

2 - THE CEDS PROCESS

The Purpose of a CEDS

The 2019 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a product of the Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC), developed in cooperation with the counties of Amelia, Buckingham, Charlotte, Lunenburg, and Prince Edward. The report follows the criteria set forth by the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA) and is guided by the CEDS Committee. The process of creating the vision, goals, and strategies of this plan, with emphasis on the community stakeholder engagement and coordination efforts, are vital to the implementation and success of the CEDS.

The Commonwealth Regional Council began its CEDS effort with the intent to create a viable economic development plan that would provide a roadmap for sustainable economic growth. Once the EDA approves the CRC CEDS, the heartland region will be eligible to receive funding from EDA programs for various projects, such as economic adjustment, planning, trade adjustment assistance, public works, and technical assistance. In addition, the CEDS process will lead to establishing an Economic Development District (EDD) designation for the CRC. EDDs are multi-jurisdictional entities that help lead locally based, regionally driven economic development planning, incorporating the involvement of the public, private, and non-profit sectors to establish a strategic roadmap for regional collaboration.

The EDA stipulates certain CEDS content. The CEDS must address economic resiliency as a goal, priority, or area to be investigated. Additionally, detailed documentation of stakeholder involvement, input, and support must be included.

These criteria ensure that the region's stakeholders play an active role in the development and execution of the CEDS plan based on the challenges and strengths within the region. The CEDS process is an opportunity for regional stakeholders to understand their relationships to one another and possibly form new ones benefiting themselves and the regional economy.

The CEDS process also ensures that planning does not follow a "one size fits all" model, and that implementation strategies are uniquely tailored to the region they are used in. Finally, the evaluation framework is necessary for future assessment of the strategies deployed so that localities can hold local leaders and programs accountable to their results.



The EDA requires every CEDS plan to contain several key sections:

- Summary Background: A summary of the economic conditions of the region
- SWOT Analysis: An in-depth analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
- Strategic Direction/Action Plan: The strategic direction and action plan should build on findings from the SWOT analysis and incorporate/integrate elements from the other regional plans (e.g., land use and transportation, workforce development, etc.) where appropriate as determined by the EDD or community/region engaged in the development of the CEDS. The action plan should also identify the stakeholder(s) responsible for implementation, timetables, and opportunities for the integrated use of other local, state, and federal funds
- Evaluation Framework: Performance measures used to evaluate the organization's implementation of the CEDS and impact on the regional economy

2 - THE CEDS PROCESS

Public Input Process

A successful economic strategy for the region is only possible with the earnest input of the public, business owners, local governments, and community groups, all working together toward shared goals. To set a foundation of community engagement, the Commonwealth Regional Commission began the CEDS project by establishing a CEDS Committee to guide the process and plan. The committee was established by the CRC early in 2018 and included representatives from each of the subject counties, the Town of Farmville, the region’s colleges, and community and business leaders. Specifically, the committee had to include representatives from its top seven employment sectors, one representative from an institution of higher education, and one representative from the South Central Local Workforce Development Board. Additionally, one representative from a chapter of the NAACP and a labor organization was required. The Committee met regularly throughout the CEDS process to inform the SWOT analysis, create a vision, set goals, and propose projects and strategies. The activities of the CEDS Committee, as well as other public and stakeholder outreach activities occurred throughout the second half of 2018 and are summarized here:

April 3, 2018:

A CEDS Kick-Off Meeting was held at CRC offices in Farmville to give members of the CEDS committee background on the CEDS process and detail the benefits of the process to the region. Additionally, a Consultant Selection Committee was established to seek outside assistance in creating the CEDS.

July 9, 2018:

The CEDS Committee held its initial planning meeting at Longwood University in Farmville on July 9. The committee was presented with a CEDS orientation and background information by CRC staff, chose committee leadership, and began the identification of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats facing the CRC region to inform and guide the CEDS process and plan. This exercise provided a foundation of public perception and community input to drive the development of economic growth strategies.



2 - THE CEDS PROCESS

September 10, 2018:

At a third meeting of the CEDS Committee, held at Hampden-Sydney College in Prince Edward County on September 10, the committee reviewed consultant presentations on regional demographic levels and trends and existing and planned infrastructure, including electric, transportation, water, rail, broadband, and others. An assessment of economic activity in the region is critical to successfully developing the region in the future. Committee members used this information to recognize and discuss existing business clusters in the region and to identify desirable future industries to attract to the area. Attendees of this meeting also began early work on setting goals and objectives for the plan and collaborated to identify additional stakeholders who should be engaged in the project.

September 27, 2018:

A public workshop was held on this date at Southside Virginia Community College in Keysville. This open forum presented a CEDS overview to attendees and solicited input from a range of local leaders, business owners, community groups, and interested citizens. Members of the CEDS Committee were encouraged to attend to help facilitate the discussion. Information gathered at this open forum provided valuable input to the plan's goals and identified key projects that are included in the implementation strategies of the plan.

October 12-16, 2018:

While many community stakeholders attended the open public forum on September 27th, some key stakeholders were not able to attend. Using stakeholder lists compiled by the CEDS committee, staff scheduled individual telephone interviews with key stakeholders, focusing on regional business owners and employers. Stakeholders interviewed represented retail, accommodation, and manufacturing businesses. These interviews gave the CEDS committee further insight into the public perception of conditions in the CRC that may not have been revealed by the data gathered in the SWOT analysis and summary background.

November 19, 2018:

At a November meeting of the CEDS Committee staff and committee members reviewed a draft plan vision statement and draft CEDS goals. After revisions the committee adopted the vision statement, giving the plan strategic direction. The results of the SWOT analysis were also reviewed and used to refine three categorical CEDS goals, each focused on a major area of the region's economy – workforce, business, and education. Using this base of vision and goals the committee moved on to identifying and refining specific projects and actions to be included as plan strategies.

February – March 2019:

At a February 25, 2019 CEDS Committee meeting, the draft CEDS plan was presented for review and approval by the Committee. The Committee voted to approve the draft plan and present it for public review and input. Throughout the month of March, the plan was made available online and presented at local Chamber of Commerce meetings in the CRC region. Public input was compiled and edits to the plan were made as necessary.

April 2019:

The Commonwealth Regional Council is governed by a Board of Directors representing local leaders of its member jurisdictions. The CEDS is a key initiative of the Board and vitally important to the future of the region. The Board received updates on the process and progress of the CEDS project and is the adopting body for these compiled strategies and the steward of the many individual efforts to implement its guidance.

