



# 2010 NADO Innovation Awards



The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Annual Innovation Awards program has been acknowledging the creative approaches to regional community and economic development since 1986. Since the program's inception, more than 1,300 projects have been honored.

The 2010 Innovation Award winners are making a difference in their regions through a variety of program areas. These include aging, community development, disaster mitigation, redevelopment, industry cluster support, sustainable development, technology, and workforce development programs. The award winners' projects are profiled according to various categories; contact information for each awardee can be found in the index.

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*Cover photos:*

*(Top left): The East Central Planning and Development District (Newton, MS) assisted the City of Philadelphia, MS with the renovation of an abandoned train depot.*

*(Top right): Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc. (Medford, OR) organized industry tours to introduce local members, business partners, and agencies to the diversity of businesses in the region.*

*(Bottom left): Southwestern North Carolina Planning & Economic Development Commission (Sylva, NC) developed the Mountain Landscapes Initiative to engage all stakeholders in sustainable planning efforts in the region.*

*(Bottom right): South Carolina Appalachian Council of Governments (Greenville, SC) created the Upstate Property Navigator, an interactive web mapping application and a dynamic regional database which provides decision support tools for economic development in Upstate South Carolina.*

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The **Aging and Disability Resource Connection**, a program of the **Northeast Georgia Regional Commission's** Area Agency on Aging, acts as a one-stop shop for older adults or disabled persons needing resource information. Consumers are screened for Long-Term Care Medicaid Services and Non-Medicaid Services that allow consumers to stay in their homes and be independent for as long as possible. Home-delivered meals are the largest service request followed by personal care services. Persons calling a toll-free number speak with caring professionals who are ready to listen and help provide information, direction, guidance and links to a wide variety of human services. Every call is confidential.

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With funding made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the **Buckeye Hills-Hocking Valley Regional Development District's Buckeye Hills Area Agency on Aging 8 (AAA8)** offered 534 participants over age 60 access to a new nutrition program called **Diner's Choice**. Designed to give residents better access to nutrition sites, it utilized the services of seven local restaurants in areas determined to be under-served by regional congregate meal sites. By working with local restaurants, the ARRA funding had a double impact, providing nutritious meals for older adults while pumping money into the local economy. Diners using the program ordered from menus designed to meet USDA nutrition guidelines. The program served 10,321 meals. A total of \$66,943 in redeemed breakfast and lunch coupons supported the seven restaurants. More than 200 surveys were received praising the program. "I have made new customers and new friends. A couple of the customers can't cook for themselves so it helps them so much," said a spokesperson for Midway Restaurant.



Photo courtesy of BHHVRDD

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After viewing a Prime Time/ABC Report featuring the **Virtual Dementia Tour** developed by Second Wind Dreams, **Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) Area Agency on Aging** staff contacted them about the possibility of purchasing kits for training. To educate community and caregivers on dementia, which is the predominant diagnosis for the deterioration of cognitive and intellectual thinking in older adults, the agency wanted to spearhead an effort in the region to bring awareness of this disease. Kits were purchased and the initial tours were provided to LRGVDC staff. Since then, the Virtual Dementia Tours have been

made available to nursing classes, the general public, and to another COG Region. Hospitals have been requesting the training for their medical staff. Ten kits were originally purchased, and now 30 kits are available for local organizations that are interested in providing training to their staff and consumers.

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## Business Development

In developing innovative, environmentally beneficial products, companies incur extensive front-end costs for prototype development and testing, evaluation, and governmental approval. However, these small companies with significant front-end financing needs are not companies in which standard venture capital funds are often interested. In response to these needs, the **Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments** has developed (through the COG's existing RLF program) a special set of financing arrangements that allow **Front-end Financing for Emerging Green Companies** with repayment upon governmental approval and production. Interest-only payments are due regularly until approval and production begins, at which point full principal/interest payments are made. Additional collateral arrangements secure investment without taking part ownership in the company.

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Developed by the **Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments**, the **Upper Coastal Plain Business Development Center** began operations on November 20, 2007. To date, operations have created nine new or expanded businesses and 15 new jobs. The center operates 24/7 and provides counseling, seminars and workshops for both tenant companies and prospective businesses. The innovative incubator provides 26,000 square feet of affordable lease space that includes utilities, broadband, copier center, fax service, secretarial and receptionist services, janitorial services, free parking, technical assistance and counseling services from a number of educational partners. Lease rates range from \$250 per month up to \$800 per month depending on the amount of leasable space needed by the client company.

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**Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc.**, (SOREDI) has orchestrated three **Industry Tours**, during which SOREDI members tour three – four local businesses to learn about their products and services. Fifteen different companies have been visited, most of whom are traded-sector companies that received assistance from SOREDI with finance, expansion, or enterprise zone benefits. All participating companies have welcomed the opportunity to promote their business and help SOREDI raise awareness of the diversity of companies in the region. Tour group size has ranged from 20 – 40 people and has only been constrained by transportation considerations and capacity at the respective tour stops. When possible, SOREDI utilized public transportation to also introduce the group to alternative personal transportation options—many had never used public transit before. Lunch for each tour was held at member restaurant locations at local, lesser-known restaurants to increase member knowledge of local entrepreneurial efforts. The impact has been highly favorable among members, and an increased interest in SOREDI has been strong. Several new business memberships have also resulted from the effort.

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**Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc.** has brought existing small business assistance and financial support, including debt and equity sources, together among various organizations to present **Jefferson Grapevine Network** events every other month. These events feature presentations from experienced or aspiring entrepreneurs and programs on key information for entrepreneurs, investors and support organizations. From the success stories, the area's aspiring entrepreneurs have learned what worked well and what was less effective, along with important aspects of what a successful entrepreneurial business needs to go through from birth to market success. Local entrepreneurs can access important information on the Jefferson Grapevine website. In addition, the Jefferson Grapevine Network has also supported the formation of a regionally based early stage investor group to provide the essential equity investment needed to fund the region's entrepreneurs to prevent stalling many aspiring business concepts.

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The greatest financing need for business development in Northwest Wisconsin continues to be equity financing for start-up and early stage firms. Several years ago, a number of community-based organizations, rural electric cooperatives, Wisconsin Business Innovation Corporation and **Northwest Regional Planning Commission** formed the **Wisconsin Rural Enterprise Fund, LLC** with the aim of bringing high quality, well-paying jobs to rural areas. The community-based investors have raised over \$2.5 million from economic development sources. The fund has also generated nearly \$500,000 in return on investments. In just a little over four years, the fund has invested in ten technology-based business start-ups. Although start-up businesses generally do not have a large job creation rate in the early stages, these ten companies have employed over 100 people in high-skill, high-wage jobs in rural Wisconsin.

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## Community Development

**Aspire Facilitation Services** (Achieving Success through Participation, Innovation, Realism, and Empowerment) utilizes various techniques to help organizations discover new approaches to existing problems or issues, utilizing talent within their organizations. Using a trained facilitator on **Central Arizona Association of Governments** (CAAG) staff, the program has enabled over 20 organizations to make significant strides toward improving their organizations, which in turn empowers them to improve their communities. CAAG has worked with various organizations to take an objective look at issues and make rational, realistic decisions. The program has also provided forums for the public to engage in civil discussion on controversial issues. These various organizations have thrived as a result and have been able to provide necessary services, solutions or programs that have changed the community with minimal cost during this economic downturn.

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**Sonoma County Restaurant Week** was the first countywide restaurant event and attracted 89 restaurants and over 15,000 diners. This **Sonoma County Economic Development Board** event promoted special restaurant deals for the week through radio, newspapers, online



## Community Development

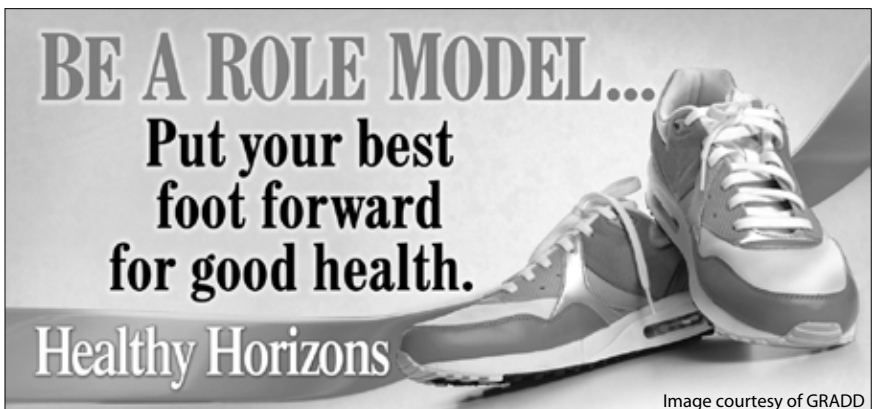
advertisements, social media and more. With an emphasis on locally sourced ingredients, Restaurant Week had an economic impact of over \$800,000, with over 90 percent of restaurants seeing an increase in customers and some experiencing record-breaking numbers. The budget for the event was \$10,000; every dollar spent coordinating the event generated an additional \$83 into the local economy. Nearly all surveyed restaurants indicated that they would like to participate in the next event. Over 99 percent of customers stated that the event should occur again.

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The **Apalachee Regional Planning Council** developed a new intersection on a state highway and extended needed water and sewer services to support a 50-bed hospital with ER and diagnostic capabilities for a rural coastal community with limited financial ability to support the local share. The **Sacred Heart Hospital on the Gulf** project garnered the support of a major local development company, the Joe Company, which provided funding and project backing to support expansion. Without the private capital backing, this important regional hospital would not have been financially possible.

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Like many rural regions, the seven-county **Green River Area Development District** is plagued by disproportionately high rates of smoking, obesity, diabetes, cancer and other health challenges. The **Green River Regional Health Council** is a grassroots organization, comprising individuals and agencies from across a



**BE A ROLE MODEL...**  
**Put your best  
foot forward  
for good health.**  
**Healthy Horizons**

Image courtesy of GRADD



broad spectrum of society, including elected officials, healthcare professionals, district health department officers, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service representatives, businesspeople and private citizens. For over a decade, the council has published an annual regional health report card, examining specific health measures for each county. Until recently, however, the council was limited on specific steps they could take to address the identified areas of concern. That changed dramatically two years ago when GRADD received a \$466,757 grant that allowed the council to greatly expand its mission. Two new regional council director positions were created, and local health facilitators were hired in each of GRADD's rural counties. The county facilitators gather community input, set specific health goals to address, and sponsor educational programs to shine the spotlight on the importance of diet, exercise and healthy lifestyle choices.

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Princeton, Kentucky's **"Let's Paint the Town!"** project, a historic preservation/downtown revitalization effort, had the community rolling up its sleeves and volunteering. In 2006, a documentary of Princeton, which is located within the **Pennyrile Area Development District**, was to be filmed by Marvo Entertainment. The film crew could not find any flattering views of Princeton. Years of alterations to the building facades had caused the appearance of a once-thriving downtown community to deteriorate. Aluminum siding, wood-covered second-story windows and scaling paint were removed in order to expose the hidden treasures of the downtown buildings and park. After the need for the project was realized, citizen volunteers, under the vision of Mayor Gale Cherry, were quickly assembled to begin work on several downtown businesses. This project has reunited the community. Volunteers from ages 14 to 80 have given over 6,000 hours working on 50 downtown businesses. Over 120 sponsors have donated more than \$65,000. Also, citizens are talking about their downtown historic area coming back to life.



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# Disaster Preparedness and Recovery

Through the work of their Disaster Recovery Coordinator (DRC), the **Region XII Council of Governments** (COG) assists the regional and statewide business community to become more aware of and prepared for dealing with disasters and to develop the ability to return more quickly to pre-disaster operational levels. Region XII COG staff members have conducted much research and attended seminars and workshops to develop a **template for writing business disaster preparedness, recovery and continuity plans** that has been shared with the other DRCs statewide. The COG has worked diligently to provide information to the other state COGs, state DRCs, individual businesses, business organizations (Chambers of Commerce, Business Economic Development Groups), city and county officials, banks, business insurance providers, and others to better prepare all of the business sector for the occurrence of a disaster, either man-made or natural. The work has been recognized throughout the state and was cited through a statewide press release from the Rebuild Iowa Office that was established by the Governor of Iowa after the disasters of 2008.

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On January 26 – 27, 2009 an ice storm struck a number of western Kentucky communities in the **Pennyriple Area Development District**, including the City of Madisonville, bringing activity to a standstill and creating an emergency situation for the entire state. The storm resulted in loss of power and water to most Madisonville citizens, presenting an immediate threat to their health and safety. Faced with impaired communication resulting from the ice storm, Madisonville Mayor Will Cox **Used Social Media** to keep citizens informed and up-to-date on developments throughout the city. Mayor Cox held town meetings from his car and employed the popular social networking site Facebook to update citizens on the status of water, power, and safety resources. Many citizens went out of town to escape the ice storm. They were privy to information through the mayor's Facebook page that would have normally been available via radio or local television station, neither of which were operational for an extended period of time.

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The **Disaster Case Management Pilot project** (DCMP) focuses on long-term recovery case management for households in the 12-county **Deep East Texas Council of Governments** (DETCOG) service area. In addition, through a collaborative agreement with Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and the East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG), DETCOG

expanded its services to cover five counties in the ETCOG service area. The model is transferable to various types of disasters and especially applicable to large, mostly rural geographic areas. Clients and case managers work closely together to assess post-hurricane needs. They develop goal-oriented recovery plans and monitor the completion of the plans. Case managers make referrals to service providers and actively take on the role of client advocate, especially on behalf of vulnerable populations. In addition to working with Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Texas HHSC, DETCOG works closely with its long-established network of local governments, community and faith-based organizations, and churches to make the model project successful. The pilot project is expected to end in September 2010, and DETCOG will have assisted over 2,000 hurricane-impacted clients.

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Within the **South Plains Association of Governments** area, the City of Ralls received a grant for \$482,771 through FEMA and the Governor's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM) to construct an above-ground storm shelter in their community. With the completion of this project, the City of Ralls now has a shelter that is approximately 2,745 square feet and will hold 24 percent of the population of Ralls and 100 percent of Ralls High School and Middle School students. The storm shelter was constructed in the center of town with easy access for schools, businesses and city offices. The City of Ralls storm shelter also has an Emergency Operations Center that will house emergency equipment, maps, radios and information that can be used by emergency personnel. The **Ralls Community Storm Shelter** was one of the first Community Storm Shelters to be built in Texas through funds provided by FEMA and GDEM.

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Kennedy, MN (pop. 350) suffered the closing of their 50,000-square-foot school building due to consolidation. The building was in excellent condition, but the community could not afford the \$50,000 per year fuel oil heating bills. The community was approached by a wind farm developer who wanted to put his operations/maintenance facility in the building. He suggested that the community operate the building using renewable energy systems, including wind, geothermal, and solar power. The community is taking another step; due to its strategic location in a prime agricultural area, a biomass furnace component will be added to the heat and power sources for the building. Thanks to support from the **Northwest Regional Development Commission** and others, the building is being converted to the **Kennedy GO GREEN Business Incubator and Renewable Energy Training Center** for energy efficiency and renewable energy outreach and education. A training and job creation component will provide instruction and certification for residential and commercial building energy auditors. Demonstration models and education in renewable technologies will be part of the outreach program.

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With help from the **South Central Oregon Economic Development District**, a geothermal resource (once considered a nuisance to the owner of the ranch on which it was located) was converted into a geothermal well available for purchase or lease by businesses considering relocation or expansion into the area. As a result of this project, six geothermal wells on the ranch now heat an array of greenhouse operations. Green Fuels of Oregon, Inc. signed a lease with Liskey Farms to develop a biodiesel production facility in existing greenhouses. Local farmer Rick Walsh has located his Fresh Green Organic Garden Community Supported Agriculture facility at Liskey Farms. “Gone Fishing” Farms uses the wastewater from the Liskey Farms greenhouses to grow tropical fish for aquariums and tilapia for the food market. Team Klamath assisted a company that provides Augmentative Biological Controls (ABC) for spider mite pests. The company, Biotactics, farms eight different species of predatory mites for all different climates. Utilizing geothermal water to heat the greenhouses in this **Geothermal Agriculture Industrial Park** helped lower their utilities and eliminate the high expense of propane.

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Image courtesy of SMPDD

The **Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District's (SMPDD) Gulfport Trails Project** to map greenways and sustainable streets aims to provide the public with preserved green space, increased recreational and transportation options, improved health and a stronger connection to nature and sense of place. This demonstration project has the potential to impact the local transit authority's bike and bus program, as it shows the connection between bike routes and transit routes and is now being used by the Gulf Coast Heritage Trails Group as a starting point for similar projects. The Tourism Commission is also using the site to promote outdoor activities available to tourists. The project is being used in efforts by the SMPDD to obtain additional funding so the project may be replicated across the three coastal counties in Mississippi. The stakeholder group has now become the "Gulfport Greenways Development Committee" and will continue to work toward funding the recommended trail improvements and additions.

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A small Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) project plus their own matching funds allowed the **Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD)** to convene community members to talk about their interest in bike development. Out of those conversations came a list of many potential projects, some of which were implemented with the RBEG funds. The RBEG **Bicycle Tourism Project** raised funds and installed a bike rack on the public transit van. NEOEDD encouraged Travel Oregon to pilot their Rural Tourism Studio workshops in Wallowa County and include a focus on bicycle tourism. Fundraising, collaboration and community support are now bearing fruit with the creation of two separate cycling maps for Wallowa County, one with mountain

# Greenways, Trails and Bicycle/Pedestrian Plans

bike routes and one with road routes. Trail development has also taken place as part of a collaborative effort, with the installation of way-finding and informational signage. Another important project is in the works—NEOEDD is working with the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority to build a Rail with Trail along the Minam River corridor on right-of-way owned by WURA. That project is in the early development stage, but is supported by the railroad and shows great promise and enthusiasm for lasting economic and community benefits. An effort is also underway to designate a Scenic Bikeway along the signature Wallowa Mountain Loop cycling route, a favorite route of Cycle Oregon.

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The **Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission** has partnered with multiple state agencies to implement the goals of the Northwest Regional Greenways Plan through the **Greenways Implementation Block Grant Program**. The Northwest Pennsylvania Greenways Plan is recognized as a State Priority to establish the connectivity of conservation and recreation greenways.



This partnership serves as a model in the Commonwealth to provide the financial assistance needed to fund and finish those eligible projects that have been identified with a Regional Greenways Plan. These funding opportunities have a maximum request for an individual project set at \$40,000, are announced in rounds, and may be funded through one or multiple partners. The administration is simplified for the state agencies by funneling through one organization, the Northwest Commission. In response to the first and second rounds of funding, 40 applications were submitted requesting \$1.2 million dollars, for total project costs exceeding \$2.5 million. Of these projects, seven projects were chosen to receive \$197,000 in awards.

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The **Down Payment Assistance Program** has provided funds to more than 150 low- to moderate-income families since the program was implemented in 2002. With support from the **Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District** in partnership with USDA, the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, and Federal Home Land Bank, the program has helped to improve the availability of housing, promote home ownership, increase attractiveness of designated underdeveloped neighborhoods, and increase local employment. The program is designated for 19 counties in the Northeast and Central Investment Zones in Nebraska.

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## Industry Cluster Support

To enhance the economic development of their region, the **Eastern Carolina Council of Governments** and other partners are developing a strategy for development of an industry-led aerospace cluster in eastern North Carolina. With construction of a Spirit AeroSystems facility underway at a multimodal industrial park in Kinston, Lenoir County, the region will capitalize on the project by creating the environment necessary for the **Aerospace Cluster Project**. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) exercise was conducted with the Defense Aerospace Advisory Committee. Strategies were then developed using this information to implement current planning projects and facilitate development. The report can serve as a resource document, with its conclusions and strategies able to be replicated by other communities to support cluster development.

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The **Columbia River Gorge Technology Alliance** (CRGTA) was created by the **Mid-Columbia Economic Development District** (MCEDD) and regional technology businesses in 2005. The CRGTA hosts monthly educational and networking meetings, issues a monthly e-newsletter and acts as the primary connection point among many technology businesses. In 2009, CRGTA initiated development of an organizational sustainability plan to research the impact of the organization on the local economy and ways it can increase the benefits it brings. The resulting white paper concluded that formation of the organization has led to further development and growth of the technology cluster. Businesses have grown in revenue and number of employees. New businesses have also developed—several as spinoffs from older technology businesses. The technology cluster has helped diversify the

# Industry Cluster Support

region's traditional agricultural economy. CRGTA has launched several recent activities to further promote regional technology businesses, including emailing a weekly Member Spotlight and creating mentorships between board members and member companies. CRGTA also recently developed a youth robotics program to encourage early technology education in support of workforce development.

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The **South Central Oregon Economic Development District (SCOEDD)** sought to establish a globally competitive Green Building and value-added wood product industry cluster by utilizing existing and emerging partnerships with business and industry. The **South Central Oregon Green Building Cluster Partnership** has resulted in the formation of the Klamath Panel Alliance (KPA), a joint initiative among four wood product companies with facilities in Klamath Falls. The intent of KPA is to develop and execute a strategy to expand markets and create financial benefit for each individual company. SCOEDD provided financial and logistical support for the KPA, which has developed a brochure to market the group as a one-stop shop for LEED-compliant wood products.

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# Intergovernmental

The **Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC)** conducted the **Avon Park Air Force Range Joint Land Use Study (JLUS)** in collaboration with Avon Park Air Force Range, four counties (Highlands, Okeechobee, Osceola and Polk) and three cities (Avon Park, Frostproof and Sebring) that are affected by the military training activities on the range. The study analyzed planned future land uses and military activities for compatibility and made recommendations for changes in land use and other protective measures. A JLUS Working Group of staff from each jurisdiction met to review and approve the data that was developed by the study consultants. To provide policy guidance, the partner jurisdictions each named an elected representative to serve on the JLUS Policy Committee. The CFRPC is working with each jurisdiction to implement the study recommendations.

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In 2003, the **Mid-Region Council of Governments** formed the **Agriculture Collaborative** to raise the economic vitality of local agriculture, address the issue of disappearing farmland and encourage agriculture/local food entrepreneurs. Today, the Agriculture Collaborative hosts monthly meetings, addressing topics that range from technical farming tips to business planning; organizes field trips and special events; utilizes innovative outreach techniques; and has implemented a variety of special projects. Example projects include farm to restaurant workshops; an e-newsletter, blog and social networking outreach; and an annual local food festival, which this year attracted more than 3,000 locavores.

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Photos courtesy of MRCOG

The **Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission** developed the **Central Ohio Local Food System Assessment and Plan**, a detailed assessment of the current status of their regional food system. Through this, they learned that demand for locally produced food is growing and that the local production of food would make the region more resilient in the face of future disruptions, particularly those due to crop failures elsewhere and growing scarcity of oil. Numerous barriers to the local production, processing and distribution of food were also identified, which explain why the vast majority of food now must be shipped in from outside the region. Based on this assessment, a 24-point plan was created to revitalize the regional food system. Only one other region in the country has done such an assessment (although a number of cities have). Implementation of the plan has begun, focusing on creating a Regional Food System Council to carry out the plan.



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# Redevelopment

With cash and in-kind match from the City of Philadelphia, Mississippi, the **East Central Planning and Development District** contributed to a **Train Depot Renovation** that was completed in three phases. The city received funds from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to stabilize the abandoned building and then the City used a CDBG grant to renovate the interior into office space for the “Community Development Partnership” (the local chamber of economic development offices). Funding from Rural Development and the Mississippi Department of Transportation allowed for parking lot pavement, landscaping and signage. Tourists visit the building for information about local activities and interests.

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The **Land-of-Sky Regional Council** used a Regional Environmental Priorities Project grant from EPA to conduct a student design competition. Titled “**Recycle This Site,**” the competition offered college students the chance to design an environmentally sound mixed-use, live, play and work space in Asheville’s artistic River District. Students were challenged

to think creatively about how to meet or exceed the regulatory requirements for erosion control, stormwater management, flood plain development and brownfields compliance. Additionally, entrants were expected to incorporate innovative building techniques, such as LEED certification and low impact development methods along with solar, wind, geothermal and greywater options. Competitors accessed information and maps for the site through Land-of-Sky’s website and Facebook page. Students were invited to tour the site and meet with experts to discuss environmental challenges on the site. Over 70 submissions were entered by more than 200 students. The end product is a professional video, available on the internet which documents the competition and is applicable to other projects regardless of location. A companion PowerPoint product offers multiple design slides for use by planners and local officials.

Land-of-Sky Regional Council  
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For many years, the **Middle Georgia Regional Commission** discussed the benefits of the ability to offer **foreign trade zone (FTZ)** benefits to companies located in Middle Georgia. However, economic development projects in 2007 and 2008 served as the impetus for action. Rather than limit FTZ benefits to a single location and user, Middle Georgia pursued the FTZ designation of multiple industrial parks through a relationship with Georgia Foreign Trade Zone 26. Today, 950 acres in Middle Georgia industrial parks are designated as FTZ sites. If a qualified user is identified in a location not included in one of the industrial parks with FTZ benefits, the company may pursue FTZ benefits through the Georgia Foreign Trade Zone 26. Companies may use FTZs for storage or distribution activities or, after specific approval by the U.S. FTZ Board, for manufacturing.

Middle Georgia Regional Commission  
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Using a \$5 million grant award and with support from the **Lincoln Trail Area Development District** and other partners, the **Wired65 Regional Competitiveness Strategy** was created to outline concise focus and approach for utilizing funds in a 26-county region in



Kentucky and southern Indiana. This strategy became the blueprint to position the Wired65 region in a global environment. Key focus areas include improving and promoting the education system, investing in economic and workforce development projects in regional priority sectors, and focus on quality of place. To address these areas, Wired65 made two types of investments: Quantum Fund to drive timely, significant and systemic change; and the Catalytic Fund to test ideas and start projects that result in small scale, yet significant change and result in related projects with funding from other sources. This regional approach allowed for leveraging resources and sharing ideas to respond to demands of regional economy and make significant gains in workforce development to support economy.

Lincoln Trail Area Development District  
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The **Eastern Maine Development Corporation** realized that an innovative approach to addressing Maine's limited resources, transportation gaps, remoteness, and energy inefficiencies to turn the economy around was critical. The statewide **Mobilize Maine Initiative** is working to support efforts to help the region grow and prosper. Local business and community leaders regularly convene to bring their energy, enthusiasm and ideas to guide planning and take stewardship of the region's

# Regional Economic Development

economic future. Initial goals have been identified and targeted for completion in 2015; Mobilize Maine is now focusing efforts to launch programs and projects. The ultimate goal is to positively impact communities through an economic foundation that is innovative, vibrant and sustainable, and fostering communities where people of all ages choose to live and work, earning a livable wage.

Eastern Maine Development Corporation

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# Sustainable Development

**Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC) Green Communities Certification** program is the only program in the country that encourages local governments to reduce their environmental footprint and recognizes communities that are leading the way to a more sustainable region. Launched in 2009, nine local governments (three counties and six cities) have earned Green Communities Certification by implementing measures in such categories as green building, water efficiency, alternative energy, recycling, green space protection and transportation. To become certified, a local government provides documentation of the measures for which they are seeking points. The checklist of measures is posted on the ARC Website as is a manual that describes each measure fully and lists what documentation is required for each. ARC staff conducts a site visit to confirm that the local government has met the requirements of the program. Local governments that earn certification receive a plaque at an ARC board meeting and are recognized at the organization's "State of the Region" breakfast. The program is becoming a way for local governments to learn from each other and to share best practices.

Atlanta Regional Commission

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Three local government facilities green features: a juvenile courthouse, park and government center. Photos courtesy of Atlanta Regional Commission.

Through the regional green business standards process called the **Petal Project**, **East Central Intergovernmental Association** (ECIA) staff members conduct site visits to regional companies to further the region's sustainability. ECIA promotes and teaches sustainable business practices that will make a difference in the environment through reducing greenhouse gas emissions and have a positive impact for business partners in the region. ECIA's Petal Project standards consist of several required and optional measures for five emphasis areas: waste reduction, energy conservation, water conservation, pollution prevention, and staff education. Due to the large numbers of requirements and the understanding that many companies will need extended periods of time to complete the criteria for all five areas, the structure of the program is such that a company can complete one area at a time and be recognized for each success. Once the company fulfills the criteria for one area, they will receive designation as a green business in progress and one piece of the green business standards logo. They will not receive the entire logo until all five areas have been completed. So far, 11 businesses participate in the program.



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In response to new ozone regulations issued by EPA in 2008, the Southeast Missouri Air Quality Committee met monthly for almost a year, guiding the preparation of a **Clean Air Action Plan** offering achievable approaches to address the issue in rural areas. The plan was adopted by the **Southeast Missouri Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission** board in November 2009. Following adoption, it was submitted to local governments for support. To date, formal resolutions of support have been received from six of seven member counties and several municipalities including the four largest cities in the region. The process involved a true public/private partnership. Roughly half of those in attendance at any meeting were from private sector businesses. Moreover, over half of the funding used to support this effort came from the private sector.

Southeast Missouri Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission  
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# Sustainable Development

This **Southwestern North Carolina Planning & Economic Development Commission** planning project was the most extensive ever embarked upon in the North Carolina mountains, in an area that has long shunned any sort of land development regulation. The effort specifically avoided the stigma associated with the implementation of zoning and focused instead on voluntary efforts to advocate better planning through education and awareness. The result of the year-long, \$400,000 effort was the production of the **Mountain Landscapes Initiative Region A Toolbox**, a thoroughly researched and extensively illustrated document that is intended to serve as a best-practices guidebook to other rural, mountain communities throughout the country. Seeded by a nonprofit with hopes of expanding the idea to an even broader Western North Carolina constituency, the Toolbox effort attracted funding from banks, utilities, developers, foundations, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and six of the seven county governments. The Toolbox is a manual for achieving the triple bottom line of environmental, social and economic sustainability across a 200-mile-wide region. It argues for the power of appropriate scales of urbanism to support sustainability, and it provides implementable guidelines for action down to the lot level. The Next Steps Fund is providing up to \$10,000 in matching grants to nonprofits and communities to move forward on coding proposals, master plans, architectural guidelines and teaching opportunities.

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Photos courtesy of Southwestern Commission

Currently, the best available digital elevation data for the entire coastal area of Georgia is from the USGS 30-meter Digital Elevation Models (DEMs). This data is inadequate for anything but regional use. The area served by the **Coastal Regional Commission of Georgia** is in need of high-resolution elevation data accurate enough to produce 1 to 2 ft. contours and suitable for a wide variety of economic and environmental needs including flood and storm surge modeling, community planning, and disaster preparedness. **Coastal Georgia Elevation Project (CGEP)** is an ad hoc group of Federal, State, and local governments to acquire very expensive data at a low cost by pooling resources and removing redundancies. CGEP contracted to create LiDAR point cloud with 1.4-meter maximum post spacing (unobstructed), a Vertical Bare earth accuracy of 18.5 cm (7.25 in) RMS minimum, and a Vertical in Vegetation of 37 cm (15 in) RMS minimum. The LiDAR data, once hydrologically corrected, will be used to generate break lines and a gridded 1-meter DEM in raster binary format will be compiled. With those products, a contour can be generated for the entire Georgia Coast. FEMA has committed to using the CGEP data to produced flood/surge mapping for all tidal influenced counties in Georgia.

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The City of Valdosta was awarded a Georgia Historic Preservation Fund grant by the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, to produce a **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-enabled Sunset Hill Cemetery Online Map and Database** to be used by family members, historians, genealogists, and others interested in learning about those laid to rest in the city-owned cemetery. Created with assistance from the **Southern Georgia Regional Commission**, this innovative resource creatively combines technology and City history and is a valuable archive of historical and genealogical information available to anyone with Internet access. There is now a spatial database of all burials within cemetery grounds which did not exist before. This toolset enhances the City of Valdosta's ability to attract genealogical tourism. Through the development of this mapping application, the preservation of gravesites of early and past Valdostans is made easier.

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Image courtesy of SGRC



# Technology

The Valdosta-Lowndes Industrial Authority (VLIA) was seeking lands to purchase and reserve for future industrial development. The objective ranking of over 40,000 parcels in the county and subsequent selection of only those with the most suitable characteristics was daunting. This task was made easier by **Utilizing Geospatial Tools for Industrial Land Selection** through the Valdosta Lowndes Regional (VALOR) GIS program housed at the **Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC)**. The characteristics of each parcel in the county were analyzed and then used to score each parcel. These site selection criteria included access to appropriate road and rail networks, soil capabilities, percentage of land area in wetlands, access to appropriate utilities, and planned and existing residential developments. The results of the analysis and leveraging of past spatial data investments made the decisionmaking process not just easier but quicker and more defensible. As a result, the VLIA purchased several tracts in 2009 to preserve for industrial development. Each tract was among the top scorers in the GIS analysis performed by SGRC staff.

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Building a GIS system from scratch, **Golden Triangle Planning and Development District, Inc.** assisted Choctaw County, Mississippi with projects such as 911 addressing, mapping the location and building type for each structure in the county, routing, digital parcel development, centerline development, school bus routing, trash truck routing and related activities. The project helped the county maintain static point inventory such as exact house location addressing, cell phone towers, bridges, road maintenance, road sign information, and whether the road is paved or gravel for exact road miles. FEMA used the data for the tornado that hit Choctaw County on April 24, 2010 (killing five people), making Choctaw



This home in Choctaw County, MS suffered damage during the tornado. Photos courtesy of GTPDD.



County one of the fastest recovery efforts in Mississippi. The **Choctaw County GIS Assistance Initiative** also identified exact house locations, which saved the school district over \$65,000 in a 180-day school year by rerouting school buses, for a cost of only \$10,000. The solid waste department saved by letting the county take over its trash pickup service and optimize routing.

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The **Buckeye Hills-Hocking Valley Regional Development District Client Mapping Project** produced a secure, online mapping tool that assists with providing fast and accurate locations for emergency response. Each of the eight counties and the EMA/911 offices in the region can access the online tool to identify Area Agency on Aging (AAA) clients that are at-risk and may need assistance evacuating in case of an emergency (tornado, flood, brush fire, ice storm, etc.). This project is unique because it was completed using AAA case managers as data collectors for the GPS data portion of the project. The data was then merged and joined with basic client information that may be needed in the event of an emergency, particularly when first responders are dispatched to locations with multiple housing units, making the location of the at-risk individuals difficult.

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**Upstate Property Navigator** combines satellite imagery, property information, local demographic data and a unique ability to manipulate maps according to a visitor's unique needs. From sketching a building site to learning the number of college-educated workers in the area, the Property Navigator equips site consultants to understand the benefits of doing business in the 10-county South Carolina Upstate area without even visiting the region. To complete the navigator, **South Carolina Appalachian Council of Governments** staff provided project design, technical development, website and data hosting, and ongoing support through database maintenance and tool innovations. The new Property Navigator builds on the successes of previous applications and takes advantage of cutting-edge technology

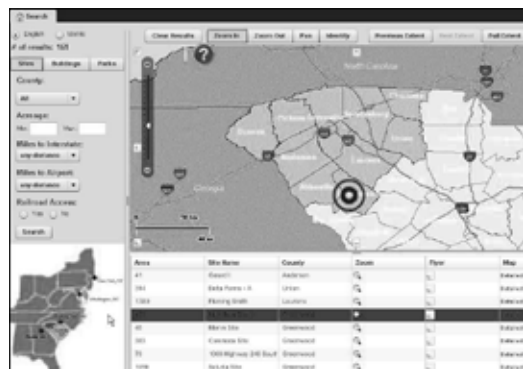


Image courtesy of SCACOG

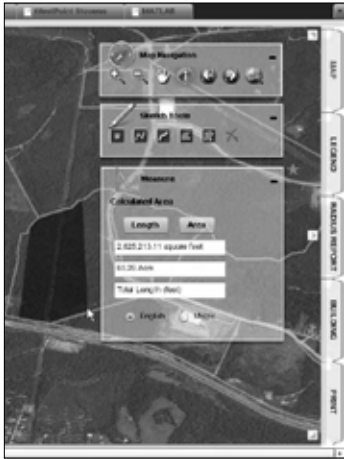


Image courtesy of SCACOG

to provide a greater variety of ways to aid the decision-making process for site selection and other economic development tasks. The innovative web tools also represent a new way for local and regional planning agencies to deliver data and visualize community resources.

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The **Cleveland Historic Cemetery** was established in 1866 on a two-acre lot centrally located in the downtown area of the City of Cleveland, in White County, GA. The Board of Trustees' limited burial

records were kept in paper format and in the board members' memories. The Trustees requested that **Georgia Mountain Regional Commission (GMRC)** staff conduct a full inventory of marked and unmarked burial sites. GMRC staff acquired digital parcel information and aerial photography for the two-acre area and proceeded to establish ground control using a Global Positioning System. Each monument and headstone was digitally located using GPS. Family plots were outlined and identified, and over 800 grave sites were inventoried on the final map of the cemetery. To locate the unmarked gravesites, an open grid was established and an organized method of sub-surface archeological testing and probing was conducted, resulting in discovery of 67 unmarked grave sites. Encroachments on unmarked grave sites were also recorded on the final map for future reference. Final deliverables included a full report of the findings, a detailed map of the cemetery and a digital cross referenced inventory spreadsheet, linked to headstone and marker photographs.

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The **Stimulus Training and Employment Program (STEP)** was an extension of a **Buffalo Trace Area Development District** Summer Youth Program intended to serve at-risk, unemployed youth. STEP was created with ARRA Stimulus Funds because unemployed youth often face a hard battle in obtaining employment, competing with more experienced adults for the same jobs. STEP provided an individualized youth applicant-to-job matching program where individual youths' strengths were highlighted to employers. The program operated from November 2009 to March 2010. Participants completed six job readiness workshops including resume/application, interviewing skills, work ethic, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. After completion of the job readiness workshops, participants were placed in real world work experiences. Twenty-seven youth participated in the program. Fourteen completed the workshops and work experience. Ten have become employed since their participation concluded, while one is in post-secondary training.



Buffalo Trace Area Development District/ TENCO Workforce Investment Area

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Beginning in July 2009, **Eastern Maine Development Council (EMDC)** became the first integrated economic and workforce development area in the state of Maine under the **Blueprint for Success: A New Architecture for Business and Workforce Initiatives**. In addition to EMDC's traditional economic and community development responsibilities, EMDC now has operational responsibility for the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board as well as the region's service delivery for all Workforce Investment Act program services. Bringing these functions under one roof has provided the region with a single portal for services for both business and workforce. For their workforce development system, this approach supports higher levels of services to the region's job seekers and those youth and dislocated workers who need to acquire the skills that employers are demanding. As a result, these services have improved both in terms of number of workers served, and in terms of outcomes including higher job placement rates and wages. It has also revived and increased participation of businesses in EMDC's economic development and community services. The integration process has positioned the region to secure additional resources for new investment, particularly for skills development in new and growing industries including the green construction and healthcare sectors.

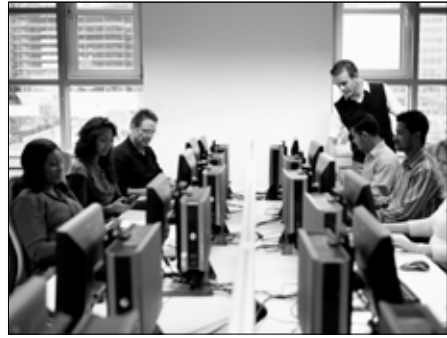
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# Workforce Development

Three years ago, the **Mid-East Commission** and the Region Q Workforce Development Board began to engage employers of high-growth industries to use assessments to identify and transition workers affected by the continued economic downturn. This **Strategic Workforce Planning** approach uncovered a need for secession planning and foundational skills assessment for recruitment for entry level occupations. Subsequently, the decision to use the WorkKeys job profiling system to assess the skills needed for chemical manufacturing occupations began. Since then, local employer PotashCorp began using the Personal Skills Assessment for Performance to assess risky behavior of an applicant as a pre-screening tool. This coupled with the WorkKeys Job Readiness assessments, used to measure an applicant's foundational skills, and recent profiles conducted at PotashCorp helped identify prospective recruits for entry into occupations vacated by retirement and attrition. This one-two-three approach to recruitment has yielded great benefits and shows promise for high stakes recruitment beyond entry level occupations. The company has started assessing the incumbent workforce as a requirement for promotion using the WorkKeys Foundational Skills assessments.



Mid-East Commission  
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The **Regional Employment Advancement Career Training Center (REACT)** is located in the Forsyth County JobLink and is a **Northwest Piedmont Workforce Development Board** initiative. REACT provides on-site, short-term training in collaboration with the Community College and other approved training providers. The JobLink/REACT Center occupies 29,000 square feet of space, with seven

classrooms, conference areas and office space for employers and partners. A cost share agreement contributes to the site's sustainability. The JobLink provides: short-term training, employability labs, GED classes, career assessment and planning, access to training and education services, and Career Readiness Certification. Since opening in August of 2008, this facility has provided short term training to over 1,500 customers. The City of Winston-Salem expanded the city's public transportation services to include



additional opportunities for customers to be dropped off and picked up at the training site due to the activity at this facility. JobLink Partnerships have increased by 50 percent.

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**The Northwest Piedmont Workforce Development Board** and four other regional Workforce Boards joined with the North Carolina Apprenticeship and Training Bureau in a demonstration project to place more workers in apprenticeship programs and to increase the number of employers offering apprenticeships. Sixty-two pre-apprentices with gaps that made them not yet eligible to enter an apprenticeship were identified. Their gaps were remediated through short-term interventions, and they were referred to employers who offer apprenticeship programs. Interventions offered through the **Regional Pre-Apprenticeship Project** included OSHA training, First Aid/CPR, Career Readiness Certification, Work Experience, job-seeking skills classes and intensive, targeted case management. The participants also received specific short-term training requested by potential employers such as fork lift training and Excel classes. A 30-hour Pre-Employment for Food Preparation training class was designed in consultation with a prospective employer who then employed most of the pre-employment class. A group of 12 Hispanic workers dislocated from a textile plant received an intensive 140-hour Technical English course designed for persons working in maintenance. Twelve employers in the region committed to meeting with the North Carolina Apprenticeship Bureau to discuss establishing apprenticeship programs.



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In the area served by the **Southwest Tennessee Development District**, the 12 rural counties investing in the **Regional Economic Development Initiative** (REDI) have higher than state average unemployment and poverty rates and lower than state average post-secondary educational attainment and per capita income. The cornerstone of REDI is Southwest Tennessee Educational Pathways (STEP), a program designed to increase the number of students enrolling in post secondary

education. STEP is being implemented in two phases: a volunteer mentoring program in each county and “last dollar” scholarships for two years of community or technical college. Mentors work with at risk and potential first generation college students, advising them on career paths and subject choices and assisting in completing college entrance applications and financial aid forms. A parallel tract of job creation in the region is focused on creating technology based jobs, including development of web-based job and entrepreneurship promotion in “digital factories.” One county that has been involved in the college access program for five years has increased its college enrollment rate from 15 percent to 85 percent. Each of the participating counties has begun their mentoring program and will be fully implemented beginning with the fall of 2010. The initial “digital factory” pilot program now has 30 employees earning between \$10 and \$25 per hour. Several employees also have full benefits.

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