Appendix VIII: Economic Resiliency Plan - COVID 19 - Economic Development District (EDD)

September 2023

Introduction:

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission received funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in August 2020 to support economic resilience efforts across the ten-county Economic Development District region directly related to COVID-19. This funding enabled SPC to create an economic resiliency plan, focus staff resources on supporting business, nonprofits and local government with assistance between 2020 and 2022 toward priorities related to COVID-19 response, recovery, grant technical assistance and planning. This economic recovery plan was made possible by EDA CARES funding and was developed by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Planning & Development staff with feedback and data collected from surveys, partnership meetings, stakeholder groups and convening on issues that were affecting southwestern Pennsylvania in 2020-2022.

This document is intended to be part of SMARTmoves for a Changing Region as a companion report on COIVD-19 Economic Resiliency Support. Please refer to these documents for in-depth discussions of existing conditions, transportation and public transit issues, environmental justice and air quality.

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Local Development District (EDD), and Economic Development District (EDD) for Southwestern Pennsylvania. In these roles, SPC is the leader in regional planning for Southwestern Pennsylvania and is charged with developing both the regional long range transportation plan and the comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS). SPC integrates these two plans into a coordinated regional program of projects and actions that are guided by the principle that the relationship between economic development and the region's transportation system is fundamental.

Background:

In March of 2020 Governor Tom Wolf reported Pennsylvania's first cases of COVID-19. To rapidly respond to the impending pandemic, all non-life sustaining Pennsylvania businesses were ordered to close by March 19, 2020.   As a result, immediate effects to residents, businesses, non-profits and local government were felt.   Significant impacts to health, business and the economy would be felt for the next two years. As the southwestern Pennsylvania region and nation faced shut-downs and significant economic and social impacts To best respond, SPC and its regional stakeholders focused energies on economic recovery.

Below are strategies and action areas that were created as a result of the data collected from stakeholder meetings, surveys and partner discussions to determine the largest factors affecting southwestern Pennsylvania from September 2020 – 2022 and updated to reflect any changes.

What is COVID-19 Economic Resiliency:

Resilience as defined is the ability to withstand the impacts of an incident and return reasonably quickly to a normal state, or preferably to a different state that is even better at thriving under difficult circumstances in the future. For example, brick and mortar establishments have seen less customers during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased their online footprint and now sell goods and services in the online marketplace.

These activities that may have been born out of necessity due to the COVID-19 pandemic can continue after the pandemic and produce income from a market that was not as fully tapped before, allowing more sales than the existing market have would allowed under other economics circumstances.

Resilient economic systems are flexible, built to withstand challenges and are able to adjust with changing times. Any economy that is strong and diverse in its abilities will fare better under stress whether environmental, economic or other.   If the region is economically healthy then we will withstand future shocks to the system. It is not simply a matter that there are sufficient jobs that pay well, but that these jobs and markets are diversified, that the workforce is nimble and talented, and that all of the underlying support systems are stable. The same is also true for the businesses that make up the economy, both on their own and in their interrelationships.

Working to ensure that the Southwestern Pennsylvania region does not see a repeat of the dramatic effects COVID-19 had on business, workforce and residents. Having a strong resiliency plan accompanied with the goals strategies and activities that are listed in the SPC combined Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRP) Smart Moves for a Changing Region will assist in the pro-active planning of the future of southwestern Pennsylvania.

COVID-19 Regional Impacts:

Impacts of the COVID-19 as a global pandemic were unlike that anything the world had ever seen and in the ten-county region of a pandemic are different than other expected types of incidents, but they are not all unique. The duration of each impact varies, and not all impacts are negative. Below are some of the particular impacts of Covid-19 seen in the southwestern Pennsylvania region as collected by data from 2020-2022:

Limitations on the Ability to Travel and Congregate

- Increased need for **broadband** support to assist remote work, learning, telemedicine and social connection
- Less travel and tourism economic activities led to less visitors to area, hotel rooms unused, restaurants and stores with less customers
- Less hotel and sales tax to municipal partners
- Less people driving and traveling
- Limitations on public transportation routes make it difficult on users

Increased Demand for Goods, Services and Supplies

- Significant **supply chain disruptions** to individuals and businesses
- Increased demand on supplies specifically personal protection equipment such as masks, gloves and cleaning supplies were difficult to locate and purchase
- Increased demand for local delivery drivers and truck drivers
- Increased timelines for receipt of items from weeks to months
- I**ncreased costs** of items

Business Closures (temporary & permanent)

- State mandate to close non-essential businesses had direct effect on small businesses
- **Closures and reduced hours** caused workforce challenges and scheduling challenges
- Confusion and frustration on essential vs non-essential status
- **Increased demand on public administration**

Public Health & Infection Rates

- **Increased demand on healthcare systems** and healthcare workers
- Infections led to increased deaths per regional statistics
- Workplace vaccination requirements new territory for employers
- Infection rates led to **workforce shortages**

Worsening of Workforce Challenges

- Limitations on childcare options and school virtualization led to women leaving the workplace
- Limited transportation options made it difficult for non-driving workers to get to work
- Employers moving from in-person to virtual to **hybrid work** models
- Most significant losses in the Food Service/Hospitality sector

Action Areas: Building Economic Resiliency

- **Small Business Support**
- **Connectivity & Broadband**
- **Workforce Development**
- **Capacity Building**

To address the impacts noted above, and within the context of the current CEDS and Long-Range Plan in a synergistic manner, four action areas stand out: Small Business Support, Connectivity & Broadband, Workforce Development and Capacity Building.

The following pages will include and provide action areas with strategies to for southwestern Pennsylvania to be more prepared for future economic shocks whether from pandemic, environmental and/or economic.

Action Area: Small Business Resiliency

This recommended action area of Increased Small Business Support and Resiliency was developed as a result of surveys and data collected by regional partners and through input of business community during September 1, 2020-September 30, 2022.   Responses collected showed the need for clear communication, resource development, and services that assist business would be needed for future success.

It was also shown that keeping businesses open and operational as long as it is safe for employees and individuals is imperative to southwestern Pennsylvania small business success. Early data suggested that access to the following areas were noted as important: Teleworking, Supply Chain, Succession Planning, Access to Personal Protection Equipment (like masks and other supplies), Finance, Distribution, Workforce, Health & Safety, Market Development and Sales.

Provide Strategic & Clear Communication:

To minimize confusion, incorrect information and decrease panic, strategic clear communication is one of the most important factors in the success of a region during an economic or environmental disaster. The state, county and municipal governments need to have a clear and

concise message to business about services, rules and next steps after an economic disruption. The pandemic revealed the need to include additional partners in the small business resiliency area. Expanding messaging and outreach to Economic Development Organizations (EDOs), Workforce Development, Small Business Development Centers and stakeholder groups maximizes the effort and effectiveness of the communication. This network should also be expanded to include social service agencies, lending partnerships and potential large scale industry groups.

The importance to maintain regional stakeholder relationships proves successful to get out mass information to a large population of businesses. Groups like the Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance PREP) which is supported by Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) is an example of a strong network of regional partnerships. Stakeholder groups like these and similar meet frequently to discuss economic impacts, resources and opportunities for small business support.

Establishing a Communications Plan before the next disaster occurs is suggested as an activity that will mitigate future disruptions and allow the region to act quickly. A crisis communications team should be established in order to react quickly. This includes the establishing of a notification method and system that would deliver key and consistent messaging to pre-identified partners. Creation of a website or one repository for consistent messaging is suggested as to remove confusion to small business.

Business Retention & Expansion

In order to offset future economic shocks, strong Business Retention and Expansion efforts are suggested to ensure long term growth and keep businesses rooted in the region. Programs like Engage! sponsored through Pennsylvania's Department of Community & Economic Development support regional partners (EDOs, WIBs, SBDCs) to regularly and proactively interact with targeted businesses within pre-defined industries. Through the engagement of these businesses, connections to a network of business services offered throughout the region such as loans, workforce, expansion services, procurement and technical assistance. Proactively working with businesses to establish early challenges or disruptions can be a factor in whether businesses stay rooted in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Business Diversification and Continuity Planning

Many businesses in the region were not prepared for the disruption in operations due to COVID-19 pandemic related disruptions. Whether workforce, financial or operational challenges, businesses need to prepare for future economic shocks. The southwestern Pennsylvania region experienced significant business closure due to the pandemic. Providing support in advance of challenges will help small businesses be successful.

Providing continuous workshops, resource materials and educational opportunities at a free or nominal cost will help businesses with emergency preparedness. Creating tool kits on business continuity and offering planning support in these areas aid in the resiliency of businesses.

Supply Chain Identification

Covid-19 was a wake-up call to the region and its small business community for how unprepared they would be in the area of supply chain and distribution. The pandemic accelerated the need for goods and services that workforce challenges only exacerbated. The trend to move manufacturing and production back to the United States and increase markets for future shocks will assist in less impact to small business in the future.

Efforts to establish and maintain industry directories and product resource locations at the state level were helpful and should be continued. It is suggested to think regional and engage with the manufacturing base to understand who potential suppliers could be in order to pivot quickly. An example of this was how local distillers and manufacturing partners were able to manufacture hand sanitizer and other PPE supplies when there were shortages nationwide.

New Revenue Development

Businesses that are agile will be more successful during economic disruptions. Businesses that are diversified in their sales, outreach and methods are inherently more resilient to impacts. Working directly with small business providing opportunities for revenue expansion prove successful.

Connecting brick and mortar stores to online marketplaces help in moving product as well as expanding the audience. Providing support to small businesses through online presence and social media to increase outreach and branding has shown increases to financial success. Working with Economic Development Partners and Small Business support networks such as Small Business Development Centers offer free and low-cost classes, webinars and that can be hosted or promoted to assist regional small business. Familiarizing your organization with the offerings of these entities and promoting to your small business community would be helpful. Regions may also find it helpful to create a central repository for small businesses support information and central point of contact.

Grow and Support Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs and small businesses play a critical role in the success of a regional economy. Working with Entrepreneurs and Small Business to navigate future impacts can assist in the regional economic resilience of southwestern Pennsylvania. It was essential to determine what their needs were and to provide assistance as needed. Small business not only aids in current retention of residents, recruiting new residents to southwestern Pennsylvania will look to see a vibrant business community as one of the criteria in what would make this region their selected community of choice.

Determine who are the regions small business navigation experts. Southwestern Pennsylvania is resource rich in its ability to support small business and entrepreneurs with a robust network of EDOs, SBDCs, Innovation Centers and municipal entities tasked with growing business. These are not only the communication centers for getting information out to small business and

entrepreneurs but also who can provide you with the current needs and challenges so that when programs need to be developed for support, regional feedback is obtained quickly.

Action Area: Small Business Resiliency Strategies

- **Provide Strategic & Clear Communication**
- **Business Diversification and Continuity Planning**
- **Supply Chain Identification**
- **New Revenue Development**
- **Grow and Support Entrepreneurship**

Action Area: Connectivity/Broadband

This recommended action area of Connectivity/Broadband was a regional priority of southwestern Pennsylvania CEDS and Long-Range Plan prior to the pandemic but was immediately brought to the forefront as of one of the only ways to access information, healthcare, learning, remote work and social interaction during COVID-19.

What has been learned is that broadband and connectivity is the gateway that allows communities and individuals across the region to access information that is essential to everyday life. Without broadband, it is difficult to participate in society, creating negative impacts on individuals and communities. Rather than viewing high-speed internet as a luxury, it is becoming increasingly clear that broadband needs to be viewed as a necessity, like electricity or water. Currently, many areas within the region lack adequate high-speed internet access and equipment that are essential for residents to better connect to jobs, education, health care, and to attract new business.

The term broadband is used to describe a range of technologies that provide high-speed internet access. Broadband commonly refers to high-speed internet access that is faster than traditional dial-up access. Unlike traditional dial-up, which requires a telephone line to connect and is not always connected, broadband access is considered "always-on," making it much more efficient to use.

The following strategy areas ensure movement in the forward direction to allow for less interruption to work, healthcare, learning and information should future economic impacts such as COVID-19 or similar return.

Regional Planning - Connectivity Roadmap:

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), in collaboration with Allies for Children, Metro21 and Traffic21 at Carnegie Mellon University, and a diverse, regional coalition of stakeholders, recognized the need for a regional Connectivity Roadmap to identify and guide

the deployment of high-speed connectivity programs and projects throughout the southwestern Pennsylvania region. Currently, many areas within the region lack adequate high-speed internet access and equipment that are essential for residents to better connect to jobs, education, health care, and to attract new business. This regional Connectivity Roadmap provides a guide for building a more comprehensive and equitable broadband network that will help people connect to opportunity.

The southwestern Pennsylvania region will collaborate to invest efficiently and equitably in high-speed internet networks and programs that are *AVAILABLE, ACCESSIBLE, and AFFORDABLE* to all to ensure our region is connected and thriving socially and economically.

To learn more about the Connectivity Roadmap, read the report [here](#).

Public Awareness & Partnership:

Taking a regional approach to ensure the importance of connectivity for all in both urban and rural areas is important to the success of broadband projects. Public outreach campaigns, surveys and roundtables are suggested to get feedback on the needs and challenges of connectivity. Working towards continued outreach on this important subject will help grow understanding of the importance.

SPC will host an annual Regional Broadband Summit with the goal of educating local governments, non-profits, partners and the public about the state of the region's connectivity, community funding opportunities and available resources (programmatic and infrastructure), current and future legislation considerations, and other important issues. The summits will include standalone sessions on various federal, state, and regional initiatives, a keynote speaker, and other networking opportunities. SPC's Connected initiative is not affiliated with any internet provider and is not intended to sell any internet services.

Rather, it seeks to guide the region's future internet investments that can be made now that the historic infrastructure bill has passed, which includes $65 billion for broadband. The intent is to keep the project un-affiliated and focused on deployment of resources. By having this initiative managed at a regional level, it will allow for greater participation.

Digital Equity:

Planning for future disruptions – fixing the most critically underserved and unserved areas of the region are imperative to ensure equitable opportunities for connection. Those without broadband access or those who did not have financial means to obtain access were sharply disadvantaged during COVID-19 as learning, work and healthcare were mostly online.

As an example, to better understand the needs of the region, SWPA Connected examined the current state of broadband coverage, speed, resources, and gaps in relation to the region's demographic and socioeconomic conditions. SWPA Connected developed two connectivity data dashboards leveraging existing local and national open-source datasets. SPC also analyzed and incorporated Environmental Justice and Title VI data to create the Connectivity Indices.

Mapping applications can be used to assist in prioritizing potential deployment locations across the region. In the meantime, these applications will serve entities who are applying to state and federal grant programs for broadband deployment funding by helping articulate the need to deploy high-speed connectivity to the most critical unserved and underserved areas of the region. Dashboard, scoring and data can be found [here](#).

Communication Tool Kits:

Creating helpful materials to assist in raising awareness about the broadband resources, current initiative like SPC's Connected, the Connectivity Roadmap, provide communities and residents across the region the tools they need to increase their digital literacy and better advocate for improved internet access.

Working with regional stakeholders such as libraries, K-12 schools, workforce investment boards, CareerLink, colleges, non-profits, stakeholder groups and other entities to provide this information where individuals with limited connection access tend to get their online support is helpful to ensure resources are shared and available.

Action Area: Connectivity Resiliency Strategies

- **Regional Planning - Connectivity Roadmap**
- **Public Awareness & Partnership**
- **Digital Equity**
- **Communication Tool Kits**

Action Area: Workforce Development

This recommended action area recognizes that workforce and employment are foundational elements of a local and regional economy. Shortages in workforce already existed pre-COVID and were exacerbated by the pandemic with issues in not only finding employees for business, but retaining talent. As mentioned in our regional-based surveys, workforce was the number one concern for our regional business and stakeholder partners.   In order to recover from the pandemics economic challenges or be resilient in the future planning of southwest Pennsylvania region workforce related challenges will need to solved and programs need to be implemented to grow, retain and attract talent to southwestern Pennsylvania.

The current issue is one of both an immediate need for employees by our regional businesses and a pro-active suggestion to plan for the jobs of the future. From an equity standpoint, systematic changes are needed to include under-represented populations and individuals from low-income areas into the workforce not only increasing the opportunity for family-sustaining wages but also increasing the opportunities for individuals to gain skills in new and emerging fields of employment.

Retain & Retrain the Regional Workforce:

A longstanding issue prior to COVID-19 only made more difficult was the retention of workers in the southwestern Pennsylvania region. There must be a strong focus on the workforce needs of the region. It means attracting and growing our population by making the region a place where people want to live, work and stay. It means training our population not just for the jobs that exist, but for the jobs we create through innovation and entrepreneurship. This region is a leader in technology and innovation and our future jobs will represent this. There is a delicate balance needed to ensure industry rooted here in southwestern Pennsylvania will be supported, while creating a workforce plan that will focus community investment on sustaining our current regional employers and preparing our future by investing in technology related businesses.

Local unions, employers, and schools should partner to prepare for this potential industry shift as the region's population ages and retires. It will be important to build workforce expectations over time as industries evolve and mature. As a region, we can work to identify and address skills and geographic mismatches while considering tradeoffs (some jobs will be created while others are eliminated). Providing flexible and easy to use funding for on the job training and teaching new computer skills will be important.

As a very diverse region with employment needs in healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, education and finance we also see the need for future jobs in robotics, automation and AI. Working with education partners, workforce investment boards, industry groups to determine immediate and future training needs that lead to direct employment with family sustaining wages will be key in the success of weathering future economic challenges.

Encourage training program partners to focus on soft skills. Local schools and universities can develop programs that focus on soft skills and industry specific training. Schools and training programs can incorporate transition plans with employment goals into graduation requirements. Regional partners can help expose students to a greater range of jobs to increase their awareness of career opportunities. Network with universities to secure funding to support education and leadership training to help move employees up the ladder. Provide or arrange for flexible and easy to use on-the-job training funds for companies to train employees and promote awareness of existing resources to aid with these goals.

Determine Workforce Barriers and Remove Them

The region is full of individuals who would like gainful employment but certain situations and conditions can make it very difficult for an individual to acquire a job. Even if a worker is able to find employment some of the below barriers can make it harder for individuals to keep and retain their position. Retention of workers is making much harder for our regional employers as they're trying to bounce back from COVID-19 workforce losses.

Barriers to employment result in a loss of competent workforce either prior to starting employment or loss as a long-term employee.   It is essential to work to remove workforce barriers as it's both beneficial for the employee and employer to maintain sustainable business operations.

Common barriers historically present and a few that were new due to COVID-19:

Barriers to Employment:

Age Conditions	**Past Substance Abuse**	**Chronic Health**
Criminal History Access	**Disability**	**Lack of Childcare**
Lack of Transportation	**Poverty**	**Language**
Employment Gaps	**Lack of Soft skills**	**Homelessness**
Lack of Internet of Family	**Restricted Hours**	**Health Conditions**

There are opportunities to work with and integrate solutions to assist individuals with barriers to employment. Individuals who are susceptible to underemployment and unemployment as a result of these barriers can be successful with assistance from regional partners and programs in place to help mitigate these challenges. The creation of new business models and pathways to employment focused on increasing equity, opportunities and family sustaining wages is a win-win for both employers and individuals in the region improving outcomes and lives.

Create Career Pathway Profiles

COVID-19 left many positions open in our manufacturing and trades fields leading to supply chain issues, logistics and distribution shortages and impacted nationwide purchasing power. To increase the numbers of workers in these fields, a re-branding of blue collar positions is needed in an effort to break the stigma that is sometimes associated with these roles as a means to increase the number of jobs in skilled trade industries (such as heavy machinery, etc.)

It is necessary to partner with local workforce boards to implement training that emphasizes problem solving and leadership skills to show that these jobs have opportunities for advancement. It is also essential to implement a public education strategy showing that skilled labor is a viable path to success, and encourage training in schools from early ages to both increase awareness of these trades and encourage hands-on work experience such as apprenticeships. Finally, partnerships with educators and employers should be built in order to better understand employer needs and post-secondary employment options. It should be a goal from every sector to emphasize skilled labor on the same level that an academic track is emphasized.

For STEM and emerging industries here in southwestern Pennsylvania, many times the K-12, regional college and university students do not have examples of occupations, companies and

career exploration opportunities that would allow them to experience these career fields. Exposing students to these jobs of the future, by providing examples of daily work activities, wage progression and current employment opportunities in aerospace, autonomation, artificial intelligence and robotics would help encourage more students to enter this field and increase enrollments into training programs. Working regionally to showcase these emerging industries with our educational partners as a way to help students and specifically those from historically underserved communities gain opportunities to work in these fields will increase regional retention and build equity opportunities.

> ## Action Area: Workforce Development Resiliency Strategies
> - **Retain & Retrain**
> - **Determine Workforce Barriers and Remove Them**
> - **Create Career Pathway Profiles**
> - **Get Creative – Increase Candidate Market**

Get Creative – Increase Candidate Market:

Increase the candidate market or "end size" to meet future workforce demands. Encourage universities to train and match workers with the jobs currently available. Employers must better align their requirements with national standards to be more competitive and attract workers. Discourage employers to require experience for entry-level positions. This can be done by retaining local talent by encouraging businesses to offer better employment packages, pay rates, and other benefits (relocation assistance, child care support, etc.). It can also be done by investing in public transit to connect people to jobs to make them both more desirable and affordable, and developing programs that change the perspective on once "undesirable" candidates, such as workers with past minor criminal records or previous substance abuse challenges.

It would benefit organizations to learn best practices of other regions that are successfully recruiting talent pools. This would keep southwestern Pennsylvania competitive in the minds of potential residents and retain those already here.

Action Area: Capacity Building

This recommendation area stems from the preparation needs stated by stakeholders, industry and local government to be ready for any future shocks to the economic ecosystem. Stakeholders and local government came together to support the region by providing resources, programing and support to battle the challenges that occurred during the pandemic. As strong as they could be to withstand the economic impacts of COVID19, entities will want to be even more prepared for any future additional challenges—whether that be economic, health or environmental. Our region continues to support and work to improve   Capacity building, implement areas of efficiency, long term financially planning for the future and making progress towards significant improvements into infrastructure, workforce, small business support. These areas will need to be supported financially as well as with workforce and continued strategic planning efforts are needed.

Succession Planning

The term succession planning refers to strategy of keeping a business or organization running smoothly and without interruption as new opportunities or challenges emerge. As mentioned in the workforce section, loss of population, an aging and retiring workforce requires succession planning not only in the workforce, but increased costs of operation for day to day activities in southwestern Pennsylvania. Data suggests an increased need in planning for the future and mitigating disruptions to our economy.

Educate regional stakeholders, county and municipal governments about best practices and their benefits, including how to prepare for future economic shocks. Target chambers of commerce and state leadership for education efforts to raise awareness about best practices, encourage ways to create great places that improve the economic resiliency of the region.

Include resiliency planning in annual and long-term strategic planning for municipal, non-profit and businesses. Create plans with a strong focus on risk reduction and disaster preparedness (economic, environmental or health). In addition, acknowledge the key areas of equity and vital importance of environmental planning to ensure a healthy economic ecosystem.

Identify New Revenue Sources – Increase Funding

To increase necessary funding for regional organizations to continue to provide services that meet the needs of the community. Practical actions are also needed to work and be visible with the state legislature in order to recognize that the need for revenue increases are a continuing process—not a "one and done" endeavor. It is essential to develop an ongoing, cooperative process with the state legislature that work towards matching revenues to regional needs.

Taking the opportunity to apply for the multitude of federal grants released as a result of COVID-19 impacted the economy. For example, under the American Rescue Plan, EDA was allocated $3 billion in supplemental funding to assist communities nationwide in their efforts to build back better by accelerating the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and building local economies that will be resilient to future economic shocks. American Rescue Plan funding enables EDA to provide larger, more transformational investments across the nation

while utilizing its greatest strengths, including flexible funding to support community-led economic development.

SPC provides technical assistance on Economic Development Grants and ARC Grants which are aimed at building capacity and long-term economic development growth in our region.

> ## Action Area: Capacity Building Resiliency Strategies
>
> - **Succession Planning**
> - **Identify New Revenue Sources – Increase Funding**
> - **Increase Partnerships & Public Awareness**

Increase Partnerships & Public Awareness

Collaboration across the region is the key to sustainable economies. Continued efforts within the public and private sector to learn from each other, as well as best practices in areas that have successful public-private partnership experience will foster an environment for growth.

Promote collaboration of planning efforts and bundling of projects and programs to reduce costs and develop cohesive communities/local governments. SPC could serve as a conduit and clearinghouse for plans and information about projects – connecting potential partners and helping to ensure that connections are made. It is also important to determine key areas of performance and opportunity for partnerships and cost-sharing to enhance the resources currently in place. Enhance understanding by the private sector, nonprofits, and the general public of regional needs; garner their support for increased economic revenues by highlighting past successes and accomplishments. Actions include making the general public aware of the benefits of increased transportation funding and how it has been used in local communities.

An example Partnerships & Public Awareness would the Covid Hospitality Industry Recovery Program (CHIRP) in which Department of Community and Economic Development allocated $145 million in funding assistance to the hospitality industry businesses adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program required counties to establish grant programs for eligible businesses. The SPC region was able to assist thousands of businesses with grant related support. Outreach efforts to news and community partners were successful and the public viewed first hand the ability for local government in partnership with Certified Economic Development Organizations (CEDO) and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) were able to partner and operate quickly to help disburse financial assistance to small business affected by COVID-19 impacts.