

Partners in Progress

# Engaging 25 Newly Elected Mayors After a Regional Wave Election

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# THE CHALLENGE

# 25

**NEW MAYORS  
across our region**

*following state rule changes  
that reshaped local elections*

## What this meant for EARPDC:

- Local elections realigned by state law, now 90% of cities and towns on the same schedule (some mayors given a bonus year)
- Most incoming mayors had no prior relationship with our organization
- Many were unfamiliar with Councils of Governments (COGs)
- Limited awareness of the CEDS process or EDA funding opportunities
- Risk of losing political support & project momentum at a critical time
- Need to establish credibility quickly — before others filled that space



# The Region

*10 counties. 54 member municipalities. One team.*

## Membership

EARPDC serves a 10-county region stretching across east Alabama — from the Georgia border to the Coosa River Valley. Our membership spans 54 municipalities, ranging from cities like Gadsden and Anniston to small towns with just a few hundred residents.

***When 25 new mayors took office, that was new leadership in nearly 1 out of every 2 member municipalities.***



# A COORDINATED STRATEGY

*No single element was groundbreaking — together they formed a system.*

**01**

## **Proactive Outreach**

Relationship-building before planning & grants consultants

**02**

## **Early Project Development**

Identify & develop projects early in new officials' terms

**03**

## **Digital Entry Points**

CEDS Dashboard + Story Map Annual Report

**04**

## **Partners in Progress**

Regional convening for peer learning & credibility



# 01 | PROACTIVE OUTREACH & SITE VISITS

*Getting there first — before others defined the narrative.*

## WHAT WE DID

- Anticipated the transition before elections were finalized
- Developed a targeted outreach list of incoming officials
- Conducted one-on-one site visits to mayors' offices & communities
- Led with listening, understanding local priorities first
- Connected mayors to EARPDC resources relevant to their specific needs

## WHY IT WORKED

- New officials are most open to new relationships in their first weeks
- Established EARPDC as a trusted partner before consultants arrived
- In-person visits signal respect and investment in local leadership
- Early relationships made later asks (data, projects, buy-in) easier

## 03 | CLEAR DIGITAL ENTRY POINTS

*Making complex planning tools accessible to non-planning audiences.*

### CEDS DASHBOARD

**The Problem:** The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is dense and technical — new mayors rarely engage with it.

**Our Solution:** Launched an interactive CEDS Dashboard that visualizes key data, priorities, and projects in an accessible, visual format.



### STORY MAP ANNUAL REPORT

**The Problem:** Traditional annual reports go unread — especially by newly elected officials with no organizational history.

**Our Solution:** Reimagined the annual report as a digital Story Map — engaging, geographically anchored, and shareable with a link.



## 04 | PARTNERS IN PROGRESS CONVENING

*A regional convening designed to add immediate value AND build the ecosystem.*

### IMMEDIATE VALUE

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Provided new mayors with direct access to state and federal partners, resources, and funding opportunities — right at the start of their terms.

### PEER LEARNING

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Created structured space for experienced mayors to engage with and mentor newly elected leaders — trusted peer voices amplify credibility.

### EARPDC AS CONVENER

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Positioned EARPDC as the connective tissue of the region — not just a planning commission, but a platform for regional collaboration.



# 04 | PARTNERS IN PROGRESS CONVENING

*A first in a series of events promoting collaboration and asset identification*



# REPLICABLE STRATEGIES

1

Anticipate transitions — don't wait for elections to be certified. Build your outreach plan before the votes are counted.

2

Get there first. Early relationships shape how officials understand your organization for their entire term.

3

Translate your work. CEDS dashboards, Story Maps, and visual tools make planning accessible to non-planners.

4

Use events as relationship infrastructure. Convenings create peer learning networks that outlast the event itself.

5

Let trusted local voices validate you. Experienced mayors speaking to peers is more powerful than any staff presentation.



# EARLY RESULTS

*Relationship-building that's already paying off.*

## Participation

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**18 of 25** new mayors attended Partners in Progress

## Grant Pipeline

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8 grant projects in the pipeline — **up 200% year over year**

## Planning

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**4 major planning projects underway,** with more in the funnel

## THE BIG IDEA

*“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!”*

*— Benjamin Franklin*



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