



HOW TO BUILD THE CEDS STRATEGY COMMITTEE



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Conducting the regional, five-year [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\)](#) is one of the defining roles of an Economic Development District (EDD). Through the CEDS process, EDDs help their regions:

- Identify pressing economic concerns and challenges in their local and regional economies.
- Serve as the regional forum for coordinating economic development efforts on the local level.
- Guide regional partners in implementing ready-to-go, community-sourced, economic development strategies.
- Help regional partners remain accountable to their commitments to implement economic development strategies.
- Position their communities to access funding for economic development assistance projects available from the [U.S. Economic Development Administration \(EDA\)](#) and other relevant federal, state and local sources.

To ensure that identified strategies are relevant and sourced from the region, the CEDS must be led by a CEDS Strategy Committee that is comprised of regional economic development stakeholders. EDA gives wide latitude to EDDs in determining who will serve on the CEDS Strategy Committee.

[13 CFR §303.6, the regulation that covers the CEDS planning process](#), reads:

“The Planning Organization must appoint a Strategy Committee. The Strategy Committee must represent the main economic interests of the Region, which may include Indian tribes, the private sector, State and other public officials, community leaders, private individuals, representatives of workforce development boards, institutions of higher education, minority and labor groups, and others who can contribute to and benefit from improved economic development in the relevant Region. In addition, the Strategy Committee must demonstrate the capacity to undertake a collaborative and effective planning process.”

While this regulation provides considerable flexibility and discretion for EDDs when building their CEDS Strategy Committee, some EDDs may struggle to prioritize which regional stakeholders are the **best fit** to serve on the CEDS Strategy Committee.

This resource will help EDDs not just simply meet the above-referenced regulatory requirements listed in [13 CFR §303.6](#), but help EDDs identify regional stakeholders that have the political will, funding capacity, and expertise to drive smart economic development through the CEDS planning process.

A special thanks to North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission for submitting the cover photo of this report to NADO's 2023 Member Photo Contest.



INPUT THAT COUNTS

The CEDS Strategy Committee's main responsibility is providing input to and guiding the direction of the CEDS process. EDDs should aim for members of the committee to have a wide variety of backgrounds, diversity of opinions, lived experiences, and a geographic reach that is representative of their region so that the resulting CEDS is realistic, actionable, and useful. EDDs should also aim for their CEDS Strategy Committee to reflect the composition of local and regional economies. Typically, EDDs ask representatives of the region's top employers to participate on the CEDS Strategy Committee.

EDDs have had success inviting several of the regional organization's board members to participate, as well as subject-matter experts working in their region to provide additional, topical expertise. Board members can serve in a foundational role on a CEDS Strategy Committee, as they typically know who in their communities can be considered subject-matter experts and can help EDDs recruit these experts to participate.

TRAITS TO LOOK FOR

Each region is different, and each regional economy has different strengths and opportunities for growth. One region's CEDS Strategy Committee may look completely different from a neighboring region's CEDS Strategy Committee based on the unique economic conditions in the area. However, there are some overarching traits EDDs can look for in CEDS Strategy Committee members that can help EDDs narrow down their search.

EDDs should look for individuals with the following traits who can contribute to building and implementing the CEDS. Participants on the CEDS Strategy Committee should possess the following:

A Collaborative Planning Mindset

Participants will likely have different priorities for what is important for the region's economic success. There is no way around some level of disagreement when discussing a topic as broad as regional economic development. But having members who have a collaborative planning mindset and who can empathize with and understand another participant's priorities for the region is vital for a successful CEDS Strategy Committee. Disagreement and having a diversity of opinions is good. Participants must be able to discuss different priorities and be able to work together to find the best solution for the region.



Ability to Read and Use Data

Participating in a CEDS Strategy Committee will involve analyzing and interpreting economic indicators and datapoints for the region and its' communities. These indicators and datapoints will be the basis for how the CEDS Strategy Committee forms what topics they focus on, what recommendations they prescribe, and strategies they will use for success. Being familiar with how to analyze economic data and how to make an informed decision from the data is vital for participating in the CEDS Strategy Committee.

Wicked Problem Solver

Regional economic development, especially in rural regions, can be considered a ["wicked problem:"](#) a problem where there is no clear solution and there are many contributing, often times conflicting or contradictory factors at the root of the problem. CEDS Strategy Committee members must bring a problem-solving approach to their work. This will help committee members untangle the web of rural economic development and provide real solutions for their regions.

Passion for the Region's Success

The best CEDS Strategy Committee members are those who are passionate about and invested in the future economic success of the region. The CEDS is meant to provide a roadmap for economic prosperity in a region and give a forum for those who care to find common ways to solve the region's economic issues. Those who are passionate about the region should be passionate about the CEDS and what a strong CEDS can do for their region.

CEDS IN SOUTHWEST TENNESSEE

The [Southwest Tennessee Development District \(SWTDD\)](#) CEDS Committee demonstrates a model of sourcing stakeholder input through a core group of elected officials that guide the CEDS process while adding input from state and regional subject-matter experts who can provide insight into the known economic issues affecting the region.

For SWTDD, the core group of elected officials is supplemented by several different unique representatives of the region's economic interests. SWTDD sought perspectives from state congressional representatives who provided insight into state-level policy and funding decisions. Regional education and workforce development organizations like representatives from the University of Tennessee system that have campuses in the region, local school districts, community colleges, and workforce development training groups offered expertise on the workforce development and education needs of the region. Additionally, SWTDD

Lead Coordinators and Collaborators

These entities were instrumental in the coordination of the planning process that resulted in this planning document.

Chester County Mayor and Staff	Haywood County Mayor and Staff
City of Henderson Mayor and Staff	Town of Stanton Mayor
Decatur County Chamber of Commerce	City of Lexington Mayor and Staff
Decatur County Mayor	Henderson County Mayor and Staff
City of Bolivar Mayor	Parker's Crossroads Mayor
City of Bolivar Administrator	Parker's Crossroad City Manager
Hardeman County Mayor and Staff	Henderson County Mayor and Staff
Hardin County Mayor and Staff	Scotts Hill Mayor and City Staff
Hardin County Schools Superintendent	City of Jackson Mayor and Staff
Hardin County Chamber of Commerce	City of Jackson Chamber of Commerce
Hardin County Convention & Visitors Bureau	Madison County Mayor and Staff
Savannah Industrial Development Corporation	McNairy County Chamber of Commerce
City of Brownsville Mayor and Staff	McNairy County Mayor and Staff
Brownsville Chamber of Commerce	

Regional Contributors

These entities represent regional organizations serving Southwest TN that participated in the planning process across the eight SWTDD counties.

Southwest Human Resource Agency
Tennessee College of Applied Technology- Crump
Tennessee Department of Economic & Community Development
Tennessee State Representatives
Tennessee State Senators
UT Institute of Agriculture (UTIA)
UT Extension
UT Martin-Selmer
West Tennessee Healthcare
Southwest Tennessee Workforce Development
Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development
West Tennessee Industrial Association

[Southwest Tennessee Development District 2022-2027 CEDS](#)

drive transformative economic impact in your region. It helps to first identify organizations or entities that have a vested interest in regional economic development and the future economic success of the region and then identify who within those organizations can best represent the organization. When considering the composition of your CEDS committee, ask yourself:

1. Do you have data, past plans, or other stakeholder input that confirms the highest-priority issues affecting your region?
2. What organizations or entities are working in the region to address these priority issues? What service areas do these organizations have? Are they focused on one community or spread across multiple counties?
3. Can you rely on any state-level departments to participate? Consider which departments routinely work with the EDD and the cities and counties in the region. How can their participation influence the CEDS process?
4. Who at these organizations would have the ability to attend CEDS Strategy Committee meetings? Does this person also have the political will, funding capacity, and expertise needed to help the EDD implement identified strategies?
5. Are there parts of the region or populations that have historically been left out of past planning processes? Consider how their participation can better inform inclusive and

sought insight from private sector representatives from the West Tennessee Industrial Association, local chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations, who represented the region's larger industrial base and employers. Rounding out the Strategy Committee with local convention and visitor bureau representatives who have insight into the region's tourism economy, the composition of the SWTDD CEDS Strategy Committee cast a wide net to effectively source input that represented the region's economy.

BUILDING THE TEAM

Along with the above **TRAITS TO LOOK FOR**, use the following questions to help guide your CEDS Strategy Committee selection process and identify stakeholders that have the political will, funding capacity, and expertise needed to

region-wide economic development. New Growth Innovation [Network's Inclusive Recovery Toolkit](#) can provide some help in outreach to these communities.

TIP: Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many EDDs have found success incorporating representatives from major hospital groups, school districts, and medical services providers into the CEDS process to deliver key insights on social determinants of health and community resilience. These organizations may also be one of the larger employers in the region.

PRESSING ISSUES

To get input that counts, consider the pressing issues you already know exist in your region: broadband access, downtown redevelopment, minority entrepreneurship, coastal resilience, housing, workforce upskilling or reskilling, intermodal transportation, etc.



For some regions, there are issues so critical to the region's economic success that EDDs have created CEDS sub-committees that are tasked with focusing on specific topic areas.

For example, [North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission \(NCPRPDC\)](#) established a [CEDS Resilience Sub-Committee](#) that was tasked with incorporating long-term resilience considerations into the CEDS.

EDDs should consider how the form and structure of the CEDS Strategy Committee can be built to draw out ideas from participants and facilitate the exchange of information from around the region. EDDs have used sub-committees, geographic-specific sub-groups for certain priority cities and counties, and other creative structures to get input that reflects the economic conditions of the region.

TIP: The [Wealth Creation framework](#) of economic development can provide a starting point for understanding the multiple forms of wealth and assets that exist in your region. This framework can help you select some members of the CEDS Strategy Committee. Ideally, a CEDS Strategy Committee would have representation that covers each of the eight forms of capital listed in [this asset tool](#).

CEDS RESILIENCE SUB- COMMITTEE

Brittany Wortman, North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission

Amy Kessler, North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission

Sherry Dumire, North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission

Jodi Brennan, Clearfield County, Pennsylvania

Tina Gradizzi, City of St. Marys, Pennsylvania

Pam Streich, Workforce Solutions for North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission

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Katie Donald Punxsutawney Groundhog Club

MAKING THE CASE FOR PARTICIPATING

Involvement in a CEDS Committee is a valuable opportunity for a local leader to help guide the regional economic development conversation and develop partnerships for their own work. However, being a part of the CEDS planning process can be time consuming for participants who each likely have other commitments competing for their time. Additionally, participants may have had poor experiences with past planning processes that were never implemented. Poor implementation in past planning processes can reduce people's confidence in the value of all planning work. EDDs should use the following tips to help inform their outreach strategies for the CEDS Strategy Committee:

Larger Regional Vision for Economic Success

EDDs should frame all their stakeholder outreach under the idea of emphasizing that participants, both through the CEDS Strategy Committee and any public input opportunities, are contributing to and shaping the economic vision for the region for the next five years. The CEDS can be the vehicle for those who care about the region's economic success to play a real role in shaping what the regional roadmap for economic success looks like. EDDs should use their outreach to make participants feel like an invitation to serve on the CEDS Strategy Committee is an honor and a sign of respect for that individual's expertise and what they can contribute to the planning process.

Past Successes showing Future Value

EDDs have been able to strengthen the economic competitiveness of their region through specific projects identified through the CEDS. Highlighting these past successes should be central to an EDDs stakeholder outreach process. For example, when reaching out to a potential CEDS Strategy Committee member, EDDs should identify the funding amounts, the role the EDD played, and the funding source for the following:

- Past or active projects the EDD has completed or is working on in the stakeholder's geographic area.
- Completed projects that were originally identified in past CEDS.
- Past projects completed in partnership with the local governments in their area.
- Past projects that have directly involved the stakeholder's organization or like entities.

Presenting this information to the potential CEDS Strategy Committee will help them better understand the value of the CEDS and the value of working with the EDD. If an EDD doesn't have projects to share with these above conditions, consider highlighting like projects from neighboring regions or projects completed with similar organizations/entities from other parts of the region.

CEDS as a Conduit for Funding

EDA requires applications for [Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance](#) to make a connection between the project requesting funds and the region's CEDS. Additionally, other federal funding agencies typically require applications for project funding to include linkages to existing planning from the region or community. Communicating this with stakeholders can help convince them to participate in the CEDS planning process. The CEDS can then be seen as a conduit to access EDA funding and other sources of funding.

Reframing/Renaming the CEDS Strategy Committee

The name 'CEDS Strategy Committee' may not elicit much excitement. While this is the technical name that EDA uses for this planning group in [13 CFR §303.6](#), EDDs are free to rename or reframe the CEDS Strategy Committee to something that makes more sense for their region or inspires more confidence in the value of the planning process. [Greater Peoria Economic Development Council](#) rebranded the regional CEDS as "[The Big Table](#)," emphasizing the importance placed on equity and sourcing feedback from a variety of regional stakeholders and the public.

Branding can be powerful and EDDs should consider how a strong, action-oriented name for the CEDS Strategy Committee can make a regional stakeholder more likely to participate. [New River Valley Regional Commission \(NRVRC\)](#) in southwest Virginia rebranded its CEDS Strategy Committee as a regional economic "think tank" under their "[Regional Economic Strategy](#)" process. Both the terms "think tank" and "Regional Economic Strategy" were chosen by NRVRC to better communicate the purpose of the CEDS Strategy Committee and the larger CEDS process. These terms are less technical and are easier for those unfamiliar with the CEDS process to understand.

In-Person Pitches

EDDs have made great advancements in social media, graphic design, marketing, and communication strategies in past years as more communication has moved online. While these are obviously positive changes, EDDs should still remember the value of an in-person meeting to explain the value of the CEDS and why a stakeholder should participate. Taking the time to communicate with stakeholders in-person signals to the stakeholder that the EDD values their input and their time. These in-person meetings also give EDDs the chance to pitch participation to a potential stakeholder and field any immediate questions that may arise. Combining these in-person meetings with digital outreach can allow EDDs to reach a large audience of potential stakeholders, while still being able to explain the value and make the sell to each individual or potential partner.

Networking and Relationship Building

The CEDS Strategy Committee can be a great opportunity for regional stakeholders to engage and network with their peers. Participating in the CEDS gives individuals the opportunity to learn more about and build relationships with individuals and organizations who are working on similar projects with similar missions as theirs. The relationships made between regional stakeholders can be seen as a periphery benefit to participating in the CEDS planning process.

SUMMARY

This resource highlighted the importance of identifying regional champions, understanding what they bring to the CEDS planning process, and making the case to get them involved during the planning and implementation phases. This process will look different in every region. For more guidance or technical questions, EDDs are encouraged to reach out to their [EDA Regional Office staff](#), explore the resources listed at the NADO Research Foundation's [CEDS Central](#), and reach out to their neighboring EDDs or state associations.

EDDs are the regional voice for economic development and have many connections and relationships that they can call upon during the CEDS planning process. Relying on these relationships and building new relationships throughout the region will make any EDD successful as it builds its regional economic success team.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[CEDS Outreach & Communication Materials for EDDs - NADO](#)

[Opportunities to Build Partnerships Wealth Creation Worksheet - NADO](#)

[Asset Tools Wealth Creation Worksheet - NADO](#)

[CEDS CENTRAL - NADO](#)



This guide was prepared by NADO Regional Development Researcher Andrew Coker. (August 2024)

This resource is offered through the Economic Development District Community of Practice (EDD CoP), managed by the NADO Research Foundation to build the capacity of the national network of EDDs. To learn more, visit: www.nado.org/EDDCoP. The EDD CoP is made possible through an award from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce (ED22HDQ3070106). The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations in this resource are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Economic Development Administration or the U.S. Department of Commerce.