

## 2021 Annual Update

The Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments' CEDS has four strategic emphasis areas (SEA): Local Government Development, Regional Collaboration, Workforce Development, and Infrastructure Support. Each of those areas has their own individual objectives. This annual update will discuss the progress made on each of these objectives.

### SEA: Local Government Development

#### Objectives

- **Provide town administration services to towns in the Pee Dee Region**  
*2021 Update: In 2018, staffing constraints made it necessary to discontinue providing this service.*
- **Provide planning assistance and training to towns and counties in the region**  
*2021 Update: In 2020, CARES Act funding received through the EDA made it possible for PDRCOG to hire a resiliency planner. The planner resigned his position for another opportunity after approximately one year of employment; however, his tenure at the PDRCOG provided a jump start to planning activities that the PDRCOG has been able to continue in his absence. This was the first full-time planner PDRCOG has had on staff in several years, and this addition greatly enhanced our ability to provide planning assistance and training to towns and counties in the region. During the year while the planner was on staff, he provided zoning ordinance guidance, began a comprehensive plan update for another locality, and conducted a review of the region's general planning capacity as the leader of the region's Resiliency Planning efforts. Upon his departure, the Pee Dee COG entered into a cooperative agreement with another COG to continue our planning efforts. This arrangement has been successful in the short time it has been in place, and we anticipate continued progress in this objective over the coming years.*
- **Promote and actively facilitate the education and training of local government officials and community leaders**  
*2021 Update: PDRCOG staff provided Planning Commission training, Municipal Association of South Carolina Training, and other workshops until the COVID-19 outbreak made this unsafe. PDRCOG staff has continued to provide assistance on a smaller scale to individual localities as possible and as needed throughout the duration of the year. Regular workshops will resume once it has been determined that it is safe to do so.*

### SEA: Regional Collaboration

#### Objectives:

- **Build a Rural Business Services Network to bring the experience, resources, and expertise normally found in urban business incubators, Chambers of Commerce, and other urban/incorporated areas to the small business owners operating throughout the region.**  
*2021 Update: Staff worked with the Executive Director of the Kelley Center for Economic Development to develop a plan for implementing this objective; however, it appears that much of these services are being provided by another entity. To avoid duplication of efforts, staff is*

*continuing to meet with the Kelley Center staff and brainstorm on ways to add value to the local business environment.*

- **Intentional, sustained engagement with Technical Colleges**

*2021 Update: The EDA grant that staff worked with Northeastern Technical College to develop and submit in 2020 was awarded and is now being managed by PDRCOG Economic Development staff. PDRCOG Economic Development staff submitted an EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge proposal in October 2021 that included a large project for expanding workforce training at both NETC and FDTC.*

## **Workforce Development**

### **Goals**

- **All individuals served by the WIOA programs receive a silver National Career Readiness Certificate.**

*2021 Update: Although the SC Work Ready Communities initiative is no longer supported by the State Workforce Development Board, the Pee Dee Local Workforce Area continues to encourage the attainment of National Career Readiness Certificates for its customers. Adults enrolled in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I adult and youth programs who earn less than a “4” on WorkKeys or WIN assessments in Reading for Information and Applied Math receive priority consideration for the programs’ services. Less than “4” (silver level certificate) is defined as basic skills deficient in accordance with local policy and the goal is for these individuals to earn at least a silver level certificate, in addition to becoming employed full-time, before exiting the workforce programs. However, data for the total number of National Career Readiness Certificates earned is not readily accessible at this time.*

- **All Pee Dee Counties to become SC Work Ready Communities and to sustain the progress made in the accomplishment of this goal.**

*2021 Update: All Pee Dee Counties became SC Work Ready Communities, but the initiative was abandoned by the State Workforce Development Board before the counties could make any progress to sustain the initiative. At this time, Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments is not pursuing individual county goals as part of its efforts to ensure that citizens receive National Career Readiness Certificates.*

- **Increase access to services for disconnected youth, specifically low-to-moderate income (LMI) youth.**

*2021 Update: Despite COVID-19 disruptions and significant reductions to federal funding, the total number of disconnected youth served in PY 20 was 280 compared to 263 served in Program Year 2019. Our service delivery continues to be customer-focused and the goal is to give as many low-to-moderate income youth as possible an opportunity to accomplish career success and self-sufficiency. It is the workforce board’s practice to reserve youth funding for workforce development to those who*

*are most in need (i.e. low income youth with at least one barrier to employment) and youth who do not meet the criteria are not selected to receive services. In addition, 100% of all new enrollees in Program Year 2020 were defined as disconnected youth under the provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which means they were not attending school (except maybe an adult education program) and were not employed at enrollment.*

*In Program Year 2020, a substantial part of the services traditionally offered to youth in person became available online, including virtual work experiences, case management and career counseling, workshops, program eligibility determination, assessment, and job fairs/ hiring events. We continued to support participants in their efforts to connect to classroom/job training opportunities virtually. To support virtual workforce development activities, the workforce board's policy regarding supportive services was expanded to support the purchase/lease of laptop computers and to cover the cost of basic internet service when it was not available from another source.*

*The Pee Dee Workforce Development Board's Youth Committee began working on the establishment of a Resource Hub for youth, which will be a single place on the SC Works Pee Dee website where youth can go to find resources to support their efforts to become self-sufficient.*

*In response to the continual decrease in federal funding, staff have actively pursued the diversification of its funding, thereby increasing the ability to offer quality training opportunities to youth and adults. Two new federal grants have been awarded to Pee Dee COG – a rural healthcare grant and a National Dislocated Worker Grant and in each opportunity, disconnected youth are among the customer groups receiving priority consideration.*

**- Serve the educational needs of youth dropouts in the Pee Dee Region.**

*2021 Update: In PY'20, about 20% of the youth served in Pee Dee Local Workforce Area's WIOA Youth Program were high school dropouts. Approximately 54% were also basic skills deficient, or reading/computing at less than ninth grade level. 24 high school dropouts served during PY'19 earned a GED or high school diploma. The purpose of the WIOA youth program is to provide youth with barriers to employment the opportunity to overcome these barriers and attain self-sufficiency. A high school equivalency diploma and further educational attainment lies at the root of career success and the Pee Dee program will continue to focus attention on supporting youth in their attainment of this milestone.*

**- Survey employers to gain a comprehensive understanding of their workforce needs and determine their opinion of the Business Services available to them through the SC Workforce System.**

*2021 Update: 182 employers responded to a survey in the SC Works Online System and 83% reported that they would recommend SC Works to other employers. 74% rated their overall experience with SC Works staff as Excellent or Good. In Program Year '20, the Integrated Business Services Team*

(IBST) made 34 site visits to employers and provided 65 business services. They also hosted 29 Job Fairs and hiring events.

<b>Employer Service Type</b>	<b>PY'20</b>	<b>PY'19</b>
On Site Visits # of Employers/Services Provided	34/65	299/359
Promotional Calls/Services Provided	388/662	317/450
Job Orders/Services Provided	508/3067	382/2057
Job Fairs and Hiring Events/Services Provided	29/151	61/105

### **SEA: Infrastructure Support**

*2020 Overall Update: This objective is the one that the Community and Economic Development Department can most visibly and effectively accomplish. At the close of the reporting cycle for 2021, the department was administering 23 grants that support regional infrastructure improvements, 14 grants that support community development, neighborhood revitalization, or public safety (fund the purchase of fire trucks); 5 planning grants to support project development and regional resiliency, and 1 grant to support workforce training at Northeastern Technical College.*

### **Objectives**

- **Implement the new Performance Based Planning and Programming methodologies required by FHWA into the TIP and STIP**

*2021 Update: This was accomplished. The PDRCOG's 2021 – 2027 Transportation Improvement Plan was updated and adopted in October 2020. The PDRCOG's 2020 – 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan was adopted in December 2020. Throughout 2021, the PDRCOG's Transportation Advisory Committee met regularly and recommended several new projects for adoption and funding across the region. These projects have been added to the TIP and are in varying stages of implementation.*

- **Provide engineering services to meet the needs of region governments in the promotion of economic development, specifically development related to increasing the number and usability of industrial parks, spaces, and buildings in the region.**

*2021 Update: PDRCOG Engineering staff provided consultation services for reviewing and providing recommendations for SC Hwy 34 improvements to accommodate increased industrial traffic relating to Harbor Freight and Equus Development in Dillon County.*

- **Expand the capacity of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.**

*2021 Update: The CDGB Director of 19 years accepted a new position in the spring of 2018. Following her departure, EDA and CDBG staff worked to manage both programs until new staff could be hired and trained. By mid-2019, new staff had been fully trained and begun generating new*

*projects. As of the end of the previous reporting period (2020 Update), the CDBG program had expanded to include a total of 11 active grants and 4 pending award. As of the end of the current reporting period, the program had successfully closed out numerous older grants and was administering 28 active grants. PDRCOG staff continued to encourage localities to leverage multiple funding sources for large projects, resulting in several projects with CDBG, EDA, SC Rural Infrastructure Authority, and other funds.*

- **Increase the visibility of EDA Public Works grants**

*2021 Update: As with the CDBG program, previous years' efforts to increase the visibility of the EDA Public Works grants continued to result in new project activity in 2021. The EDA Director continued to meet regularly with local economic development partners, industry leaders, and city and county administrators. At the end of 2021, the department had 10 active EDA grants and was working on development of several more. In October 2021, the department submitted a proposal to the Build Back Better Regional Challenge for more than \$200 million in infrastructure improvements across the region; while the proposal was not ultimately funded, the development of the proposal generated new interest in EDA projects and potential among local government leaders, and PDRCOG staff will continue looking for funding sources for the projects contained in the proposal.*