

Northwest Georgia's Economic Development Strategy

2025 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

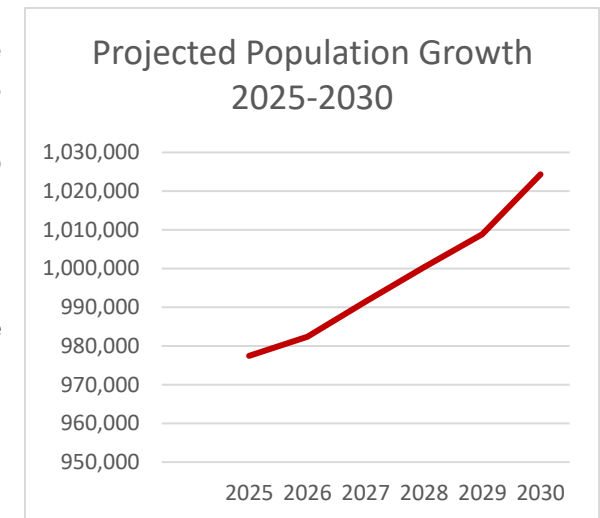
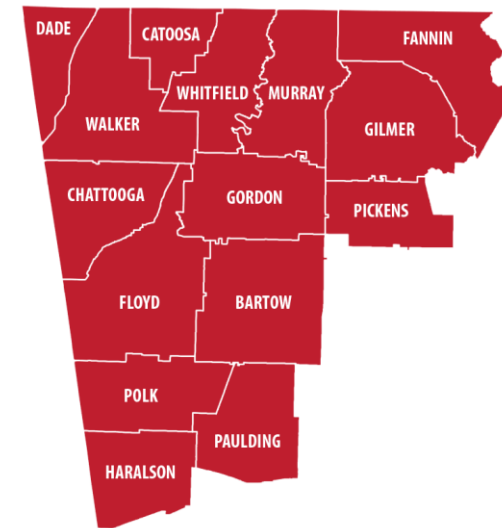
Northwest Georgia is located in the southern foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Georgia's Ridge and Valley, Blue Ridge Mountains, and Piedmont geographical regions. The region consists primarily of rolling hills with valleys and tall hills, ridges, and mountains running primarily north-south.

Demographics

The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget estimates the 2024 population of the region to be 977,442 and predicts it will be 1,024,334 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 58.1% of the jobs in the region (Q1 2025). This is followed by the good-producing sector accounting for 27.4% of the employment in the region. Manufacturing accounts for 22.5% of all employment.



Economy

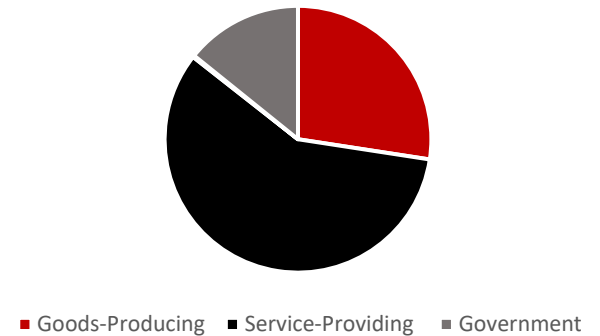
Traditionally, the region's economy has depended upon the manufacturing sector (22.5% of the region's employment in Q1 2025), which was dominated by the floor-covering industry. Even though the housing industry collapsed in 2007 dramatically reduced demand for floor-covering products and led to several 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. Three of the ten employers listed are healthcare institutions (Floyd, Gordon, and Hamilton). 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 3.4%, less than the national average of 4.0%. 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 2025



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. Toyo Tires
10. Walmart

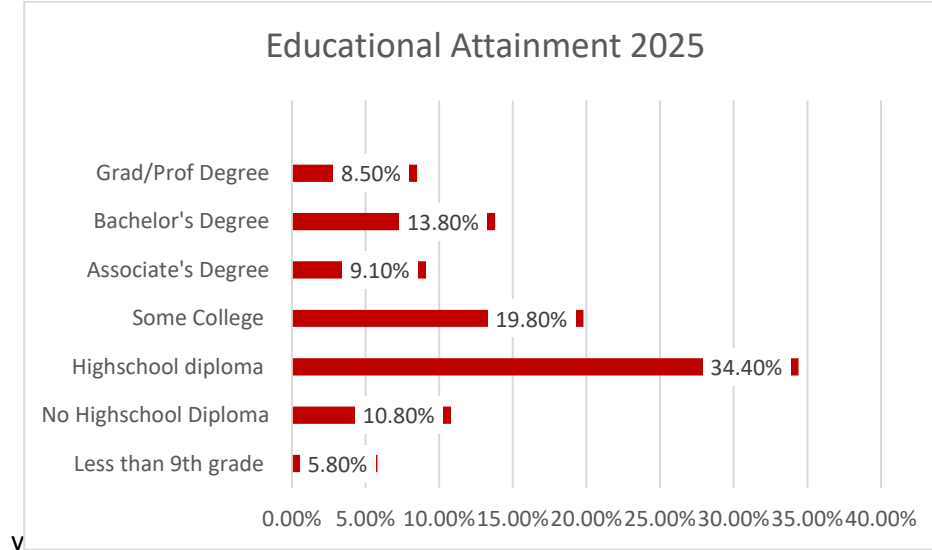
Source: GA Dept. of Labor

(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 93.8% as of 2024, this is up 2.3 percent from 2022. Of individuals 25 or older, 85.6% have a high school education or higher. Of the 31.4% that have a college degree, most have a bachelor's degrees (13.8%).

Georgia Department of Education 2024 Four-Year Graduation Rate			
System Name	Graduation Class Size	Total Graduated	Graduation Rate
Bartow County	1031	980	95.1%
Catoosa County	827	751	90.8%
Chattooga County	147	140	95.2%
Dade County	167	147	88.0%
Fannin County	227	207	91.2%
Floyd County	592	565	95.4%
Gilmer County	251	247	98.4%
Gordon County	443	429	96.8%
Haralson County	200	196	98.0%
Murray County	480	453	94.4%
Paulding County	2,584	2,333	90.3%
Pickens County	282	259	91.8%
Polk County	593	539	90.9%
Walker County	599	553	92.3%
Whitfield County	1,003	914	91.1%
Bremen City	175	172	98.3%
Calhoun City	302	297	98.3%
Cartersville City	360	328	91.1%
Chickamauga City	86	84	97.7%
Dalton City	628	524	83.4%
Rome City	486	463	95.3%
Trion City	95	94	99.0%
Northwest Georgia Region	11,558	10,675	93.8%
Source: Georgia Department of Education			



Regional Vision, Goals, and Strategies

Regional Vision

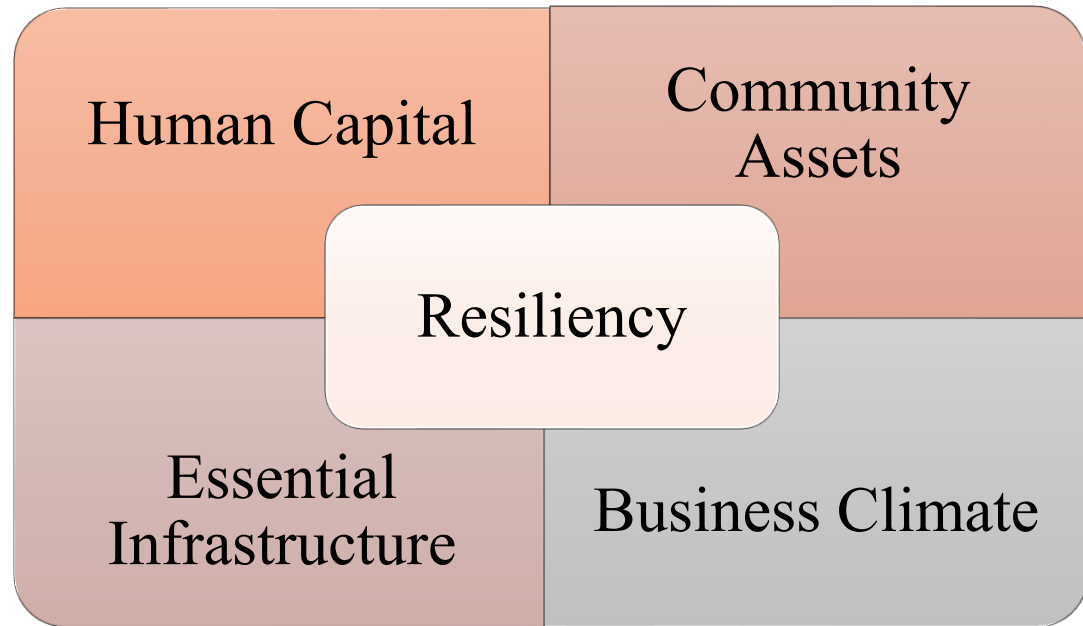
Northwest Georgia strives to become a region where economic opportunities are available for all citizens; where our natural resources are used wisely and conserved for future generations; where community facilities and services support the needs of everyone; where cooperation among the public, private, 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 2025

Local Government	Project Description	Estimated Investment		Funding Sources / Program	Status
		Grant Funds	Local Funds		
Chattooga County	Chattooga County / Tooga Theater Renovation Project – Phase 1	\$1,000,000	\$372,000	Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)	Funded
City of Cedartown	City of Cedartown / Performing Arts Center Renovation Phase 1	\$1,000,000	\$806,882	ARC	Funded
Catoosa County	LIFT Youth Center	\$62,500	\$62,500	ARC	Pending
City of Cedartown	Cedartown Wastewater Improvement Project	\$2,000,000	\$254,400	ARC / State Funding	Pending
Whitfield County	East Morris Street Streetscaping Improvements	\$1,998,665.63	\$1,998,665.63	ARC	Pending
Murray County	Murray County Sidewalk Expansion	\$520,000	\$520,000	ARC	Pending
Rome-Floyd	ECO Roost on the River	\$685,568	\$685,568	ARC	Pending
City of Summerville	Summerville Water Tank Project	\$2,000,000	\$1,000,000	ARC	Pending
Whitfield County	WC South Dixie Hwy/W. Industrial Blvd. Intersection Improvements	\$2,000,000	\$2,166,885	ARC	Pending
City of Cave Spring	Cave Spring Sidewalk Project	\$4,160,000	\$0.00	GDOT TAP	Pending
City of Cedartown	Cedartown Downtown Streetscape Project	\$1,402,098.66	\$350,524.66	GDOT TAP	Pending
Chattooga County	Chattooga County Sidewalk Project	\$4,160,000	\$0.00	GDOT TAP	Pending
City of Chickamauga	Chickamauga SR 1 Sidewalk Project	\$6,470,000	\$0.00	GDOT TAP	Pending
City of Chickamauga	Chickamauga SR 341 Sidewalk Project	\$2,940,000	\$0.00	GDOT TAP	Pending
City of Cohutta	City of Cohutta Sidewalk Project	\$3,610,000	\$0.00	GDOT TAP	Pending
City of Ringgold	City of Ringgold Sidewalk Project	\$1,227,283.84	\$306,820.96	GDOT TAP	Pending
City of Summerville	City of Summerville Sidewalk Project	\$4,680,000	\$0.00	GDOT TAP	Pending

City of Trenton	City of Trenton Sidewalk Project	\$11,780,000	\$0.00	GDOT TAP	Pending
Dade County and City of Trenton	GICH Application	N/A	N/A	Georgia Initiative for Community Housing	Pending
City of Summerville	Rural Zone Designation	N/A	N/A	Department of Community Affairs	Pending
City of Tallapoosa	Rural Zone Designation	N/A	N/A	Department of Community Affairs	Pending
City of Ringgold	Ringgold Playhouse	\$500,000	\$513,641.50	Vibrant Communities Grant	Pending
City of Cedartown	GA – 100 Mini-Pitch	\$100,000	\$125,000	ATL United Community Fund	Pending
Floyd County	GA – 100 Mini-Pitch	\$100,000	\$125,000	ATL United Community Fund	Pending
City of Summerville	GA – 100 Mini-Pitch	\$100,000	\$125,000	ATL United Community Fund	Pending
Catoosa County	GA – 100 Mini-Pitch	\$100,000	\$100,000	ATL United Community Fund	Pending
Walker County	GA – 100 Mini Pitch	\$63,562.50	\$63,563.50	ATL United Community Fund	Pending
Gilmer County	GA – 100 Mini-Pitch	\$88,562	\$88,562	ATL United Community Fund	Pending

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