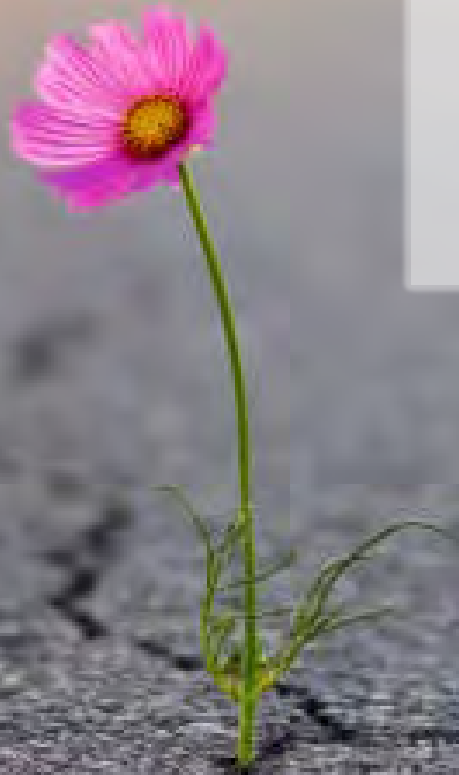


# Southern Georgia Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan



Published September 2021

Atkinson - Bacon - Ben Hill - Berrien  
Brantley - Brooks - Charlton - Clinch - Coffee  
Cook - Echols - Irwin - Lanier - Lowndes  
Pierce - Tift - Turner - Ware Counties



**sgirc**  
**SOUTHERN GEORGIA**  
**REGIONAL COMMISSION**  
Waycross - Valdosta

## **SOUTHERN GEORGIA ECONOMIC RECOVERY & RESILIENCY PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) is an Economic Development District (EDD) located in Service Delivery Region 11, which includes Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware Counties. The vast region covers South Central to Southeast Georgia where agriculture, commercial timber production, manufacturing, and other rural development initiatives are all cornerstones of the economy.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, radical shifts occurred in the economy and everyday life throughout the SGRC EDD region, Georgia, and the United States. Georgia's statewide shelter-in-place order issued in April 2020 brought with it closures of schools, colleges, businesses, and many local governments. There were mass layoffs throughout the region, school students were suddenly faced with the challenge of online learning, the unemployed were desperately searching for resources, and many hospitals were at maximum capacity treating those struck ill by the coronavirus.

In August 2020, the SGRC received Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for the purpose of assisting the region with pandemic recovery and increasing resilience. With this funding, the SGRC has worked directly with the communities to assess the region's needs, and to devise a strategy to meet those needs through coordination, partnerships, and leveraged resources. The result of these efforts is the development of this Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan which assesses the region's current community and economic needs, devises strategies to address these needs, and identifies methods to strengthen economic resilience.

Development of this plan pinpointed four strategic target sectors as the foundation for economic recovery and resiliency in the SGRC EDD. These target sectors are: Business, Industry, & Workforce; Housing; Broadband; and Health & Wellbeing. Implementation of the action plan for each of these target sectors will improve the economy and quality of life in the region, and will prepare the region to endure future shocks to the economic base.

The Southern Georgia Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan will be incorporated into the SGRC EDD's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs).

# CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Planning for a Resilient Region	7
Strategic Target Sectors	11
Strategic Target Sector 1: Business, Industry, and Workforce	12
Strategic Target Sector 2: Housing	14
Strategic Target Sector 3: Broadband	16
Strategic Target Sector 4: Health and Wellbeing	18
Performance Measures	20
Regional Projects	21
Appendix	22



## CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS

SGRC Council

Region 11 Economic Development Professionals  
Working Group

SGRC Workforce Development Board

SGRC Planning, Community & Economic Development, and  
GIS Divisions

18 Counties & 45 Municipalities of the SGRC

Economic Development Administration



# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS ECONOMIC RESILIENCE?

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) defines economic resilience with the following overview<sup>1</sup> in their content guidelines for creating an impactful CEDS document:

It is becoming increasingly apparent that regional economic prosperity is linked to an area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., 'shocks') to its economic base. Many definitions of economic resilience limit its focus on the ability to quickly recover from a disruption. However, in the context of economic development, economic resilience becomes inclusive of three primary attributes: the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid the shock altogether. Establishing economic resilience in a local or regional economy requires the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how that risk can impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity. Often, the shocks/disruptions to the economic base of an area or region are manifested in three ways:

- Downturns or other significant events in the national or international economy which impact demand for locally produced goods and consumer spending;
- Downturns in particular industries that constitute a critical component of the region's economic activity; and/or

- Other external shocks (a natural or man-made disaster, closure of a military base, exit of a major employer, the impacts of climate change, etc.).

At the regional or community level, economic development practitioners are instrumental in building the capacity for economic resilience. Economic development professionals and organizations often become the focal point for post-incident coordination, information dissemination, responding to external inquiries, and the lead grant administrator for federally-funded recovery initiatives.

In building economic resilience, it is critical that economic development organizations consider their role in the pre- and post-incident environment to include **steady-state** and **responsive** initiatives.

Steady-state initiatives tend to be long-term efforts that seek to bolster the community or region's ability to withstand or avoid a shock. Responsive initiatives can include establishing capabilities for the economic development organization to be responsive to the region's recovery needs following an incident.

*(Continued on Next Page)*

<sup>1</sup> U.S. EDA. Economic Resilience. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Content Guidelines: Recommendations for Creating an Impactful CEDS | U.S. Economic Development Administration (eda.gov)

# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS ECONOMIC RESILIENCE?

Examples of *steady-state* economic resilience initiatives include:

- Engaging in comprehensive planning efforts that involve extensive involvement from the community to define and implement a collective vision for resilience that includes the integration and/or alignment of other planning efforts (e.g., hazard mitigation plans) and funding sources;
- Undertaking efforts to broaden the industrial base with diversification initiatives, such as targeting the development of emerging clusters or industries that (a) build on the region’s unique assets and competitive strengths; and (b) provide stability during downturns that disproportionately impact any single cluster or industry;
- Adapting business retention and expansion programs (e.g., economic gardening or other enterprise supports) to assist firms with economic recovery post-disruption;
- Building a resilient workforce that can better shift between jobs or industries when their core employment is threatened through job-driven skills strategies and support organizations;
- Maintaining geographic information systems (GIS) that link with municipal business licenses, tax information, and other business establishment data bases to track local and regional “churn” and available development sites. GIS can also be integrated with hazard information to make rapid post-incident impact assessments;

- Ensuring redundancy in telecommunications and broadband networks to protect commerce and public safety in the event of natural or manmade disasters;
- Promoting business continuity and preparedness (i.e., ensuring businesses understand their vulnerabilities—including supply chains—in the face of disruptions and are prepared to take actions to resume operations after an event); and
- Employing safe development practices in business districts and surrounding communities. Strategies may include locating structures outside of floodplains, preserving natural lands that act as buffers from storms, and protecting downtowns and other existing development from the impacts of extreme weather.

Some examples of *responsive* economic resilience initiatives include:

- Conducting pre-disaster recovery planning to define key stakeholders, roles, responsibilities, and key actions;
- Establishing a process for regular communication, monitoring, and updating of business community needs and issues (which can then be used after an incident) ;
- Establishing/using a capability to rapidly contact key local, regional, state, and federal officials to communicate business sector needs and coordinate impact assessment efforts; and
- Establishing/using coordination mechanisms and leadership succession plans for short, intermediate, and long-term recovery needs.

# INTRODUCTION

## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 is by far the most significant public health emergency to affect the region. As of September 17, 2021, 1,181,648 cases of COVID-19, 21,235 confirmed deaths, and 3,342 probable deaths had been reported in the state of Georgia. Over 11 million COVID-19 tests have been administered in Georgia, with 1,178,288 of those test results being positive. Within the 18-county region there have been 43,074 cases and 1,130 deaths. Statewide, 46% of Georgia residents are fully vaccinated, and 53% have been administered at least one dose. In the SGRC EDD region, 32% of people are fully vaccinated, and 37% have received at least one vaccination shot.<sup>2</sup>

A statewide lockdown during the spring of 2020 had a profound economic impact on the region. Widespread business closures resulted in high unemployment and financial uncertainty. School closures disrupted parents' ability to work and the shift to remote learning impacted K-12 students and college students alike.

A crucial need that surfaced at the onset of the pandemic was food insecurity and the need for emergency food supplies. Many food pantries that typically provide emergency food across the region opted to suspend their operations to protect

*(Continued on Next Page)*



<sup>2</sup> Georgia Department of Public Health. Daily Status Report. <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>

# INTRODUCTION

## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

their vulnerable volunteers. In an effort to fill the service gap, regional food banks like Second Harvest shifted their operations to the preparation and distribution of food boxes via strategically placed drive through locations that often experienced mile-long vehicle lines.

Food insecurity was especially high for senior residents. This was due in part to the fact that they were homebound for safety reasons, were afraid to go out shopping, were no longer able to visit local food pantries as needed, and/or were no longer able to attend senior center programs where they normally received a hot meal each day. The SGRC Area Agency on Aging (AAA) experienced a 52% increase in calls for assistance to its Aging and Disability Resource Connection toll-free number.

In response to the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by seniors during the pandemic, the SGRC AAA made adjustments to continue to provide much needed services. Senior centers that were closed adapted to provide virtual senior center activities. Meals were offered via contactless delivery or pickup at senior centers, and Home Delivered Meal Sites began weekly delivery of frozen or shelf-stable meals for home-delivered meal clients (all hot daily meal deliveries ceased). Although the SGRC AAA's sole Adult Day Care site in Valdosta closed to in-person clients in March 2020, the site provided telephonic activities for clients instead.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most basic of human needs—food, shelter, safety—became top priorities. In addition, mental health, social isolation, loneliness, and emotional wellness surfaced as priority issues with possible long-term implications.



Photo courtesy The Tifton Gazette, 5-7-20



# INTRODUCTION

## THE STATE OF THE REGION

The global pandemic has levied a hard blow to the Southern Georgia EDD and its economy. The negative effects of the pandemic included:

- business closures,
- rural hospitals struggling to meet demand for healthcare,
- students with limited broadband experiencing educational gaps because of inability to participate in online education,
- hospitality industry decimated,
- supply chain disruptions, and
- mass layoffs throughout the region.

Unemployment skyrocketed. In fact, the unemployment rate in the SGRC EDD in February 2020 was 3.7%. Fast forward to April 2020, and the EDD's average unemployment more than doubled to 9.6%, the highest recorded unemployment rate since the onset of the pandemic. Coinciding with this apex of the unemployment rate was the 10,628 unemployment claims filed in the SGRC EDD region during the week of April 4, 2020, the most claims filed in a week's time since the arrival of the coronavirus.

As the pandemic seemingly wanes, Southern Georgia is beginning to recover with more and more businesses reopening and attempting to restaff. However, many businesses are finding it difficult to fill all of the available positions. Some attribute this worker shortage to increased unemployment benefits, while others cite childcare issues or



concerns about contracting COVID as a deterrent to employment – perhaps it is a combination. In order to attract new employees, some employers have raised starting wages and many are offering “signing bonuses.”

Nevertheless, there is a subset of the unemployed that have completely disengaged from the labor market and are not reflected in the unemployment rate. This fact is reflected in the region's per capita income and poverty data. The average per capita income (PCI) in the SGRC EDD is a mere \$20,420, which is in stark contrast to Georgia's PCI of \$31,067 and the United States' PCI of \$34,103. All but two of the SGRC EDD's eighteen counties are considered to be areas of persistent poverty (more than 20% of a county's population lives below the poverty threshold). Reengagement of this pool of potential workers is crucial to the economic health of the region.

The economic injury in the SGRC region as a result of the coronavirus pandemic is substantial, and the Southern Georgia EDD is committed to assisting local governments, businesses, and stakeholders with their economic recovery through the implementation of the resiliency, mitigation, and economic recovery action items identified in this plan.



# INTRODUCTION

## RESILIENCY FRAMEWORK

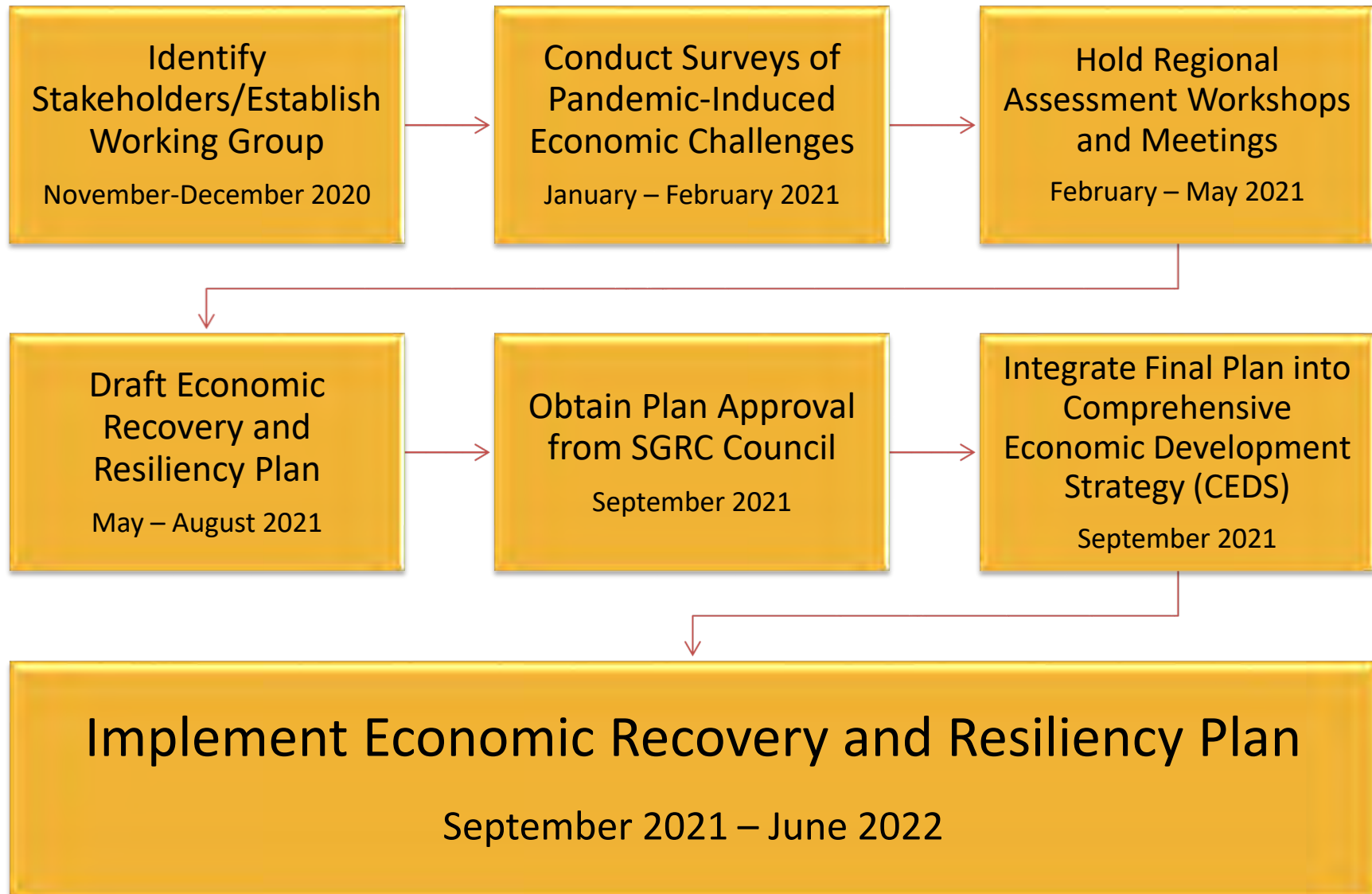
Economic resilience is the ability of a community or region to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from various disruptions to its business and industrial base. These disruptions can be caused by a variety of things, including a downturn in the national or local economy as a result of the pandemic. A resiliency framework in the face of a pandemic is a multi-dimensional effort emphasizing engagement and support from all aspects of the community, including economic development practitioners. Some examples include:

- Efforts to broaden the industrial base or local sectoral specialization with diversification initiatives (e.g., moving away from a local or regional economy overly dependent on one industry that might be susceptible to downturns caused by the pandemic);
- Enhancing business retention and expansion programs to strengthen existing high-growth sectors and industries, development and construction of high-performance and resilient infrastructure and buildings to mitigate future risk and vulnerability;
- Comprehensive planning efforts that involve extensive engagement from the community to define and implement a collective vision for economic recovery; and
- Investing and enhancing community human capital development through workforce training to broaden the skills base of the regional workforce.
- Deploying technologies such as broadband to support dynamic, diverse economies that better withstand acute disruptions.

Resilience (within the context of economic development) is strengthened when it includes methods and measures to mitigate the potential for future economic injury, promote a faster “up-time” for economic anchors (e.g., key businesses and/or industries), and strengthen local and regional capacity to troubleshoot and address vulnerabilities within the regional economy.<sup>3</sup> All communities, whether those in locations likely to experience significant natural disasters or those dealing with immediate or pending economic shifts, must be able to recognize their vulnerabilities. Once those vulnerabilities have been identified, the communities should develop goals, strategies, and actions that can mitigate the effects of an economic incident and support long-term recovery efforts.

# PLANNING FOR A RESILIENT REGION

Following the award of EDA CARES Act funding, SGRC staff created a timeline for the preparation of the Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan:



# PLANNING FOR A RESILIENT REGION

A two-pronged approach was used to gather data for this plan: surveys and regional assessment workshops/meetings. The first survey was distributed to the region's economic development professionals for the purpose of measuring the immediate economic effect of the pandemic. This effort was followed by the distribution of a comprehensive survey to local government staff, elected officials, economic and workforce development professionals, business & industry leaders, and the general public via Constant Contact, email, and social media.

The results of these surveys were used as a foundation for the discussions that took place during the Regional Assessment Workshops and Meetings, all of which were held between February 2021 and May 2021. During these workshops and meetings, SGRC-EDD staff:

- 1) facilitated the prioritization of the region's economic issues exacerbated by the pandemic;
- 2) helped to identify opportunities to foster economic recovery; and
- 3) assisted with recognizing ways to strengthen economic resiliency.

Furthermore, a key goal of the workshops/meetings was also to consider action steps that could be taken to support economic recovery in strategic target areas of the regional economy.



*Regional Assessment Workshop*



# PLANNING FOR A RESILIENT REGION

## REGIONAL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

In the initial survey taken in January 2020, the region's economic development professionals were asked:

*What has been the single most devastating economic effect of COVID-19 in your area, and what is needed to address it?*

Here are some of their responses...

The mental aspect of COVID will probably be the single most devastating economic effect. Folks giving up on their businesses, shoppers scared to enter stores, pressures from the lockdowns, not getting back to whatever normal was, fear of getting sick, and the fear of change and the unknown will effect economic development in some way.

Independently-owned entertainment, tourism, and hospitality related assets that are based indoors like downtown restaurants. This also includes small businesses that rely on festivals, Christmas parades, sporting events, concerts, etc. for revenue boost that puts them in the black for the year...(a business owner) once told me that softball and baseball tournaments were his largest revenue days. These businesses are the ones that advertise locally, make charitable contributions to local non-profits and school systems so the loss is felt on multiple levels.

(The) single most devastating economic effect of COVID-19 has been the workforce absenteeism from quarantines from exposure/testing positive and caring for family members out of school, etc. People having to quarantine (or care for children) and not be able to work has hampered the ability of industries to reach and/or maintain full production capacities. Multiple industries have reported an increase in demand since the beginning of the pandemic, but lack the labor capacity to meet production requirements.

Recently we've witnessed a rash of "mom and pop" owned small businesses closing or informing us that they are considering closing. While some are still profitable, the risk of COVID is outweighing the financial reward. It should be noted that most of the businesses are owned by individuals 60 years old or older. Some are still doing business the way they have for years...Throw in supply chain disruptions that are preventing "mom and pops" from obtaining inventory and available inventory being bought up by larger retailers, and you have to wonder if we are going to witness a lot of store fronts being vacated.

# PLANNING FOR A RESILIENT REGION

## REGIONAL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Following the initial survey, a comprehensive survey was distributed region-wide. Here are the major findings...



**TOP 3**

### Most Impacted Industries

1. Restaurant/Service Industry
2. Healthcare Facilities
3. Retail Establishments

### Economic Development Funding Needs

1. Connecting employers with talented workforce
2. Broadband infrastructure improvements
3. Job training and workforce development

### Community Development Funding Needs

1. Affordable housing/rehabilitation of substandard housing
2. Improvements to public spaces (parks, recreation facilities, youth & senior facilities, health departments, etc.)
3. Water, sewer, and street infrastructure improvements

Nearly

**50%**

Of respondents indicated **pandemic recovery** would take **12-24** months

Over

**60%**

Of respondents said support of existing business and industry would **improve resilience** and protect against **economic disruption**

# STRATEGIC TARGET SECTORS

The regional assessment findings identified **four strategic target sectors** for economic recovery and resiliency.



Business, Industry, and  
Workforce

---



Housing

---



Broadband

---



Health and Wellbeing



## STRATEGIC TARGET SECTOR 1



# BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, AND WORKFORCE

# BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, AND WORKFORCE

## NEEDS/ISSUES

- Number of unemployed, underemployed, and unskilled adults
- High school seniors without plans for employment or post secondary education after graduation
- Work-age individuals not engaged in the workforce
- Loss of educated/trained workforce to larger urban areas
- Increased work absenteeism due to COVID-19 illness and/or exposure
- Lack of skilled workforce, both hard and soft skills
- Siloed workforce training programs
- Disconnect between workforce training programs and employee needs of business and industry
- Limited employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated
- Infrastructure improvements (road, water, sewer, rail, etc.) to attract new business and industry
- Creation of more manufacturing jobs that pay above average wages

## GOAL

Promote strategies that develop a skilled workforce through job training and education, support business and industry, and provide adequate infrastructure to further economic development.

## ACTION PLAN

- ❖ Establish a coalition of workforce development professionals to coordinate the removal of barriers to region-wide job training programs
- ❖ Identify employment opportunities that will be in high demand in the future and match educational offerings for these jobs
- ❖ Develop a workforce participation encouragement program for individuals disengaged from the work force
- ❖ Identify potential fund sources for workforce development initiatives
- ❖ Launch an incubator to grow knowledge-based business in order to retain college and university graduates, and to provide support for start-ups and entrepreneurs
- ❖ Pursue funding for infrastructure upgrades that support private investment and job creation/retention
- ❖ Provide support for existing businesses (tool-box type small grants and façade improvement local grants)
- ❖ Support programs that connect high school students with potential after-graduation jobs and educational opportunities
- ❖ Share best practices of businesses with successful reintegration employment programs for the previously incarcerated

# STRATEGIC TARGET SECTOR 2



# HOUSING



# HOUSING

## NEEDS/ISSUES

- Deteriorating housing stock in need of rehabilitation, reconstruction, or demolition
- Limited access to affordable, workforce housing
- Shortage of developers/contractors building mid-range housing subdivisions
- Negative mindset concerning multi-family affordable housing
- Pandemic-induced cost increase and shortage of building materials
- Safe, sanitary housing for low to moderate income families

## GOAL

Facilitate the construction of affordable housing developments while also addressing substandard housing through rehabilitation and reconstruction.

## ACTION PLAN

- ❖ Support construction of affordable, workforce housing
- ❖ Develop incentive programs that encourage the construction of affordable housing developments
- ❖ Establish best practices to ensure economical, but structurally sound construction
- ❖ Educate the public about the benefits of multi-family affordable housing
- ❖ Inventory housing conditions in neighborhoods targeted for redevelopment
- ❖ Pursue funding for housing rehabilitation, reconstruction, and demolition in declining neighborhoods
- ❖ Identify barriers to the development of affordable housing
- ❖ Encourage local governments to participate in programs related to housing and community development such as the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH)
- ❖ Support neighborhood cleanup efforts and encourage the provision of designated collection points for bulk trash
- ❖ Evaluate code enforcement efforts region-wide, and urge active enforcement to address code violations

# STRATEGIC TARGET SECTOR 3



# BROADBAND

# BROADBAND

## NEEDS/ISSUES

- Many unserved and underserved areas throughout the region
- Insufficient broadband service hinders businesses that rely on connectivity
- Deployment of broadband to unserved areas
- Student connectivity vital to successful remote learning
- Lack of broadband is a barrier to accessing telehealth services
- Few local governments designated as Broadband Ready in the region

## GOAL

Provide broadband to all unserved and underserved people throughout the region.

## ACTION PLAN

- ❖ Upgrade network capabilities to in-building wireless for all county and city facilities
- ❖ Build out primary and redundant 10G fiber links to county and city facilities
- ❖ Identify broadband service providers willing to participate in public-private partnerships to expand existing networks
- ❖ Reduce obstacles to broadband infrastructure investment
- ❖ Assist local governments in amending comprehensive plan to include the promotion of broadband deployment, and with adopting Broadband Ready Community Ordinance
- ❖ Assist local governments with obtaining Broadband Ready Designation
- ❖ Identify and pursue grant funding and financing sources to facilitate the construction of broadband infrastructure
- ❖ Promote affordable access to broadband

## STRATEGIC TARGET SECTOR 4



# HEALTH AND WELLBEING

# HEALTH AND WELLBEING

## NEEDS/ISSUES

- Limited access to healthcare and mental health services
- Increased exposure of essential workers to COVID-19
- Strained resources at hospitals and other healthcare facilities
- Improvements to public spaces for outdoor recreation
- Low vaccination rates and pandemic fatigue
- Protection of at-risk populations
- Implementation of senior citizen well-being programs

## GOAL

Advance healthcare initiatives and partnerships that ensure healthy lives and well being for children, youth, adults, and seniors.

## ACTION PLAN

- ❖ Promote improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure
- ❖ Coordinate with nonprofit to offer financial literacy classes to students and adults
- ❖ Ensure appropriate amounts of medical supplies are available (PPE, oxygen, etc.) from a variety of sources
- ❖ Build outdoor venues for meeting space
- ❖ Partner with Area Agency on Aging to implement AARP Age-Friendly Community initiatives
- ❖ Improve public outdoor spaces such as parks and recreation facilities
- ❖ Identify funding to retrofit public facilities like health departments, mental health centers, senior centers, etc. to facilitate the implementation of COVID-19 protocols
- ❖ Assess the region to identify areas of food insecurity and work to improve food access in these areas



# PERFORMANCE MEASURES

## BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, AND WORKFORCE

- Number of jobs created/retained, and amount of new private investment
- Number of job training program participants
- Number of grants awarded for infrastructure upgrades
- Amount of technical assistance provided to local governments
- Number of disengaged workers trained, placed, or otherwise impacted by workforce sector initiatives

## BROADBAND

- Number of grants awarded for broadband deployment
- Reduction in the number of unserved locations
- Increase in the number of people being served
- Number of Broadband Ready Community Ordinances adopted by local governments
- Number of local governments receiving Broadband Ready Designation

## HOUSING

- Number of designated GICH communities
- Number of grants awarded for housing rehabilitation and reconstruction
- Number of affordable housing developments
- Number of incentive programs initiated by local governments
- Number of properties remedying code enforcement violations

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Reduction in the number of food deserts in the region
- Number of grants awarded for construction or rehabilitation of public facilities
- Number of outdoor spaces improved
- Number of Age-Friendly Community initiatives implemented
- Number of bicycle and pedestrian facilities improved or constructed

# REGIONAL PROJECTS TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Industrial Park Infrastructure Improvements

Development of New Industrial Parks/Expansion of Existing Parks at Capacity

Regional Business Retention and Expansion Program

Increased Water and Wastewater Capacity

Tourism Product Development

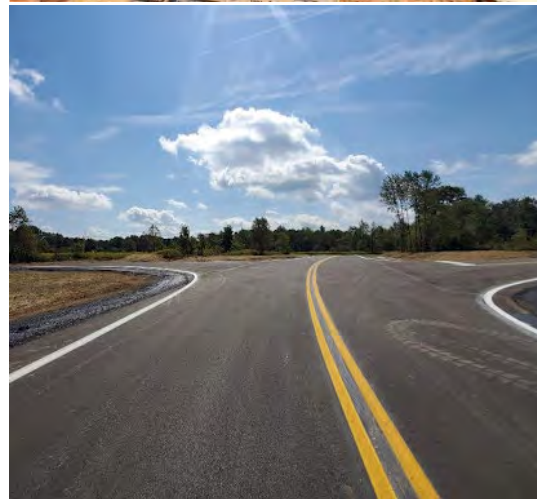
Workforce Engagement Program

Airport Enhancements and Improvements

Workforce Housing Developments

Establishment of Enterprise and Opportunity Zones for Incentivized Development

Long-range Infrastructure Planning



# Appendix

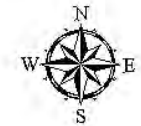
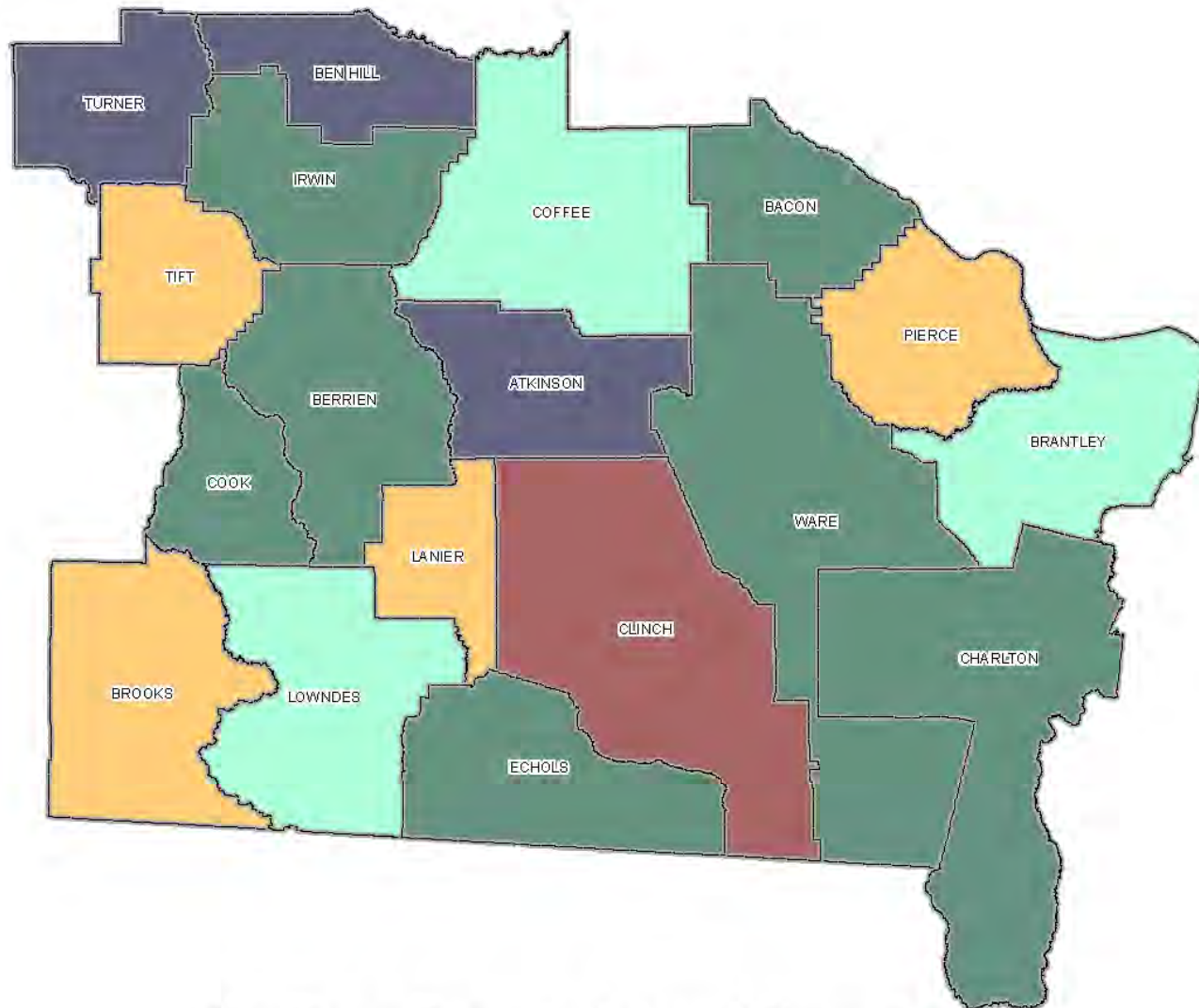


# SOUTHERN GEORGIA EDD REGIONAL DATA







County	% Poverty Rate			Median Household Income			Per Capita Income			Unemployment**	
	2021*	2015	2010	2021*	2015	2010	2021*	2015	2010	#	%
Atkinson	33.3	29.9	28.0	\$ 34,877	\$ 30,403	\$ 33,834	\$ 18,565	\$ 16,228	\$ 15,456	108	2.3
Bacon	23.8	20.4	16.5	\$ 36,964	\$ 37,698	\$ 31,429	\$ 19,634	\$ 18,109	\$ 17,110	125	2.8
Ben Hill	29.6	36.2	26.9	\$ 32,705	\$ 30,643	\$ 30,134	\$ 17,563	\$ 15,497	\$ 15,529	272	5.0
Berrien	24.2	25.3	23.1	\$ 40,415	\$ 31,812	\$ 32,202	\$ 19,547	\$ 16,660	\$ 16,049	210	2.8
Brantley	19.6	20.9	21.4	\$ 38,857	\$ 36,301	\$ 37,343	\$ 20,191	\$ 16,774	\$ 18,905	209	2.8
Brooks	22.7	27.8	17.0	\$ 38,285	\$ 31,686	\$ 41,309	\$ 25,700	\$ 19,473	\$ 20,346	191	2.7
Charlton	25.2	18.0	19.8	\$ 41,961	\$ 41,059	\$ 40,850	\$ 18,323	\$ 17,586	\$ 16,652	118	2.4
Clinch	40.2	34.6	25.7	\$ 27,658	\$ 29,125	\$ 31,963	\$ 15,152	\$ 18,256	\$ 16,709	75	2.5
Coffee	19.9	26.0	21.3	\$ 40,859	\$ 34,523	\$ 35,202	\$ 19,905	\$ 16,796	\$ 16,664	655	3.5
Cook	24.0	25.1	23.3	\$ 41,854	\$ 34,230	\$ 31,390	\$ 20,128	\$ 18,858	\$ 16,528	215	2.6
Echols	24.1	30.1	32.1	\$ 39,494	\$ 32,667	\$ 32,390	\$ 23,885	\$ 17,350	\$ 14,201	39	2.0
Irwin	23.9	22.3	25.4	\$ 37,736	\$ 36,729	\$ 38,376	\$ 19,878	\$ 18,614	\$ 16,561	146	4.1
Lanier	23.1	30.6	20.4	\$ 40,986	\$ 36,904	\$ 37,522	\$ 19,207	\$ 16,860	\$ 16,894	108	2.8
Lowndes	21.2	25.3	21.6	\$ 45,683	\$ 37,248	\$ 39,096	\$ 24,708	\$ 19,353	\$ 20,041	1,636	3.1
Pierce	22.1	20.0	15.4	\$ 42,804	\$ 41,685	\$ 37,062	\$ 22,268	\$ 21,601	\$ 18,283	200	2.4
Tift	23.3	27.7	22.8	\$ 45,639	\$ 34,830	\$ 36,847	\$ 22,974	\$ 19,560	\$ 18,394	544	2.6
Turner	33.6	24.8	25.4	\$ 37,039	\$ 29,763	\$ 30,763	\$ 19,527	\$ 17,215	\$ 15,973	171	5.2
Ware	24.9	26.2	20.5	\$ 36,869	\$ 35,247	\$ 35,517	\$ 20,411	\$ 18,341	\$ 18,295	433	2.9
<b>Avg Total</b>	25.5	26.2	22.6	\$ 38,927	\$ 34,586	\$ 35,179	\$ 20,420	\$ 17,952	\$ 17,444	303	3.0
<b>Difference</b>	+ 10.4	+ 7.7	+ 6.9	\$- 19,773	\$- 14,756	\$- 14,168	\$-10,647	\$ - 7,475	\$ - 7,690		- 0.2
<b>State Total</b>	15.1	18.5	15.7	\$ 58,700	\$ 49,342	\$ 49,347	\$ 31,067	\$ 25,427	\$ 25,134	164,744	3.2
<b>Difference</b>	+ 12.1	+ 10.6	+ 8.8	\$- 23,916	\$- 18,896	\$- 16,735	\$-13,683	\$ -10,603	\$ - 9,890		- 2.7
<b>US Total</b>	13.4	15.6	13.8	\$ 62,843	\$ 53,482	\$ 51,914	\$ 34,103	\$ 28,555	\$ 27,334	9,221,000	5.7

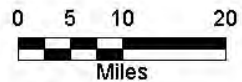
\*2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate

\*\*GDOL, August 2021



### Map Legend

-  SGRC Counties
- Poverty Percentage**
-  18.6% - 21.2%
-  21.3% - 23.3%
-  23.4% - 25.2%
-  25.3% - 33.6%
-  33.7% - 40.2%



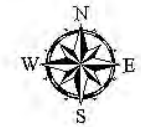
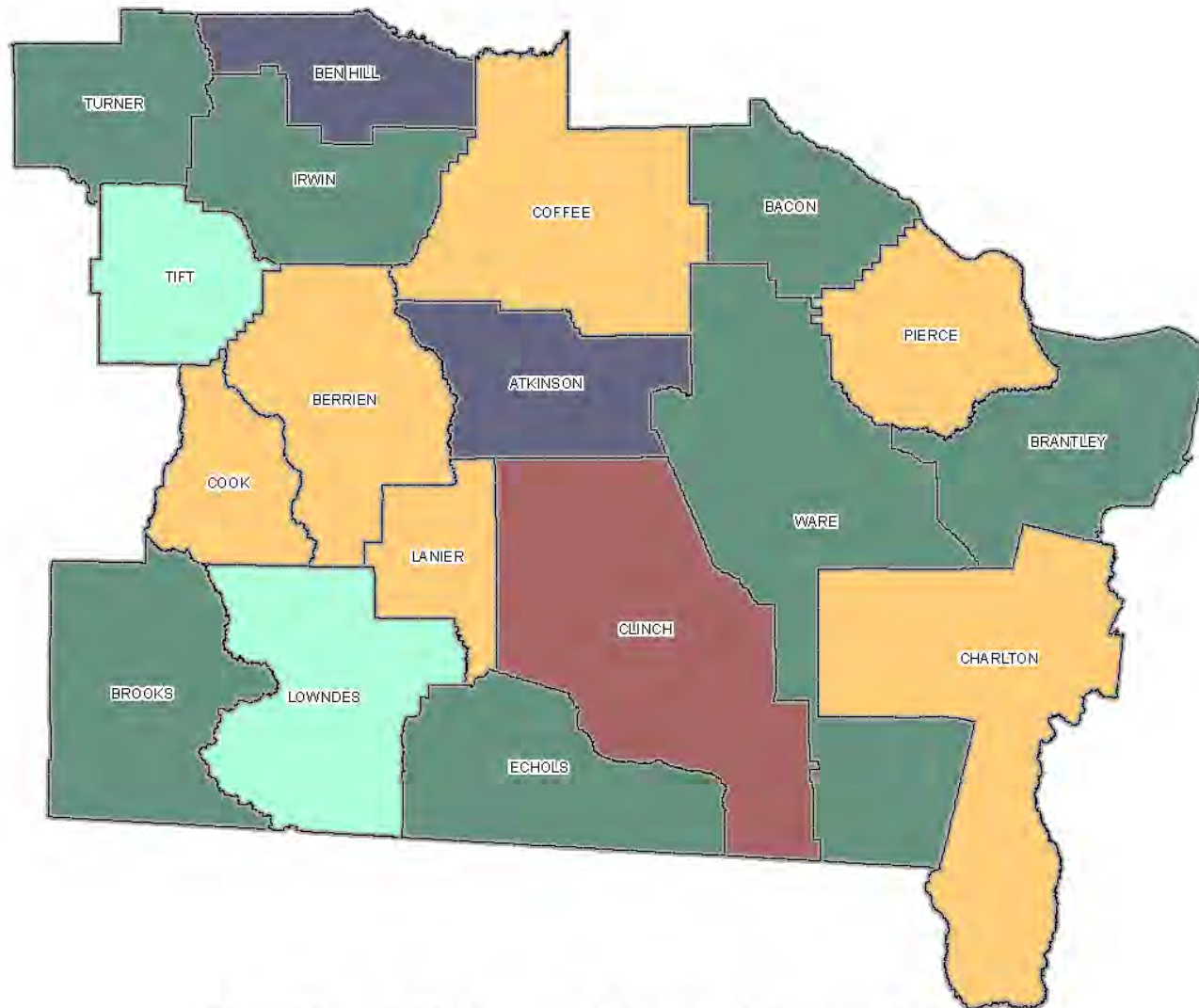
## Southern Georgia Regional Commission 2021 Poverty Rate Percentage

Map created September 2021 for general planning purposes only. Refer all questions on data accuracy and availability to the Southern Georgia Regional Commission.



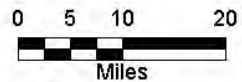
Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 American Community Survey





### Map Legend

-  SGRC Counties
- Median Household Income**
-  \$27,658
-  \$27,659 - \$34,877
-  \$34,878 - \$39,494
-  \$39,495 - \$42,804
-  \$42,805 - \$45,683

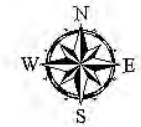
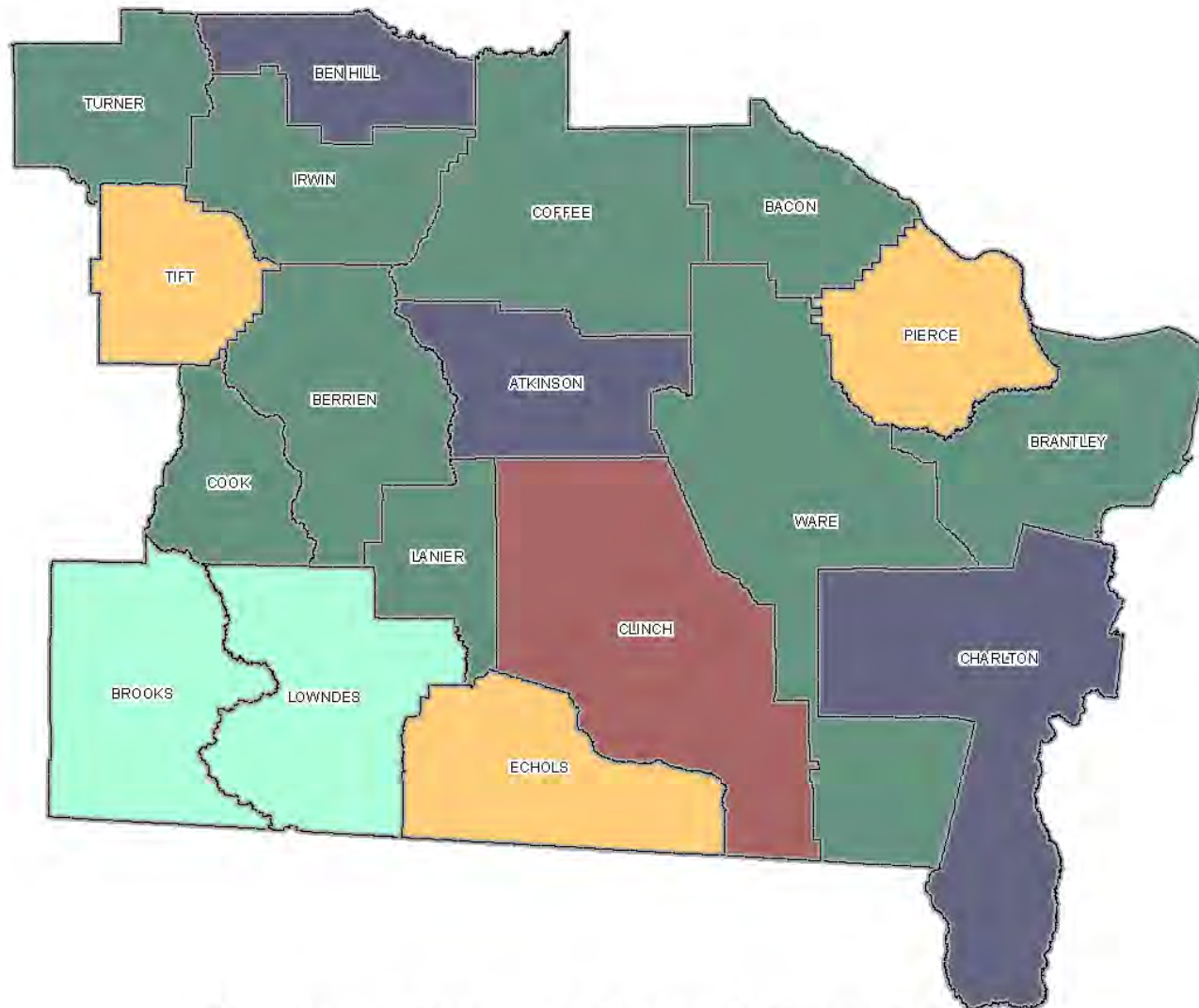


## Southern Georgia Regional Commission 2021 Median Household Income

Map created September 2021 for general planning purposes only. Refer all questions on data accuracy and availability to the Southern Georgia Regional Commission.

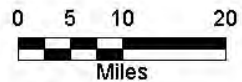


Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 American Community Survey



### Map Legend

-  SGRC Counties
- Per Capita Income**
-  \$15,152
-  \$15,153 - \$18,565
-  \$18,566 - \$20,411
-  \$20,412 - \$23,885
-  \$23,885 - \$25,700



## Southern Georgia Regional Commission 2021 Per Capita Income

Map created September 2021 for general planning purposes only. Refer all questions on data accuracy and availability to the Southern Georgia Regional Commission.

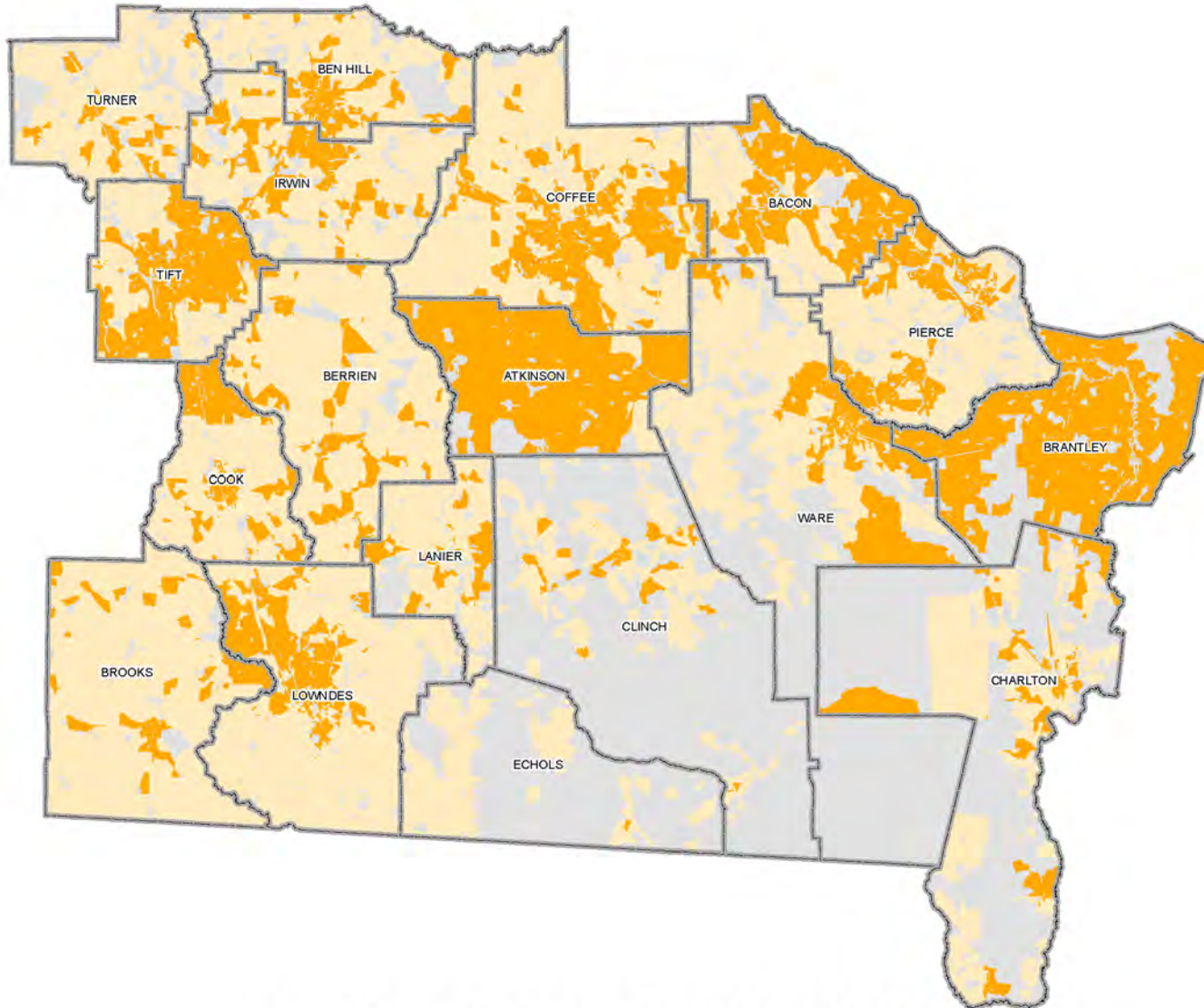


Source: US Census Bureau, 2015-2019 American Community Survey

## Educational Attainment of Workforce 25 years & older 2015-2019 ACS 5-year est., Table S1501

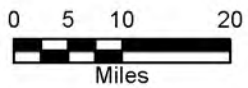
County	Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	9 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade, no diploma	High School Graduate, GED or equivalent	Some College, no degree	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate or Professional Degree	Total
Atkinson	869	836	1,805	694	360	262	374	5,200
Bacon	398	1,001	3,116	1,548	603	468	301	7,534
Ben Hill	552	1,286	5,052	1,981	1,035	841	414	11,161
Berrien	768	1,999	5,597	2,297	1,022	977	533	13,193
Brantley	661	2,039	5,691	2,109	1,137	552	579	12,768
Brooks	636	1,009	3,875	2,434	1,146	1,394	571	11,065
Charlton	1,049	1,316	3,670	1,678	626	355	451	9,145
Clinch	382	984	1,503	933	186	261	182	4,431
Coffee	2,220	4,632	10,497	5,041	2,152	2,206	1,469	28,217
Cook	606	1,752	4,108	2,246	1,065	951	574	11,302
Echols	296	425	1,170	453	175	166	105	2,790
Irwin	208	949	2,507	990	641	542	401	6,238
Lanier	482	890	2,593	1,131	626	734	394	6,850
Lowndes	2,195	4,309	22,551	14,840	8,192	12,197	5,388	69,672
Pierce	702	1,451	5,543	2,451	1,187	864	764	12,962
Tift	1,435	3,227	8,942	4,495	3,020	2,488	2,183	25,790
Turner	375	671	2,116	1,089	662	363	287	5,563
Ware	1,360	3,195	9,600	4,591	2,022	2,452	1,258	24,478





**Map Legend**

-  SGRC Counties
- Served & Unserved Areas**
-  Served
-  Unserved
-  No Locations



**2021 Georgia Broadband Availability  
by County**

Map created August 2021 for general planning purposes only. Refer all questions on data accuracy and availability to the Southern Georgia Regional Commission.



Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs

## SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION COUNCIL

County Representative	Municipal Representative	Private Sector Representative	
Atkinson	Lace Futch	Robert Johnson	Janice McKinnon
Bacon	Vacant	Larry Taylor	Lisa Coley
Ben Hill	Steve Taylor	Jim Puckett	Jason Dunn
Berrien	Ronnie Gaskins	John Clayton	Lisa Smart
Brantley	Skipper Harris	Barbara Maefield	Vacant
Brooks	Patrick Folsom	Nancy Dennard	Zurich Deshazior
Charlton	James Everett	Lee Gowen	Dana O'Quinn
Clinch	Roger Metts	Willie Hardee, Jr.	Vacant
Coffee	Oscar Paulk	Tony Paulk	Adam Smith
Cook	Audie Rowe	Buddy Duke	Derry Bennett
Echols	Bobby Walker	N/A	Cheryl Garner
Irwin	Scott Carver	Matt Seale	Mona Paulk
Lanier	Dennis Fender	Bill Darsey	John Fitton
Lowndes	Joyce Evans	Vivian Miller-Cody	Anthony Payton
Pierce	Neal Bennett	Keith Brooks	Andy Brannen
Tift	Tony McBryer	Julie Smith	Vacant
Turner	Dana Whiddon	Sandra Lumpkin	Vacant
Ware	Elmer Thrift	Michael-Angelo James	Barbara King
Governor's Office	Norman "Bo" Lovein III	Lt. Governor's Office	Keith Stone
	Guy Daughtrey		
	Jonathan Jones	Speaker's Office	Vacant



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS COMMITTEE

<p><b>Kevin McGovern</b> Atkinson County Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Jeff Brown</b> Clinch County Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Kathy Walker</b> Lake Park Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p><b>Elizabeth McLean</b> Georgia Department of Economic Development</p>
<p><b>Kevin Ellis</b> Alma/Bacon County Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Phil Martin</b> Clinch County Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p><b>Matt Carter</b> Pierce County Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Amanda Peacock</b> Georgia Department of Economic Development</p>
<p><b>Jason Dunn</b> Fitzgerald-Ben Hill Development Authority</p>	<p><b>John Henry</b> Douglas-Coffee County Economic Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Sarah Gove</b> Pierce County Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p><b>Lori Hennesy</b> Georgia Department of Economic Development</p>
<p><b>Melissa Dark</b> Fitzgerald-Ben Hill Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p><b>Lisa Collins</b> Cook County Economic Development Commission</p>	<p><b>Bethany Strickland</b> City of Blackshear Main Street &amp; Economic Development</p>	<p><b>Kelly Lane</b> Georgia Department of Community Affairs</p>
<p><b>Lisa Smart</b> Berrien County Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Heather Green</b> Adel-Cook County Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p><b>Melody Cowart</b> Tifton-Tift County Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p><b>Scott Purvis</b> Georgia Power</p>
<p><b>Nancy Pesce</b> Nashville Main Street Program &amp; Economic Development</p>	<p><b>Cathy Stott</b> Ocilla-Irwin County Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industrial Authority</p>	<p><b>Abbey McLaren</b> Tifton Main Street &amp; Economic Development</p>	<p><b>Jenny Robbins</b> Georgia EMC</p>
<p><b>Mel Baxter</b> Brantley County Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Andrea Schruijer</b> Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Ashley Miller</b> Ashburn-Turner County Chamber of Commerce &amp; Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Saralyn Stafford</b> Carl Vinson Institute of Government</p>
<p><b>Stephanie Mata</b> Brooks County Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Christie Moore</b> Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p><b>Jonathan Lupo</b> Waycross and Ware County Development Authority</p>	<p><b>Brandy B. Wilkes</b> Wiregrass Georgia Technical College</p>
<p><b>Ashley Gowen</b> Okefenokee Chamber of Commerce &amp; Economic Development</p>	<p><b>Ellen Hill</b> Valdosta Main Street</p>	<p><b>Rene' Bolden</b> Waycross-Ware Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p><b>Dennis Lee</b> Southern Regional Technical College</p>
			<p><b>Pete Snell</b> Coastal Pines Technical College</p>

# SOUTHERN GEORGIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Member Name	Title	Entity	Board Category
Frank Bannamon	Recruiter/Retention Specialist	McKinney Medical Center, Inc.	Business Representative
Keith Bryant	Human Resources Director	Clinch Memorial Hospital	Business Representative
Melissa Dark	Executive Director	Fitzgerald Ben Hill Chamber of Commerce	Business Representative
Elton Dixon	President	Enay Coaching, LLC	Business Representative
Jennifer Gainey	Human Resources Manager	Satilla EMC	Business Representative
Jonathan Gray	Complex Manager	Cal-Maine Foods, Inc.	Business Representative
Heather Green	President	Adel-Cook County Chamber of Commerce	Business Representative
Sean Panizzi	Branch Manager	Teamtemps Personal Staffing, Inc.	Business Representative
Lisa Smart	Executive Director	Berrien Co. Chamber of Commerce & Development Authority	Business Representative
Darlene Tait	Human Resources Supervisor	AJM Packaging	Business Representative
Courtney Taylor	Human Resources Manager	Optima Chemical Group	Business Representative
Katrena Felder	Executive Director of Adult Education	Coastal Pines Technical College	Education & Training
Shannon McConico	Dean of Student Affairs	Wiregrass Georgia Technical College	Education & Training
Leigh Wallace	Executive VP & VP of Student Affairs	Southern Regional Technical College	Education & Training
Grady Burrell	Assistant Business Agent	International Brotherhood of Teamsters	Workforce
Myrtice Edwards	Program Coordinator	Telamon Corporation	Workforce
Melvin Johnson	Director	Lee Street Resource Center	Workforce
Ben Lott	Business Representative	International Union of Painters & Allied Trades	Workforce
Merrill Kemp-Wilcox	Strategic Partnership Coordinator	Georgia Partnership for Excellence on Education	Workforce
Kevin Ellis	Executive Director	Alma/Bacon County Development Authority	Government & Economic Dev.
Jennifer Gillard	Rehabilitation Unit Manager	Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency	Government & Economic Dev.
Curtis Griffin	Deputy Director	Waycross/Blackshear Housing Authority	Government & Economic Dev.
William Palmer	Career Center Manager	Georgia Department of Labor	Government & Economic Dev.
Jamon Williams	Regional Coordinator	Georgia Department of Labor	Government & Economic Dev.

# Identification of Community and Private Sector Partners

The following is a listing of initially identified Community and Private Sector Partners:

## Local Governments:

*Atkinson County*  
*City of Pearson*  
*City of Willacoochee*  
*Bacon County*  
*City of Alma*  
*Ben Hill County*  
*City of Fitzgerald*  
*Berrien County*  
*City of Alapaha*  
*City of Enigma*  
*City of Nashville*  
*City of Ray City*  
*Brantley County*  
*City of Hoboken*  
*City of Nahunta*  
*Brooks County*  
*City of Barwick*  
*City of Morven*  
*City of Pavo*  
*City of Quitman*  
*Charlton County*

*City of Folkston*  
*City of Homeland*  
*Clinch County*  
*City of Argyle*  
*City of Dupont*  
*City of Fargo*  
*City of Homerville*  
*Coffee County*  
*City of Ambrose*  
*City of Broxton*  
*City of Douglas*  
*City of Nicholls*  
*Cook County*  
*City of Adel*  
*City of Cecil*  
*City of Lenox*  
*City of Sparks*  
*Echols County*  
*Irwin County*  
*City of Ocilla*  
*Lanier County*  
*City of Lakeland*

*Lowndes County*  
*City of Dasher*  
*City of Hahira*  
*City of Lake Park*  
*City of Remerton*  
*City of Valdosta*  
*Pierce County City*  
*of Blackshear City*  
*of Patterson City*  
*of Offerman Tift*  
*County*  
*City of Omega*  
*City of Tifton*  
*City of Ty Ty*  
*Turner County*  
*City of Ashburn*  
*City of Rebecca*  
*City of Sycamore*  
*Ware County*  
*City of Waycross*

## Other Stakeholders:

*Area Agency on Aging*  
*Boards of Education*  
*Business & Industry*  
*Chambers of Commerce*  
*Development Authorities*  
*Historic Preservation Boards*  
*Hospitals/Medical Centers*  
*Housing Authorities*  
*Main Street Organizations*  
*Private Citizens*  
*Southern Georgia Regional Commission*  
*State and Federal Agencies*  
*Technical Colleges*  
*Universities/Colleges*  
*Workforce Development Board*



**sgrc**

**SOUTHERN GEORGIA  
REGIONAL COMMISSION**

Waycross - Valdosta