

Northwest Georgia's Economic Development Strategy

2024 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) ANNUAL
UPDATE

Northwest Georgia Regional Commission
NWGRC COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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Introduction

The Northwest Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a strategic plan for the economic development of the Northwest Georgia Region. The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission develops and implements this strategic plan with the assistance of the CEDS Strategy Committee. The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission receives funds from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to create this plan.

The Northwest Georgia Economic Development Strategy for the period of 2022-2026, was submitted in September 2022. The purpose of this annual update is to show our progress on the strategic plan, as well as discuss the general condition of the region.

Major responsibilities of the regional commission include: (1) implementation of the Georgia Planning Act of 1989; (2) administration of the Area Agency on Aging; (3) administration of the Workforce Investment Act; and (4) providing planning and development assistance to member governments in areas they could not otherwise afford. The mission statement of the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission is "to improve the quality of life for every Northwest Georgia resident, through orderly growth, conservation of the region's natural and historic resources, and care and development of the region's human resources."



Northwest Georgia Regional Overview

Overview

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission's district consists of 15 counties (Bartow, Catoosa, Chattooga, Dade, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Gordon, Haralson, Murray, Paulding, Pickens, Polk, Walker, and Whitfield) and the forty-eight cities located within these counties. The region is predominantly rural but continues to grow substantially due to its proximity to Atlanta and Chattanooga. The Interstate 75 corridor runs north-south through the eastern part of the Region connecting these two metropolitan areas.

Geography

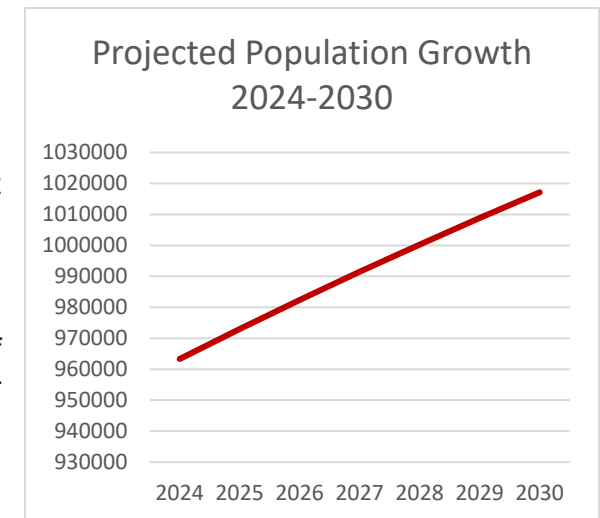
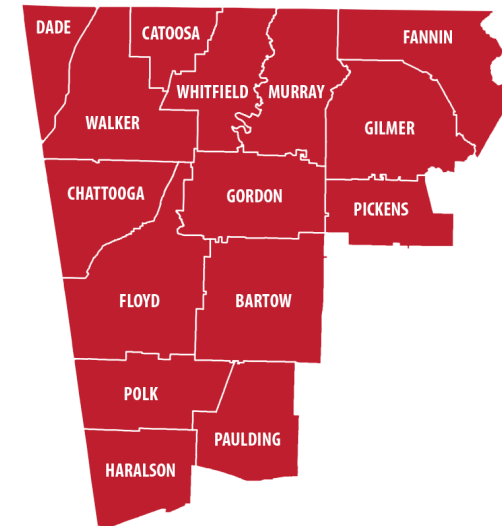
Northwest Georgia is located in the southern foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Georgia's Ridge and Valley, Blue Ridge Mountains, and Piedmont geographical regions. The region consists primarily of rolling hills with valleys and tall hills, ridges, and mountains running primarily north-south.

Demographics

The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget estimates the 2024 population of the region to be 963,323 and predicts it will be 1,017,141 by 2030. The median age of northwest Georgia is 38.8 as of 2022. Our region is aging at a much higher rate than the rest of Georgia with a 37.9% increase in 60+ residents from 2000-2013. As of the 2020 census, the 65+ segment made up 16.5% of the population of the region.

Industry Mix

The largest industry in the region is the service-providing sector which accounts for 57.7% of the jobs in the region (Q1 2024). This is followed by the good-producing sector accounting for 27.8% of the employment in the region. Manufacturing accounts for 23% of all employment.



Economy

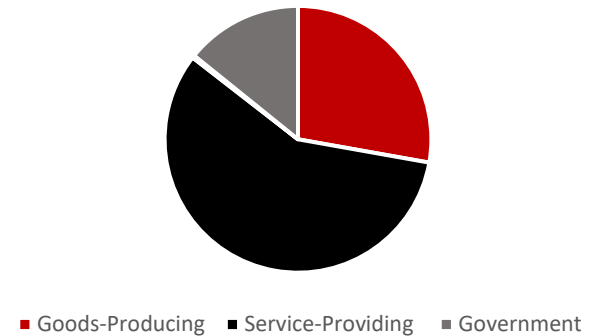
Traditionally, the region's economy has depended upon the manufacturing sector (23% of the region's employment in Q1 2024), which was dominated by the floor-covering industry. Even though the housing industry collapsed in 2007 dramatically reduced demand for floor-covering products and led to several plant closings. However, the floor-covering industry maintains its economic dominance in several of the region's counties.

The production model for manufacturing in the region continues to evolve. It is moving from a highly labor-intensive, hands-on production system to an automated system, where skilled technicians guide machines using computer programming or perform manual tasks with robotic assistance. In this changing job market, prospective employees must have or be able to learn the required skill set which includes engineering, computer technology, and programming. The labor market is trending towards a more logistics and services-focused economy.

The Georgia Department of Labor's Area Labor Profile cites the ten largest employers in Northwest Georgia. Four of the ten employers listed are healthcare institutions (Floyd, Gordon, Hamilton, and Wellstar). The next largest industry is the floor manufacturing industry, with three of the top-ten employers (Engineered Floors, Mohawk Carpet, and Shaw Industries).

The 24-month unemployment rate for Northwest Georgia is 2.9%, less than the national average of 4.1%. In 2022, the region's Per Capita Income was \$44,817 as calculated by the Georgia Department of Labor. This is still below the national and statewide Per Capita Income of \$69,792 and \$59,882, respectively.

Industry Mix Q1 2024



Ten Largest Employers in Northwest Georgia

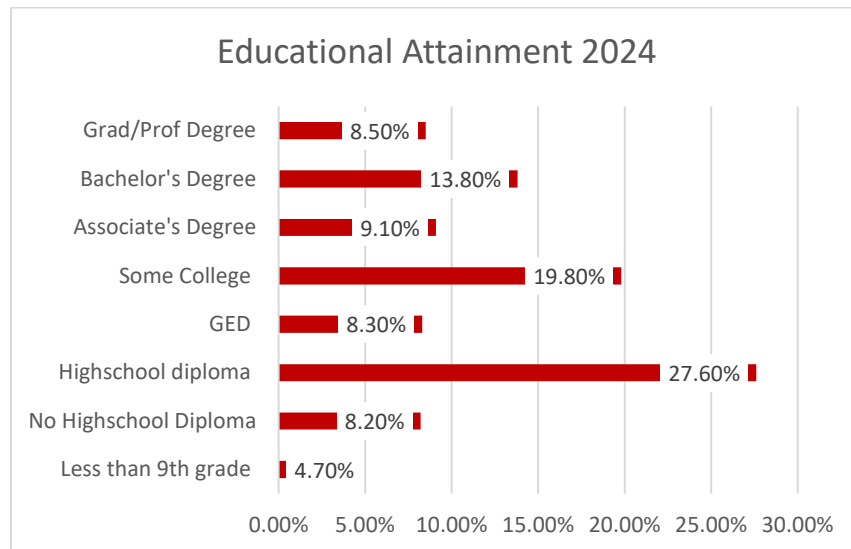
1. Century II Staffing, LLC
2. Engineered Floors, LLC
3. Floyd Healthcare Management, Inc.
4. Gordon Hospital
5. Hamilton Medical Center, Inc.
6. Mohawk Carpet Distribution, L.P.
7. Roper Corporation
8. Shaw Industries Group, Inc.
9. Walmart
10. Wellstar Health System, Inc.

Source: GA Dept. of Labor

(excluding government workers)

Education

Improving high school graduation rates is an important first step in ensuring the region has a skilled workforce, but it is also essential for the labor force to have an ample number of workers with advanced training, certifications, and degrees. High school graduation rates are rising in the region with the average being 94.4% as of 2023, this is up 2.3 percent from 2022. Of individuals 25 or older, 87.1% have a high school education or higher. Of the 31.5% that have a college degree, most have a bachelor's degrees (13.8%).



Georgia Department of Education 2023 Four-Year Graduation Rate			
System Name	Graduation Class Size	Total Graduated	Graduation Rate
Bartow County	866	823	95.0%
Catoosa County	863	771	89.3%
Chattooga County	121	109	90.1%
Dade County	160	139	86.9%
Fannin County	228	212	90.4%
Floyd County	512	488	92.1%
Gilmer County	252	234	94.0%
Gordon County	489	473	96.7%
Haralson County	211	204	96.7%
Murray County	468	449	95.6%
Paulding County	2,578	2,317	89.9%
Pickens County	265	238	89.8%
Polk County	576	499	86.8%
Walker County	557	510	91.6%
Whitfield County	1,006	858	85.3%
Bremen City	164	156	95.1%
Calhoun City	268	268	100.0%
Cartersville City	345	318	92.2%
Chickamauga City	113	108	95.6%
Dalton City	615	501	81.5%
Rome City	460	419	91.1%
Trion City	77	76	98.7%
Northwest Georgia Region	10,762	10,170	94.4%
Source: Georgia Department of Education			

Regional Vision, Goals, and Strategies

Regional Vision

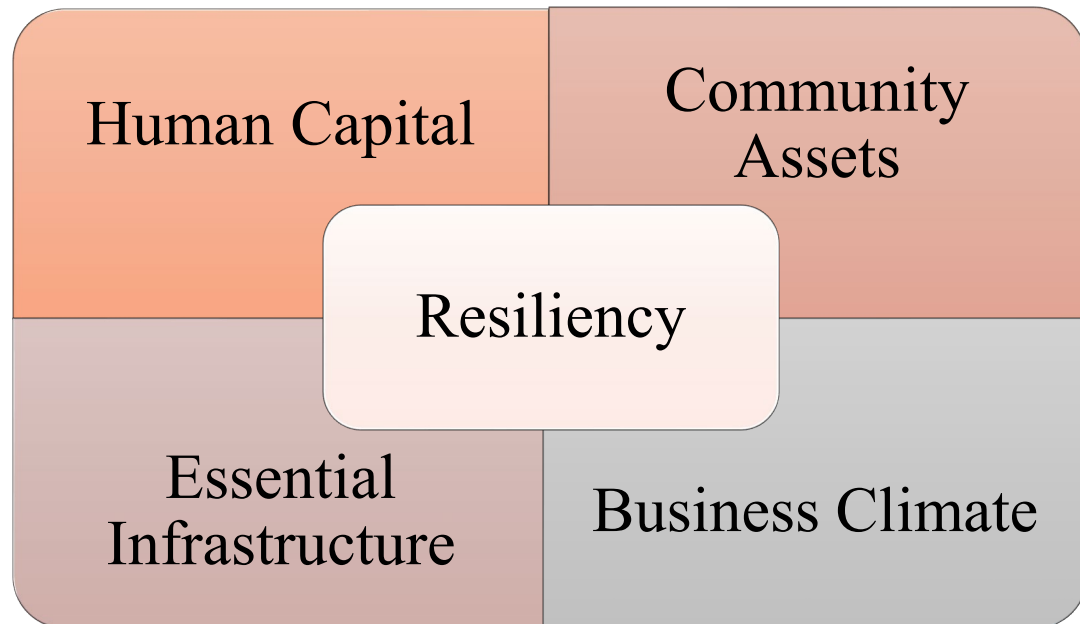
Northwest Georgia strives to become a region where economic opportunities are available for all citizens; where our natural resources are used wisely and conserved for future generations; where community facilities and services support the needs of everyone; where cooperation among the public, private, and non-profit sectors is commonplace, and where citizens have opportunities to enjoy a healthy and productive life.

Regional Goals & Strategies

Matching the themes identified in the SWOT Analysis, the goals in the Northwest Georgia's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy are organized into five broad categories:

1. Human Capital,
2. Community Assets,
3. Essential Infrastructure,
4. Business Climate, and
5. Resiliency

These categories are associated with regional goals and appropriate strategies in the following section of the document.



Regional Goals at a Glance

Human Capital

- **Workforce Skills:** Increase the number of residents skilled in advanced manufacturing to meet the current and changing needs of Northwest Georgia employers.
- **Educational Attainment:** Expand the number of students in the region that are prepared for future employment in skilled and professional positions through enhanced educational opportunities and active career counseling.
- **Human Services:** Ensure appropriate human services are available to meet the needs of the region's current and future workforce.

Community Assets

- **Tourism and Film Industry:** Increase tourism, visitor spending, and revenue earned from the film industry in Northwest Georgia.
- **Quality of Life:** Enhance quality of life amenities in the region to retain talent, and to gain a competitive advantage when recruiting new business and industry.
- **Housing:** Ensure the availability of attainable, decent, and safe housing to meet the needs of the region's growing workforce.

Business Climate

- Increase entrepreneurship and innovation by supporting business development in existing and emerging sectors.
- Increase access to capital for small businesses in the region. The CEDS allows the use of Revolving Loan Funds to supplement financial support to local businesses to ensure economic stability and growth in Northwest Georgia. These RLF funds are specifically designed to be low-interest loans to sustain and stimulate job growth.

Essential Infrastructure

- **Industrial Properties:** Ensure Northwest Georgia has sufficient, ready-to-develop industrial properties available to meet the region's current and future needs.
- **Transportation:** Advocate for transportation projects that are critical for regional economic development.
- **High Speed Internet:** Increase coverage and accessibility of high-speed internet for residential, commercial, and industrial areas, with a focus on rural areas.
- **Traditional Infrastructure:** Ensure Communities in the region have adequate, basic infrastructure to implement their community and economic development objectives.

Resiliency

- **Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness:** Ensure that all communities have updated hazard mitigation plans and are prepared for natural disasters.
- **Communications During Economic Downturn or Emergency:** Ensure adequate communication infrastructure between local governments and economic development organizations during economic downturns.
- **Resilient Workforce:** Ensure that education and workforce training are suitable to allow workers to easily switch jobs and attain broader skill sets.
- **Industrial Diversity:** Achieve sufficient industrial diversity to minimize the impacts on the regional economy of a downturn in any given industry sector.
- Ensure adequate housing options are available to meet existing and future workforce demands.

NWGRC Assistance Provided in 2024

Local Government	Project Description	Estimated Investment		Funding Sources / Program	Status
		Grant Funds	Local Funds		
Walker County	Battlefield Connector Multi-Use Trail	\$434,141	\$434,141	Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)	Funded
City of Fort Oglethorpe	City of Fort Oglethorpe/ Historic District Water and Storm Water System Improvements	\$1,000,000	\$3,232,600	ARC	Funded
City of Ringgold	Joint Wastewater Infrastructure Study	\$24,502	\$24,502	ARC	Pending
Atrium Health Floyd	Mobile Computed Tomography Scanner	\$595,700	\$595,700	ARC	Pending
Chattooga County	Tooga Theater Renovation Project–Phase 1	\$1,000,000	\$372,000	ARC	Pending
City of Cedartown	Performing Arts Center Renovation Phase 1	\$1,000,000	\$806,882	ARC	Pending
City of Dalton	RWHI	\$1,500,000	\$0.000	RWHI	Funded
City of Ringgold	Water Treatment Plant Generator	\$94,968.75	\$31,656.25	BRIC	Funded
Murray County	The GreenHouse Project	\$320,280	\$25,000	CDS	Pending
City of Cedartown	Goodyear Trail	\$103,700	\$200,000	RTP	Pending
Walker County	Walker Rocks Trail Remediation	\$80,000	\$200,000	RTP	Pending
Chattooga County	Chattooga County Recycling Project	\$13,400	\$341,467	EPD Recycling and Waste Diversion (RWD)	Funded
City of Chickamauga	Community Concert Project	\$2,000	\$0.00	Georgia Vibrant Communities	Funded
City of Rome/YMCA	GA 100 Mini-Pitch	\$100,000	\$139,868	GA 100 (Atl United)	Funded
City of Trion	GA 100 Mini-Pitch	\$75,000	\$75,000	GA 100 (Atl United)	Funded
City of Rockmart	GA 100 Mini-Pitch	\$100,000	\$119,006	GA 100 (Atl United)	Funded

City of Rockmart	Portable Generators	\$125,610	\$41,870	FEMA/HMGP Grant	Funded
City of Ringgold	Water Treatment Plant Generator	\$94,968.75	\$31,656.25	FEMA/HMGP Grant	Funded
City of Cedartown	Cedartown Backup Generators	\$560,100	\$186,700	FEMA/HMGP Grant	Funded
City of Fort Oglethorpe	Rural Zone Designation	N/A	N/A	Department of Community Affairs	Selected
City of Chickamauga	Rural Zone Designation	N/A	N/A	Department of Community Affairs	Selected
City of Cedartown	Tuner Street Park Rehabilitation	\$500,000	\$513,641.50	Land and Water Conservation Fund	Pending
Murray County	Application to become a GICH Community	N/A	N/A	GICH	Selected

References

Georgia Department of Labor . (2024, October). *Northwest Georgia Local Workforce Area* . Retrieved from Georgia Department of Labor : <https://explorer.gdol.ga.gov/vosnet/mis/Profiles/lwda/lwda01.pdf>

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Stats America. (2024). *Stats America*. Retrieved from Stats America: <https://www.statsamerica.org/distress/>

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**RESOLUTION TO SUBMIT THE
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE UPDATE
TO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION**

WHEREAS, the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission is a designated Economic Development District under the requirements and regulations of the Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA); and

WHEREAS, the member governments and citizens of the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission have benefited through the resources and assistance available to designated districts and through numerous successful projects throughout the district; and

WHEREAS, the EDA requires qualifying districts to prepare a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to guide the region's economic development programs and to remain eligible for EDA assistance and financial awards; and

WHEREAS, a Five-Year Plan for economic development was developed for the period of 2022 through 2026; and

WHEREAS, EDA requires an annual performance update each year during the planning period; and

WHEREAS, the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission Council has determined that the CEDS's current update reasonably reflects general and specific goals, projects, and desired outcomes.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission Council does hereby adopt the 2024 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Annual Performance Update as the general guide for economic development activities and approves the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Annual Performance Update for submission to the Economic Development Administration in compliance with the requirements.

Approved and adopted, this 17th day of October, 2024.

Certificate of Passage

I hereby certify that the above and foregoing resolution was duly adopted by the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission in regular session assembled on the 17th day of October 2024 and recorded in the official minutes of the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission.



Signature of Authorized Official

Boyd Austin, Executive Director
Name and Title of Authorized Official



Signature of Authorized Official

Greg Hogan, Chairperson
Name and Title of Authorized Official

Signed, sealed, and delivered this 17th day of October, 2024, in the presence of



Witness

Barbara Snead, Executive Assistant
Name and Title of Authorized Official