

## ALAMO AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (AACOG) COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDDS)

### AACOG

The Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) is a voluntary association of local governments that works to enhance the quality of life of residents in the Alamo Area through assisting local governments with planning and coordinating activities and providing health and human services to residents in the region.

AACOG was organized in 1968 as a regional planning commission under Chapter 391 of the Local Government Code. AACOG is a political subdivision of the State, which can plan, assist local governments, and deliver public services. The agency does not possess statutory authority to tax or regulate. State law requires the governing body of AACOG to be comprised primarily of local government officials.

AACOG serves the Alamo Area State Planning Region 18. This region includes Atascosa, Bandera, Bexar, Comal, Frio, Gillespie, Guadalupe, Karnes, Kendall, Kerr, McMullen, Medina and Wilson counties. The AACOG 13-county region covers 12,585 square miles. The region's population is approximately 2.7 million as of the 2020 Census.

The Alamo Area is a mix of urban, suburban and rural counties anchored by the San Antonio-New Braunfels Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

### CEDS

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a strategy driven economic development plan for the region. It is designed to encourage capacity building and economic resiliency. Input from the region's public and private stakeholders establishes the mission, vision, goals and strategies to improve and maintain the quality of life for residents and success of businesses in the region.

The CEDS is a prerequisite for designation as an Economic Development District (EDD). Districts must update their CEDS at least every five years to qualify for Economic Development Administration (EDA) assistance under its Public Works and Economic Development Adjustment Assistance programs.

## AACOG CEDS 2024-2029

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for 2024-2029 is a 5-year plan for achieving economic and community development goals through realistic strategies implemented by the partners and stakeholders in the 13-county Alamo Region. CEDS is supported by the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and is a requirement for Economic Development Districts (EDD). AACOG was designated by EDA as one of the first four EDDs in the United States in 1968.

The AACOG CEDS 2024-2029 incorporates the input of region partners and stakeholders during 2023 by way of CEDS Committee meetings and sub-region meetings held in Atascosa County, Comal County, Karnes County, Kerr County, and Bexar County. During the meetings, discussions on the current state of the region (demographics, impact of COVID-19, inclement weather, droughts, etc.), SWOT analysis, and development of goals were discussed. Conversations led to ideas for strategies to achieve the goals and to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to guide the Alamo Region for the next 5 years.

The AACOG CEDS 2024-2029 focuses on how the Alamo Region can improve the economies of the region, provide equitable services and opportunities for its residents, sustain economic and community growth, and prepare for and respond to man-made and natural disasters that impact growth and sustainability.

Four goals were developed as a result of outreach and meetings in 2023. They are:

- Foster methods of adaptation and mitigation to strengthen the Alamo Region's resilience against climate-related impacts.
- Create an economic development process for the Alamo Region which is transparent, promotes engagement and collaboration, and prioritizes and addresses the needs of the communities.
- Develop, retain and attract an educated, well-trained, versatile and competitive workforce.
- Strengthen broadband infrastructure, and increase access and affordability of broadband services to support resilient communities, economic and workforce development.

The implementation of the goals will begin in 2024.

## **BACKGROUND**

**Geography** – The 13-county Alamo Region consists of 12,585 square miles of land. The largest counties in the area are Medina County (approximately 1,325 square miles of land), Bexar County (approximately 1,239 square miles of land), and Atascosa County (approximately 1,219 square miles of land). The land topography for the entire Alamo Region is described as “irregular plains” and “plains with high and open hills”.

**Population and Growth** – In 2023, the Alamo Region had 2,769,787 people living in the area, based on the July 2022 update by the U.S. Census Bureau. This is an increase of over 9% from the 2016 update of the 2010 Census. Since the 2010 Census, the Alamo Region has grown just over 20% or approximately 554,000 people. The Alamo Region is approximately 9% of the total population of the state of Texas.

**Race and Ethnicity** – The Alamo Region is predominantly White, racially. On average, approximately 65.72% is White for the 13-county area. In Bexar County, the percentage is 45.77%; in the 12 surrounding counties the average is 67.38%. These figures are for race only, and are not broken down by ethnic group. The percentages of White population range from 45.77% in Bexar County to 82.06 in Bandera County. The counties with percentages of over 70% White are in the northern counties; while percentages below 70% are found in the counties that are west, south and east in the region. The Black or African American population represents an average of 2.97% for the Alamo Region. The percentages range from 0.41% in Gillespie County to 8.03% in Bexar County. Outside of Bexar County, the county with the highest percentage of Black population is Karnes County with 7.98%. The remainder of the region’s population breaks down as follows: American Indian and Alaska Native with an average of 0.69%; Asian with an average of 0.98%; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander with an average of 0.13%; and Other with 10.19%.

**Age** – The AACOG Region has a relatively young population. Approximately 57% of the Alamo Region population is under the age of 40, with an estimated 28% being aged 19 and under. The balance of 43% of the region’s population is made up of persons age 40 to over 85, with the population aged 60 to 85+ making up approximately 19% of the region’s population. The median age of the region ranges from 32.1% in Frio County to 52.6% in Bandera County.

**Employment** - The labor force in the Alamo Region is comprised of approximately 2 million people. According to U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey for July 2021, Bexar County represents approximately 75% while the 12 surrounding counties represent the other estimated 25%. The region has an average unemployment rate of 3.83%. This is 0.10% higher than the national average. The county with the highest unemployment rate is Atascosa with 4.18%; while the county with the lowest unemployment rate is McMullen with 1.77%. Approximately 58% of the labor force is between the ages of 35 to 74. The largest age groups in the labor force are 35 to 44, 45 to 54, and 65 to 74. These groups represent approximately 44% of the region’s labor force.

The industries predominant in the area are manufacturing, biomedical, construction, leisure and hospitality, transportation, oil and gas. Manufacturing is predominant in the western and eastern parts of the region, while oil and gas is strong in the southern part. Transportation supports manufacturing and oil and gas. Leisure and hospitality can be found throughout the Alamo Region.

Based on 2021 data, the industry with the highest annual average number of workers is the Service Producing industry with approximately 753,268 workers. This is followed by the Trade, Transportation and Utilities industry with 192,273, Education and Health Services with 163,247, and Professional and Business Services with 144,641. The industry with the lowest annual average number of workers is the Information industry with 16,535.

Poverty – The average poverty rate in the 13-county Alamo Region is 12.32%; this represents a range with a low of 4.8% in Kendall County and a high of 25% in Frio County. In just the 12 counties surrounding Bexar County with its 15.1%, the average poverty rate is 12.09%. The counties with under 10% poverty are Comal (6.7%), Guadalupe (9.2%), Kendall (4.8%), and Wilson (9.8%).

Environment – Air quality is a health concern in the Alamo Region that requires a shared commitment from local agencies, businesses, and individuals to ensure that the region meets national air quality standards, and to protect the community and environment. Thresholds for ozone and other air pollutants considered harmful to public health and environment are set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This is required by the Clean Air Act. Collectively, the thresholds are referred to as the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). The standards are subject to periodic review and may be modified if it is determined that they do not provide adequate protection of health and the environment. Areas that violate these standards must be designated by the EPA as nonattainment areas, making them subject to federal regulations intended to bring the area back into compliance. These regulations can potentially hinder economic development by increasing the cost of doing business.

Infrastructure – The Alamo Region's infrastructure is one of the area's largest advantages. Location at the junction of Texas's largest corridors, IH-35 and IH-10, is an advantage for trade, transportation and travel industries. The region has an international airport and intermodal trade facility located near the United States-Mexico border. There are 10 regional and commuter airports throughout the 13-county area: Castroville Municipal, Devine Municipal, Gillespie County, South Texas Regional (Hondo), Kerrville Municipal/L. Schreiner, New Braunfels National Airport, McKinley Field (Pearsall), Pleasanton Municipal Airport, Kenedy Regional (Karnes County) Airport, and Stinson Municipal (San Antonio).

Port San Antonio is a multimodal trade facility that is centrally located near IH-35, IH-10 and IH-37 in San Antonio. It covers 1,900 acres and possesses a 350-acre rail served site, and a 11,500-foot runway.

Eight major interstate and other highways service the region: IH-35, IH-10, IH-37, IH-410, US Highway 90, US Highway 181, US Highway 281, Loop 410 and Loop 1604.

Broadband – Broadband is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Communities continue to seek resources to help obtain and install infrastructure and affordable services.

Industry Sectors – The Alamo Region has a diverse economy which includes aerospace, bioscience, cyber security, farming and processing, financial services, manufacturing, oil and gas, ranching and technology. Economic development partners across the region seek to further diversify the economy by adding support industries to the existing as well as expanding and sustaining the existing industries. Economic development partners across the region seek to sustain and expand existing industries, as well as further diversify the economy by developing support industries.

## **ECONOMIC RESILIENCE**

EDA defines economic resilience as the “ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., ‘shocks’) to its economic base”. EDA identifies two main approaches: steady-state initiatives that “tend to be long-term efforts that seek to bolster the community or region’s ability to withstand or avoid a shock” and responsive initiatives that address problems after they emerge after a disaster.

The Alamo Region and its partners seek planning for a resilient region that will anticipate threats and economic risk, developing resources to reduce their impact, responding appropriately, and leading the region to recovery. This resilient approach extends beyond emergency responsiveness by utilizing available resources for planning and utilizing regional leadership to address vulnerabilities, and to build and support vibrant, healthy communities.

The AACOG Region has several strengths, with respect to steady state initiatives. The region has a relatively diverse economic base with many emerging clusters including cybersecurity, biomedical and manufacturing. Further diversifying the economic base will help insulate the region from more severe economic shocks.

When the region does experience economic shocks, successfully and efficiently responding to those shocks is a community and regionwide effort. Since economic shocks tend to be macro in nature, they require macro level responses, including things like regional mutual aid, and collaboration and coordination of community members and stakeholders. One major theme that emerged in the CEDS community meetings was the issue of collaboration among the multitude of governmental and private sector organizations. While this issue was brought up in varying contexts, it is also very relevant in an economic resilience context.

## **CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

Another critical component to the CEDS is climate resilience, which the EDA defines as “the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to the climate”. In looking at the data and the community feedback we received during the CEDS committee meetings and sub-regional meetings, a couple of issues stand out. First, the degree of uncontrolled growth in the region poses significant challenges for the sustainable and equitable management of resources—particularly water. Second, large swaths of the AACOG Region have endured exceptional drought conditions for several years now, which has strained the Edwards Aquifer, the main source of groundwater in the region, even further.

A secondary effect of exceptional drought is a significantly increased risk for wildfires. Based on data compiled by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening tool, all census tracts within four counties in the region—Frio, Gillespie, Kendall, & Kerr—rank in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile in the entire United States for wildfire risk within the next 30 years. However, 27% of all census tracts within the AACOG Region rank in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile in the U.S.; so, the risk is present throughout the region. While these numbers are specific to properties at risk, fires and other natural disasters obviously threaten people and crops as well. Of all census tracts in the AACOG Region, 22.91% rank in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile in the U.S. for expected population loss, including 100% of tracts in Bandera, Gillespie, Karnes, and McMullen counties. For expected agricultural loss, 10.2% of all census tracts in the AACOG Region rank in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. The population loss and agricultural loss numbers include all natural disasters.

In Texas, drought is often accompanied by extreme high temperatures. Summers have seen increasingly longer and more severe heat waves that put vulnerable people at risk for adverse health effects and strain the electric grid. Energy resiliency is an important subset of climate resiliency, and its consideration is necessary to accommodate continued population and business growth. The need for energy resiliency became prominent after the winter storm of 2021 led to massive statewide electric blackouts during a multi-day consecutive stretch of bitterly cold, subfreezing temperatures. As the impact from weather events becomes more extreme, AACOG and its partners across the region must incorporate climate and energy resiliency measures into economic development initiatives. But while the Alamo Region does have long term drought, there is also the risk for flash flooding - 1998, for example. The transition between gulf coast plain and hill country make it very prone to flooding during heavy rain events. Climate resiliency means preparing for hotter hots, colder colds, wetter wets and drier dries, the implications of which are far reaching: health, infrastructure, energy, overall quality of life.

Source:

Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool

<https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5>

## **EQUITY**

One of the main investment priority areas is equity in economic development, which the EDA defines as “a set of strategies and targeted approaches to serve populations that may have been underserved by traditional methods to economic development”. There are many aspects of equity that can be analyzed, but for the Alamo Region, the focus is on income inequality, racial equity, and historic underinvestment in housing. With respect to income inequality, seven counties in the AACOG region were significantly more equitable than the nation as a whole including Atascosa, Bandera, Bexar, Comal, Guadalupe, Medina, and Wilson counties.

With respect to racial equity, Bexar County performed well on inclusion metrics analyzed by the National Equity Atlas. Scoring well on inclusion metrics means that there were smaller racial gaps in various indicators, signifying greater equality among different racial groups within the county.

Another critical factor that still affects equity to this day is historic underinvestment in housing, also known as redlining. 23 census tracts in Bexar County were identified as being redlined. These census tracts continue to suffer from the effects of this historical underinvestment as all of the tracts are still classified as low income in the present day.

Source:

National Equity Atlas

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Workforce (or labor force) development is another important EDA content guideline category. Workforce development is very dependent on a population’s educational attainment as most jobs require at least a high school education and many require some college level education or specialized training programs. With respect to the biggest hurdle for workforce development—a population’s percent of high school graduates or higher—five counties in the region had statistically significant lower levels of high school education including Atascosa, Bexar, Frio, Karnes, and Medina. Six counties were roughly on par with the nation including Bandera, Gillespie, Guadalupe, Kerr, McMullen, and Wilson; while two counties had higher rates, Comal and Kendall counties.

Another important facet to look at is language barriers. Residents who struggle to speak and understand English may be limited in the types of jobs they can get and how far they will be able to advance in those jobs. Five counties in the AACOG region had statistically significant greater percentages of residents who struggle with English including Atascosa, Bexar, Frio, Karnes, and Medina counties.

One of the most frequently discussed points during the CEDS committee meetings and sub-region meetings was the apparent misalignment between the population's education and skills, and industry need. Several organizations and institutions are bridging the gap including Workforce Solutions Alamo, Ready to Work San Antonio, and the many educational institutions in the region, although much more work needs to be done in this area.

### **DIGITAL DIVIDE**

Another critical EDA content area is the digital divide and how to best tackle the issue. According to the Census Community Resilience Estimates, five counties in the AACOG region had statistically significant, lower percentages of households with a broadband subscription relative to the national average including Atascosa at 82.8%, Frio at 66.1%, Karnes at 74.3%, McMullen at 72.6%, and Medina at 83.6%. It's important to note that this is a crude measurement, and it likely understates the issues with broadband in the region. Simply having a broadband subscription says nothing about the performance and speed of the service being provided.

For example, according to Connected Nation data, most of the AACOG region has coverage for the slowest speed tiers of 10x1 MBPS and 25x3 MBPS, but the numbers vary wildly for the higher speed tiers of 50x5 and 100x10 MBPS. For these speeds, Karnes and McMullen have very few options, if those speeds are even available at all. Broadband in these areas is likely either cost-prohibitive due to their rural nature and relatively small customer base or concerns surrounding the geographic and logistical challenges, which restrict the types of broadband technologies that can be deployed. While Karnes and McMullen counties have significant logistical and infrastructure issues, Frio County has the opposite issue. According to Connected Nation, Frio County has fairly high coverage of over 90%, even at higher speed tiers, but only 66% of households have a broadband subscription, which suggests that it's more of an affordability issue.

### **PLAN OF ACTION**

As the regional economic development district (EDD) and lead agency for implementation of the CEDS, AACOG will perform several key roles to ensure support of the plan of action. These will include promoting regionalism in economic development to ensure capitalization of assets and competencies; promoting local economic development initiatives that leverage the assets of communities in the region; supplying timely economic and labor market data to regional decision makers; providing technical assistance to ensure communities have knowledge and access to resources needed for communities to prosper; and promoting collaboration and coordination among economic development partners, and facilitating relationships.

AACOG will continue to leverage resources and align planning and development components including economic development, workforce development, transportation, natural resources (air quality), housing, broadband development, and more.

The CEDS Committee will meet quarterly to monitor and track activity towards implementation of the action plan and the strategies to achieve the goals set out in the AACOG CEDS 2024-2029.

## **SWOT ANALYSIS**

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis is a strategic planning tool used to ensure that economic development goals are formed by comprehensive understanding of a region's capabilities and capacity. It should answer the question "Where are we now?" A SWOT analysis identifies the region's competitive advantages compared to the factors that impede a region's development potential.

Strengths are a region's relative competitive advantages (e.g., industry cluster, transportation network, broadband assets, workforce, education levels, partnerships, etc.).

Weaknesses are a region's relative competitive disadvantages (e.g., change-resistant culture, limited or weak infrastructure, etc.).

Opportunities are chances or occasions for regional improvement or progress (e.g., expansion of an industry, development of educational resources, etc.).

Threats are chances or occasions for negative impacts on the region, or regional decline (e.g., downturn in economy, loss of businesses and jobs, population decline, etc.).

During July and August 2023, AACOG staff traveled to four specific areas in the Alamo Region to conduct CEDS workshops that included demographic data specific to each sub-region. The workshops also included SWOT analysis activities. In addition, AACOG held a meeting in San Antonio in September 2023 and CEDS committee meetings, and included the same type of information and activities. The SWOT analysis was conducted for area partners to weigh in on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that the partners identified as impacting their respective sub-regions and the Alamo Region as a whole.

In each meeting, in-depth conversations took place regarding whether an item was a strength or opportunity; and, whether an item was a weakness or a threat. The exchange enabled the partners to clearly identify examples of and situations of events/items that were strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Some common themes emerged from the CEDS sub-region workshops and CEDS Committee meetings:

**Education and Workforce Development** – partners expressed concern for the availability of an educated and skilled workforce for technology-based industries like cyber-security, biosciences, and aerospace. Discussions centered on the K-12 education systems in the area providing programs for young people to have basic skills to enter the technology arena. In addition, discussions included the availability of higher education programs in the 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities – do the programs include training and skills development for technology-based jobs? Alamo Region partners expressed an interest in establishing/enhancing partnerships to develop curriculum and training programs for industries growing in the area. Education attainment was identified as being a critical factor in workforce development.

**Natural Resources** – partners were concerned about water supply and demand for residents as well as industry. The areas of resource management, conservation, and water storage were discussed as being

key to community and economic development. Air quality was identified as an area to follow and work with federal and state agencies to improve.

Information Dissemination – providing information regarding available resources to residents and local governments officials/staff was identified as being a weakness and an opportunity. Keeping residents and local governments apprised of development activities, resources and access to funding was important to all areas. In fact, in two meetings, lack of community participation in various development activities was attributed to being a result of little to no information being shared with the public.

Land Development – identifying owners of vacant, developable land was a concern for Alamo Region partners. It was noted that the region needs to have uniform regulations and building standards so that land development occurs properly and does not impede on development occurring within city boundaries.

Housing – the availability of affordable housing is a key factor in economic development. Multi-family housing was identified as an opportunity for the Alamo Region as the population continues to grow.

Diversified Economy – all areas identified improving the economy by retaining businesses was just as important as attracting new businesses and industries. Partnerships like those of economic development corporations and foundations can be instrumental in working with educational institutions and training institutions so that services and resources are available to existing and new businesses in the region.

Broadband – lack of or limited infrastructure and services were identified by all sub-regions. The partners agreed that the Alamo Region needs to seek and obtain as many funding opportunities as possible to ensure that more and improved infrastructure is available throughout the region. Affordable broadband services is the ultimate goal for the region.

**Strengths:**

**Location** – major inter-state and state highway intersections; central Texas location as part of San Antonio and New Braunfels area, and close to Austin; proximity to ports in Houston and Gulf Coast; rail and air services are significant in a number of the counties outside of Bexar; access to natural resources; proximity to Mexico; desirable place to live

Cost of Living

Growing diversified population

Diversifying economy

Education – strong system; good programs; over 15 colleges and universities; industry supported schools for applied sciences and technology, and agriculture; development of partnerships to improve programs and systems

Workforce – young, available, trained/trainable, loyal/dedicated; cost

Culture – heritage based; high degree of personal wealth

Business and Political Climate – Active political participation; investment savvy; strong entrepreneurial eco-system; public private partnership with economic development foundations and corporations; support of and for the UTSA Small Business Development Center

Communications Infrastructure – growing and improving connectivity

Availability of Land for Development – land outside of Bexar County

Development of Industry – tourism, military missions, wineries, oil and gas, construction, finance, cyber security/technology, biosciences, aerospace

**Weaknesses:**

Climate – heat

Quality of Transportation

Access to Childcare

Lack of Adequate workforce and workforce services – need for company-specific and industry-specific training; need for wrap-around services for trainees and workforce; lack of multi-jurisdictional participation with workforce development

Wage Differential

Education Attainment – Preparation vs. Need

**Lack of Regulation and Building Standards for Growth** – unregulated standards for growth in unincorporated and rural areas

Information Distribution – lack of community awareness of development in area; lack of communicating of existing resources to residents

Inadequate Broadband – lack of infrastructure and services

Road Improvements – lack of local control/input in state projects

Community Involvement/Engagement – low support

Economic Development – imbalance between attraction and business retention & expansion; limited or no communication of existing resources to small business and entrepreneurs; connecting to workforce development and education (K-12)

Lack of Affordable Housing – including availability and variety

Lack of Collaboration with State and Federal Partners – project development and implementation; access to funding opportunities like Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds

County Priorities – lack of knowledge and inquiry by local and regional groups

**Opportunities:**

Inevitable Growth – preparation

Location – appealing places to live for young people and young families; proximity to higher education

Partnerships for Workforce Development – develop talent pool

Training/Education – tailor training and education to meet industry needs to fill gaps

Entrepreneurial Climate – increase and improve entrepreneurial opportunities to meet industry needs

Business Development and Attraction - retain and grow small business for stronger business retention and expansion; increase business/industry attraction to help reduce commute for employees and retain workforce

Multi-family Housing

Maintain Competitiveness in housing market

Innovative Economies

Attract suppliers to reduce supply chain issues

**Continue Momentum on Austin-San Antonio mega county/region**

Development of airport and airline services

Land – private and available; controlled growth/development

County Navigator – information availability

Economic Development Information Availability – share information on what organizations do

Potential to Access Philanthropy – to assist with community needs and development

Creation of a Community Development Fund

**Threats:**

Water – supply, quality, management

Housing Demand

Power Grid  
Potential for Ozone/air quality standard to be lowered  
Access to healthcare  
Cost of Living Increase – unaffordable for some individuals and families  
Reduction in Population  
Lack of Sufficient Diversity in Economy  
Government Regulation and Mandates  
Lack of Controlled Growth  
Land Ownership – absentee owners  
Tourism Management  
Imbalance of Infrastructure Meeting Growth Needs  
Rapid Influx of Higher Educated, Domestic Migrants

## EVALUATION

The most recent demographic and statistical information was provided to each sub-region during the CEDS workshops. The sources included:

- Census Bureau - American Community Survey, Decennial Census, County Business Patterns, Business Formation Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Centers for Disease Control
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation
- Texas Comptroller
- Texas Department of State Health Services
- National Centers for Environmental Information
- Texas Association of Counties
- Alamo Area Council of Governments

The evaluation of the success of the AACOG CEDS 2024-2029 will be determined by comparing the data used to develop the CEDS to the data in 2029. In addition, the performance measures identified to evaluate the progress of activities in achieving the goals will include:

- Number of jobs created or retained in the region
- Population changes
- Lower unemployment rates
- Higher labor force participation
- Increased levels of educational attainment
- New and sustainable industries
- Environmental impact
- Infrastructure investment
- Number of business formations and expansions in the region
- Regional median income change
- Business starts

## GOALS

Based on the sub-region and CEDS Committee meetings, and the SWOT analysis, goals were developed for the AACOG CEDS 2024-2029 that address the SWOT analysis and the areas of Economic Resilience, Climate Resilience, Equity, Workforce Development, and Digital Divide.

**Goal for Economic Resilience:** Assist region's local governments to develop and implement economic and disaster recovery strategies to expand and retain existing businesses, attract new businesses, and maintain economic resilience.

Strategies:

- Support regional efforts to enhance the economy by leveraging existing assets in the military, research and biotechnology, tourism, cyber security, and oil and gas sectors.
- Develop and maintain partnerships with community representatives – elected officials, school district superintendents, utility executives, chambers of commerce, neighborhood action groups, etc. – to enhance area economic development efforts.
- Increase awareness of resources for economic disaster response and recovery.
- Support development of long-term economic resilience plans throughout the region.
- Support and coordinate efforts to obtain grant funding to upgrade and maintain aging infrastructure.
- Support and coordinate the expansion of infrastructure to underserved areas.
- Increase awareness of resources for business start-up/development, expansion and retention.
- Develop inventory of developable land in the region.
- Develop a one-stop, regional information resource.
- Work with area business organizations, universities, small business centers, etc., to develop business continuity planning events/programs.
- Support revitalization of historic areas and corridors, especially in low-to-moderate income areas and underserved areas.

**Goal for Climate Resilience:** Foster methods of adaptation and mitigation to strengthen the Region's resilience against climate-related impacts.

Strategies:

- Support development of long-term disaster recovery and hazard mitigation plans throughout the region.
- Increase awareness of resources for climate disaster response and recovery.
- Support and increase awareness of plan for rapid return of utilities after climate disaster.
- Develop and incorporate climate and energy resiliency measures into economic development initiatives, especially in response to extreme weather events.

**Goal for Equity:** Create an economic development process for the region which is transparent, promotes engagement and collaboration, and prioritizes and addresses the needs of the communities.

Strategies:

- Increase awareness of fair and affordable housing.
- Assist communities develop short-term strategic plans.
- Identify resources for increased investment and development of affordable housing.

- Support and coordinate efforts to increase services and improve infrastructure in underserved areas.
- Invest in studies and analyses that will provide insight on current socioeconomic conditions and impact policy and programmatic decisions at the city and county-level.
- Coordinate efforts and resources to diversify and expand public transportation for low-to-moderate income areas.

**Goal for Workforce Development:** Develop, retain and attract an educated, well-trained, versatile and competitive workforce.

- Identify industry and business needs for workforce.
- Create, retain and attract jobs to the region.
- Support the development and work of area job training and vocational programs and services.
- Identify emerging technologies and skills development needs.
- Identify industry clusters and skills needs.
- Develop partnerships with federal, state and local agencies to develop skilled workforce.
- Identify wrap-around resources/services to enhance workforce training.

**Goal for Digital Divide:** Strengthen broadband infrastructure and increase access and affordability of broadband services to support resilient communities, economic and workforce development.

Strategies:

- Support the development of high-speed internet connections and bridge gaps, particularly in rural areas.
- Support and coordinate funding opportunities to provide and increase affordable broadband access in underserved areas.