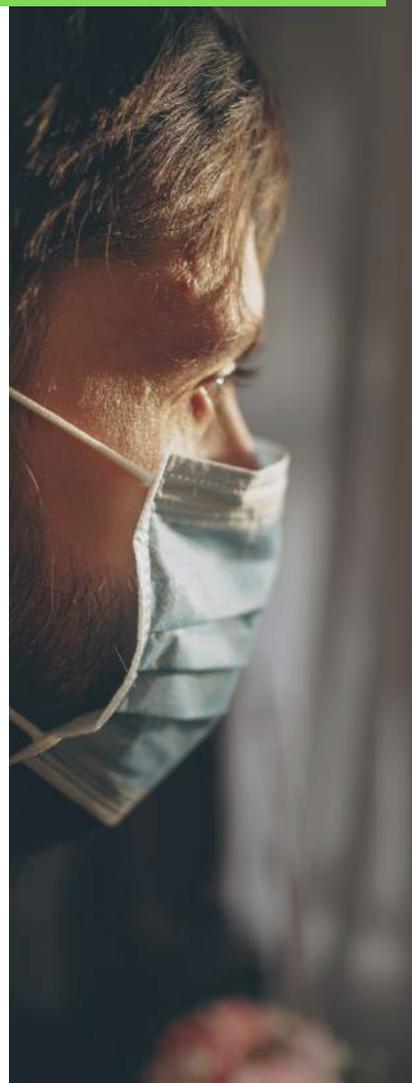


NORTHEAST FLORIDA COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN



DEVELOPED BY THE:
NORTHEAST FLORIDA ECONOMIC RESILIENCE TASK FORCE

PUBLISHED MAY 2021



The Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) received funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in August 2020 to support economic resilience efforts across the Region directly related to COVID-19.

This funding will enable the NEFRC to focus staff resources, between 2020 and 2022, toward priorities related to COVID-19 response, recovery, and long-term planning.

This economic recovery plan was made possible by EDA funding and was developed by the Northeast Florida Economic Resilience Task Force.

For more information about the Task Force and its charge, please visit:
www.nefrc.org/taskforce

The NEFRC, which serves as the designated Economic Development District for Northeast Florida, will work closely to align the priorities of this funding with the goals of the Region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Beth Payne, Chief Executive Officer

NEFRC
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This plan would have not been possible without the support and commitment of partners at the local, regional, and national levels.



Special thank you to the partner organizations that made this possible!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan reflects the collaborative efforts of more than 20 leaders from across the region who dedicated their knowledge, time, and expertise to a planning exercise that lasted for more than six months. Included in this recovery plan are detailed recommendations that can assist local governments and regional partners in ensuring a successful recovery ahead.

The Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC), a government agency that serves seven counties and 26 municipalities, received Federal funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in August 2020 to support economic resilience efforts directly related to the coronavirus pandemic. The funding was made possible through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act.

In utilizing this funding opportunity to advance regional priorities related to economic recovery, the NEFRC established the Northeast Florida Economic Resilience Task Force to identify and implement public policy recommendations across three identified priority areas: (1) infrastructure; (2) small business relief and support; and (3) equity. The Task Force is a policy group comprised of 20 leaders from the government, private, and nonprofit sectors. Membership includes representation from each and every county across the region.

The NEFRC, which serves as the designated Economic Development District for Northeast Florida, will work closely to align the priorities of this funding opportunity with the goals and objectives of the Region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Upon immediate release of this plan, the NEFRC will begin a plan implementation process that will involve community outreach, presentations to elected commissions, and additional technical assistance activities.

Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC)

The Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) is a dynamic network of local governance, serving seven counties – Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Putnam, Nassau, and St. Johns – and 26 municipalities. The Council has been engaged in numerous issues around the Region since 1977 and works to serve the needs of member local governments. The Council serves to communicate, convene, and collaborate with a variety of stakeholders across the seven counties in Northeast Florida. Council staff, through work programs, calculate and analyze data and information and ultimately help to construct solutions.

For more information, please visit: www.nefrc.org

U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)

The U.S. EDA's investment policy is designed to establish a foundation for sustainable job growth and the building of durable regional economies throughout the United States. This foundation builds upon two key economic drivers - innovation and regional collaboration. Innovation is key to global competitiveness, new and better jobs, a resilient economy, and the attainment of national economic goals. Regional collaboration is essential for economic recovery because regions are the centers of competition in the new global economy and those that work together to leverage resources and use their strengths to overcome weaknesses will fare better than those that do not. EDA encourages its partners around the country to develop initiatives that advance new ideas and creative approaches to address rapidly evolving economic conditions.

For more information, please visit: www.eda.gov

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) contributes to effective economic development in America's communities and regions through a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process. Simply put, a CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. A CEDS is the result of a regionally-owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region.

To learn more about Northeast Florida's CEDS, please visit: www.nefrc.org/ceds

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Equity Priority Area

Kristopher Smith, LISC Jacksonville
Dr. Nancy Russo, SMA Healthcare in Putnam County
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Plan Development Meeting

Greg Vaday, U.S. Economic Development Administration



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INTRODUCTION



SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

What is Economic Resilience?



ECONOMIC RESILIENCE refers to the ability of local economies to “bounce back” to normal conditions after losing function because of an uncontrollable event. Resilient economies have the capacity to quickly respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations such as a public health crisis or a high-intensity storm.

From a long-range perspective, resilient economies find ways to adapt to changing conditions, such as disruptions to major supply chains, so that future losses are minimized, and continuing stresses are adequately managed.

In addition to a built capacity to withstand shocks, resilient economies take necessary measures to prevent and avoid major disruptions.

For economic resilience strategies to be successful, equity must be an integrated component of long-range plans – ensuring that ALL who live and work, within a given community, have access to a good education, affordable housing, and transportation, and are able to prosper.

How can Local Communities Plan for Economic Resilience?

According to the U.S. Economic Development Administration, “At the regional or community level, economic development practitioners are instrumental in building the capacity for economic resilience. Economic development professionals and organizations often become the focal point for post-incident coordination, information dissemination, responding to external inquiries, and the lead grant administrator for federally-funded recovery initiatives. In building economic resilience, it is critical that economic development organizations consider their role in the pre- and post-incident environment to include steady-state and responsive initiatives.”



Examples of **steady-state** economic resilience initiatives include:

- (A)** Engaging in comprehensive planning efforts that involve extensive involvement from the community to define and implement a collective vision for resilience that includes the integration and/or alignment of other planning efforts (e.g., hazard mitigation plans) and funding sources;
- (B)** Promoting business continuity and preparedness (i.e., ensuring businesses understand their vulnerabilities—including supply chains—in the face of disruptions and are prepared to take actions to resume operations).

Examples of **responsive** economic resilience initiatives include:

- (A)** Establishing a process for regular communication, monitoring, and updating of business community needs and issues;
- (B)** Establishing/using a capability to rapidly contact key local, regional, state, and federal officials to communicate business sector needs and coordinate impact assessment efforts.

Planning for Economic Resilience: Understanding Risks

In establishing both short-term and long-range strategies for economic resilience, it is valuable to develop an inventory of the various shocks and stresses that have the potential to impact the functionality of a community or region.

Shocks are identified as sudden events that cause a community to immediately lose function. Examples of shock events include hurricanes, global health pandemics, terrorism attacks, and stock market crashes.

Stresses, on the contrary, take place over time and gradually weaken the fabric of a community. Examples of stresses include sea level rise, aging infrastructure, homelessness, and high unemployment.



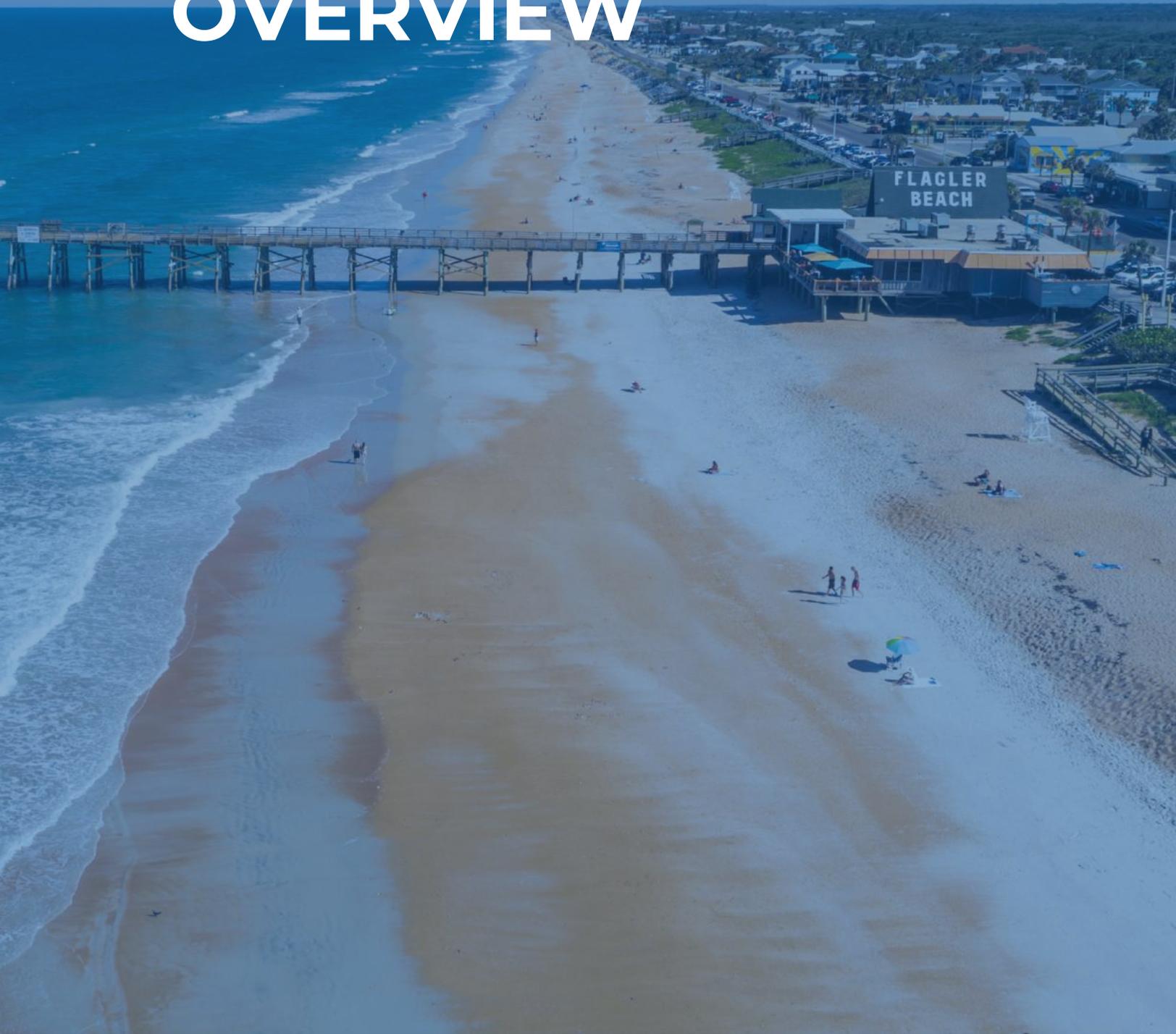
Historical Hazards, Future Hazards & COVID-19

Once an inventory of shocks and stresses is established, a valuable next step is to identify historical lessons that have been already inventoried; and future uncertainties that need to be further investigated and discussed.

In Florida, local governments have already developed a robust understanding of how to prepare and respond to the threat of hurricanes and tropical storm events. These environmental hazards occur on an annual basis, and because of the historical frequency of these events, lessons and best practices have already been identified (although there is always room for new lessons and improvement).

When examining the current COVID-19 crisis from a historical perspective – taking lessons from the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic – what becomes clear is that the country and region are currently facing a 100-year event. The challenge ahead relates to how the region deals with the compound effect of historical hazards, future hazards, and an evolving economic and public health crisis.

TASK FORCE OVERVIEW



TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

Charting a Path Forward for the Region

The work of the Northeast Florida Economic Resilience Task Force is divided into two distinct processes.

The first process, which has already been completed, was focused on immediate objectives and priorities for economic recovery. The Task Force began this process in October 2020 with meetings focused on establishing context around COVID-19 and its economic impacts. The process continued with priority area meetings focused on identifying recommendations.



Once the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan is communicated across the region, the Task Force will then transition to a long-range economic resilience planning process that will aim to identify additional recommendations that will protect Northeast Florida moving beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic.

TASK FORCE CHARGE

In responding to the coronavirus pandemic and current economic disaster, the task force will comprehensively assess the conditions that local communities in Northeast Florida are dealing with. Once context is established, and baseline economic conditions are clearly understood, the task force will recommend actionable strategies that will assist member governments and communities in meeting short-term economic recovery objectives relating to the coronavirus pandemic.

In developing these recommendations, taskforce members will review existing economic damage surveys, data, and reports; and will make an inventory of available strategies that can increase the region's resilience to disruptions moving forward. Following implementation of a "COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan," the task force will expand its scope to address challenges relating to long-range economic resilience planning.

Through support from NEFRC staff, the task force will identify long-term objectives and strategies that will protect Northeast Florida from a broad range of future shocks and stresses; including, but not limited to, coastal storms, future pandemics, economic disruptions, supply chain shocks, and sea level rise.

Once an inventory of historical and future hazards is established, the task force will develop a "Regional Economic Resilience Plan," for Northeast Florida, that is holistic, action-oriented, equitable, and capable of being executed. Upon implementation of the plan, the task force will evolve into a body that will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating progress made.

TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Established in August 2020, the Northeast Florida Economic Resilience Task Force is a policy group comprised of 20 regional leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. These members were responsible for developing this plan.



Valerie Jenkins
Roxanne Horvath
Jeff Rawls
Jessie Spradley Jr.



Jeff Sheffield
Greg Anderson
Darryl Register
Cathy Hagan



Bill Lazar
Kristopher Smith
Wendell Chindra
Jonathan Griffith



Taco Pope
Denise Bevan
Bob Porter
Bruce Ferguson



Perry Bechtle
Rebecca Livingston
Reuben Franklin
Bill Garrison

RECOVERY PLAN

Between October 2020 and April 2021, the Task Force met on a monthly basis to achieve a wide-range of objectives. Because of social distancing guidelines, each meeting was facilitated online. Membership established context, identified priority areas for economic recovery, and then developed policy recommendations.

01

Phase 1 - Establishing Context

To establish context, the first few meetings of the Task Force were focused on collecting the best available data and information, identifying priority areas of concern, and developing a work plan for implementation.

02

Phase 2 - COVID-19 Economic Damage Assessment

The Northeast Florida Economic Resilience Briefing Guide, produced by NEFRC staff, was published in November 2020 to better inform the work of the Task Force. The Briefing Guide features data and demographic information, GIS maps, economic indicators, and an inventory of local media coverage related to COVID economic impacts

03

Phase 3 - Priority Area Meetings

Meetings facilitated in Spring 2021 focused attention on three identified priority areas: (1) infrastructure; (2) small business relief and support; and (3) equity. These priority area meetings ultimately informed the development of a COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan.

PRIORITY AREA #1 - INFRASTRUCTURE

INFRASTRUCTURE POLICIES

1.1

Expand affordable broadband access

In an era of remote structures in work, telehealth, education, and other realms, reliable and affordable access to broadband has become more integral than ever before to the economic viability of urban and rural communities.

1.2

Build and modernize rural infrastructure

The State of Florida is projected to add 4 million people to its population by 2032. This population growth, whether desirable or not, will undoubtedly have an impact on rural communities.

1.3

Create best-in-class infrastructure investment

Florida is the 3rd most populated state in the U.S. with 900 people moving to the state every day. In managing current growth and preparing for future growth, smart investments are critical.

1.4

Confront the challenges of legacy infrastructure

COVID-19 has brought into focus the challenges faced by low-income and minority communities in dealing with the impacts of historical infrastructure gaps.

1.1

Expand affordable broadband access

In an era of remote structures in work, telehealth, education, and other realms, reliable and affordable access to broadband has become more integral than ever before to the economic viability of urban and rural communities.

Context

- HB 969, passed by the Florida Legislature in 2021, tasked the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) with several directives related to identifying gaps in broadband access across the state.
- The Florida Broadband Initiative maintains, “Every household and business in Florida should have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed Internet Services.”

Policy Mechanisms

- Initiate partnerships with state agencies, local and county governments, and other entities to kickstart broadband investments.
- Explore the viability of establishing a Rural Broadband Pilot Program; based on lessons learned from the Eastside Jacksonville Broadband Program.
- Leverage anchor institutions (such as schools, libraries, medical facilities, and government buildings) to provide rapid community internet services.
- Improve broadband coverage maps and identify where gaps exist.
- Coordinate and expand broadband affordability programs.
- Track and monitor ongoing legislation related to broadband.
- Explore the viability of establishing a regional broadband working group to share best practices and evaluate/recommend opportunities for implementation.
- Identify funding and financing sources for broadband deployment.
- Utilize Federal Stimulus allocations to specifically address gaps in broadband infrastructure across urban and rural communities.

Case Study Examples

- Cambria County, Pennsylvania announced the completion of a \$1.1 million project designed to expand the availability of broadband Internet service in underserved parts of the county's rural northern half. Funding for the project came from Cambria County's share of the CARES Act.
- Smart North Florida is a newly created non-profit organization that is currently involved in developing a trial project to provide broadband access to the East Jacksonville neighborhood. This project uses newly developed OnGo CBRS transmitter devices to create a wide area private LTE network which is faster and has a wider range than current WIFI systems – the entire 2 square mile East Jacksonville neighborhood is covered by only 9 transmitters.

1.2

Build and modernize rural infrastructure

The State of Florida is projected to add 4 million people to its population by 2032. This population growth, whether desirable or not, will undoubtedly have an impact on rural communities.



Context

- The State of Florida is projected to add 4 million people to its population by 2032. This population growth, whether desirable or not, will undoubtedly have an impact on rural communities.
- Remote working opportunities might lead to demographic changes in where employees decide to live (i.e. desirability to live in a rural community but work online).

Policy Mechanisms

- Modernize the built infrastructure for rural utilities, including the full installation of smart grid technology throughout rural power systems.
- Provide incentives for for-profit companies to develop and market technologies (such as in the areas of communications and information technologies) that create rural competitive advantage.
- Leverage and bolster existing programs and initiatives, including, but not limited to, opportunity zones, EPA brownfield funding, and Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) grant opportunities.
- Explore the viability of establishing a regional infrastructure working group to share best practices on infrastructure modernization and expansion, and evaluate/recommend opportunities for implementation.
- Leverage North Florida TPO's Long-Range Plan as a mechanism for identifying and prioritizing rural infrastructure opportunities and projects.

Case Study Examples

- The City of Palatka was awarded \$385,000 from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to develop an infiltration and inflow mitigation capital improvement plan.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has launched a [Clearinghouse for Environmental Finance](#), an online database of land, air, and water information. This new Clearinghouse catalogs available funding, financing, and instructional resources to aid communities in their efforts to improve environmental conditions.

1.3

Create best-in-class infrastructure investment

Florida is the 3rd most populated state in the U.S. with 900 people moving to the state every day. In managing current growth and preparing for future growth, smart investments are critical.



Context

- At \$1.1 trillion, Florida is the world's 17th largest economy with a Florida 2030 Blueprint goal to become the 10th.
- 20th most diversified economy in the U.S. with a Florida 2030 Blueprint goal to become Top 12 by 2030.

Policy Mechanisms

- Align local economic development initiatives and programs with the Florida 2030 Blueprint, produced by the Florida Chamber Foundation.
- Evaluate opportunities to integrate findings from the Northeast Florida Economic Resilience Taskforce into the region's 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) update.
- Find new mechanisms to fund and/or subsidize infrastructure development and housing construction so that the burdens, as well as the benefits of creating livable communities and affordable housing, are shared among both new and existing property owners.
- Develop new mechanisms to expedite and accelerate investment in infrastructure critical to regional mobility.
- Complete regional, multi-agency projects that improve water supply resilience by creating new water and wastewater systems, upgrading and linking existing systems, and addressing climate-related issues (i.e. saltwater intrusion).
- Encourage rural support scheme spending, particularly that associated with sustainable agriculture, ecosystem regeneration, or accelerating clean energy installations.

Case Study Examples

- Planning for economic diversification is an important undertaking to explore when updating a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Economic diversification helps support regional resilience, a concept that should be woven into all aspects of your CEDS and can serve as a guiding framework for how a region approaches planning and economic development.

1.4

Confront the challenges of legacy infrastructure

COVID-19 has brought into focus the challenges faced by low-income and minority communities in dealing with the impacts of historical infrastructure gaps.



Context

- Legacy infrastructure refers to critical infrastructure gaps which are the result of underinvestment and poor maintenance in low-income communities.

Policy Mechanisms

- Enact a regional study to identify infrastructure liabilities for each county or municipality within the region and determine if there are intergovernmental gaps. Examples of potential liabilities include large-scale projects, categories of assets, and populations facing major infrastructure-related environmental health risks (e.g., households affected by lead pipes, urban air pollution, or lack of safe wastewater infrastructure).
- Explore the viability of establishing a new pilot program within short-term relief and recovery funding packages for community-supported infrastructure experiments to support major transportation, water, energy, and telecom system upgrades. Examples include bus rapid transit corridors, bike lanes and pedestrian plazas, flood control installations, and distributed energy and telecom systems. Funded pilots can complement these expanded public engagement projects and be rewarded in follow-on funding application scoring criteria.

Case Study Examples

- The City of Jacksonville, through Ordinance 2021-0118, plans on tackling a legacy infrastructure challenge in the Cristobel Neighborhood on the North Side of the city. The bill appropriates funds in the sum of \$27 million to fund the Septic Tank Phase-Out Project for the Christobel neighborhood. \$12.5 million is a contribution from JEA and \$14.3 million is coming from COJ debt funding.
- FHLBank Atlanta offers Community Investment Program (CIP) and Economic Development Program (EDP) advances to help financial institutions meet the housing and economic development needs of low- to moderate-income communities.

PRIORITY AREA #2 - SMALL BUSINESS RELIEF

SMALL BUSINESS RELIEF

2.1

Strengthen relationships across ecosystem

With many partners assisting small businesses across the region, there is a need to further integrate the business support environment to not only include small business assistance programs but also a collaboration between entrepreneurship and other similar programs to strengthen the region's competitiveness.

2.2

Identify and communicate scaleable best practices

The pandemic's effect on small businesses and the environment in which small business operates has heightened the need to identify and communicate scalable best practices. Small businesses must be able to adapt not only to the pandemic, but also to norms and regulations that will continue to change in the years to come.

2.3

Leverage public-private partnerships

The region's ability to spur and support innovation and adaption for small businesses is essential for these businesses to adapt to the challenges ahead in economic recovery. The ability to leverage private-public partnerships will assist the region's businesses to become more innovative and adaptable.

2.4

Utilize investment-based crowdsourcing

The use of investment-based crowdsourcing can provide the needed innovation finance tools that small businesses can utilize to support creation, retention, and growth.

2.5

Expand urban services to rural areas

With many small businesses confronting challenges from the economic downturn, there is a need for small businesses to have direct access to courses, mentorship programs, assistance from potential investors, and other resources. Many of these services, however, are heavily concentrated in urban areas. Expanding access to these urban resources is vital for rural small business owners across the region.

2.1

Strengthen Relationships Across the Ecosystem

With many partners assisting small businesses across the region, there is a need to further integrate the business support environment to not only include small business assistance programs but also a collaboration between entrepreneurship and other similar programs to strengthen the region's competitiveness.

Context

- The development of a regional ecosystem, one that incorporates a collaborative partnership model between county chamber of commerce partners and business development centers, is an important step to spur greater economic development.
- At the 2/18/2021 Economic Resilience Taskforce meeting, Dr. Carlton Robinson from the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce provided a visual of the limited number of small business resources that exist outside of the region's urban areas. The development of a digital ecosystem will provide the resources and support small businesses need to succeed moving into the future.

Policy Mechanisms

- Driving an interconnected regional business pipeline is essential to further interconnect the region and provide a more competitive environment for the region overall. The Federal Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Program could assist in growing the region's participation in the research and development sector of the economy.
- Explore the viability of establishing a partnership non-profit with all regional and county small business assistance actors to assist in regional collaboration between these groups and assist small businesses in acquiring necessary resources.
- Develop and utilize a concept map for the region to connect small businesses within the region to the nearest resources based on their jurisdiction and location.

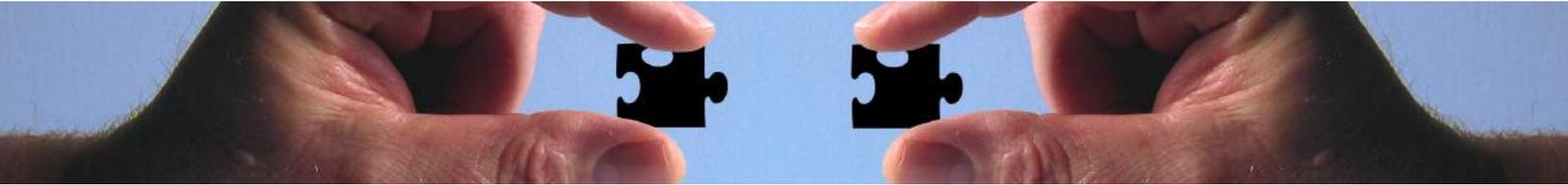
Case Study Examples

- If possible, a regional business development agency or nonprofit could collaborate with the state to apply for the Small Business Administration's Federal and State Technology Partnership to increase proposals for the SBIR/STTR awards to grow the region's research and development sector. Wichita State University, a regional public university in Kansas, is the central location for the state in assisting small businesses in commercializing high-tech innovation.
- The Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce's digital transformation program is focused on improving business processes, customer experience outcomes, and identifying channels of distribution.
- JaxSmallBizHelp.org and NorthFloridaSmallBizHelp.org represent government and non-profit organizations that assist small businesses with resources. The mission is to bring partners together to share information, to exchange ideas, to coordinate assistance activities, and to advocate on behalf of their small business members/clients.

2.2

Identify and Communicate Scalable Best Practices

The pandemic's effect on small businesses and the environment in which small business operates has heightened the need to identify and communicate scalable best practices. Small businesses must be able to adapt not only to the pandemic, but also to norms and regulations that will continue to change in the years to come.



Context

- To encourage small businesses to continue operations during the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic, regulatory reforms should be encouraged to promote economic vitality while also addressing public health concerns.
- To ensure that small businesses can thrive post-pandemic, it is important to identify and communicate best practices and regulatory reforms to stakeholders and small businesses throughout the region.

Policy Mechanisms

- Make outdoor dining easier by reducing fees, expanding the opportunity for revenue, and expediting the permitting process.
- Pass a commercial eviction moratorium and provide a pathway for rent repayment negotiations between landlords and struggling business owners.
- Establish a sales tax sharing agreement with small businesses to help businesses regain their footing and spur new business development, which would bring in new sales tax and property tax revenues.
- Develop tax-sharing incentives for specific industries and revenue sources.
- Offer new commercial or light industrial development a reduction in permit and impact fees as well as a cut in water tap-on fees.

Case Study Examples

- The City of Hoboken developed a [guide for small-business recovery strategy](#) which included an expanded outdoor dining program to allow restaurants to operate in private parking lots, on the sidewalk, or in cases where possible in closed streets.
- Work across jurisdictions to ease the enforcement of zoning and permit barriers and the speed of the permitting process as seen in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area.
- Jacksonville Council Member Rory Diamond has proposed Ordinance 2020-757 to allow property owners to utilize a mobility fee contract to memorialize credits against future mobility fee payments for the cost related to the demolition and repurposing of an existing structure of improvement. If passed, landowners can enter a Mobility Fee Contract with the City's Planning and Development Department allowing the owners or developer of the property to receive credits for repurposing and/or demolishing any existing structure or improvement on the subject property.

2.3

Leverage Public-Private Partnerships

The region's ability to spur and support innovation and adaptation for small businesses is essential for these businesses to adapt to the challenges ahead in economic recovery. The ability to leverage private-public partnerships will assist the region's businesses to become more innovative and adaptable.



Context

- Public-private partnerships hold great potential in encouraging innovation and adaptability for small businesses across the region.

Policy Mechanisms

- Encourage municipal and county governments to apply for and provide grants to assist businesses in their recovery from COVID-19 related economic challenges.
- Provide grants to help entrepreneurs with local businesses innovate in the face of social distancing and other coronavirus-prompted changes.
- Use private investors (e.g., venture capital) to screen and select the best startups and use a financial instrument, such as a convertible loan, that can become equity under certain conditions.
- Explore the viability of establishing a Revolving Loan Fund to support small business owners. Revolving Loan Funds are a way to direct capital to businesses that may have difficulty accessing traditional financing methods. The fund loans money and uses the proceeds and repayments to offer financing to additional participants.
- Leverage the Florida Main Street Program in efforts to support small business owners. The program offers communities a tool kit for encouraging and sustaining business development in their traditional downtowns, but despite the number of historic small towns in the region, only two are currently participants.

Case Study Examples

- In Giles County Virginia, a centralized gift card program was established to promote local businesses and quickly generate needed revenue for local restaurants, lodging, and other hospitality businesses. Gift cards can be purchased online through the county and customers will receive 50% increased value when redeemed, subsidized directly by local meals tax and other tourism-related tax revenues. 100% of the funds raised are sent directly to local businesses across the county.
- The University of North Florida's Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation utilizes investors to support new businesses in the cohort. The center serves as a small business incubator for the region. The Center provides potential entrepreneurs with access to resources which could include mentorship opportunities, workshops, and speakers.

2.4

Utilize Investment-Based Crowdsourcing

The use of investment-based crowdsourcing can provide the needed innovation finance tools that small businesses can utilize to support creation, retention, and growth.



Context

- The use of investment-based crowdsourcing can provide the needed innovation finance tools that small businesses can utilize to support creation, retention, and growth.
- Crowdsourcing is a joint process development or problem-solving technique that requires help from a network of people, or a crowd. This network is usually connected via the Internet or through a specific website.
- Especially in a digital age of transformation, online crowdfunding platforms can serve a valuable purpose to small businesses looking to raise much-needed capital investments.

Policy Mechanisms

- Encourage businesses to utilize investment-based crowdfunding from community investors to encourage entrepreneurialism and new businesses.
- Local governments and regional partners can provide resources for businesses and guidance on crowdsourcing options and sources. Existing small businesses or start-ups will then have access to regional small business support entities that provide resources, mentors, funding opportunities, and potential employees.
- Utilize the University of North Florida Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation and the Small Business Development Center to provide regional support to both aspiring entrepreneurs and existing small businesses.

Case Study Examples

- The co-founder of the Tecumseh Brewing Company in Tecumseh, Michigan utilized investment-based crowdsourcing to raise \$175,000 from community investors to open their brewery. The company plans to invest \$500,000 in the community and to locally source materials, labor, food, and supplies, creating an even greater economic impact in the city.
- The City of Monticello, Indiana provided small businesses guidance on accessing the two mainstream COVID-19 small business crowdsourcing funds. In expanding on this case study, regional partners and communities could create a webpage that provides updates when needed to reflect the changes in crowdsourcing options.

2.5

Expand Urban Programs to Rural Areas

With many small businesses confronting challenges from the economic downturn, there is a need for small businesses to have direct access to courses, mentorship programs, assistance from potential investors, and other resources. Many of these services, however, are heavily concentrated in urban areas. Expanding access to these urban resources is vital for rural small business owners across the region.



Context

- In 2014, the Jax Bridges Entrepreneurs Program became a principal facilitator for supplier quality and development within Northeast Florida. This program assists smaller companies in their development and supply chain diversification through a variety of entrepreneurial activities. With the Jax Chamber transitioning towards virtual training, smaller businesses in counties outside of Duval County will have access to these resources.
- Expanding access to these urban resources and programs is vital for rural small business owners across the region in their economic recovery.

Policy Mechanisms

- Initiate partnerships with small business development centers, entrepreneurship programs, and other similar groups to kickstart regional programs specifically aimed at assisting small business owners in rural areas.
- Promote the value of SBDC at UNF to small business owners in rural areas.
 - The Small Business Development Center at the University of North Florida provides services to businesses throughout the region including retail, wholesale, tech and web services, healthcare, personal service and wellness, and consulting and business services.
 - The program has numerous satellite campuses throughout the region and provides access to business training resources and services outside of the urban core of Duval County.
- Identify funding opportunities that can support the development of regional small businesses assistance partnerships and networks.

Case Study Examples

- The [U.S.D.A. Rural Business Development Grant](#) is designed to provide technical assistance and training for small rural businesses.
- While the [U.S.D.A. Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program](#) provides loans and grants to Microenterprise Development Organizations (MDOs) to assist startups and facilitate growth through a Rural Microloan Revolving Loan Program provided through an MDO and the provision of training and technical assistance for microloan borrowers and micro-entrepreneurs.

PRIORITY AREA #3 - DRIVING EQUITY

DRIVING EQUITY

3.1 **Enhance mental health resources**

The toll on mental health due to the pandemic is widespread, with many citizens requiring mental health resources, which have been historically underfunded.

3.2 **Protect essential workers in vulnerable sectors**

Our region and economy rely on workers that face great risks due to the nature of their jobs and require resources and support to ensure the best possible protection from COVID-19 transmission.

3.3 **Protect landlords and tenants**

Low- to moderate-income tenants and small, independent property owners are bearing the brunt of the pandemic; inducing economic downturn and require broad rental assistance.

3.4 **Ensure all have access to affordable housing**

The pandemic has worsened the state's considerable affordable housing shortage, with cost-burdened households at greater risk of eviction and foreclosures. Supporting affordable housing infrastructure across the region has become critical.

3.1

Enhance mental health resources

The toll on mental health due to the pandemic is widespread, with many citizens requiring mental health resources, which have been historically underfunded.



Context

- Several existing healthcare care organizations such as the Healthcare Coalitions (both Northeast and North Central) and the Health Planning Councils (Northeast and Well Florida) work with healthcare facilities in the seven-county region on a span of issues that include mental health services and providers.
- Engaging organizations with current programs, knowledge, and relationships can more effectively and efficiently understand the present mental health situation in Northeast Florida and what additional services, funds, and resources are needed.

Policy Mechanisms

- Advance parity of esteem and address the inequities between mental and physical health care by engaging with mental health organizations to better understand their needs and to identify where gaps in care exist.
- Provide Mental Health First Aid training to enhance knowledge about mental health and substance-use issues, reduce its stigma, and improve responsiveness to signs of an emerging problem or crisis.
- Explore the viability of hosting recurring virtual town halls on mental health to discuss and raise awareness of mental health challenges and resources.
- Develop a means for residents to get immediate mental health assistance, such as through a three-digit prevention lifeline number or a crisis text line, and build upon existing programs designed to help communities deal with trauma.
- Engage communities of color and reduce barriers to accessing treatment by partnering with community and faith-based organizations to identify and respond to specific needs in culturally appropriate ways.

Case Study Examples

- Alachua County, Florida, developed an evidence-based strategy to assist county employees in identifying and appropriately responding to mental health issues. The county's training initiative was recognized with an Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.
- The City of Jacksonville is working with Hearts 4 Minds, a volunteer-organization, to raise awareness about mental health.
- An effort is underway to create a "drop-in mental health clinic" somewhere along State Road 100 in Flagler County. This is similar in concept to medical clinics that offer health services to people without the need for an appointment, are generally open longer hours, and can even offer 24-hour services.

3.2

Protect essential workers in vulnerable sectors

Our region and economy rely on workers that face great risks due to the nature of their jobs and require resources and support to ensure the best possible protection from COVID-19 transmission.



Context

- Numerous workers serve in occupations that cannot be carried out at home. They risk their health to provide essential services during these unprecedented times and help the region continue to function and maintain a semblance of normalcy.
- Their efforts underscore the need to ensure that essential workers have the resources and support they need to do their jobs safely and to protect their health and wellbeing.

Policy Mechanisms

- Explore a multi-sector approach to facilitate the procurement of personal protective equipment and virus mitigation technologies.
- Encourage employers to update their risk assessments in light of new strains and new knowledge about how the virus is transmitted.
- Explore the viability of launching a communications campaign to employers, workers, and customers that stresses the importance of following safety guidelines to cut the risks to essential workers.
- Integrate social care with health care. Facilitate formal linkages, communication, and financial referral relationships between the health and social care sectors.
- Promote community-driven practices to understand barriers to and increase support for accessing socioeconomic assistance programs and implementing systems changes.

Case Study Examples

- Through Orange County's [PPE for Community Initiative](#), more than 60,000 small businesses have been provided personal protective equipment at no cost.
- Through [local incentive agreements and regulatory approvals](#), the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County helped secure the operations of a newly established PPE business.

3.3

Protect landlords and tenants

Low- to moderate-income tenants and small, independent property owners are bearing the brunt of the pandemic; inducing economic downturn and require broad rental assistance.



Context

- An increasing number of tenants are experiencing greater rent burdens, with 30% or more of their income spent on housing.
- Tenants of smaller property owners are at particular risk, as many of these owners are facing their own insolvency. Small rental property owners provide a crucial source of naturally occurring affordable housing for essential and low-income workers.
- Additionally, these properties are a means of wealth-building for minority owners.

Policy Mechanisms

- Require mediation before accepting a new eviction case to preserve a tenant's rental record and to reduce the fees paid by landlords.
- Screen renters for emergency assistance eligibility and provide them with a right to counsel or expanded access to legal services to reduce eviction judgments.
- Use federal, state, and local funding to provide rental, security deposit, and/or first- and last-month rent assistance to protect the long-term housing of tenants – and smaller landlords.
- Facilitate the sealing or expungement of an eviction case to ensure the resolved eviction filing does not create lasting harm as a negative court record.
- Develop a toolkit that distributes information and resources on what relief is available to landlords and tenants, such as forbearance plans, community grants, unemployment assistance, and other benefits.

Case Study Examples

- The City of Jacksonville utilized \$29 million in federal relief to launch an emergency rental and utility assistance program. This program can serve as a model for future assistance needs.
- Heart of Florida United Way has set aside \$150,000 to pay for the legal representation of families facing eviction.

3.4

Ensure all have access to affordable housing

The pandemic has worsened the state's considerable affordable housing shortage, with cost-burdened households at greater risk of eviction and foreclosures. Supporting affordable housing infrastructure across the region has become critical.



Context

- The pandemic has exacerbated Florida's housing crisis, inducing a loss of employment and an unanticipatedly high-priced market for homeownership and rentals.
- With limited affordable units and numerous low-income households struggling to make rent and meet their day-to-day needs, there is a heightened need for Florida to increase its supply of affordable housing.

Policy Mechanisms

- Commit sufficient resources to expand the availability of dedicated affordable housing and implement comprehensive, systemic zoning code reforms to remove barriers to development and help increase affordability.
- Pair housing with non-housing policies to expand the coalition of organizations and individuals willing to support needed housing reforms. Coalitions can be built around common interests, such as the environment, health, and education.
- Create incentives and requirements for local developers to build dedicated affordable housing or include dedicated affordable housing units within a mixed-income or mixed-use development.
- Employ a regional approach to support the development of affordable housing in resource-rich areas and to alleviate employment-housing mismatches.
- Engage diverse community stakeholders to balance competing interests and policy choices and to develop feasible local housing strategies, measurable goals, and a process for reporting to ensure accountability.

Case Study Examples

- The Daytona Beach Housing Authority provided bonuses up to \$400 to landlords willing to lease to low-income renters.
- Chipola Area Habitat for Humanity partnered with Auburn University Rural Studio and Chipola College to design and build four new affordable homes.

NEXT STEPS

NEXT STEPS

With the adoption of the plan in May 2021, the NEFRC will transition its focus towards the implementation of this economic recovery plan. NEFRC staff will communicate the details of this plan to local elected officials, government staff, regional partner agencies, chambers of commerce, and other relevant stakeholder groups.

The objective will be to ensure that strategies featured in the plan are shared and coordinated among the diverse number of stakeholders across the region. Simultaneously, recently passed State legislation and pending Federal legislation will be analyzed for impacts and opportunities moving forward.

While starting work on the initial plan implementation, the Task Force will reconvene in June 2021 to begin a long-range economic resilience planning process. The scope of the Task Force will grow to also consider broader resiliency components pertaining to affordable housing, technology and innovation, food security, sea level rise, and other related issues.

The NEFRC will continue to expand regional discussions on these issues to be more inclusive, equitable, and holistic. Members of existing NEFRC committees and policy groups (i.e. P2R2 Committee, CEDS Committee) will be engaged in these discussions so additional perspectives are brought to the table. These efforts will allow for NEFRC to address the resilience of the whole community moving forward.

From a longer-term perspective, while moving into 2022, the ultimate objective of this work will be to integrate findings and recommendations from the Task Force into the update of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This will culminate in a shared vision across Northeast Florida.

During the long journey ahead, the NEFRC remains committed to working with all partners to advance strategic regional interests in the realms of economic development, resiliency, and preparedness across all levels of government to achieve a more resilient Northeast Florida.

NEFRC MISSION

The mission of the NEFRC is to celebrate the unique assets of Northeast Florida and to engage its people, businesses, governments, and organizations. In doing so we communicate issues, convene stakeholders, collaborate with others, calculate and analyze, and construct solutions.



Baker County



Clay County



Duval County



Flagler County



Nassau County



Putnam County



St. Johns County

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The Board of Directors of the NEFRC is comprised of 35 members: two-thirds elected officials and one-third gubernatorial* appointees. They provide the Council with the insight and tools to make critical decisions that affect the quality of life within our Region.

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