protect citizens) and staffing \$400K to offset additional staffing for emergency services; the next set of funds we're using on infrastructure - sanitary sewer, a new advanced technology center for the community college, a shell building, water resources for the airport, and other expenses we thought we would never had like plexiglass

No single organization can do everything so we need to partner; other organizations do things better than us so we need to rely on each other

We need our state legislature to really put some effort or teeth behind ensuring there is

broadband in rural communities - there is nothing that directly benefits us more - it's frustrating!

Safe facilities, we are limited to what we can do on our own

We need continued public patience and trust to get through this – it won't be the last one!

Money to advertise and support our area businesses; federal CARES Act money enabled us to advertise an event and even put it on the state website which drew a lot of attention

Clinical resource issues will take years to resolve; healthcare pays well in the community you grew up in so we need to remove barriers and get more people into health careers; we just need folks at the bedside who care about their neighbors – this is the way to build stronger local communities and spur economic development

### CEDS Strategies Update

To adequately and strategically respond to the economic shifts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and to prepare for future impacts, a coordinated regional response is warranted. In the current COG CEDS, four goals are identified:

Goal 1: Build on the Region's Competitive Advantages and Leverage the Marketplace

Goal 2: Establish and Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure

Goal 3: Create Revitalized, Healthy, and Resilient Communities

Goal 4: Develop Talented and Innovative People

Each of these goals is listed in the sections below, along with a relevant example perspective, and corresponding recommendations that will aid the COG district's COVID-19 response, recovery, and resiliency efforts. It is understood that the COG has limited staff and is not expected to be the sole or primary agent implementing the strategies that follow. However, where and when possible, the COG can support stakeholders and other partners to accomplish these goals. With that in mind, a likely partner is suggested for each strategy.

#### Goal (1) Build on the region's competitive advantages and leverage the marketplace

Perspective: The purpose of this goal is to focus on the unique character and quality of the region through programs designed to capitalize on the area's economic strengths. The region has many talented and dedicated individuals, committed to increasing the area's economic vitality. Not only do these individuals work within various sectors, agencies, and departments throughout the region, but they also live in the region. Therefore, they are committed to seeing the region grow and prosper. [22]

#### Actions

Continue to work with regional communities and partners to identify grant-eligible economic development projects to help ensure that the region takes full advantage of available funding opportunities.

Support the region's economic development professionals to determine additional database or data management needs, focusing on what the COG can provide to benefit economic development analyses across the region.

Convene at least one workshop for regional stakeholders with a focus on

#### Partner

County and municipal leaders, economic development leaders

County and municipal leaders, economic development leaders

County and municipal leaders,

business response/recovery/resiliency needs and resources	economic development leaders
Collaborate with other economic development organizations (EDOs) that are focused on COVID-19 response, recovery, or resiliency throughout the region to enhance regional programs, goals, or metrics.	State and regional EDOs, County and municipal leaders, economic development leaders

## Goal (2) Establish and maintain a robust regional infrastructure

Perspective: The recent American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 targets infrastructure funding. “Sections 602(c)(1)(C) and 603(c)(1)(C) of the Act provide recipients with broad latitude to use the Fiscal Recovery Funds for the provision of government services. Government services can include, but are not limited to, maintenance or pay-go funded building of infrastructure, including roads; modernization of cybersecurity, including hardware, software, and protection of critical infrastructure; health services; environmental remediation; school or educational services; and the provision of police, fire, and other public safety services.” [23]

Actions	Partner
Support regional efforts for improved rural public transit systems to provide everyone in the region with essential, affordable, and reliable transportation options.	DOT and local transportation organizations
Support the appropriate planning organizations to promote and guide and attract multi-modal federal and state transportation investments throughout the region.	DOT and local transportation organizations
Convene at least one workshop for regional infrastructure stakeholders on water and/or wastewater system financing that considers the unique impacts and financing challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.	Public works directors, county and municipal leaders
Collaborate with stakeholders to identify funding sources that address local government water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure needs with a focus on projects that promote economic expansion and improve community resiliency and system viability.	Public works directors, county and municipal leaders
Continue supporting broadband connectivity throughout the region.	State, regional, and local broadband organizations, ISPs, education, and electric co-operatives
Support stakeholders in creating and adopting Capital Improvement Plans and Asset Management Plans to guide ongoing infrastructure investments.	County and municipal governments
Collaborate with stakeholders to identify funding for affordable housing development or existing housing rehabilitation.	County and municipal governments, nonprofit housing advocates

## Goal (3) Create Revitalized and Vibrant Communities

Perspective: As an example of community revitalization, the Brookings Institution sums up a case study, writing, “as we recover and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are presented with an urgent imperative: Rebuild better by centering disconnected and disenfranchised communities and instigating holistic, systemic change. Supporting community-led civic structures is one vital component of this strategy, and it requires unlocking the potential of connected communities to do so.” [24]

Actions	Partner
Determine ways to partner with the NC Department of Commerce’s Main Street & Rural Planning Division to facilitate implementation of the	County and municipal governments



Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency Initiative (CERRI) in the Kerr-Tar region, which is developed with a deliberate focus on COVID-19 response, recovery, and resiliency.

Support the recovery and resiliency of the region's community support services sector including their systems and programs in place which help to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on historically marginalized populations. Some targets include senior services, childcare, food supplement, health, housing, and utility support sectors.

County and municipal governments, nonprofit organizations

Where and when appropriate, support the Kerr-Tar region in implementing COVID-19-related operational changes including remote public meeting formats, social distancing in public spaces, and use of personal protective equipment, to help foster safety.

All partner organizations

Collaborate with the state and region's local food system stakeholders to strengthen and grow access to local, healthy foods, especially for those most vulnerable and underserved residents.

County and municipal governments, nonprofit organizations, agriculture extension services

Promote new fiscal models to support sustainable and environmentally-friendly agricultural practices to enhance the resiliency of the region's critical agricultural sector.

County and municipal governments, nonprofit organizations, agriculture extension services

Identify and foster private and non-profit partnership opportunities to support the region's COVID-19 preparation, response, recovery, and resiliency efforts, acknowledging the need for additional leadership capacity within the region's non-profit network to help build and sustain a healthy and productive region.

nonprofit organizations, NC Rural Center, NC Office of Recovery and Resiliency

#### Goal (4) Develop a healthy, skilled, and vibrant workforce

Perspective: According to a recent McKinsey & Company podcast, "accelerating trends in remote work, e-commerce, and automation means that more people will need to change jobs and learn new skills." [25]

Actions	Partner
Collaborate with the region's community colleges to determine the COG's and stakeholders' roles in expanding or enhancing entrepreneurial programming and ecosystem-building efforts.	Regional community colleges
Support emerging health entrepreneurship and innovative public health measures in the region.	K-12 and higher education, healthcare organizations
Encourage resource-providing organizations across the region to contribute to and participate in NCCARE360, an electronic statewide care network administered by the NC Department of Health and Human Services, to streamline COVID-related assistance.	County and municipal governments, healthcare organizations
Coordinate with stakeholders to adjust or enhance workforce training and hiring programs for pandemic resilience, like virtual hiring and job fairs and a virtual platform to connect job seekers and employers.	County and municipal governments, workforce development professionals
Support area agencies on aging to determine the need for adjustment of programs that seek to improve the prosperity and financial wellbeing of the region's senior citizen workforce.	County and municipal governments, workforce development professionals
Support increasing educational and development opportunities in healthcare professions, especially increasing the pipeline of healthcare workers to rural and underserved areas.	K-12 and higher education, healthcare organizations



Convene at least one workshop for regional stakeholders, in partnership with regional workforce development organizations, with a focus on responding to or preparing for workforce development impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

K-12 and higher education, healthcare organizations, workforce development professionals

Collaborate with stakeholders to address the economic impacts of childcare and eldercare challenges.

Child and elder care focused nonprofit organizations, workforce development professionals

Work to better understand the importance, support needs, and development opportunities of essential workers

Workforce development professionals

### Additional Recommendations

Continue to research and share educational, technical, and funding resources with stakeholders through newsletters, social media content, special meetings, workshops, and Board of Director updates.

Partner and coordinate with member local governments and organizations across the Kerr-Tar region to implement the CEDS and this COVID-19 Addendum, convene the CEDS Advisory Committee to invite input on regional priorities, and monitor the effectiveness of the CEDS and this COVID-19 Addendum.

Work with small business support organizations, incubators, accelerators, and investment groups to survey and understand the scope and diversity of small businesses across the region

Support the region's industrial and business site development efforts to assist in attracting and retaining quality employers, recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant impacts to the commercial real estate industry and site selection process.

Collaborate with stakeholders to address the region's economic development infrastructure needs to help regional stakeholders prioritize most strategic investments at existing or additional business and industrial sites.

Work with small business support organizations, incubators, accelerators, and investment groups to survey and understand the scope and diversity of small businesses across the region

Support the district's industrial and business site development efforts to assist in attracting and retaining quality employers, recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant impacts to the commercial real estate industry and site selection process.

Collaborate with stakeholders to address the region's economic development infrastructure needs to help regional stakeholders prioritize strategic investments at existing or additional business and industrial sites.

### Conclusion

This update to the existing CEDS describes the initial and lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across the COG region, statewide, and nationally. Though the regional economy is recovering, the pandemic's impact on workforce has created supply chain bottlenecks that are limiting business and industry capacity, raising consumer prices, and forcing companies to attempt creative workforce strategies like increased wages, extra benefits, automation, and flexible work schedules. So far, these strategies have had limited benefits.

During this project, the region's stakeholders and leaders were interviewed to gather direct, first-person accounts about how COVID-19 impacted the region and how citizens responded. People shared a wide variety of opinions and commentary and the relevant sections in this report should be read closely. In general, interviewees noted that organizations had to pivot quickly to a virtual environment and that communication, coordination, and networking were essential to managing and surviving the crisis. To anticipate the next shock, organizations plan

to rely on regional networks, capacity building, and increased training.

Lastly, this pandemic response includes updated strategies to the existing CEDS goals that will help build recovery and resilience. These recommendations will equip the COG to help regional leaders, business owners, and residents improve recovery and resilience and ignite changes that lead to meaningful impacts. To be effective, it will be important that regional stakeholders act deliberately and continue to focus on required actions to execute the necessary incremental changes. Leadership and commitment are required to implement the suggestions in this report, and fortunately, the COG region has strong organizations and citizens who work tirelessly for the health and well-being of the region.

## **Appendix A – CEDS Committee Members**

Mike Bailes, Franklin County Public Utilities  
Laureen Jones, Franklin County Schools  
LaChaun Banks, UNC Kenan Institute  
Ken Krulik, Warren County Planning  
John Barnes, Henderson-Vance Chamber of Commerce  
Mark Little, UNC Kenan Institute  
Jody Blackwell, Piedmont Community College  
Stuart Litvin, Vance County Economic Development  
Ken Bowman, Warren County Economic Development  
Sara Lloyd, Vance-Granville Community College  
Bo Carson, Franklin County Economic Development  
Travis Marshall, NCDOT  
Doris Carver, Piedmont Community College  
Bryce Mendendall, Franklin County Public Utilities  
Jimmy Clayton, Person County Commissioner  
Harry Mills, Granville County Economic Development  
Mark Craig, NCDOT  
Lindsay Mize, South Granville Water and Sewer Authority  
Ginne Currin, Granville County Chamber of Commerce  
Bryan Pfol, The Sunrock Group  
C. Elton Daniels, Franklin County Government  
Turner Pride, Jr., Vance County Cooperative Extension  
Robert Davie, Town of Warrenton  
Darren Rhodes, NC Department of Commerce  
Richie Duncan, Franklin County Economic Development  
T. Griffen Rice, Student, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Tanya Evans, District Manager Duke Energy  
Barry Richardson, Kerr-Tar COG Board  
Dale Fey, Vance-Granville Community College  
Jacqueline (Jackie) Sergeant, City of Oxford Mayor  
Walter Gardner\*, Mayor Town of Warrenton  
Betty Jo Shephard, Office of United States Senator Richard Burr  
Stuart Gilbert, Person County Economic Development  
Hillary Sherman, Economic Development Administration  
Ronnie Goswick, The Sunrock Group  
Ashley Tucker, Student, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Carolyn Fryberger, The Kenan Institute  
Tanya Weary, Vance-Granville Community College  
Charles Halsall, Jr., NC Department of Commerce  
Morris White, Vance County Cooperative Extension  
Richard Hancock, NCDOT  
Dexter Williams, CenturyLink  
Joey Hopkins, NCDOT  
Nancy Wilson, Vance County Tourism Development Authority  
Mike Inscoe, City of Henderson Councilmember

**Appendix B – CEDS Update Project Oversight Group**

Jane Ball-Groom, Executive Director at Pier View Community Innovations, Inc.

John Snow, CEO, Granville Health System

Michele Burgess, President, Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce

Vincent E. Jones, Warren County Manager

Louie "Bo" Freeman, Person County Extension Director, N.C. Cooperative Extension

Janet Clayton, Health Director, Person County Health Department

Margaret McMann, Tourism Development Authority Director, Person County

## **Appendix C - Stakeholders interviewed**

Brooks Lockhart, Roxboro City Manager  
Derrick Smith, Captain / Commanding Officer, The Salvation Army of Henderson NC  
Vincent E. Jones, Warren County Manager  
Oliver Greene, Director, Franklin County Parks & Recreation  
Tanya Evans, District Manager, Duke Energy  
Micheal Felts, Granville County Manager  
Angela Allen, Tourism Development Authority Director, Granville County  
John Snow, CEO, Granville Health System  
Tom Church, Henderson County Economic Development Board  
Michele Burgess, President, Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce  
Pamela Senegal, President, Person County Community College  
Janet Clayton, Health Director, Person County Health Department  
Jerry Edmonds, Vice President of Workforce and Community Engagement,  
Vance Granville Community College  
Jordan McMillen, Vance County Manager  
Jane Ball-Groom, Executive Director at Pier View Community Innovations, Inc.  
Louie "Bo" Freeman, Person County Extension Director, N.C. Cooperative Extension  
Robert Davie, Warrenton Town Administrator  
Val Short, Executive Director, Triangle North Healthcare Foundation  
Rhonda Shuler, Superintendent, Franklin County Schools  
Stan Winborne, Associate Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction and Student Services  
Public Information Officer at Granville County Public Schools

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