

Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments
 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2022
 COVID-19 Addendum
 Response | Recovery | Resiliency



Introduction

The Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments (UCPCOG) was designated as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the United States Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) on June 26, 1996. This designation helps the 5-county region work together for greater prosperity. One of the EDA requirements of the UCPCOG EDD is the creation and maintenance of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). UCPCOG's existing CEDS, CEDS 2022, was adopted in 2017. This document serves as an addendum to the UCPCOG CEDS 2022. The UCPCOG CEDS Strategy Development Group (SDG), a group of professional and community representatives from across the 5-county region, assisted in the development of the CEDS 2022 and with the development of this COVID-19 Addendum. A full list of SDG members is included at the end of this addendum.

To ensure that the 5-county region is equipped to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SDG convened four times in December 2020 to discuss each goal area of CEDS 2022. The CEDS 2022 goal areas are: Economic Development, Regional Infrastructure, Community Development, and Workforce Development. The purpose of each convening was to determine how the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have shifted or otherwise altered the landscape across the region within each goal area and how UCPCOG, its members, and partners can adjust course under the CEDS. Though the four goal areas are interrelated, and many regional strategies and priority areas fall under more than one, framing the regional discussion and this addendum around these four goal areas provides a cohesive framework.

The content of this addendum incorporates SDG input, an analysis of relevant data, and professional observations of UCPCOG staff. The purpose is to present additional or modified strategies to aid in the region's COVID-19 pandemic response, recovery, and resiliency. This addendum will provide a strategy for regional stakeholders and UCPCOG staff to **respond** to the economic injuries resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, **recover** from those existing and ongoing injuries, **prevent** further economic injuries, and **prepare** for future economic injuries.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

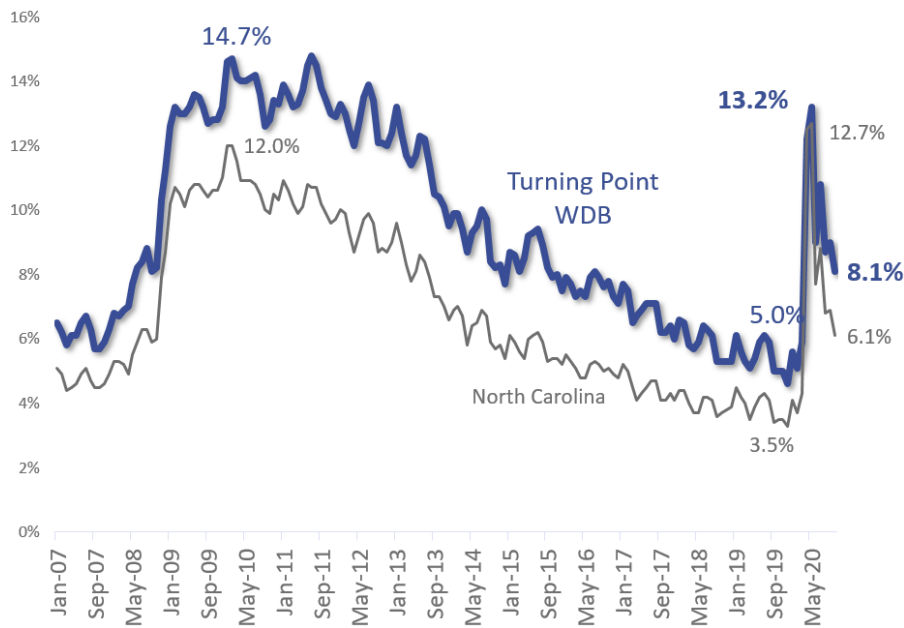
The economic injuries and other impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the UCPCOG 5-county region are still emerging and the full extent is not yet realized. However, some initial data measure the severity of this pandemic on the region's economy and document the need for a cohesive response, recovery, and resiliency strategy. These baselines, along with project specific data, can be used to measure the response/recovery efforts and contributions of projects and their impacts on the region.

According to the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), the unemployment rate in North Carolina in May 2020 was higher than at the height of the Great Recession. The region has not yet fully recovered from the impacts of the Great Recession with unemployment rates consistently above the state average. To make matters more severe, low-income households are more likely to have lost income than wealthier households as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Loss of income across the region and among the region's most vulnerable populations has had widespread effects that are not yet fully realized. Unemployment rates highlight this impact across the region. The rates presented below were provided by the [North Carolina Department of Commerce](#):

REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE – COVID-19 IMPACT

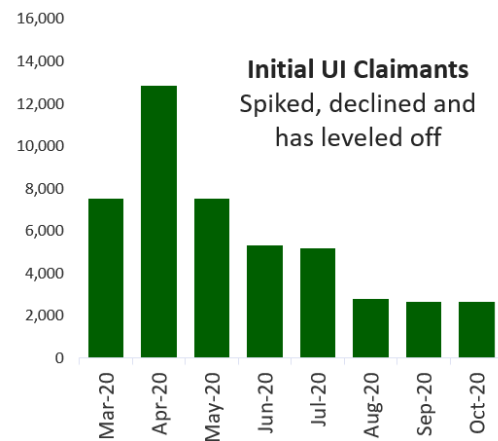
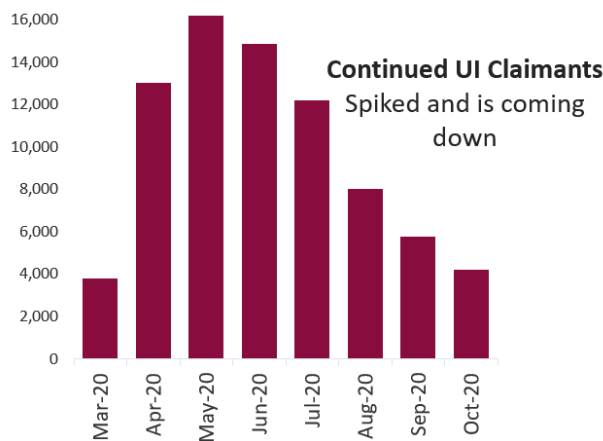
COUNTY	OCTOBER 2019	OCTOBER 2020	% CHANGE
EDGECOMBE	5.4%	9.8%	+4.4%
HALIFAX	5.5%	8.6%	+3.1%
NASH	4.4%	7.4%	+3.0%
NORTHAMPTON	4.8%	6.7%	+1.9%
WILSON	5.3%	7.7%	+2.4%

The April 2020 unemployment rate for the 5-county region was 12.5%, which decreased to 8.1% by October 2020. The chart below demonstrates that the unemployment rate in the Turning Point WDB (representing the 5-county region), rose sharply and is declining sharply as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, close to the rates seen during the Great Recession:



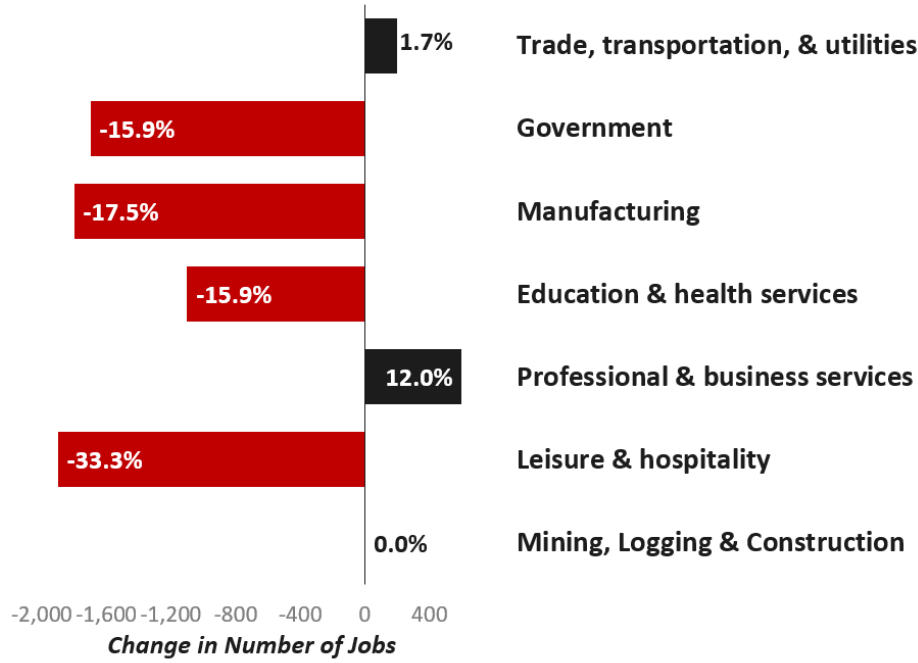
Source: NC Department of Commerce, LEAD LAUS

For both continued and initial Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims, there was a spike during the COVID-19 pandemic:



Source: NC Department of Commerce LEAD & DES

The COVID-19 pandemic’s impacts were not equally severe across all industries. The chart below presents job losses in the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Statistical Area (representing Nash and Edgecombe Counties) between October 2019 and October 2020:



On a national scale, the [Kenan Institute](#) presents 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 5-county region:

- Changes in work, travel and migration patterns
- Accelerating shifts toward on-demand and at-home retail
- Onshoring and widening of supply chains
- Renewed focus on diversity and dismantling systemic racism
- Upending of education and childcare
- Shocks to health care and pharmaceutical demand
- Risk assessment by capital providers

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.

Regional Strategic Response

To aid the region’s COVID-19 response, recovery, and resiliency efforts, UCPCOG, as the region’s EDD will:

- Continue to research and share educational, technical and funding resources with member local governments and allies through newsletters, social media content, special meetings, workshops, and Board of Director updates.
- Participate with federal, state, and local organizations and networks to help coordinate resource development and dissemination for member local governments, for example, UCPCOG will actively participate in the NC Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network that continues to share information about funding opportunities and other resources through its contact list of nearly 1,000 individuals and organizations.
- Redefine and expand its role as a data resource for the region, considering new software and research tools to provide member governments and stakeholders with timely, relevant services to enable stronger,

fact-based measurement and decision making. Initial efforts include metrics relevant to specific project areas targeted in this addendum.

- Partner and coordinate with member local governments and organization across the 5-county region to implement the CEDS and this COVID-19 Addendum, while continuing to convene the CEDS SDG to invite input on regional priorities and monitor the effectiveness of the CEDS and this COVID-19 Addendum.

COVID-19 Strategies | Economic Development

- Continue to work with member local governments and partners to identify economic development grant-eligible projects to help ensure the region takes full advantage of available funding opportunities.
- Coordinate with the region's economic development professionals to determine additional database or data management needs, focused on determining what UCPCOG can provide as EDD to benefit economic development analyses across the region.
- Provide at least one workshop for regional stakeholders with a focus on business response/recovery/resiliency needs and resources for the most impacted sectors, including small businesses, based on analyzing economic data and studies to aid in the creation or retention of quality employers.
- Partner with the NC Department of Commerce's Main Street & Rural Planning Division to implement the [Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency Initiative](#) (CERRI), re-focusing UCPCOG's ongoing small-town strategic planning efforts with deliberate focus on COVID-19 response, recovery, and resiliency.
- Work with the region's community colleges to determine UCPCOG's and stakeholders' roles in expanding or enhancing entrepreneurial programming and ecosystem building efforts.
- Seek and apply for strategic grant opportunities that leverage emerging health entrepreneurship and innovative public health measures in the region.
- Support member local governments' 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.
- Utilize the Upper Coastal Plain Brownfields Coalition and stakeholders to identify new potentially contaminated sites that may have been vacated as a result of the economic downturn.
- Collaborate with other economic development organizations that are focused on COVID-19 response, recovery, or resiliency throughout the region when productive partnerships are identified to enhance regional programs, goals, or metrics.

COVID-19 Strategies | Regional Infrastructure

- Work to expand GIS services to member organizations that contribute to resilient record keeping practices and provide a better understanding of public assets and infrastructure to aid in economic recovery.
- Support improved rural public transit systems with an aim to provide everyone in the region with essential, affordable, and reliable transportation options.
- Partner with the Upper Coastal Plain and Peanut Belt Rural Planning Organizations and the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Planning Organization to promote and guide multi-modal transportation investments and to attract federal and state transportation investments throughout the region.

- Support the installation and use of alternative fuels and electric vehicles infrastructure for the member local governments' and other fleets to lower operation costs and carbon footprints, increasing public service resiliency to economic disasters.
- Provide 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.
- Analyze local water and wastewater rates to help municipalities and stakeholders understand the rate's impact on the economy and on the system's eligibility for grant and loan financing programs.
- Seek and apply for 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.
- Encourage the consolidation and regionalization of non-viable water and wastewater systems in a manner that protects the fiscal interests of current owners of such systems.
- Continue the Upper Coastal Plain Broadband Task Force's momentum on improving broadband connectivity throughout the region, with an increased focus on digital literacy, technical support, and advertising for new internet service providers to add or expand adequate, high-speed broadband internet service in underserved communities.
- Analyze the region's economic development infrastructure needs to help regional stakeholders prioritize most strategic investments at existing or additional business and industrial sites.
- Support member local governments in creating and adopting Capital Improvement Plans and Asset Management Plans to guide ongoing infrastructure investments.

COVID-19 Strategies | Community Development

- Support the recovery and enhance the 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 the senior services, childcare, food supplement, health, housing and utility support sectors.
- Determine additional strategic uses for the three existing Community Education Centers located in Halifax County and, where impactful, apply a similar model in the other four counties.
- Support member local governments in implementing COVID-19-related operational changes including remote public meeting formats, social distancing in public spaces, use of personal protective equipment, and more to help foster a continuity of public services.
- 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 ensure those seeking assistance in response to COVID-19 impacts do not face a fragmented, difficult to navigate referral system.
- 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.
- Support development of local food and related value chain assets based on [Heathy Food Access Mapping Project](#) Assessment and Gap Analysis.

- Continue UCPCOG’s existing partnership with the Croatan Institutes’ [ROADS Initiative](#) to promote new fiscal models supporting sustainable and environmentally-friendly agricultural practices to enhance the resiliency of the region’s critical agricultural sector.
- 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.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to focus regional digital inclusion and digital literacy efforts on increasing access to and adoption of telehealth services, especially among the region’s senior citizen population.
- Study the changing need for affordable housing rehabilitation and development across the region to determine where such development would be most strategic, to foster senior livability for the region’s aging population, and to support the region’s workforce.
- Seek funding for affordable housing development or existing housing rehabilitation and assist member local governments in planning for improved housing stock, with priority focus on areas with recently expanded water or sewer capacity.

COVID-19 Strategies | Workforce Development

- Coordinate with Turning Point Workforce Development Board to adjust or enhance workforce training and hiring programs for pandemic resilience, with focus on obtaining a software program that enables virtual hiring/job fairs and a virtual platform to connect job seekers and employers.
- Expand access to the [NC Simulation Station](#) for remote learners and adult dislocated workers by acquiring or gaining access to additional devices capable of running training simulation games and/or by obtaining additional gaming licenses.
- Coordinate with the Upper Coastal Plain Area Agency on Aging to determine the need for adjustment or improvement to the [Senior Community Service Employment Program](#) and other programs that seek to improve the prosperity and financial wellbeing of the region’s senior citizen workforce.
- Help grow the supply of healthcare providers by increasing educational and development opportunities in healthcare professions, especially to increase the pipeline of healthcare workers to rural and underserved areas.
- Provide at least one workshop for regional stakeholders, in partnership with the Turning Point Workforce Development Board, with a focus on responding to or preparing for workforce development impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Work to address the economic impacts of childcare and elder care challenges and seek relevant case studies of economic/workforce development strategies to support the childcare and elder care needs impacting the region’s workforce.
- Work to better understand the support needs and development opportunities of essential workers and their importance in the role of the “workforce behind the workforce.”

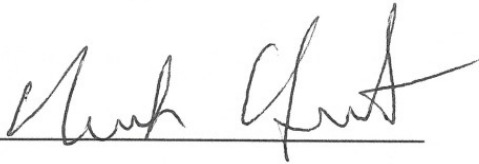
Conclusion

To assist in carrying out the regional priorities set forth in this addendum, UCPCOG may utilize EDA CARES Act Supplemental Funding to competitively procure consultants/consulting firms as needed in order to supplement staff capacity or provide a higher level of expertise. UCPCOG and Turning Point Workforce Development Board staff

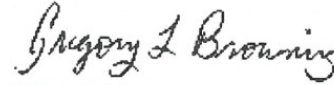
will work with member local governments, regional stakeholders, and other partners to carry out the strategies set forth in this addendum. Additionally, the SDG will continue to advise on these strategies and this addendum will be considered as UCPCOG begins the process of rewriting the regional CEDS. The full SDG will be involved in the CEDS rewrite process and will be notified of any major changes to UCPCOG's pandemic response priority areas.

For questions about the CEDS rewrite, CEDS 2022, this COVID-19 addendum, or other UCPCOG services, contact Executive Director Robert Hiatt: rhiatt@ucpcog.org or (252)-234-5950.

The COVID-19 Addendum was adopted by the UCPCOG Board of Directors in their role as CEDS Advisory Committee for the Upper Coastal Plain Economic Development District on January 19, 2021.



Executive Director, Robert Hiatt



Chairman, Gregory Browning

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