Comprehensive Economic Development Survey Results

2017 Regional Data
Survey responses gathered through region-wide administration with Survey Monkey host site
The River Valley Regional Commission (RVRC) is tasked with conducting a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the 16 counties in west-central Georgia every 5 years with annual updates. In order to inform this project, a survey is developed and distributed within the region.

The survey was developed with online services and available between January 2017 and May 2017. The targeted response group for the survey included those with an interest in Economic Development, and 267 total people responded. Staff distributed information regarding administration of the survey via e-mail, multiple meetings, social media, and with TV appearances on Columbus Consolidated Government’s TV station.

To better understand the responses from those surveyed in such a diverse region, we asked respondents to indicate the county in which they lived. The survey results were then analyzed based on location specific results. Four separate analyses were conducted: All counties combined; Columbus (Muscogee County alone) as the major metropolitan area in the region; Crisp and Sumter Counties (two of the largest regional economic centers – both having higher education, regional retail and significant medical facilities); and the 13 of 16 remaining rural counties.

Results of the survey follow, and will be used in conjunction with existing economic development plans and individual by the CEDS committee and staff to develop the next 5 year plan for the region. More information about the CEDS process can be found on the RVRC website.
Overall County Results

**Strengths:**
Tourism and Community Leadership highlight overall results for all counties collectively.

**Weaknesses:**
All include concerns about a well-trained workforce, but housing and quality school systems are also a concern.

Please select up to five (5) from the following that you think best characterize the greatest economic development strengths of your home county:

- A well-trained workforce
- Access/proximity to markets
- Transportation network
- Raw materials/natural resources
- Renewable energy potential (wind, solar, geothermal, hydro, biomass)
- Tourism assets
- Strong existing businesses
- Strong community leadership
- Effective economic development organization
- Place-based economic incentives
- Local resources for capital business loan funds
- Local health care facilities
- Technology/communications
- Quality local/regional school system
- Housing Options
- Attractive, livable communities
- Other (please specify)

Please select up to five (5) from the following that you think are the most significant economic development weaknesses or deficiencies in your home county:

- A well trained workforce
- Access/proximity to markets
- Transportation network
- Raw materials/natural resources
- Renewable energy potential (wind, solar, geothermal)
- Tourism assets
- Strong existing businesses
- Strong community leadership
- Effective economic development organization
- Place-based economic incentives
- Local health care facilities
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- Quality local/regional school system
- Housing options
- Attractive, livable communities
- Other (please specify)
Overall County Results

**Threat:**
The perceived number one threat in the region, flight of the younger generation is understandably a universal concern in the region.

**Opportunity:**
The biggest opportunity seen overall is available land. This was true in all counties except the City of Columbus (Muscogee County). Tourism attractions were also an important opportunity throughout the region.

Please select up to five (5) from the following that you think most threaten or limit the economic development potential of your home county

- Lack of affordable housing
- Infrastructure deficiencies (i.e. roads, water/sewer, gas, rail, broadband)
- Lack of labor force training opportunities
- Lack of developable land and/or suitable buildings
- Lack of community amenities (i.e. parks, community center, etc.)
- Vacant Main Streets, town centers and/or shopping areas
- Volatility of business cycle (boom/bust)
- Declining industries
- Lack of access to capital
- Flight of younger generation from our community
- Excessive permitting fees & hostile regulatory environment
- Ineffective existing government (local, state, federal)
- Limited water resources and impacts on local industries and/or agriculture
- Other (please specify)

Please identify the economic opportunities that provide the most potential for your county. Please select the top five (5) opportunities

- Population growth
- Skilled labor force
- Available land
- Access to transportation, air, highway, rail
- Anchor industries or clusters
- Proximity to research university
- Specific demographic group (i.e. students, retirees, etc.)
- Tourism attractions, including Agritourism
- Vital Main Street or downtown
- Natural resource base
- Attractive communities/quality of life
- Availability of water resources
- Other (please specify)
Top goals:
The creation of new jobs is paramount. Encouraging growth of existing businesses is also very important.

Partnerships:
Chambers are seen as important partners, although the economic development partnerships and entities do vary throughout the region.

What should be your home county's top measurable goals or strategies for economic development? (What would the county like to achieve?) Please select up to five (5) strategies

- Diversify the economic base
- Create new jobs
- Encourage the growth of existing businesses and industries
- Create a strong entrepreneurial climate
- Increase access to capital for new and existing businesses
- Improve transportation infrastructure
- Create a business-friendly climate
- Increase job skills of local labor force.
- Other (please specify)

Overall County Results

To your knowledge, what partnerships have formed in your county to work together to solve economic development issues? Check all that apply

- Economic Development Council
- Regional advocacy groups
- Regional Commission
- Local government
- Civic clubs
- Chamber of Commerce
- Don't know if one exists
- Other (please specify)
Resources:
Grants are important, but there is broad agreement that a full suite of tools is needed for economic development. One of the most actionable items is developing (and presumably disseminating) better information about existing state programs.

What other key community organizations should be involved in the development of the CEDS? Check all that apply
- Economic Development Authority
- Industrial Development Authority
- Chambers of Commerce
- Visitor and Convention Bureaus
- Technical Colleges and Universities
- Civic/Service organizations i.e. Rotary, Kiwannis
- Main Street or downtown marketing organizations
- Local government/County government
- Utilities
- Elected officials
- Small Business Development Centers
- School Boards/PTA's
- Other (please specify)

What resources/actions from the State of Georgia would be most helpful to your home county in order to implement a plan? Please select up to five (5) resources
- Strategic grants to leverage economic development projects
- Business loan funds/micro loans/access to capital
- Incentives for job growth
- Tax credits for job growth
- Streamline regulations and permitting
- Technical assistance and assessment visits to develop local action plans
- More worker training programs
- Entrepreneurial programs
- Better information about existing state programs
- Other (please specify)
City of Columbus Results

Top 5 economic development strengths of county:
1. Strong community leadership  13%
2. Tourism assets  12%
3. Strong existing business  11%
4. Attractive, livable communities  10%
5. Local health care facilities  9%

Top 5 economic development weaknesses of county:
1. Quality local/regional school system  13%
2. A well trained workforce  12%
3. Transportation network  12%
4. Housing options  12%
5. Renewable energy potential (wind, solar, geothermal)  9%

Top 5 threats/limitations to economic development potential of county:
1. Flight of younger generation from our community  17%
2. Declining industries  14%
3. Lack of affordable housing  11%
4. Infrastructure deficiencies (i.e. roads, water/sewer, gas, rail, broadband)  11%
5. Lack of labor force training opportunities  11%
6. Vacant Main Streets, town centers and/or shopping areas  11%
City of Columbus Results

Top 5 potential economic opportunities of county:
1. Tourism attractions, including Agro-tourism 15%
2. Attractive communities/quality of life 14%
3. Vital Main Street or downtown 13%
4. Skilled labor force 8%
5. Anchor industries or clusters 8%
6. Availability of water resources 8%

Top 5 goals or strategies for economic development of county:
1. Create new jobs 19%
2. Increase job skills of local labor force 16%
3. Create a strong entrepreneurial climate 14%
4. Diversify the economic base 13%
5. Encourage the growth of existing businesses and industries 12%

Top 5 known established partnerships for economic development of county:
1. Chamber of commerce 21%
2. Local government 20%
3. Regional Commission 17%
4. Economic Development Council 13%
5. Regional advocacy groups 12%
Crisp and Sumter County Results

**Top 5 economic development strengths of county:**
1. Tourism assets 17%
2. Local health care facilities 12%
3. Access/proximity to markets 8%
4. Strong community leadership 8%
5. Effective economic development organization 8%
6. Attractive, livable communities 8%

**Top 5 economic development weaknesses of county:**
1. A well trained workforce 16%
2. Technology/communications 10%
3. Quality local/regional school system 10%
4. Transportation network 9%
5. Strong community leadership 9%

**Top 5 threats/limitations to economic development potential of county:**
1. Flight of younger generation from our community 21%
2. Declining industries 13%
3. Vacant Main Streets, town centers and/or shopping areas 11%
4. Ineffective existing government (local, state, federal) 9%
5. Lack of community amenities (i.e. parks, community center, etc.) 8%
Crisp and Sumter County Results

Top 5 potential economic opportunities of county:
1. Available land  18%
2. Tourism attractions, including Agro-tourism  16%
3. Vital Main Street or downtown  13%
4. Specific demographic group (i.e. students, retirees, etc.) 12%
5. Access to transportation, air, highway, rail  11%

Top 5 goals or strategies for economic development of county:
1. Create new jobs  20%
2. Increase job skills of local labor force  19%
3. Encourage the growth of existing businesses and industries  16%
4. Diversify the economic base  11%
5. Create a business friendly climate  9%

Top 5 known established partnerships for economic development of county:
1. Chamber of commerce  23%
2. Economic Development Council  21%
3. Regional Commission  19%
4. Local government  14%
5. Regional advocacy groups  9%
Rural County Results

Top 5 economic development strengths of county:
1. Tourism assets 12%
2. Strong community leadership 12%
3. Raw materials/natural resources 11%
4. Renewable energy potential (wind, solar, geothermal, hydro, biomass) 9%
5. Transportation network 8%

Top 5 economic development weaknesses of county:
1. A well trained workforce 15%
2. Housing options 11%
3. Strong existing business 10%
4. Quality local/regional school system 10%
5. Local health care facilities 9%

Top 5 threats/limitations to economic development potential of county:
1. Flight of younger generation from our community 16%
2. Lack of labor force training opportunities 14%
3. Vacant Main Streets, town centers and/or shopping areas 14%
4. Lack of affordable housing 9%
5. Declining industries 9%
Rural County Results

Top 5 potential economic opportunities of county:
1. Available land 19%
2. Tourism attractions, including Agro-tourism 13%
3. Access to transportation, air, highway, or rail 12%
4. Availability of water resources 11%
5. Natural resource base 9%
6. Attractive communities/quality of life 9%

Top 5 goals or strategies for economic development of county:
1. Create new jobs 19%
2. Increase job skills of local labor force 18%
3. Encourage the growth of existing businesses and industries 15%
4. Create a strong entrepreneurial climate 11%
5. Create a business friendly climate 11%

Top 5 known established partnerships for economic development of county:
1. Chamber of commerce 24%
2. Economic Development Council 19%
3. Local government 19%
4. Regional Commission 16%
5. Civic clubs 8%
**Your County's Economic Strengths:** Please select up to five (5) from the following that you think best characterize the greatest economic development strengths of your home county.

- Other (please specify)
- Attractive, livable communities
- Housing Options
- Quality local/regional school system
- Technology/communications
- Local health care facilities
- Local resources for capital business loan funds
- Designated Enterprize Zones
- Effective economic development organization
- Strong community leadership
- Strong existing businesses
- Tourism assets
- Renewable energy potential (wind, solar, geothermal, hydro, …)
- Raw materials/natural resources
- Transportation network
- Access/proximity to markets
- A well-trained workforce

**Survey Comparison Chart**

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<th>Your County's Economic Strengths</th>
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Your County's Economic Weaknesses: Please select up to five (5) from the following that you think are the most significant economic development weaknesses or deficiencies in your home county.

- A well trained workforce
- Access/proximity to markets
- Transportation network
- Raw materials/natural resources
- Renewable energy potential (wind, solar, geothermal)
- Tourism assets
- Strong existing businesses
- Strong community leadership
- Effective economic development organization
- Designated enterprise zones
- Local health care facilities
- Technology/communications
- Quality local/regional school system
- Housing options
- Attractive, livable communities
- Other (please specify)
**Economic Threats or Limitations:** Please select up to five (5) from the following that you think most threaten or limit the economic development potential of your home county.

- Limited water resources and impacts on local industries
- Ineffective existing government (local, state, federal)
- Excessive permitting fees & hostile regulatory environment
- Flight of younger generation from our community
- Lack of access to capital
- Declining industries
- Volatility of business cycle (boom/bust)
- Vacant Main Streets, town centers and/or shopping areas
- Lack of community amenities (i.e. parks, community center,...)
- Lack of developable land and/or suitable buildings
- Lack of labor force training opportunities
- Infrastructure deficiencies (i.e. roads, water/sewer, gas, rail,...)
- Lack of affordable housing

Survey Comparison Chart
**Economic Opportunities:** Please identify the economic opportunities that provide the most potential for your county. Please select the top five (5) opportunities.
Name one action the State of Georgia could undertake to help advance economic development in your home county:

“Increase education with regards to starting/maintaining a successful business”

“Continue to promote the film industry and other related fields”

“Job training for the disabled”

Other comments:

“Develop more areas than just downtown. Build buildings with interesting architecture that will make people want to visit. Place them in places that people will notice on their way to Ft. Benning and Panama City. It doesn’t have to be a skyscraper, just big and interesting enough to be noticed. Create a large tourist attraction, some kind of amusement park, water park, etc. Whitewater is nice but it’s not enough. Promote Columbus to be favorably featured in movies, pop culture”

“Support CSU Business School growth, as our next generation of leaders should come from them. More intern programs—promote Columbus at University job fairs—great companies AFLAC, Pratt & Whitney, TSYS, CSU, WCB Bradley, etc.”