



Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Development Plan 2023-2027

State of Mississippi
Governor Tate Reeves



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State of Mississippi

TATE REEVES
Governor

January 31, 2023

Dr. Jennifer Clyburn-Reed
Federal Co-Chair
Southeast Crescent Regional Commission
1901 Assembly Street, Suite 370
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Dr. Clyburn-Reed,

It is my distinct honor to present the first Development Plan and corresponding Strategy Statement from the State of Mississippi for the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission. These documents identify the goals, objectives, and priorities for investing SCRC funds to strengthen the community and economic development and reflect the needs of the Region.

Please be advised that this Plan shall be my plan of record until otherwise notified, and it is consistent with the authorizing language in the Public Law 110-246, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, the "Farm Bill."

I look forward to robust conversations and working with this Commission to build partnership as we address the socioeconomic parity of this Region across the country, and specifically, Mississippi. If there are any questions about the above-mentioned document, please contact Kristen Windham, my designated SCRC Alternate, or Mike Amour and Andrea Rose, my designated SCRC Program Managers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tate Reeves".

Tate Reeves
Governor

COMMISSION OVERVIEW

This document will serve as the interim Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Development Plan for the State of Mississippi. This plan will outline the strategic agenda for the Southeast Crescent in Mississippi, based on economic needs, weaknesses, and strengths of the 18-county Mississippi region. This plan may be updated as the Governor identifies regional opportunities through the planning process. This plan will define how development projects will be prioritized based on available resources. The implementation of this plan will address needs and goals of the region by targeting resources and strategies supported by Governor Tate Reeves that meet the defined goals and objectives of the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission.

This Development Plan:

- Reflects the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission’s strategic plan;
- Describes Mississippi’s development and planning organization and coordination process, including the roles of LDDs and citizens;
- Describes methods used to measure the relative financial resources of project applicants, ensure equitable allocation of state contributions for projects to its Southeast Crescent area, and explain the rationale and application of such methods.

Background

Congress authorized the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (“The Farm Bill”) in 2008 to address issues related to economic development and poverty in its 428 counties across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. SCRC aims to implement its strategic mission by serving as convener, equity-driver, and capacity builder.

The Commission is comprised of the Governors of the 7 Southeast Crescent states and a Federal Co-Chair appointed by the President. By both the Federal Co-Chair and a majority of these Governors involved, SCRC’s consensus model ensures close collaboration between the federal and state partners in carrying out the mission of SCRC.

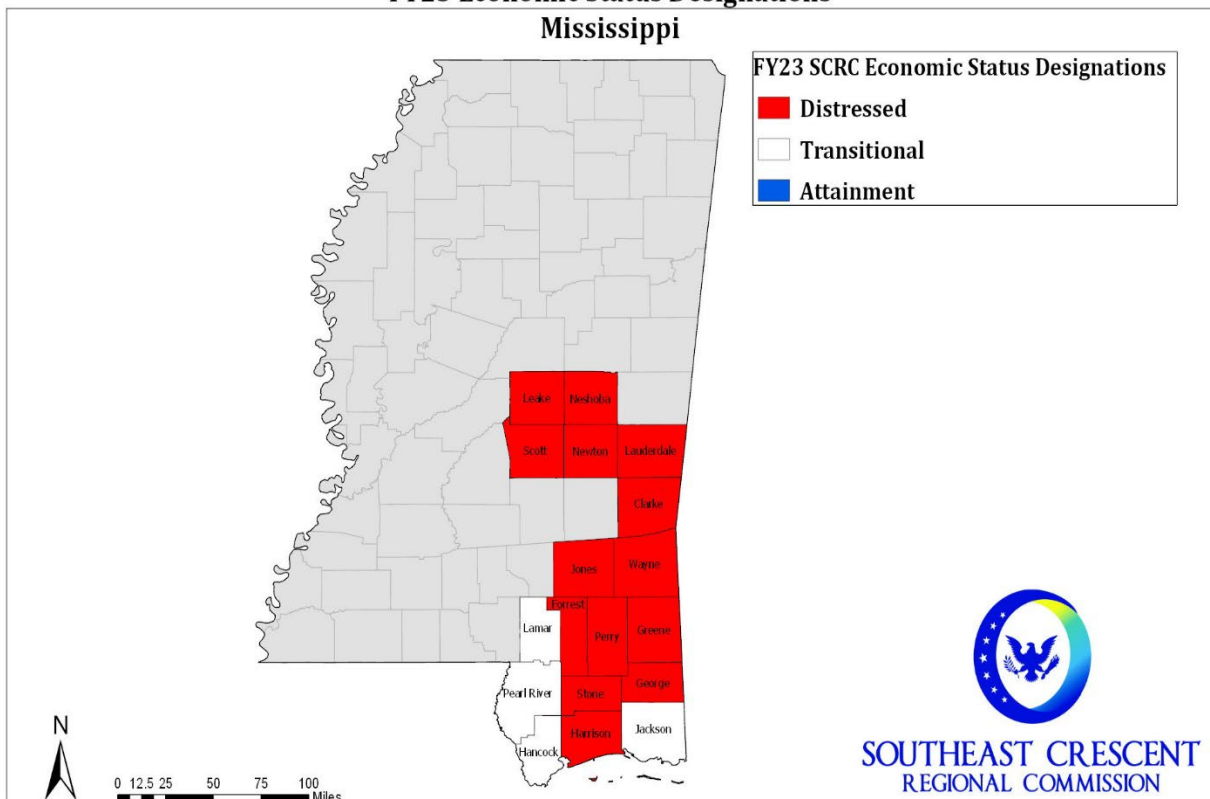
SCRC is currently based in Columbia, SC and houses the Office of the Federal Co-Chairman and SCRC Commission (Executive Director and SCRC staff). Governor Tate Reeves is the State of Mississippi’s representative to SCRC. The responsibility for the administration of the SCRC program within Mississippi is being developed to operate as a bureau within the Mississippi Development Authority. Governor Reeves has appointed Kristen Windham as his Alternate to SCRC. He also has appointed Mike Armour and Andrea Rose as the Interim State Program Directors.

In Fiscal Year 2023, 14 of the 18 Mississippi SCRC counties are designated distressed, a concentration of distressed counties of 78%. The Southeast Crescent Region of Mississippi consists of 18 counties:

Clarke*, Forrest*, George*, Greene*, Hancock, Harrison*, Jackson, Jones*, Lamar, Lauderdale*, Leake*, Neshoba*, Newton*, Pearl River, Perry*, Scott*, Stone*, Wayne*
Distressed counties (FY2023 counties designated as Distressed are marked with an asterisk) are the most economically depressed counties, ranking among the most disadvantaged of the nation's counties. Current maps and data can be found at scrc.gov.

Southeast Crescent Regional Commission

FY23 Economic Status Designations



Economic Status

Mississippi continues to move toward economic parity with the nation and region. Jobs, skills to transition into more advanced and technical economic opportunities, industrial site availability, and adequate infrastructure all contribute to the growth and sustainability of a region. Provision of reliable water and wastewater systems is essential for furthering economic development growth. The 18 counties in Southeast Crescent Mississippi still have areas without adequate service and opportunity. These will be targeted by investments and programs of SCRC.

Technology is key to future development and considered part of infrastructure. Lack of adequate high-speed internet service is a barrier to economic development and competitive educational opportunities. Ensuring access to technology and high-speed internet is key to advancing the educational level and ensuring economic opportunity. The State of Mississippi plans to address these issues, and others facing this region in Mississippi through the Governor's priorities laid out in this plan.

Economic development investments remain crucial to the future of the people in the Southeast Crescent Region of Mississippi and the nation. They are not, however, the end. Much remains to be done, particularly in the distressed counties and areas of our state. Mississippi will work to take advantage of opportunities by utilizing collaborative partnerships that strengthen not only the state, but the region. These efforts at federal, state, and local levels will help this region foster new opportunities in targeted industries like advanced manufacturing, automobile and parts manufacturing, aerospace and aviation, clean energy, metal fabrication and steel, and advanced materials manufacturing.

Governor Tate Reeves' priorities align with *Southeast Crescent Regional Commission: Strategic Plan (2023-2027): Building sustainable communities and strengthening economic growth across the Southeast Crescent Region*, the current SCRC Strategic Plan for FY 2023-2027). Each of these goals will be implemented by Mississippi through the objectives and strategies below. Governor Reeves has a goal of economic success for all counties in Mississippi, and he is committed to the betterment of this region in Mississippi, and the vision of socioeconomic parity with the region and the nation. Southeast Crescent Regional Commission's mission to build sustainable communities and strengthen economic growth in this region of Mississippi is reflected in Governor Reeve's priorities:

1. Build and improve infrastructure;
2. Support a healthy workforce;
3. Develop a globally competitive workforce;
4. Promote private-sector, high-wage jobs, entrepreneurship, and small businesses;
5. Support population growth;
6. Preserve and leverage natural, cultural, and local assets.

Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Strategic Goals and Objectives

*Source: *Southeast Crescent Regional Commission: Strategic Plan (2023-2027): Building sustainable communities and strengthening economic growth across the Southeast Crescent Region.*

SCRC Strategic Goal 1: Invest in Critical Infrastructure

- SCRC Objective 1.1: Expand the region’s basic water and sewer infrastructure to be more resilient.
- SCRC Objective 1.2: Expand and improve access to affordable and reliable digital infrastructure (e.g., broadband, cellular).
- SCRC Objective 1.3: Support expanded regional transportation infrastructure systems and transit services.

Examples of Potential projects include downtown Wi-Fi, industrial access roads, water and sewer projects that result in job creations and/or retention, industrial site development, infrastructure planning, and transportation planning.

SCRC Strategic Goal 2: Improve Health and Support Services Access and Outcomes

- SCRC Objective 2.1: Support initiatives that expand access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and services that support overall mental and physical health.
- SCRC Objective 2.2: Provide support to build capacity for navigating and accessing support services.

Examples of potential projects include telehealth programs, peer support programs, health care training programs, and rural health care clinics.

SCRC Strategic Goal 3: Strengthen Workforce Capacity

- SCRC Objective 3.1: Promote workforce development programs (e.g., apprenticeships, internships, on the job training, programs at technical and community colleges) for local high-demand job opportunities (e.g., plumbers, electricians, etc.).
- SCRC Objective 3.2: Increase enrollment in and completion of critical training programs by investing in wrap-around services.

Examples of potential projects include K-12 education programs, career pathway program development, college access programs, supporting programs that offer employees wrap-around services and workforce development programs.

SCRC Strategic Goal 4: Foster Entrepreneurial and Business Development Activities and Objectives

- SCRC Objective 4.1: Support the expansion of access to business capital (e.g., micro loans) to support innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic equity,
- SCRC Objective 4.2: Invest in programs and business opportunities that address critical challenges facing SCRC communities while providing opportunities to attract and retain talent locally.

Examples of potential projects include shared-use kitchens, co-package plants, small business incubators, regional agriculture markets, community loan funds, industry cluster development, small business plan competitions, and small business mentorship programs.

SCRC Strategic Goal 5: Expand Affordable Housing Stock and Access

- SCRC Objective 5.1: Increase access to wrap-around services and legal assistance to resolve title, heirship, land tenure, and eviction issues.
- SCRC Objective 5.2: Support enrollment in and access to homebuyer programs.
- SCRC Objective 5.3: Invest in efforts to improve the affordability and availability of quality housing across the region.

Examples of potential projects include programs that provide services on title, heirship, land tenure and eviction issues, support programs that provide homebuyer education and training and regional planning projects, community economic development planning efforts. Programs benefitting under this goal should aid a wide-ranging population and strive to build capacity to provide these services over a long period of time.

SCRC Strategic Goal 6: Promote Environmental Conservation, Preservation, and Access

- SCRC Objective 6.1: Invest in air, water, and soil clean-up efforts that impact historically disadvantaged communities.
- SCRC Objective 6.2: Preserve and expand access to the SCRC region's natural resources to increase outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities.

Examples of potential projects include regional planning projects, community economic development planning, local food, farm and forestry programs, downtown streetscape projects, downtown revitalization, agritourism development, establishment of gateway community programs, and outdoor recreation economy planning and development.

Investment Focus for Mississippi's Southeast Crescent Region

Governor Reeves will leverage SCRC investment to develop critical infrastructure, grow a globally competitive workforce, and strengthen community and economic development in order to attract and retain more and better jobs. The state will utilize SCRC resources to provide technical assistance and support in the 18 SCRC counties.

Governor Reeves believes SCRC investments can be leveraged to support the Region in workforce development, infrastructure access and improvements, and enhanced economic opportunity in the region. All SCRC investments in Mississippi will be utilized to partner with communities for economic and community development leading to equity with other areas of the country. Priorities for investment:

Mississippi Investment Priority 1: Build and Improve Infrastructure

Communities must have viable water, wastewater treatment, transportation, technology (broadband, connectivity), and basic utility systems. The Mississippi SCRC Office will invest in critical infrastructure including new technologies and improvement of existing resources and transportation in communities able to show an ability to sustain basic infrastructure over time that particularly:

STATE STRATEGY:

- 1.1: Make strategic investments that leverage federal, state, local, and private capital for the development and improvement of water, wastewater, and basic utility systems.
- 1.2: Support construction and development of business and industrial development sites and public facilities to stimulate economic and community development.
- 1.3: Provide infrastructure support to projects that create private sector and high wage jobs.
- 1.4: Make strategic investments in new technology infrastructure to increase local and regional access.
- 1.5: Support access to and growth of broadband network.
- 1.6: Create and expand telecommunications, computing, and data enterprises.
- 1.7: Support planning and construction of intermodal transportation networks.
- 1.8: Promote awareness of, and commerce between, intermodal and transportation systems in the region.
- 1.9: Support local access road or highways that create or retain jobs.
- 1.10: Support improvements to airports related to economic opportunities.
- 1.11: Develop physical infrastructure along main cargo transportation corridors.

Mississippi Investment Priority 2: Support a Healthy Workforce

Healthy workforce programs directly impact worker productivity. Activities and policies that improve the supply and distribution of the professional healthcare workforce (physicians, nurse practitioners, psychologists, dentists, medical technicians, etc.) in the Southeast Crescent Region of Mississippi can help ensure

that health care is accessible, comprehensive, and affordable. The Mississippi SCRO will support sustainable initiatives that develop a globally competitive workforce through improvements in healthy workforce initiatives and increased access to healthcare, particularly:

STATE STRATEGY:

- 2.1: Provide limited start-up incentives to communities establishing sustainable healthy living programs.
- 2.2: Promote nutrition education, healthy lifestyles, physical activity, and early screening as means of reducing or eliminating the incidence of health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.
- 2.3: Support local efforts to expand access to healthcare programs and recruit healthcare professionals through the J-1 Visa Waiver Program and other programs.
- 2.4: Support educational institutions that identify healthcare needs and train professionals to help meet those needs.
- 2.5: Provide gap support to viable primary care systems.
- 2.6: Support programs that effectively address workforce reentry after SUD.
- 2.7: Support telemedicine applications for communities.

Mississippi Investment Priority 3: Develop a Globally Competitive Workforce

Workforce training can be improved at all development stages. To increase workforce participation rate and number of credentialed employees while supporting the development of the current and future workforce, the Mississippi SCRO will particularly support sustainable initiatives in workforce training, readiness, education, and achievement that:

STATE STRATEGY:

- 3.1: Support industry-driven apprenticeship programs.
- 3.2: Support community and junior colleges that provide programs to develop critical workforce skills, both for existing business and industry and targeted new business and industry.
- 3.3: Improve classroom teaching, using technology as a teaching tool, and improving student achievement in science, math, engineering, computers, and technology.
- 3.4: Support programs aimed at improving early childhood learning.
- 3.5: Support integration of skills training and knowledge of workplace requirements across, and into, educational and training curricula.
- 3.6: Support initiatives to target and develop critical workforce skills, particularly in distressed counties.
- 3.7: Support local and regional efforts to better prepare students, out-of-school youth, and adults for post-secondary level training and education, as well as the workplace.
- 3.8: Support dropout prevention programs.
- 3.9: Support efforts to increase access to quality childcare.

Mississippi Investment Priority 4: Promote private-sector, high-wage jobs, entrepreneurship, and small businesses

Identify and support projects that lead to private-sector, high-wage jobs, increased entrepreneurship, and small business growth. Strengthen sustainable local economies by increasing access to capital. Invest in diversifying and strengthening the economic base. The Mississippi SCRO will particularly support sustainable initiatives that strengthen and diversity the economy:

STATE STRATEGY:

- 4.1: Improve access to investment capital.
- 4.2: Encourage formation of business networks and trade groups.
- 4.3: Encourage foreign investment in the region.
- 4.1: Connect communities and local developers with economic prospects, particularly in distressed counties.
- 4.2: Expand and create technology research initiatives at research universities that will lead to job creation in the region.
- 4.3: Promote export trading initiatives.
- 4.4: Invest in capacity and leadership of the region to diversity and grow economic base.
- 4.5: Support development and growth of businesses in the Creative Economy.

Mississippi Investment Priority 5: Support Population Growth

A growing workforce needs access to quality and affordable housing. To support a growing workforce population, the SCRO will support sustainable projects to improve access to housing information, support infrastructure rehabilitation and construction:

STATE STRATEGY:

- 5.1: Connect communities to and support access to quality housing.
- 5.2: Support initiatives that help local governments and other community development organizations become more effective.
- 5.3: Support self-help and other initiatives that engage citizens in assessing, improving, beautifying, and motivating their communities to increase economic development.
- 5.4: Support access to financial and homeownership education.
- 5.5: Support planning and construction of infrastructure improvements that run along-side economic development infrastructure projects.

Mississippi Investment Priority 6: Preserve and Leverage Natural, Cultural, and Local Assets.

The Southeast Crescent Region of Mississippi has many cultural, local, and natural assets that are valuable to residents and visitors alike. Protecting the landscape of the region while leveraging unique properties for increased quality of life and community and economic development can improve quality of life. The SCRO will support projects acknowledging natural resources, particularly those that:

STATE STRATEGY:

- 6.1: Support efforts to institutionalize the capacity to assist communities in identifying and leveraging local and regional assets for development, including: arts, music, history, natural, heritage, and cultural.
- 6.2: Support efforts to maximize the economic benefits of tourism, arts, and crafts industries.
- 6.3: Invest in development of vibrant downtowns and support placemaking.
- 6.4: Invest in development and promotion of cultural and heritage-based assets.
- 6.5: Support efforts to increase capacity to manage natural resources.

State Program Operations

The Mississippi SCRC program is led by Governor Tate Reeves' office. Administrative responsibilities and day-to-day operations for the Mississippi SCRC program have been assigned by Governor Reeves to Interim Program Managers Mr. Mike Armour and Ms. Andrea Rose until the SCRC is operating at full capacity.

Mississippi SCRC Program staff will work with two planning and development districts in SCRC project development, application preparation, and implementation. The Executive Director and staff of Mississippi's SCRC PDDs work with their board members, elected officials, citizens, and economic developers to identify needs of local communities.

General Funding Timelines and Procedures (TBD)

SCRC Grants are awarded to state, local, and Native American Governments as well as public or nonprofit organizations for projects that align with the Commission's strategic investment priorities and the State's plans and strategies. All applications are made through, evaluated by, and certified by the corresponding State, then approved by the Commission.

- A Preapplication workshop will be announced and promoted broadly to ensure diverse attendance;
- PreApplications will be solicited as funds are made available by Congress and the Commission;
- Preapplications will be reviewed to ensure eligibility, alignment with strategies, and overall strength of application;
- Projects selected for further review go to the Governor who makes final recommendations for full project submissions;
- Full project submissions will be made to the State who will review and submit to the Commission for Commission's review and final approval;
- Full project applications are due within 60 days of being notified;
- Applicants are strongly encouraged to work with their local PDD for Technical Assistance with Pre-Application and/or Full Submission.

In addition to meeting the requirements of the SCRC Strategic Plan, all projects must demonstrate a contribution to achievement of one or more of the Commission's strategic goals, except that the state may request approval of a project or projects without such supporting demonstration to take advantage of special development opportunities, or to respond to emergency economic distress.

The Mississippi SCRO will work with SCRC to promote Commission outreach and workshops for residents, applicants, and grantees. Project applications must include measurable outputs and outcomes that are consistent with and can be measured in accordance to federal and state performance measurement requirements. All projects must track the actual outputs and outcomes for up to three years after project completion. This

may be monitored by MDA, SCRO, SCRC and/or the Office of Inspector General, or other federal and state entities.

Funding for operation grants is usually limited to an initial year and one year's continuation if deemed necessary. No project is guaranteed more than one year of support. Generally, SCRC funds will be reduced if a second year of funding is approved. Proposals should include a plan for continuation and sustainability after grant funds are expended.

SCRC Funding Guidelines

SCRC Funding guidelines can be found in the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission's Strategic Plan (2023-2027) and are subject to change.

Match Guidelines

- Distressed Counties are eligible for an 80/20 Match Rate
- Transitional/Isolated Areas of Distress are eligible for a 50/50 Match Rate
- Attainment Counties are not eligible for SCRC Grants
- Multi-County Projects may use the better match rate if at least half of the counties are in that designation.
- If at least one, but less than half, of counties are distressed, the SCRC grant is limited to the higher of 50% or the average percentage applicable to the counties in the project.

Match Examples:

A project serving Clarke County:

Clarke County is Distressed; the project is eligible for 80/20 Match Rate

A project serving George and Jackson Counties:

George County is Distressed, Jackson County is Transitional. Since at least half of the counties are distressed, this project can use the distressed match rate of 80/20.

A project serving Jackson, Hancock, and Harrison Counties:

Jackson and Hancock are both Transitional; Harrison County is Distressed. This project can use a 60% match rate since the average (80%/50%/50%) of 60% is higher than the majority rate of 50%.

If you have questions about what the match rate would be, please reach out to the PDD or SCRO.

Preapplication Review

The following criteria will be used by the SCRO to score and rank projects for recommendation to Governor Reeves for consideration:

- Alignment of project with Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Strategic Goals
- Alignment of project with Mississippi Strategies and Investment Goals
- Projects with other federal and state agency funding will be given higher priority
- Strength of overall financial plan for project
- Amount of SCRC funds applicant has received to date
- Amount of time since most recent SCRC funds received
- Past grant project performance
- Private investment in the project
- Ratio of local match to grant funds
- Severity and/or imminence of project need
- Jobs created and/or retained
- Project scope and cost effectiveness
- Proposed performance measures
- Benchmarks, Timelines, Action Plan completeness

Projects will be evaluated based on committed and expected financial resources. Projects with private investment will be scored highest. Projects with secured local, state, or other federal funds will be given higher scores than those with expected or applied for funds. Projects with new/retained jobs will receive preference. These projects should include letters of commitment from these sources.

Planning and Development Districts in the Southeast Crescent Region of Mississippi:

East Central Planning and Development District

Kawana McCary, Executive Director

P.O. Box 499

Newton, MS 39345

(601) 683-2007

SCRC Counties served: **Clarke, Lauderdale, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott**

Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District

Leonard Bentz, II, Executive Director

10441 Corporate Drive, Suite 1

Gulfport, MS 39503

(228) 868-2311

SCRC Counties served: **Forrest, George, Greene, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Jones, Lamar, Pearl River, Perry, Stone, Wayne**



Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Strategy Statement 2023

State of Mississippi
Governor Tate Reeves



Annual Strategy Statement, FY23

Congress authorized the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (“The Farm Bill”) in 2008 to address issues related to economic development and poverty in its 428 counties across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. SCRC aims to implement its strategic mission by serving as convener, equity-driver, and capacity builder.

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Clarke*, Forrest*, George*, Greene*, Hancock, Harrison*, Jackson, Jones*, Lamar, Lauderdale*, Leake*, Neshoba*, Newton*, Pearl River, Perry*, Scott*, Stone*, Wayne* Distressed Counties (**FY2023 counties designated as Distressed are marked with an asterisk*) are the most economically depressed counties, ranking among the most disadvantaged of the nation’s counties.

This Annual Strategy for Fiscal Year 2023 lies within the scope of the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission’s current Strategic Plan (2023-2027), and reflects Governor Tate Reeves’ priorities to build sustainable communities and strengthen economic growth in this region of Mississippi by leveraging investments that:

1. Build and improve infrastructure;
2. Support a healthy workforce;
3. Develop a globally competitive workforce;
4. Promote private-sector, high-wage jobs, entrepreneurship, and small businesses;
5. Support population growth;
6. Preserve and leverage natural, cultural, and local assets.

With the beginning of the work of this new commission there are many opportunities to collaborate and partner. There is much work to be done, particularly in the distressed counties of our state. Mississippi will work to take advantage of opportunities by utilizing collaborative partnership and convening all communities. These efforts at federal, state, and local level will help Mississippi identify opportunities for conversation and collaboration. As the world continues to adjust to the shifts in supply chains and workforce this new program has the potential to seize new opportunities. Mississippi will work to convene broad audiences and have robust conversations around shared issues in this Region of the State that can leverage SCRC investments to improve community economic development.

Distressed Counties

The strategies set forth in this annual plan as well as the four-year Development Plan apply in particular to distressed counties in SCRC of Mississippi. Further, the Mississippi SCRC will develop collaborative partnerships with Planning and Development Districts, local economic development organizations, and local governments to enhance capacity to identify projects and submit grant proposals from these distressed counties.

Mississippi Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Operations

The Mississippi SCRC will focus on areas of highest need, areas suffering from economic distress, areas with existing health hazards, areas where projects will have the most impact, and areas that are not able to help themselves. Mississippi SCRC requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and must contain performance measures, outputs and outcomes consistent with those set by the Commission and the State in their Development Plans. The Planning and Development Districts (PDD) are encouraged to solicit as many proposals as possible within their service area so that the needs of the entire population can be identified.

Certain types of projects remain inappropriate for federal funding. Except for unusual circumstances, which will be fully documented and explained, the following type of activity will not be eligible for SCRC funding in Mississippi: Projects related to the operation of local government (This includes construction of city halls, courthouses, jails, etc. as well as salaries and operating cost related to government functions. This restriction will not, however, extend to programs operated by local government that provide direct service to the residents of the Mississippi SCRC region such as education or health services.)

The Governor may reserve the right to recommend projects for final approval that are not included in the enclosed list of objectives and strategies but are consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in SCRC's Strategic Plan and Mississippi's 4-Year Plan.