



# Southeast Crescent Regional Commission: Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

Building sustainable communities and strengthening  
economic growth across the Southeast Crescent Region.

DECEMBER 2022

*Cover Photo: Charleston, South Carolina by Leonel Heisenberg*



SOUTHEAST CRESCENT  
REGIONAL COMMISSION



*Message from the Federal Co-Chair  
Dr. Jennifer Clyburn Reed*

On behalf of Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC), I am pleased to present the Commission's inaugural five-year strategic plan.

Developed in collaboration with partners at the federal, state, and local levels and with input from residents across the region, this plan represents priorities, needs, and perspectives shared by the very communities the Commission serves. The Commission will empower these communities through its flagship grant program set to launch in the Spring of 2023. By investing in local and regional planning initiatives, projects, and programs, SCRC is committed to building sustainable communities and strengthening economic growth across the Southeast region, particularly the economically distressed and impoverished communities in our seven-state region.

This plan is envisioned as a living document to drive action, change, and meaningful progress across the six priority areas identified and confirmed by community stakeholders from all seven SCRC states. Through strategic investments in physical infrastructure and human capital, SCRC, in collaboration with state and local partners, will address persistent economic distress, maximize impact, and improve outcomes for residents in its 428 counties.

I look forward to the continued work with our regional partners to support the launch and execution of our innovative grants program and initiatives, allowing SCRC to achieve its mission to ensure a prosperous future for the people who call the Southeast Crescent region home.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Clyburn Reed, Ed.D.  
Federal Co-Chair, SCRC

The Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) is a federal-state partnership authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill to promote and encourage economic development in parts of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and all of Florida. SCRC invests in projects that support basic infrastructure, business development, natural resource preservation, and workforce/labor development. SCRC is committed to supporting job creation, building communities, and improving the lives of those who reside in the 428 counties of the seven-state region.

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# SCRC Leadership & Board Members

The leadership of the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) is comprised of a Federal Co-Chair (Dr. Jennifer Clyburn Reed), State Co-Chair (the Honorable Henry McMaster, Governor of the State of South Carolina), and the Governors of the seven Southeast Crescent states.

Each Governor appointed a delegate, referred to as the Governor’s Alternate, to serve as a liaison between the Governor and SCRC and to represent the state’s interests and priorities. In addition, State Program Managers work with Governor’s Alternates and local organizations to guide them through the SCRC funding process. Governor’s Alternates and State Program Managers ensure that all funding requests align with SCRC’s strategic goals.

## LEADERSHIP OF SCRC



**Dr. Jennifer Clyburn Reed**  
*Federal Co-Chair*



**Governor Henry McMaster**  
*States’ Co-Chair*

## BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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*Governor, Alabama*



**Kenneth Boswell**  
*Governor’s Alternate*  
*Director, Department of Economic and Community Affairs*

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**The Honorable Ron DeSantis**  
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**Katherine Russo**  
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### STATE OF GEORGIA



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**Christopher Nunn**  
*Governor’s Alternate*  
*Commissioner, Department of Community Affairs*

**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**



**The Honorable Tate Reeves**  
*Governor, Mississippi*



**Kristen Windham**  
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**Jim McCleskey**  
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**Jordan Marsh**  
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**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**



**The Honorable Glenn Youngkin**  
*Governor, Virginia*



**Bryan Horn**  
*Governor's Alternate  
Director, Department of Housing  
and Community Development*

# Executive Summary

## Overview of SCRC

THE SOUTHEAST CRESCENT REGIONAL COMMISSION (SCRC) is an economic development partnership agency of the federal government and seven state governments. SCRC’s mission is to build sustainable communities and strengthen economic growth across the Southeast Crescent region.

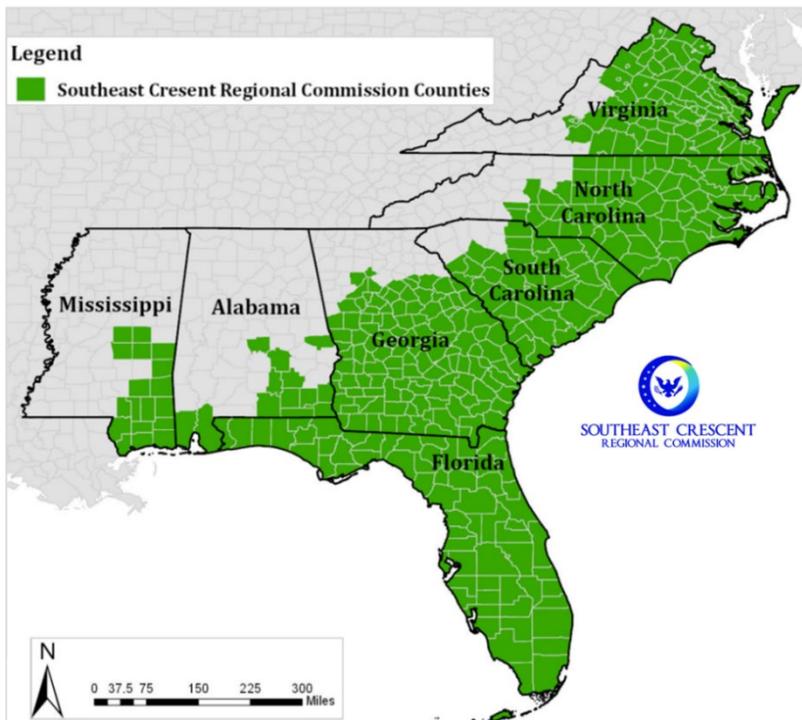
### The SCRC Mission

To build sustainable communities and strengthen economic growth across the Southeast Crescent region

Authorized in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (“The Farm Bill”)<sup>1</sup>, SCRC’s focus is on addressing issues related to economic development and poverty in its 428 counties across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Of the 428 counties, 42 percent are categorized as persistent poverty.

Persistent-poverty counties typically have high rates of unemployment; banking, healthcare, and broadband deserts; and a scarcity of quality, affordable housing and safe drinking water.<sup>2</sup> Looking ahead, SCRC will allocate at least 50 percent of funds in “distressed counties and isolated areas of distress in the region... that have high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration”<sup>3</sup> to ensure the economic development and sustainable growth of communities across the Southeast.

## SCRC Service Area



## About the SCRC Region

The Southeast Crescent region is home to over 51 million people who proudly represent and contribute to the unique spirit, culture, traditions, and natural environment of the region. From the Florida Everglades to the Mississippi Palisades, and the saltwater marshes in South Carolina’s Lowcountry to the Little River Canyon National Preserve in Alabama, the beauty of the Southeast Crescent is as unique as its people. Many SCRC counties are home to a larger share of Black and/or African American residents as well as Latinx and/or Hispanic residents as compared to the national average.<sup>4</sup>

“ People in this community genuinely love and care for each other and they are not hesitant to share their resources across the community or with neighbors. ”

SCRC Survey Response, 2022.

Situated between the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean, the region boasts more than 600 colleges and universities and is home to important historic sites and locations – from the home of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Georgia, the famous Fredericksburg battlefield in Virginia, and the location of the first flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina – drawing visitors and residents year-round. In a survey launched by SCRC soliciting resident perspectives from across the seven-state region (see [Appendix I](#)), it was no surprise that

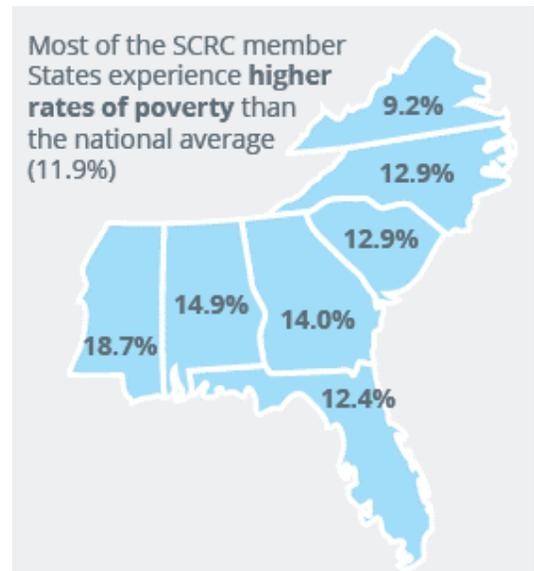
the top three community strengths identified were the people, educational institutions, and natural environment.

Despite the myriad of assets and opportunities, challenges remain. The Southeast Crescent region encompasses areas with among the highest rates of poverty in the United States, and almost six million people live in SCRC’s distressed counties. In 2020, state-wide poverty rates ranged from 9.2 percent in Virginia to 18.7 percent in Mississippi.<sup>5</sup> In all seven states of SCRC, Black households face the largest gap in median household income, as compared to their Hispanic and non-Hispanic White counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

Infrastructure in the region – including water, transit, and broadband – is considered mediocre by the American Society of Civil Engineers,<sup>7</sup> while healthcare costs, healthcare access, and health outcomes are among the lowest ranking in the country. Through an economic mobility lens, the region has lower-than-average median household income levels and job growth rates, while a lack of economic diversification in some communities leaves them susceptible to economic turbulence. Legacy barriers in housing impacts the socioeconomic security and well-being of residents today, while the region’s stunning environmental landscape comes at the high cost of vulnerability to extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and floods.

### Guiding Principles

SCRC serves seven states – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia – of which six are also served by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and Delta Regional Authority (DRA). Like SCRC, these regional commissions are charged with the mission to improve regional economic development by investing in programmatic activities across their service areas. The ARC and DRA have been active for 57 years and 22 years, respectively, and provide successful models of programs, projects, and activities that drive community and economic development, job growth, and socio-economic outcomes. SCRC is committed to building on the successful examples set forth by partner commissions; replicating and adapting best practices; and



using lessons learned to inform programming aimed to improve outcomes and drive growth in the Southeast Crescent region.

### **SCRC Roles**

To successfully implement its strategic mission, SCRC recognizes the critical leadership role it plays in enabling the long-term growth and development of the region. SCRC commits to undertaking the following three roles:

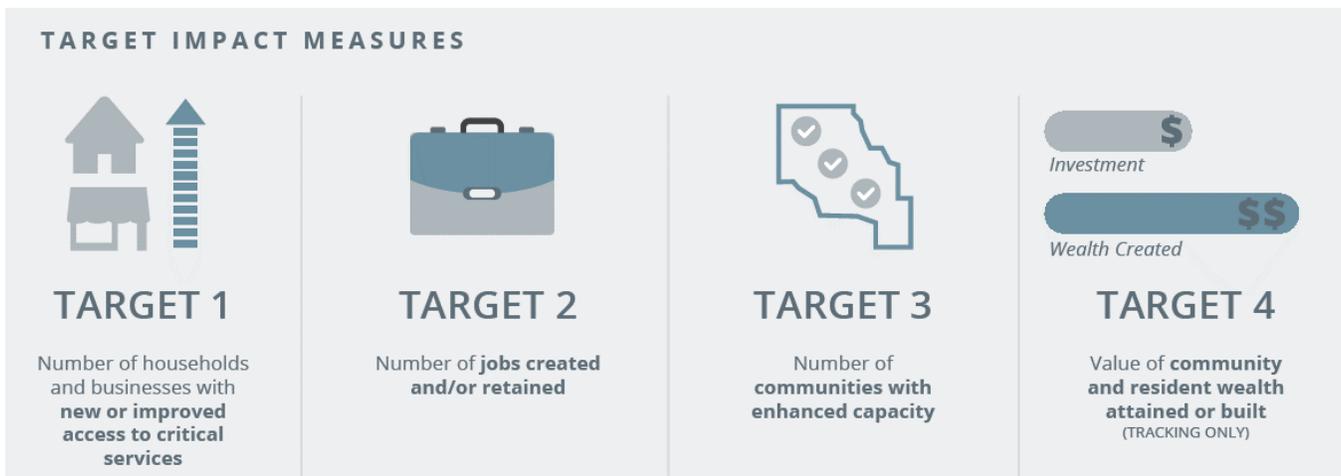
1. **Convener:** SCRC serves the important function of bringing together federal, state, and local government as well as private, non-profit, civilian, and other partners to coordinate various funding sources and to work collaboratively to invest resources and implement solutions that will catalyze community and economic development.
2. **Equity Driver:** SCRC invests in and supports projects, programs, and activities designed to transform the economy and to expand outcomes across the region, so improvements are more equitably experienced and shared among the diverse residents across urban and rural communities.
3. **Capacity Builder:** SCRC supports efforts that build community capacity by investing in and supporting under-resourced groups in successfully planning and executing programs and activities that will improve economic outcomes in SCRC communities and enhance overall quality of life for SCRC residents.



Florida Everglades; Credit: Florida Seminole Tourism

## SCRC Impact Measures

At this critical moment, SCRC is positioned to set the standard for anti-poverty, sustainable community, and economic growth efforts in the region. Driven to affect change, SCRC established four key impact measures to evaluate all efforts and investments made by the agency from 2023 to 2027. These targets will measure the outcomes associated with all priority initiatives selected in the inaugural SCRC grant program. The fourth target – which serves to estimate returns on investment by assessing the value of community and resident wealth attained or built – is a tracking-only metric for SCRC informational purposes and will not be used to evaluate grant program outcomes.



- Target 1: Number of households and businesses with new or improved access to critical services because of SCRC efforts or investments.** SCRC is committed to empowering community and economic development and growth by serving and impacting as many households, businesses, and residents as possible. SCRC aims to impact 3,000 households and businesses each year, and a total of 15,000 by FY 2027.
- Target 2: Number of jobs created and/or retained through SCRC efforts and investments.** Spurring job creation and retention underpin a thriving economy and community. SCRC is committed to investments that will enable community and economic development through job growth, including 220 jobs created and/or retained in the first year, and 1,100 through FY 2027.
- Target 3: Number of communities with enhanced capacity due to SCRC efforts or investments.** Of the 428 counties in SCRC, 179 are facing severe and persistent economic distress, and pockets of persistent poverty exist throughout the others. Capacity building, in the form of technical assistance, technology support, and institutional strengthening, enables communities to bridge critical service gaps and enhance quality of life for communities and their residents. This plan targets meaningful investment across the distressed counties and communities needing enhanced capacity, in at least 20 counties/communities annually, and 100 counties/communities by FY 2027. SCRC will allocate at least 50 percent of its grant program funding to counties and areas of distress.

- **Target 4: Value of community and resident wealth attained or built as a result of SCRC efforts or investments (tracking only).** Quantifying investment returns is an important process in ensuring effective allocation of funds. SCRC is uniquely positioned to address poverty in the region through investments that will build and generate long-term and intergenerational wealth opportunities. Through this target, SCRC seeks to gauge its estimated impact in order to inform and guide programmatic decisions in the future. For every \$1 invested in the region, SCRC seeks to create \$2 in wealth for its communities and residents. Using proxy measures, the value of wealth generation will be calculated by multiplying the number of people, households, or businesses impacted by the anticipated increase in wealth attained or built.

  - Scenario: SCRC invests \$1 million to support an environmental cleanup effort that impacts 100 local homes at \$20,000 per home. The total increase in property value and wealth generated due to this investment totals \$2 million. This achieves an investment ratio of 2 to 1.
  - Scenario: SCRC invests \$100,000 to revitalize a vacant or distressed property. This investment leads to increased property values for properties within a quarter-mile radius that total at least \$200,000. This achieves an investment ratio of 2 to 1.

|                                                                                               | PERFORMANCE TARGETS                                                                                    |                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
|                                                                                               | ANNUAL TARGET                                                                                          | FIVE-YEAR TARGET |
| HOUSEHOLDS AND BUSINESSES WITH IMPROVED ACCESS TO SERVICES                                    | <b>3,000</b>                                                                                           | <b>15,000</b>    |
| JOB CREATED AND/OR RETAINED                                                                   | <b>220</b>                                                                                             | <b>1,100</b>     |
| NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES WITH ENHANCED CAPACITY                                                  | <b>20</b>                                                                                              | <b>100</b>       |
| RETURN ON INVESTMENTS THROUGH COMMUNITY AND RESIDENT WEALTH ATTAINED OR BUILT (TRACKING ONLY) | <b>2 TO 1 RATIO OF COMMUNITY AND RESIDENT WEALTH ATTAINED AND/OR BUILT TO VALUE OF SCRC INVESTMENT</b> |                  |

*Note: These targets assume a FY 2023 launch of the SCRC grant program and annual funding of \$10 million over the five-year period. Changes in funding levels will require corresponding adjustments to the targets above.*

### Strategic Goals and Guiding Objectives

With a focus on service, equity, and resiliency, SCRC set six distinct strategic goals to both assess specific gaps in resident opportunities throughout the region and to support services and resources to help fill those gaps. SCRC will provide grant funding for the implementation of programs and/or projects that will: (1) invest in critical infrastructure, (2) improve health and support services access and outcomes, (3) strengthen workforce capacity, (4) foster entrepreneurial and business development activities, (5) expand affordable housing stock and access, and (6) promote

environmental conservation, preservation, and access. The six strategic goals are mutually reinforcing and are designed to drive impact across all four designated targets. Each strategic goal includes two to three guiding objectives that focus the strategic goal on actionable and effective, near-term, high-impact interventions.

As SCRC invests in driving positive outcomes across the six strategic goals and measuring impact against the four defined impact targets, the agency will emphasize its role as lead convener to coordinate cross-sector collaboration and champion equity-centered anti-poverty efforts that will enable the region’s economic development, community sustainability, and resident opportunity.



**STRATEGIC GOAL 1: INVEST IN CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

- 1.1 Expand the region’s basic water and sewer infrastructure to be more resilient
- 1.2 Expand and improve access to affordable and reliable digital infrastructure
- 1.3 Support expanded regional transportation infrastructure systems and transit services



**STRATEGIC GOAL 2: IMPROVE HEALTH AND SUPPORT SERVICES ACCESS AND OUTCOMES**

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



**STRATEGIC GOAL 3: STRENGTHEN WORKFORCE CAPACITY**

- 3.1 Promote workforce development programs for local high-demand job opportunities
- 3.2 Increase enrollment in and completion of critical training programs by investing in wrap-around services



**STRATEGIC GOAL 4: FOSTER ENTREPRENEURIAL AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

- 4.1 Support the expansion of access to business capital to support innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic equity
- 4.2 Invest in programs and business opportunities that address critical challenges facing SCRC communities while providing opportunities to attract and retain talent locally



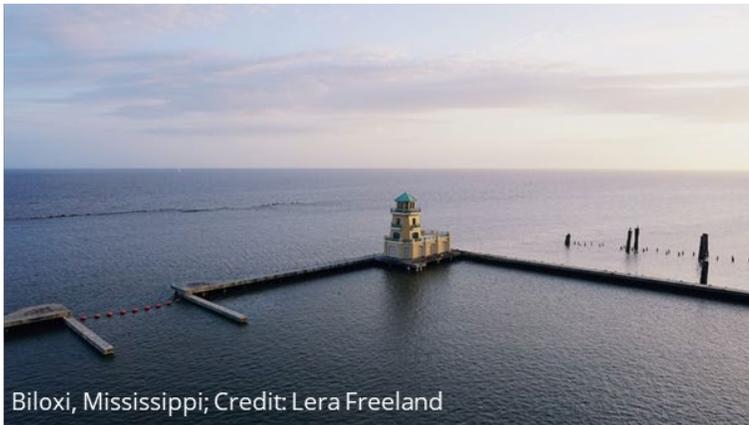
**STRATEGIC GOAL 5: EXPAND AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK AND ACCESS**

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



**STRATEGIC GOAL 6: PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION, PRESERVATION, AND ACCESS**

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



Biloxi, Mississippi; Credit: Lera Freeland



Sunset in Churchville, Virginia; Credit: Scott Pruett

## Strategic Plan

SCRC's five-year strategic plan is comprised of six strategic goals that are united to build sustainable communities and strengthen economic growth across the Southeast Crescent region by providing resources to help create jobs, build communities, and improve the lives of those who reside in the 428 counties in the seven-state region.

The goals are cross-cutting in nature and serve to mutually reinforce one another, reflecting their interrelated and symbiotic qualities. Each strategic goal includes a set of guiding objectives as well as example grant programs and activities to drive action and change. The objectives and activities are illustrative and not meant to be exhaustive.

Over the next five years, SCRC grant program will target funding to achieve four cross-cutting performance targets that align with all six strategic goals. They include:

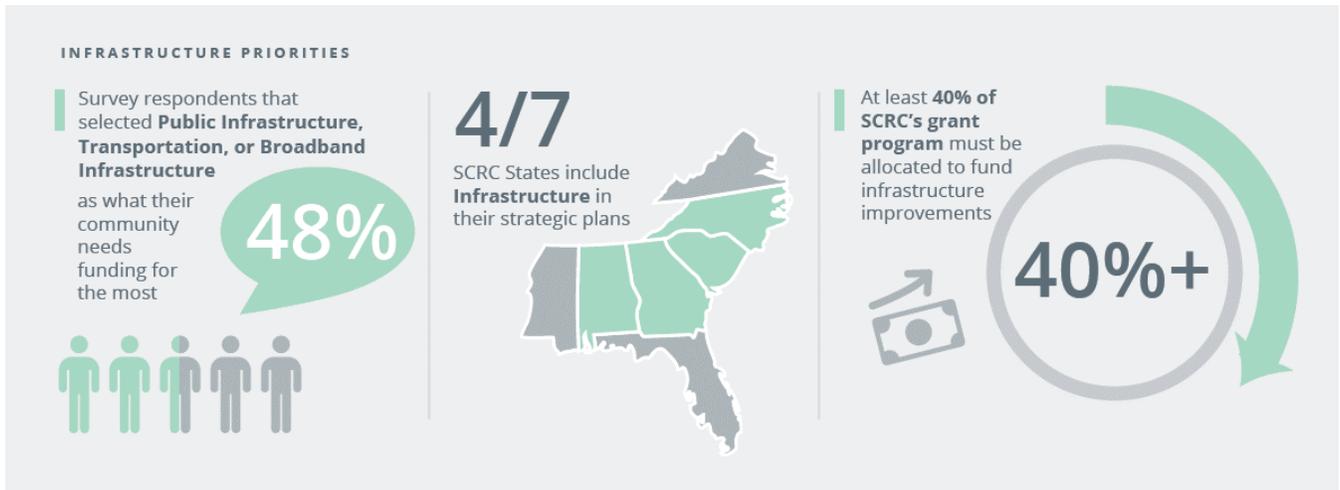
- Households and businesses with improved access to services
- Jobs created and/or retained
- Number of communities with enhanced capacity
- Return on investments through community and resident wealth attained or built

The subsequent pages provide a detailed overview of each strategic goal, the important contribution the goal has in addressing persistent poverty and enabling community and economic development, a bolded list of guiding objectives, programs, and activities to be supported by SCRC investments as well as the performance targets that align to each goal.



## Strategic Goal 1: Invest in Critical Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the foundation on which economic growth and development build upon. More importantly, infrastructure must be resilient and sustainable to provide the long-term services necessary for communities and economies to function and prosper.<sup>8</sup>



The region’s existing infrastructure is under stress, and many residents lack access to basic utilities and transportation options they need to thrive. Clean water availability is expected to decline within the region due to droughts, anticipated population growth, and changes in land-use. Four SCRC states identified infrastructure as a strategic priority and almost half of SCRC survey respondents, 48 percent, selected Public, Transportation, or Broadband Infrastructure as the funding area that their community needs most, far outweighing any other category.

SCRC is committed to allocating at least 40 percent of its grant program funds to expanding and servicing existing basic public, telecommunications, and transportation infrastructure, recognizing that broadening access will foster a higher quality of life for residents while also attracting new talent, business, and capital to the region. With the large influx of funds coming into the region – including through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – SCRC will work with state and local partners to build capacity so jurisdictions can leverage and maximize potential investments in the region to advance public, digital, and transportation infrastructure, particularly in rural and semi-rural communities.<sup>9</sup>

“ I would improve infrastructure – roads, water, sewer, natural gas, broadband – so we could have more developable sites for housing and businesses. ”  
**SCRC Survey Response, 2022.**



**Objective 1.1- Expand the region’s basic water and sewer infrastructure to be more resilient.**

Wastewater treatment is vital to protecting public health and the environment; and ensuring resiliency in water and wastewater systems will ensure continued access to safe water usage and treatment within the region. According to the EPA, more than one-third of homes in the southeast region of the United States depend on individual septic systems to treat their wastewater, while residents of other regions rely primarily on public sewers.<sup>10</sup> These private septic systems can be costly to maintain for individual homeowners. If not treated and cared for properly, the systems can lead to polluted water sources, serious illness, and harm to natural habitats.

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) water and wastewater system improvements (e.g., connecting homes to sewer systems, investments to existing septic tanks, funding decommissioning of septic tanks); (b) projects that emphasize resiliency to extreme weather conditions and impacts; (c) technical assistance and capacity building programs; and (d) other high-impact, proof of concept projects (e.g., site grading, drainage ditch cleaning).



**Objective 1.2- Expand and improve access to affordable and reliable digital infrastructure (e.g., broadband, cellular).**

Affordable and reliable broadband internet and cellular connectivity remains a challenge in the region, especially in rural communities. More than 2.7 million households across SCRC member states are without an internet subscription, including almost one in five Mississippi households.<sup>11</sup> This limited connectivity impedes millions of adults and children from accessing educational, professional, and tele-medicine opportunities.

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) expanding services to support rural areas; (b) promoting SCRC region to high-speed internet providers as a test bed for service; and (c) technical assistance and capacity building programs.



**Objective 1.3- Support expanded regional transportation infrastructure systems and transit services.**

Efficient and reliable regional public transit systems enable residents, particularly in semi-rural or rural communities, to commute to counties where there are more employment and/or educational opportunities. Due to limited transit system access, only 0.4 percent to 4.4 percent of each states’



A passenger boards a Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System (BRATS). Credit: Alabama.com; Press Register photo

workforce commutes to work by public transportation.<sup>12</sup> Increased access to public transit systems will alleviate the challenges of isolation and pave the way for residents in distressed counties to access healthcare support, workforce development and job opportunities as well as other income and wealth generating programs.

Further, the states' coastal access and port infrastructure enable SCRC states to serve as gateways for local, state-wide, and regional commerce. Seaports across all seven states have played an important role in spurring statewide as well as regional economic and

industry development, employment, labor income, annual gross state product, and tax revenue.<sup>13</sup> Investments in ports and regional transportation infrastructure will continue enabling the efficient transport of goods and secure future economic success for the Southeast Crescent region.

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) expanding access to public transit; (b) implementing public-private strategies and approaches to expand existing transit systems to serve nearby rural and semi-rural communities; (c) demonstration projects targeting cross-county and/or regional transportation infrastructure and systems; (d) promotion and marketing of existing transit programs; and (e) technical assistance and capacity building programs.

### Goal 1 Target Impact:

- **Target 1:** SCRC will measure the number of households and business that have new or improved access to clean and reliable water systems, reliable broadband infrastructure, and public transit systems.
- **Target 2:** SCRC will assess the jobs created and/or retained in both the public and private sector, including major industries like construction and engineering, utilities, transportation, and community planning.
- **Target 3:** SCRC will aggregate the number of communities that are directly and indirectly impacted by job creation, improved accessibility, and increases in property values due to these investments.
- **Target 4:** SCRC will track the return on investment through the following proxy measures:
  - Internet: Total number of households/businesses with improved access to broadband connectivity multiplied by 1.05 the average local property value, assuming improved access increases local property values on average of five percent.<sup>14</sup>
  - Public Transportation: Total number of households and businesses with improved access to public transit multiplied by 1.15 the average local property value, assuming improved access increases local property values on average of 15 percent.<sup>15</sup>



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

Access to quality health care is an important instrument for and deeply connected to community and economic development and growth, while support services are crucial in supporting the most vulnerable community members to catalyze economic security and independence. The region has some of the nation’s lowest ranking healthcare systems (based on cost, access, and outcomes),<sup>16</sup> and compared to other regions, an excess of 1.18 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, representing an estimated 1,600 infant deaths annually.<sup>17</sup> In 2019, the region saw the highest number of people living with HIV (474,786) and newly diagnosed with the disease (19,100).<sup>18</sup> All seven SCRC states include Healthcare, Health and Human Services, and Public Safety in their strategic priorities (see [Appendix II](#)), underscoring the importance of improving healthcare outcomes for the region.

“ I would improve healthcare - elimination of disparities in health outcomes, provision of additional health services, education of local residents to understand why good health is important. ”

SCRC Survey Response, 2022.

Through coordinated efforts across federal, state, and local government as well as private, non-profit, and other partners, SCRC is committed to expand access to high-quality healthcare and to reduce the burden on support service navigation. This will connect residents with critical services, reduce disparities, and increase economic security and financial stability for SCRC residents.



### Objective 2.1- Support initiatives that expand access to affordable, high-quality healthcare and services that support overall mental and physical health.

Access to affordable, high-quality healthcare – including services addressing physical health, mental health, and substance use disorder – is extremely important to maintaining a viable, healthy, and productive workforce. Over the last 15 years, the Southeast Crescent region observed 43 hospital closures,<sup>19</sup> which impact patients’ access to healthcare and lead to job losses in surrounding communities.<sup>20</sup>

In response to the medical professional shortage and low access to quality healthcare in the region, SCRC launched its J-1 Visa Waiver program as an initiative of the newly-formed Crescent Care Collaborative to



allow foreign physicians – who trained in the United States – to work in medically-underserved areas or health professional shortage areas across the region. This program along with other local projects and activities will be invaluable in providing healthcare access to low-income and rural communities.



Monarch’s new Mobile Integrated Care Clinic offers mental health and substance use disorder services to people into Northeast North Carolina Counties; Credit: Monarch

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) Crescent Care Collaborative J-1 Visa Waiver program to bring new and/or keep existing physicians in the region and provide greater access to healthcare; (b) convening federal, state, and local agencies as well as regional employers and partners (e.g., universities, medical schools, hospitals, community health centers) to address and implement new public-private strategies and approaches for improving health access and outcomes or to expand

healthcare services education, training programs, and access to health care; (c) registration clinics in underserved communities to increase enrollment and access to qualifying programs; (d) supporting innovative readiness training programs to provide medical services to underserved communities; and (e) technical assistance and capacity building initiatives to identify medically underserved areas and baseline community needs, gaps, and opportunities for healthcare facilities and specialty clinics.



**Objective 2.2- Provide support to build capacity for navigating and accessing support services.**

Navigating the support services ecosystem can be challenging and the fragmented system often leads to undue burden on customers as well as social service organizations and providers. Through SCRC’s coordinated efforts with public, private, and non-profit sectors, investments to connect individuals and families to existing services, resources, and activities in their community will foster a seamless and enhanced experience for residents, providers, and organizations while improving health outcomes and enabling economic security and independence for SCRC residents.

Launched in 2019, NCCARE360 is the first state-wide coordinated care network that connects individuals to local services and resources in North Carolina. Established through a public-private partnership between the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and the Foundation for Health Leadership and Innovation, NCCARE360 connects individuals and families who have unmet social needs to community resources provided.<sup>21</sup> Partnership, programs, and efforts could be modeled after this network to ensure all SCRC residents have the tools they need to establish more robust economic independence and self-sufficiency.

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) the creation, promotion, and marketing of an online knowledge bank of healthcare resources and support, aimed at using digital innovation to raise

awareness in hard-to-reach communities, connect residents with critical care (e.g., 988, 211), and offer support and educational services and programs (e.g., fitness and health classes, introduction to local farming); and (b) the implementation of other high-impact, proof of concept projects to enable efficient navigation of social services.

### Goal 2 Target Impact:

- **Target 1:** SCRC will measure households and businesses with increased access to quality healthcare facilities and affordable services, and increased enrollment in social services for eligible households.
- **Target 2:** Jobs created and/or retained may include those in the healthcare sector, public and non-profit social assistance workers, employees of support and educational services and programs (e.g., wellness), as well as technical assistance providers.
- **Target 3:** SCRC will aggregate the number of communities that observe an increase in job opportunities, access to healthcare and services, and improved health outcomes.



Houston Medical Center in Warner Robins, Georgia  
Credit: Houston Healthcare



## Strategic Goal 3: Strengthen Workforce Capacity

SCRC region has the nation’s largest workforce and boasts robust educational institutions that serve students and community members as well as a diversity of job opportunities for residents with varying education levels; 16 percent of jobs in the South are considered low-skill and 55 percent are middle-skilled jobs that may not require a four-year degree.<sup>22</sup>

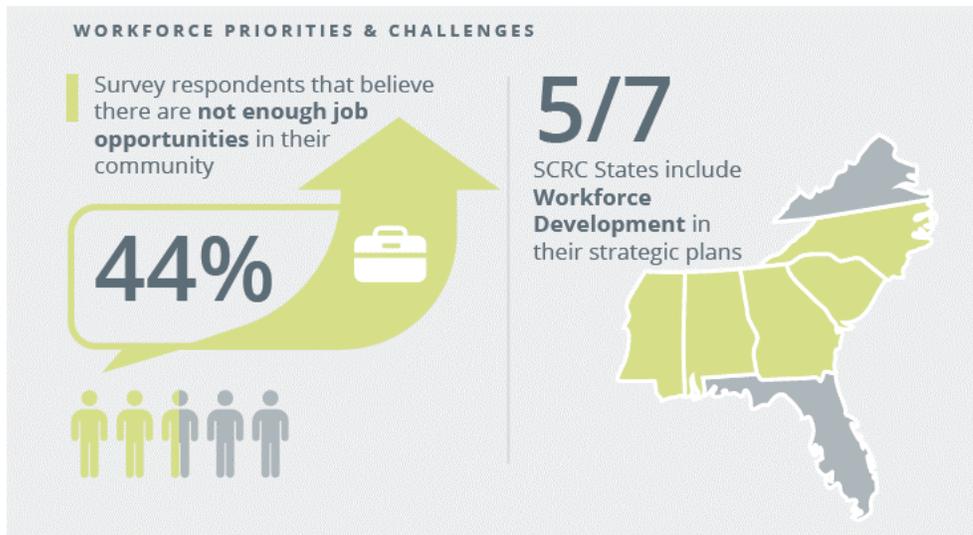
Despite the available jobs in the region, OxFam America’s “Best States to Work” index – based on wages, worker protections, and rights to organize – ranked five SCRC states among the bottom ten.<sup>23</sup> SCRC states

“ Young and upcoming professionals leave the area seeking better jobs. If we could find ways to retain these young professionals, I feel that it would only help our community grow. ”

SCRC Survey Response, 2022.

have some of the highest rates of unemployment relative to other regions and the U.S. more broadly. From 2017 to 2018, the U.S. experienced a one percent increase in layoffs and discharges, compared to four percent in the SCRC region during the same time.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to five SCRC states identifying workforce development as a strategic priority (see [Appendix II](#)), “job opportunities” was the top ranked challenge to economic growth and development in the SCRC survey, with 44 percent of respondents believing there are not enough job opportunities in the region.



Education and capability building are a well-known channel to improving socioeconomic mobility,<sup>25</sup> and SCRC seeks to work with regional and local stakeholders to build upon existing successes to empower residents with greater economic opportunities and higher-paying jobs, while also helping fill essential job gaps across the region.



**Objective 3.1- Promote workforce development programs (e.g., apprenticeships, internships, programs at technical and community colleges) for local high-demand job opportunities (e.g., plumbers, electricians, etc.).**

SCRC member states are host to more than 600 two- and four-year colleges and universities and over 400 job and career centers. However, without an innovative marketing and outreach mechanism or plan that leverages digital media, many programs are unbeknownst to community members while barriers to entry further discourage enrollment in or pursuit of such programs and/or careers. SCRC will promote existing, high-quality educational and workforce development programs across the region to connect residents with available specialized training educational programs, and higher-paying job opportunities.



Public-private partnerships can spur private sector employers in offering practical education locally to ensure program participants obtain the skills they need to gain employment and successfully execute their work.<sup>26</sup> Alabama’s community college system, in concert with private employers in the automotive industry, brought training programs in robotics and automation processes to bolster the state’s largest export industry and economic growth engine,<sup>27</sup> while several technical colleges and state university centers in Mississippi offer customized training to meet the needs of its various private sector firms in the automobile manufacturing industry.<sup>28</sup> In Georgia, technical colleges across the state partnered with a private electric utility company to offer Electrical Lineworker Apprentice Certificate programs that provide participants with the training and skills they need to gain employment as an entry-level lineworker with public and/or private electrical utility companies.<sup>29</sup>



Students in the Lineworker Training Program at Bishop State Community College prepare for careers in the field through outdoor hands-on training; Credit: Bishop State Community College

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) building on the success of existing programs to align vocational education, professional certification programs, skills training, and apprenticeship/internship opportunities with local, regional, and state-wide industry economic development efforts and encourage trainees to stay in communities; (b) roundtables and workgroups convening government, education, workforce, economic development, and industry representatives to understand employer needs and gaps; (c) public-private partnerships and efforts to diversify workforce in traditionally dominated industries; (d) the creation, promotion, and marketing of an online knowledge bank of information on future employment opportunities aimed at educating

parents, students, and teachers about career options; (e) supporting industry-specific training programs in high-need areas and marketing; and (f) investing in dual enrollment programs for individuals pursuing high school diploma (or equivalent) while fulfilling requirements for technical education or associates degree.

 **Objective 3.2- Increase enrollment in and completion of critical training programs by investing in wrap-around services.**

Supportive services – such as transportation, childcare, and health care – are critical to job training success, regardless of program location, size, participant demographics, or other characteristics.<sup>30</sup> Receiving supportive services when enrolled in a workforce program is associated with an eight-percentage point increase in completing the program, and a two-percentage point increase in finding a job.<sup>31</sup> SCRC is committed to leveraging the roles and impact of the private and non-profit sectors to

support residents in enrolling in and completing education and specialized training programs through expanded access to supportive services.

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) developing a network of existing employment supports to help individuals access and complete training programs, especially in high-need jobs and industries; (b) convening and connecting workers with local organizations (e.g., nonprofits and workforce training organizations) to raise awareness of employer-driven employment and skills development opportunities (e.g., scholarships, internships, apprenticeship programs); and (c) leveraging public-private strategies and approaches to expand enrollment through supportive services access.



Graduates of South Carolina State University's await President Joe Biden's address during the winter commencement in December 2021. Credit: Nick Reynolds, The Post and Courier



Student in the Welding Technology Program at the West Harrison County Center; Credit: Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

### Goal 3 Target Impact:

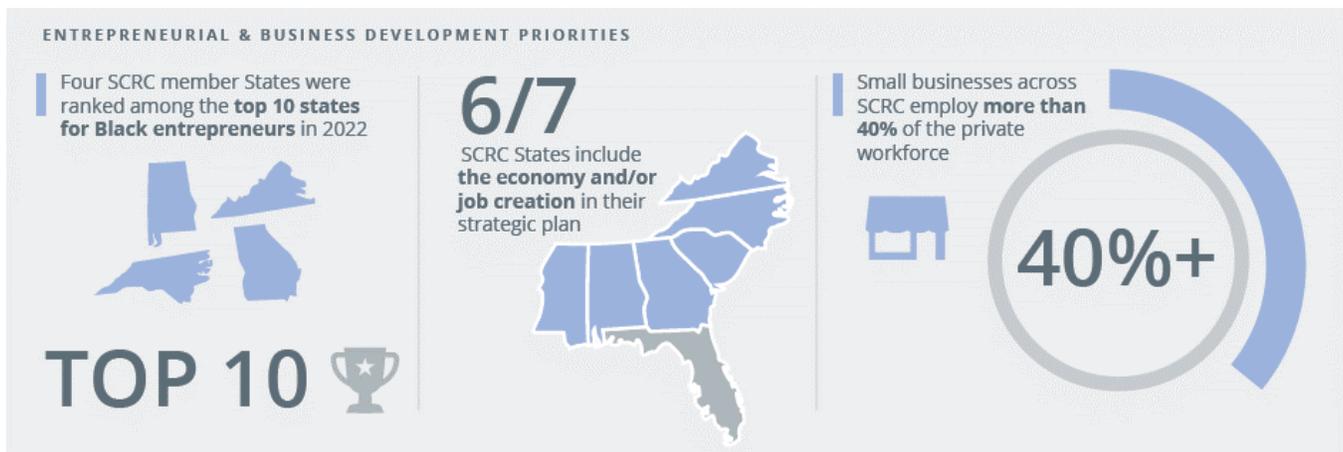
- **Target 1:** SCRC will measure the number of individuals who gain access to job skills and training programs and higher-paying jobs, as well as businesses that hire locally trained talent and benefit from increased investments in workforce capacity.
- **Target 2:** SCRC will assess the jobs created and/or retained in support of these efforts, including those who administer or conduct job training programs, those who are enrolled and complete the programs, as well as those who benefit from increased enrollment in support services (e.g., childcare centers).
- **Target 3:** SCRC will count the communities that are directly and indirectly impacted by these investments. This includes communities that represent program enrollees, program leaders, and supportive services providers, and communities that benefit from increased access to high-demand specialized workers (e.g., plumbers, electricians).
- **Target 4:** SCRC will track return on investments through the following proxy measure:
  - Total number of people who accessed workforce training programs through SCRC efforts of investments multiplied by 1.14 of the regional median income, assuming program participants earn 14 percent more on average than individuals who don't participate in employment programs.<sup>32</sup>



## Strategic Goal 4: Foster Entrepreneurial and Business Development Activities

Across the Southeast Crescent region, residents have great potential to capitalize on significant entrepreneurial opportunities in economic growth and diversification. Small businesses across the region employ more than 40 percent of the private workforce, especially in growing industries like healthcare, retail trade, and manufacturing.<sup>33</sup> Even more, the region has the highest share of employee firms owned by minorities in the country.<sup>34</sup>

However, fostering entrepreneurship and business development remains a challenge across the region. In 2021, five of seven SCRC states observed rates of new entrepreneurs either fall to or below the national rate.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, within the SCRC region, communities experience stark differences in business and job opportunities when evaluated through an urban vs. rural lens. Companies traditionally look to urban centers when considering relocation sites, thereby further widening the divide that isolates rural and other economically distressed communities.



The economy and/or job creation is a confirmed priority for six of seven SCRC states (see [Appendix II](#)). SCRC is committed to efforts that will attract new businesses; retain and expand existing businesses; and

“If I could change one thing in or about my community, it would be opportunities to drive more entrepreneurship and innovation and to create more opportunities for the community. This would serve to keep more folks in the region.”

SCRC Survey Response, 2022.

create new entrepreneurial and business endeavors. Business ownership broadens access to wealth, increases financial security for workers, increases productivity and stability of businesses, and plays a role in preserving local economies.<sup>36</sup> Enabling business ownership and empowering business owners will propel innovation, entrepreneurship, and

equity for the region, while also creating jobs to attract and retain local talent. Four SCRC member states

were ranked among the top ten states for Black entrepreneurs in 2022,<sup>37</sup> carving out a unique opportunity for the Southeast Crescent region.



**Objective 4.1– Support the expansion of access to business capital (e.g., micro loans) to support innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic equity.**

Businesses require adequate access to capital in order to open, operate, hire workers, and be successful. While investments are made from the federal, state, and local level to support small business, many entrepreneurs struggle to tap into funding sources due to stringent requirements or restrictive costs of doing business.

In FY 2021, the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) Microloan Program, which provides small-scale loans for underserved communities, allocated approximately 61 percent of microloans to minority-owned or minority-controlled firms, representing 41 percent of the total amount issued, while women-owned or women-controlled firms received 48 percent of the number of microloans issued and 41 percent of the amount issued.<sup>38</sup> Enabling access to funding sources like the SBA’s microloans will have a positive and economically significant impact on small business employment growth and small business entry.<sup>39</sup> More than that, it will also stimulate growth in minority-owned businesses and expand intergenerational wealth building potential.



The New Black Wall Street Market in Stonecrest, Georgia  
Credit: The New Black Wall Street Market

Revolving loan funds – which are self-replenishing pools of capital that leverage interest and principal payments on old loans to issue new loans<sup>40</sup> – also provide an avenue to capital for entrepreneurs. Revolving loan funds exist throughout the SCRC region, with purposes ranging from promoting the economic viability of Florida’s rural communities<sup>41</sup> to wastewater infrastructure and pollution prevention projects in Georgia.<sup>42</sup> Through coordinated efforts with federal, state, and private sector partners, SCRC has the opportunity to expand access to existing funding sources to entrepreneurs across the region.

Community projects may include but are not limited to: (a) facilitating access to seed and growth capital and credit, including micro-loans and loans with flexible interest rates; (b) enabling incentives to lenders to support entrepreneurs and business development opportunities; and (c) helping entrepreneurs grow microenterprises and/or tap into federal funding sources.



**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.**

Diversifying the local and regional economy will allow communities to withstand downturns and unforeseen circumstances. Doing so will require innovative investments to spur new industries and job opportunities with livable wages to discourage brain drain. Investments in entrepreneurship for local residents in economically distressed areas may chart a new path to retain local talent and enable resident wealth building. SCRC can support programs and efforts that leverage and build on existing successes to propel economic diversification as well as increase access to existing entrepreneurial and business support services and programs for local communities.



Mid-Year Economic Outlook hosted by Durham Chamber of Commerce; Credit: Durham Chamber of Commerce

Florida recently ranked among the top three best states to launch a technology startup<sup>43</sup> – beating California’s Silicon Valley – while three other SCRC states, including North Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia, ranked among the top ten.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, colleges, universities, and non-profits throughout the region offer a variety of resources through innovation centers and hubs that support local entrepreneurs with business development resources and navigating the business registration process (e.g., licensing, codes). Expanding these business support services beyond the immediate communities in which they are geographically located will enable a greater number of SCRC residents to access and benefit from these programs.

Additionally, connecting more residents with the various opportunities for affordable capital offered by federal, state, local, and other partners will drive business ownership and economic growth across the region. For instance, The Southern Opportunity and Resilience (SOAR) Fund provides flexible, affordable capital as well as free business support services to small businesses and nonprofits impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in all seven SCRC states.<sup>45</sup>

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) workshops and other resources to support businesses in navigating the registration process (e.g., licensing, codes, applying for loans); (b) convening and growing a regional small business/entrepreneurial community and networks through mentoring and networking events that bring together entrepreneurs, potential investors, and service providers to share expertise, best practices, and innovations from across the region; (c) supporting cooperative development of small businesses and opportunities for entrepreneurial education, training, and support programs; (d) technical assistance and capacity building to counties and municipalities with limited economic development resources; and (e) the creation, promotion, and marketing of an online knowledge bank of information of existing programs and services for entrepreneurs and start-ups.

#### Goal 4 Target Impact:

- **Target 1:** SCRC will measure the number of households and businesses with access to newly formed businesses, access to entrepreneurial community networks, and increases in entrepreneur funding and/or investment opportunities.
- **Target 2:** SCRC will assess the total number of jobs created and/or retained through the entrepreneurship and business development initiatives it supports.
- **Target 3:** SCRC will aggregate the number of communities impacted by newly formed local businesses, increased business tax revenue, and entrepreneurial investments and funding opportunities.
- **Target 4:** SCRC will track return on investments through the following proxy measure:
  - Total number of jobs created through small business development multiplied by regional median income.



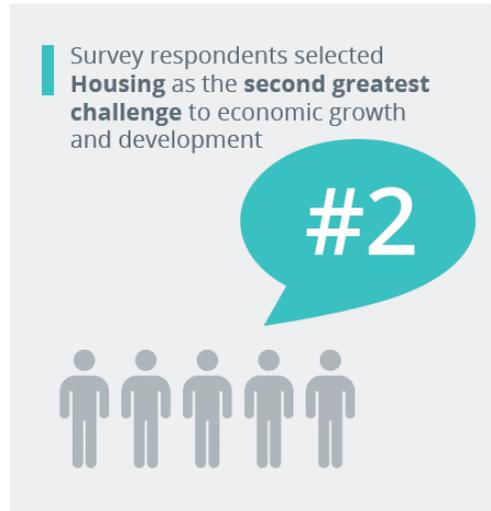
Rural area in Southwest Florida; Credit: Florida Regional Councils Association (FRCA)



## Strategic Goal 5: Expand Affordable Housing Stock and Access

Homeownership remains the primary way in which most families build wealth in the United States.<sup>46</sup> The Southeast Crescent region faces unique housing challenges – amplified by legacy legal barriers and increased risk of eviction as well as rural economic dislocation, impoverishment, and depopulation – that have multigenerational impacts on the socioeconomic security, financial stability, and well-being of residents. Community members may not know how to engage government services, access housing crisis services, secure affordable housing, or build wealth through equity and home value appreciation.

Respondents in the SCRC survey identified the lack of housing as the second greatest challenge to economic growth and development, while 16 percent of participants said SCRC should focus on housing to support their vision of a strong, healthy community. Without access to affordable housing, workers must live further from their employment location, which then requires a commute, typically from an area with limited public transit infrastructure. Without public transit, workers need to expend additional resources (e.g., car ownership, cost of gas) while also increasing use of public roads (and thereby contributing to traffic congestion), which further diminishes quality of life for residents.



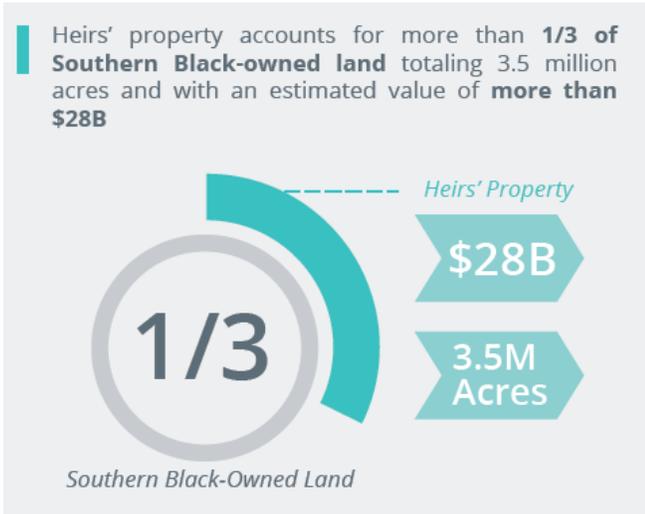
“ If I could change one thing in my community it would be housing. We need more structurally sound, well-insulated affordable housing for all people at all income levels. ”

SCRC Survey Response, 2022.

SCRC is committed to investing in programs and projects that will empower its residents to resolve title, heirship, land tenure, and eviction issues; support multi-generational wealth attainment through homeownership programs; and improve the affordability and availability of quality housing across the region.



**Objective 5.1- Increase access to wrap-around services and legal assistance to resolve title, heirship, land tenure, and eviction issues.**



Heirs' property – a practice of passing ownership to an heir without a will – accounts for more than one-third of Southern Black-owned land totaling 3.5 million acres and with an estimated value of more than \$28 billion. Households that face title, heirship, and land tenure issues are at an increased risk of having speculators and developers acquire their property against their will.<sup>47</sup> Legacy legal barriers – from real estate redlining to heir's property laws – have multigenerational impacts on residents of the Southeast Crescent region. Increasing access to legal assistance will allow more families to maintain their family homes and increase multi-generational wealth attainment through clear-title

homeownership.

Furthermore, almost one million evictions were filed across SCRC states in 2018, threatening 3.8 percent of renter households in Alabama to 23.3 percent of renter households in South Carolina.<sup>48</sup> Without the right to counsel in eviction cases, low-income tenants must navigate the complex legal process without representation and are more likely to have worse outcomes in eviction proceedings.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore important to invest in eviction and foreclosure diversion programs that engage and partner with the social services and court systems. Early interventions can support households and tenants in need of assistance while also supporting landlords who would otherwise be impacted financially through accumulated rental arrears.<sup>50</sup>

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) supporting the creation, promotion, or marketing of an online knowledge bank of information on existing organizations that provide services, support, assistance, and education for title, heirship, land tenure, and eviction issues; and (b) the development of other high-impact, proof of concept projects to increase access to housing-related programs and services.

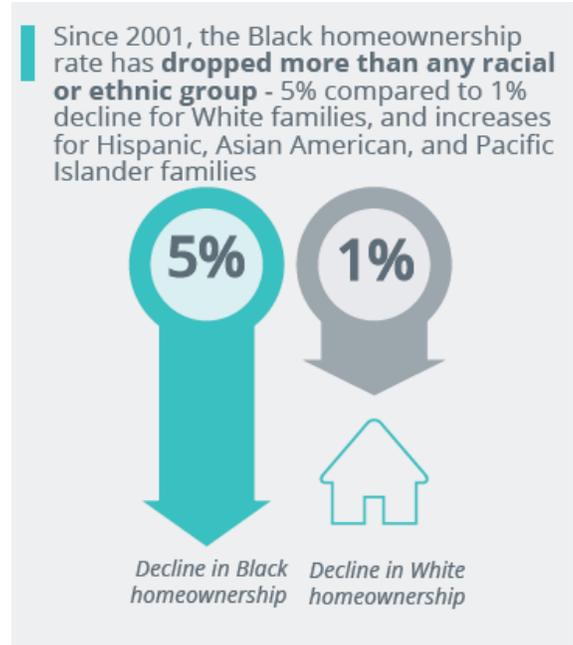


**Objective 5.2- Support enrollment in and access to homebuyer programs.**

The gap in homeownership rates between Black and White families today is wider than it was before the passage for the Fair Housing Act in 1968, which outlawed the practice of refusing to sell a home on the grounds of one's race. From 1930 to 1968, redlining played a central role in creating racial inequity and racial injustice in U.S. housing, enabling banks to legally deny non-white Americans mortgages and loans – the effects of which are measurable still today.<sup>51</sup> Since 2001, the Black homeownership rate has seen the most dramatic drop of any racial or ethnic group.<sup>52</sup> The drop of five percent, as compared to a one percent decline for White families and increases for Hispanic, Asian American, and Pacific Islander families, threatens to further widen the gap and exacerbate racial inequality.<sup>53</sup>

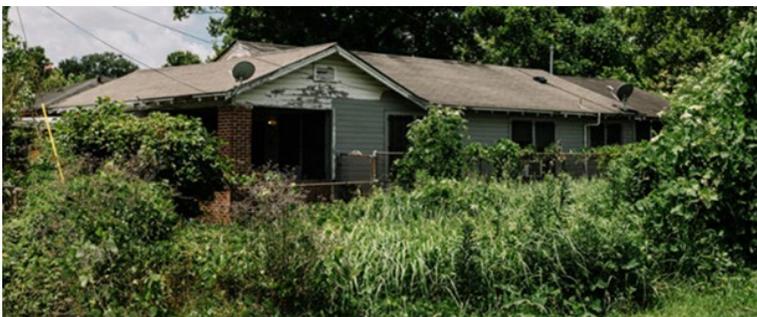
Increased and equitable access to secure affordable housing plays an outsized role in individual and familial health, socioeconomic security, and well-being. By streamlining a path to homeownership, more people will be able to successfully purchase homes and build wealth. Enrolling prospective homebuyers in programs to educate and prepare them for the intricacies of homeownership will set them up for success in the short term (e.g., obtaining mortgages, accessing down payment assistance programs) and long term (e.g., wealth building, avoiding foreclosure).

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) increasing enrollment in existing homebuyer programs and loans; and (b) supporting the promotion and marketing of existing readiness programs to prepare and educate prospective homebuyers.



**Objective 5.3- Invest in efforts to improve the affordability and availability of quality housing across the region.**

The ongoing housing affordability crisis in the United States is most acutely affecting people with the lowest incomes,<sup>54</sup> including the almost six million people living in distressed counties across SCRC. This, coupled with the region’s long history of racial discrimination in housing policy, means the most vulnerable residents who are disproportionately impacted are the people and communities of color, leading to millions of dollars of lost inter-generational wealth and sustained class immobility.<sup>55</sup>



Abandoned lot on Clay Street in Mobile, Alabama  
Credit: William Widmer, Redux Pictures for Fast Company

Furthermore, vacant and abandoned properties significantly reduce the value of nearby occupied properties and wealth-building potential for homeowners. Extremely high levels of vacancy and abandonment are especially impacting the rural South, including much of Mississippi and Alabama, due to continued economic dislocation, impoverishment, and depopulation.<sup>56</sup> In Mobile, Alabama, city officials claim that

25 percent of homes are within 150 feet of a vacant or distressed property, costing homeowners an average of \$6,300 in lost market value and \$83 million city wide.<sup>57</sup> Investments to revitalize vacant or distressed properties will lead to increased property values, inter-generational wealth building, as well as local tax revenues that can be invested back into communities.<sup>58,59</sup>

Through zoning reform efforts, jurisdictions can encourage responsible growth and sustainable development, while also contributing to community benefits. In 2015, the City of Charleston, South

Carolina approved a new, incentive-based zoning district to offer height and density bonuses in exchange for community benefits such as affordable housing, public open space, renewable energy, electric vehicle charging stations, transportation improvements, stormwater management improvements, green infrastructure, and achieving building certification programs for a high performing building.<sup>60</sup> Similar efforts can be employed across the SCRC region to encourage public and private investment and to drive economic development.

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) technical assistance and capacity building to support local zoning reforms (e.g., research to identify most impactful reforms); (b) providing incentives for sustainable and equitable affordable housing investments; (c) providing incentives for affordable housing development in concert with regional economic development efforts; (d) supporting the development of community land trusts and shared equity homeownership models to enable affordable housing efforts.

### Goal 5 Target Impact:

- **Target 1:** SCRC will measure households that are connected to pro bono legal assistance; households that resolve title, heirship, land tenure, and eviction issues; households that enroll in educational programs or homebuyer assistance programs; households that are first-time homeowners; households and businesses impacted by revitalized properties and assets (e. g., vacant, abandoned, distressed), as well as increases in the number of affordable housing units.
- **Target 2:** SCRC will assess the jobs created and/or retained through these initiatives, including social services workers and legal representatives who provide support to families seeking to resolve title, heirship, land tenure, and eviction issues; homebuyer program employees; and workers (e.g., construction, utilities) who support revitalization efforts.
- **Target 3:** SCRC will aggregate the number of communities that benefit from local zoning reforms; resolved title, heirship, land tenure, and eviction issues; revitalization efforts, and new homeownership.
- **Target 4:** SCRC will track the return on investment through the following proxy measures:
  - Total number of households and business impacted by revitalized properties and assets multiplied by \$5,000, assuming local property values increase by a minimum of \$5,000 due to revitalization efforts.<sup>61</sup>
  - Total number of households that resolve title, heirship, and land tenure issues multiplied by \$20,000, assuming households gain a minimum of \$20,000 in property value.<sup>62</sup>



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

Just like its people, the Southeast Crescent region maintains great diversity in its natural environment. Nestled between the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean, much of the region is a large coastal plain lying below elevated plateaus and highlands. The region is home to large stretches of rural landscape and growing metropolitan hubs interspersed with mountain ranges and major rivers. The environment has a tremendous impact on the quality of life for residents and communities, and all aspects of economic development must also consider environmental implications. Targeted investments that emphasize sustainability, preservation, conservation, and access have the potential to unlock significant economic gains and benefits for the region, particularly the tourism sector which attracts millions of visitors from across the globe.

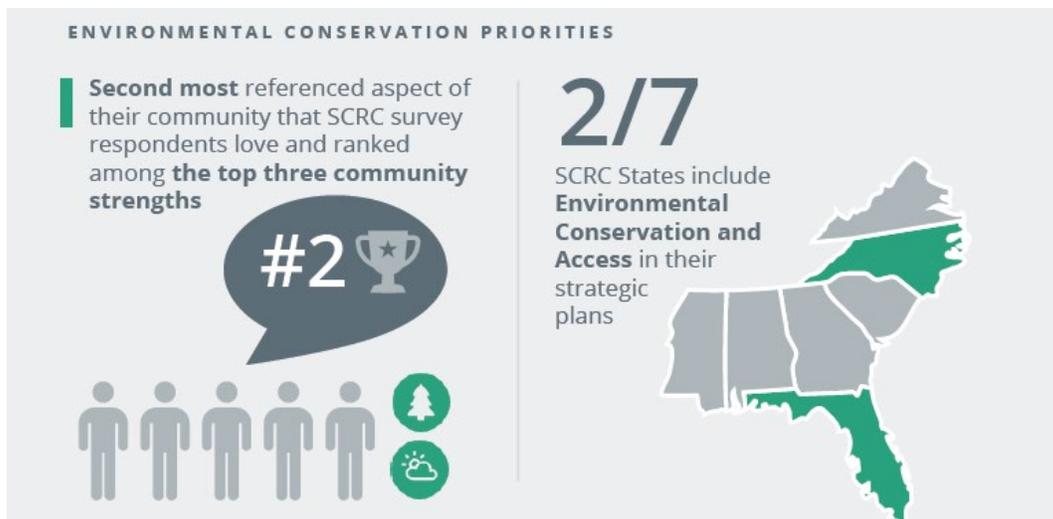
Coastal communities across SCRC states are acutely vulnerable though to extreme rainfall events and sea level rise. Between 1851 and 2004, SCRC member states faced a combined 260 direct

“ I would change the overzealous building, destruction of natural habitats which is bad for animals and heats up our environment. ”  
 SCRC Survey Response, 2022.

hurricane hits.<sup>63</sup> During Hurricane Irma in 2017, a record 6.8 million people were ordered to evacuate Florida as were 540,000 coastal residents in Georgia and untold numbers in other coastal locations.

The region is projected to see increases in both the depth and frequency of coastal flooding, adding to the climate disasters that leave millions without critical utilities for days at a time. In coastal areas throughout

the Gulf region, severe weather events and disasters cause an annual average of \$14 billion in losses and could reach \$23 billion by 2030.<sup>64</sup> These coastal plains and low-lying regions must withstand the social and economic impacts from flooding, while locations across the Southeast are experiencing rising temperatures and more frequent episodes of extreme heat.<sup>65</sup> Though upfront



costs may seem significant, the costs of inaction are certainly higher and may lead to losses in labor productivity and productive land use, damaged infrastructure (e.g., highways, utilities), decline in tourism, increased incidence of disease, and reduced agricultural yields.<sup>66</sup>

Accordingly, SCRC has resolved to promote environmental conservation, preservation, and access. The environment was the second most loved aspect of the community and among the top three strengths identified by SCRC survey respondents and is a confirmed priority for two of seven SCRC states (see [Appendix II](#)).



### **Objective 6.1- Invest in air, water, and soil clean-up efforts that impact historically disadvantaged communities.**

Through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the U.S. federal government is setting aside billions of dollars to support the clean-up of hazardous sites and pollution and to enhance communities' resilience to disasters and hazards.<sup>67</sup> Communities across the Southeast region can leverage these and other resources to build on emerging economic opportunities and avoid economic losses through investments in economic sustainability and conservation. SCRC can facilitate bold investments that will bring immediate benefits to the marginalized and economically distressed communities that are disproportionately exposed to harmful environmental factors, and long-term benefits to all residents across the region. While costs may be high at the outset, the region is expected to ultimately experience significant economic gains through sustainable investments in environmental conservation and preservation.

With air in particular, major urban areas in SCRC states suffer from poor air quality. The Southeast has more days with stagnant air masses than other regions of the country and higher levels of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5), which cause heart and lung disease.<sup>68</sup> Poor air quality caused by emissions from vehicles, power plants, wildfires, airborne allergens, and the growth of urban areas also exacerbate respiratory diseases like asthma in the area and disproportionately affect low-income communities of color.<sup>69</sup> Promoting environmental justice, conservation, and preservation as well as investing in clean-up efforts will improve residents' quality of life; increase local property values, household wealth, and local tax revenue; enable a more dynamic and resilient economy; and potentially attract net new businesses and commercial establishments.

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) air, water, and soil clean-up efforts that impact historically disadvantaged communities, such as trash traps in rivers, removal of contaminated soil, or groundwater treatment; and (b) the redevelopment, repurposing, and clean-up of unused,



Macalloy Corporation Superfund site in North Charleston, South Carolina has been cleaned up and returned to use.

Credit: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

underutilized, or neglected brownfields, and other sites, especially in rural and distressed communities.



**Objective 6.2- Preserve and expand access to the SCRC region’s natural resources to increase outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities.**

The Southeast Crescent region boasts a variety of ecosystems that are home to unique animal and plant communities, and it is globally recognized for its biodiversity value. These ecosystems provide important environmental and socioeconomic services, ranging from water quality to recreational and tourism opportunities.<sup>70</sup> Preserving and sustainably expanding access to these natural resources will reaffirm the tremendous impact on the quality of life for communities for future generations and continue to attract visitors from across the world who are drawn to the unique scenery and outdoor activities, such as birding, swimming, fishing, and snorkeling. Across the U.S., proximity to outdoor recreation consistently correlates with higher physical activity levels for both adults and youth. Next to schools, parks and recreation agencies are the second largest public feeder of children, distributing 2.5 million healthy meals to children of low-income families, helping to increase their nutrition levels.<sup>71</sup>

Projects may include but are not limited to: (a) small-scale, high-touch projects to increase access to natural assets (e.g., crossover walkway, pedestrian walkway); (b) capacity building support to develop strong partnership networks among parks, hiking trails, and natural habitats to drive local development and access; and (c) supporting sustainable recreational and eco-tourism with a special emphasis on small business growth.



Catharpin Regional Park in Catharpin, Virginia  
Credit: Prince William County Government

### Goal 6 Target Impact:

- **Target 1:** SCRC will measure the number of households and businesses with new or improved access to parks, outdoor recreational spaces, infrastructure (e.g., bike trails, walking trails), and those impacted by air, soil, and water clean-up efforts.
- **Target 2:** SCRC will assess the jobs created and/or retained in environmental remediation, park services and management, community planning, and construction.
- **Target 3:** SCRC will aggregate the number communities that have increased access to green space, that are impacted through technical assistance, and that benefit from remediated sites.
- **Target 4:** SCRC will track the return on investments in environmental clean-up, preservation, and access through the following proxy measures:
  - Total number of households/businesses impacted multiplied by 1.05 of the average local property values, assuming remediation and/or increased access to natural assets increases property values by five percent on average.<sup>7273</sup>

## Conclusion

SCRC is committed to investing in the future of the Southeast Crescent region and its residents by continuing to work closely with state and local community partners to ensure investments catalyze action to address evolving challenges, capitalize on opportunities to reduce disparities and promote wealth generation and attainment, and enact lasting change for the region’s people and communities. This plan is envisioned as a living document to drive action, change, and meaningful progress across the six priority areas.

We recognize the mission of building sustainable communities and strengthening economic growth across the Southeast region can only be achieved if SCRC works in tandem with its local, state, and national partners to address deeply rooted issues and challenges. We look forward to continued work with our partners and community members to maximize impact and improve outcomes as we activate the plan through the launch of SCRC’s flagship grant program and establishment of a research and evaluation consortium.

### **What’s Next: SCRC Member States’ Economic and Infrastructure Development Plans & Strategy Statements**

In accordance with the [2008 Farm Bill – Section 15502](#), each SCRC state shall submit a comprehensive State Economic and Infrastructure Development (SEID) plan for their respective state. In addition to the SEID, an annual state strategy statement shall also be developed. The SEID plans and annual strategy statements shall align with the goals, objectives, and priorities identified in SCRC’s strategic plan. All subsequent community investments by SCRC will align with the approved SEID plans and strategy statements developed by each SCRC state.

In developing SEID plans and strategy statements, SCRC states shall consult with and take into consideration the goals, objectives, priorities, and recommendations of interested local parties (e.g., local development districts, councils of government, colleges, and universities) and encourage public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of all plans and programs.<sup>74</sup>

### **Applying for SCRC Grants**

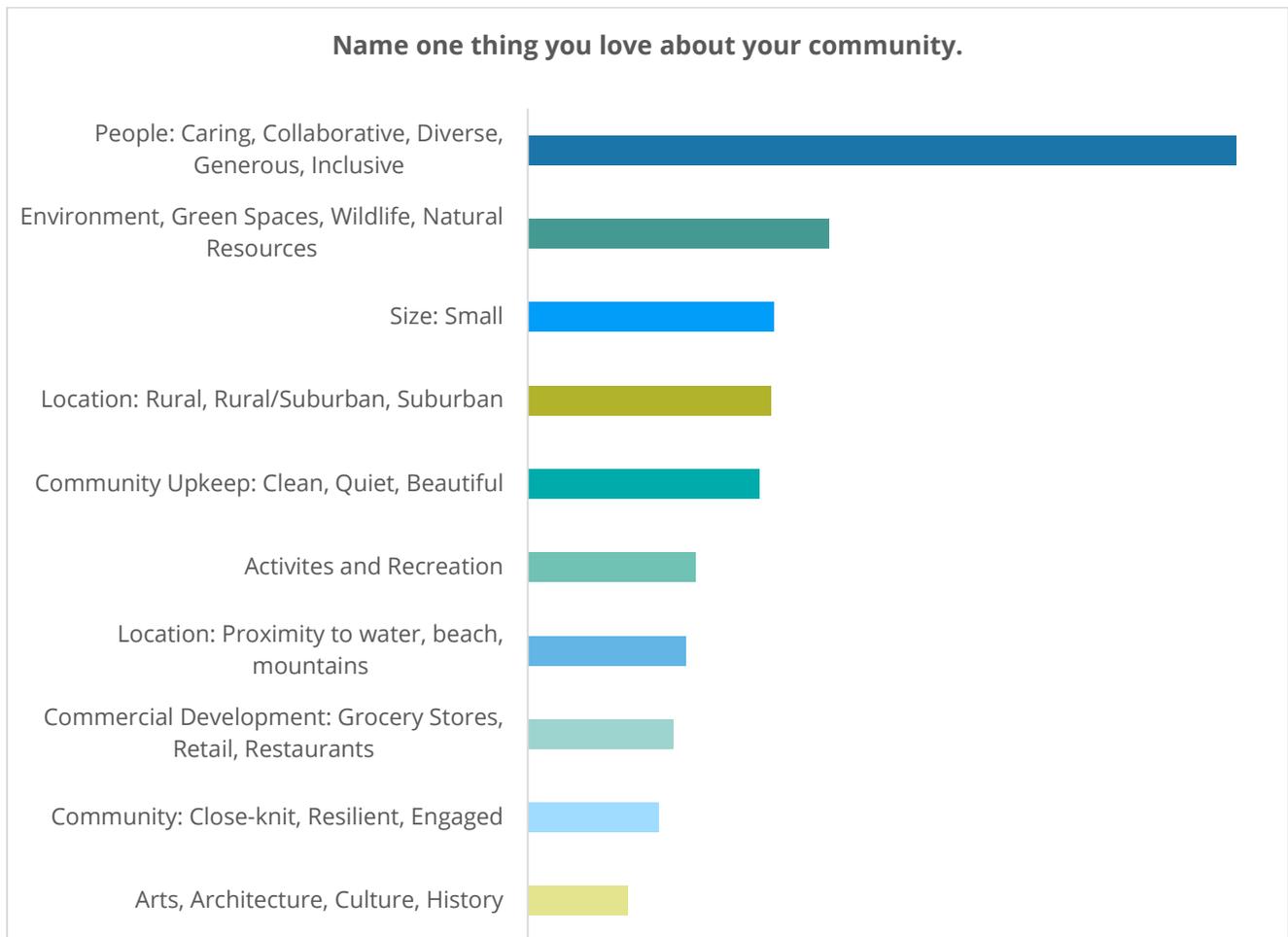
SCRC grants are awarded to state, local, and Native American governments as well as public or nonprofit organizations for projects that align with the Commission’s strategic investment priorities and SEID plans and strategies. All grant applications are made through, evaluated by, and certified by the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

# Appendix I: SCRC Survey Summary

Beginning in April 2022, SCRC launched a community-centered survey soliciting resident perspectives. Participants were asked to respond to a combination of multiple choice and open-ended questions to provide feedback and insight into their community – including what they love most, strengths, challenges, desired changes, job opportunities, funding needs, and prioritized investment areas for a stronger, healthier community. Respondents were also asked to provide demographic information, including age, race/ethnicity, state, county, and how long they’ve lived in the Southeast Crescent region. At the time of analysis (July 2022), the SCRC survey solicited responses from community members across the region. All responses were synthesized to produce this report and inform the development of the SCRC Strategic Plan.

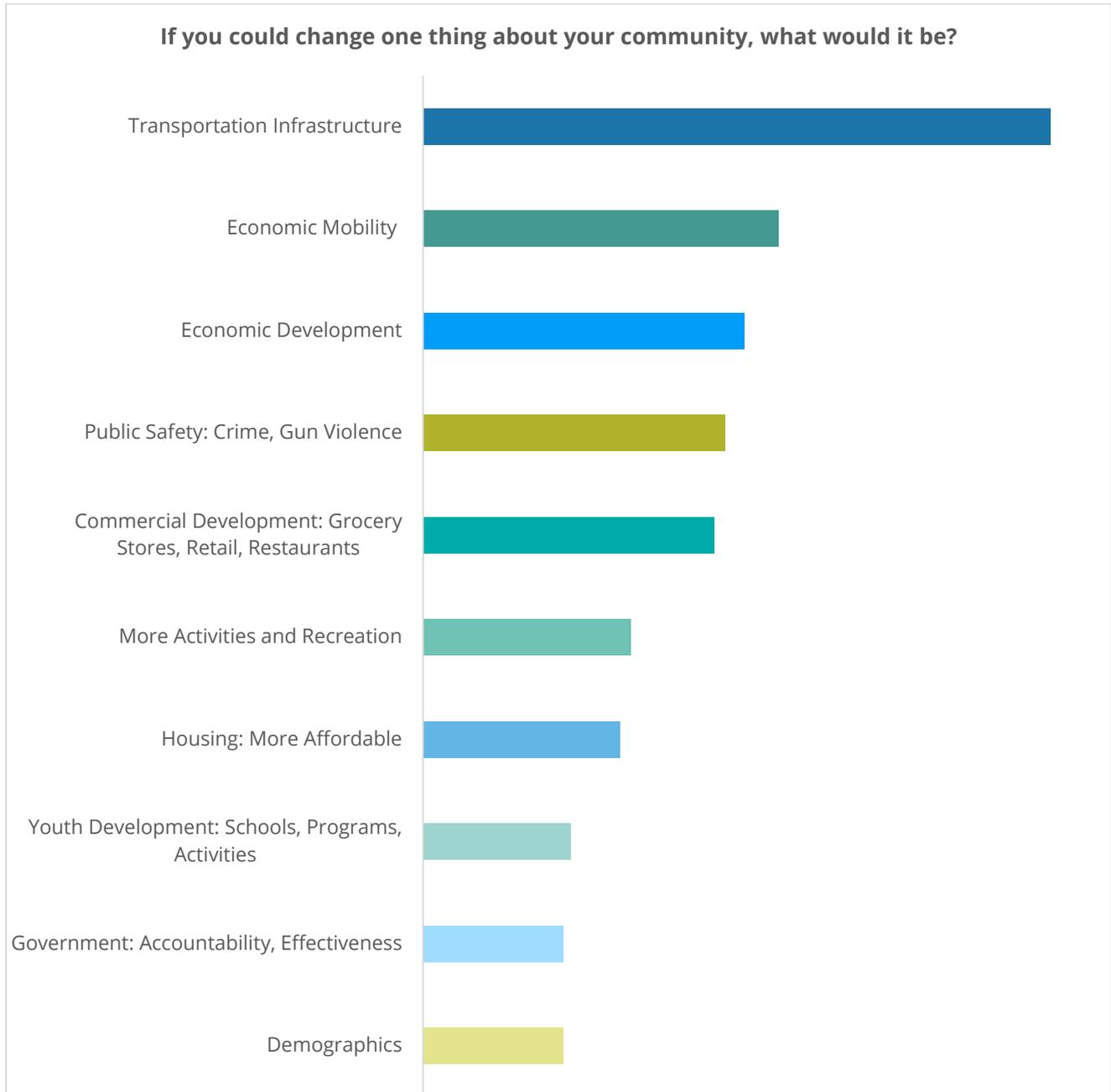
## Question 1: Name one thing you love about your community.

*The most loved community features include People, Environment, Small Size, and (mostly) Rural settlement.*



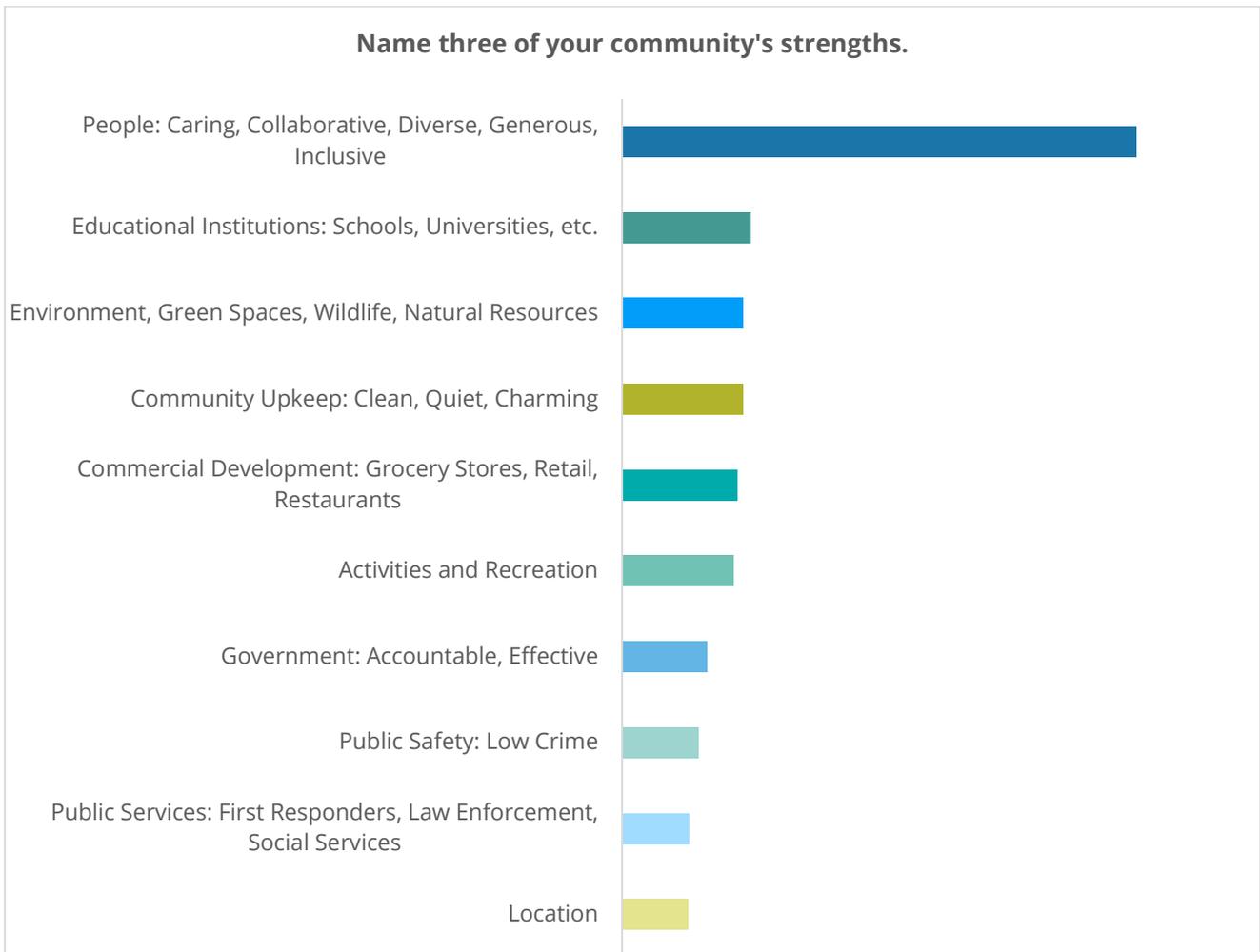
**Question 2: If you could change one thing in or about your community, what would it be?**

*People are most keen to change transportation infrastructure (roads, sidewalks), economic mobility (jobs, cost of living), economic development, and public safety.*



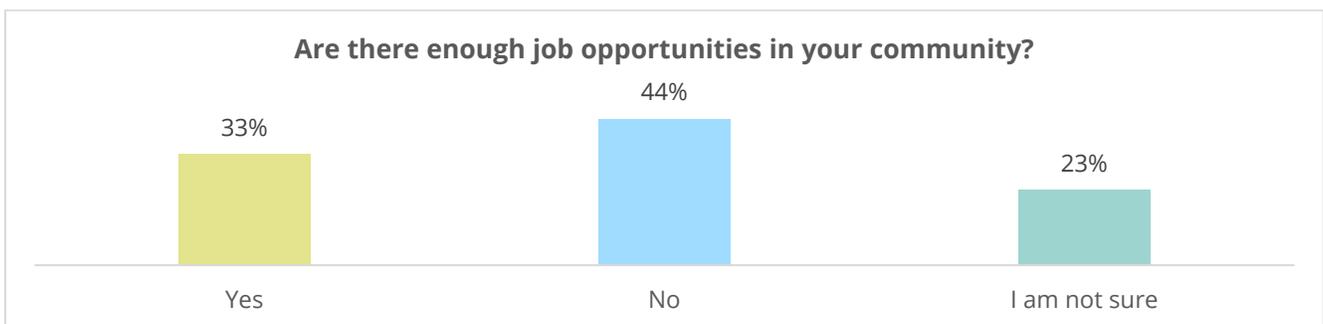
**Question 3: Name three of your community’s strengths?**

*People, Educational Institutions, Environment, and Community Upkeep are considered top strengths.*



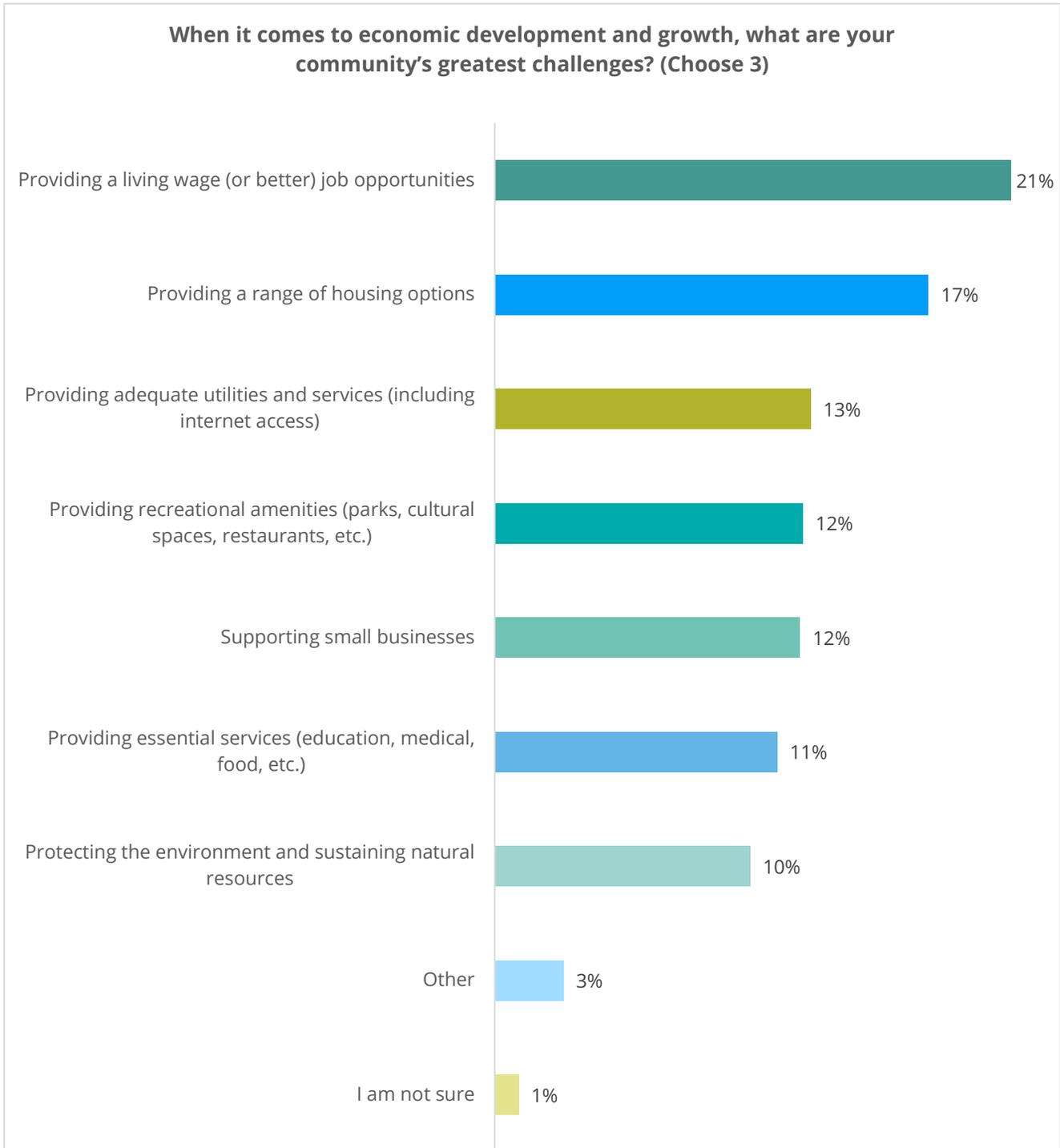
**Question 4: Are there enough job opportunities in your community?**

*Most respondents believe there are not enough jobs.*



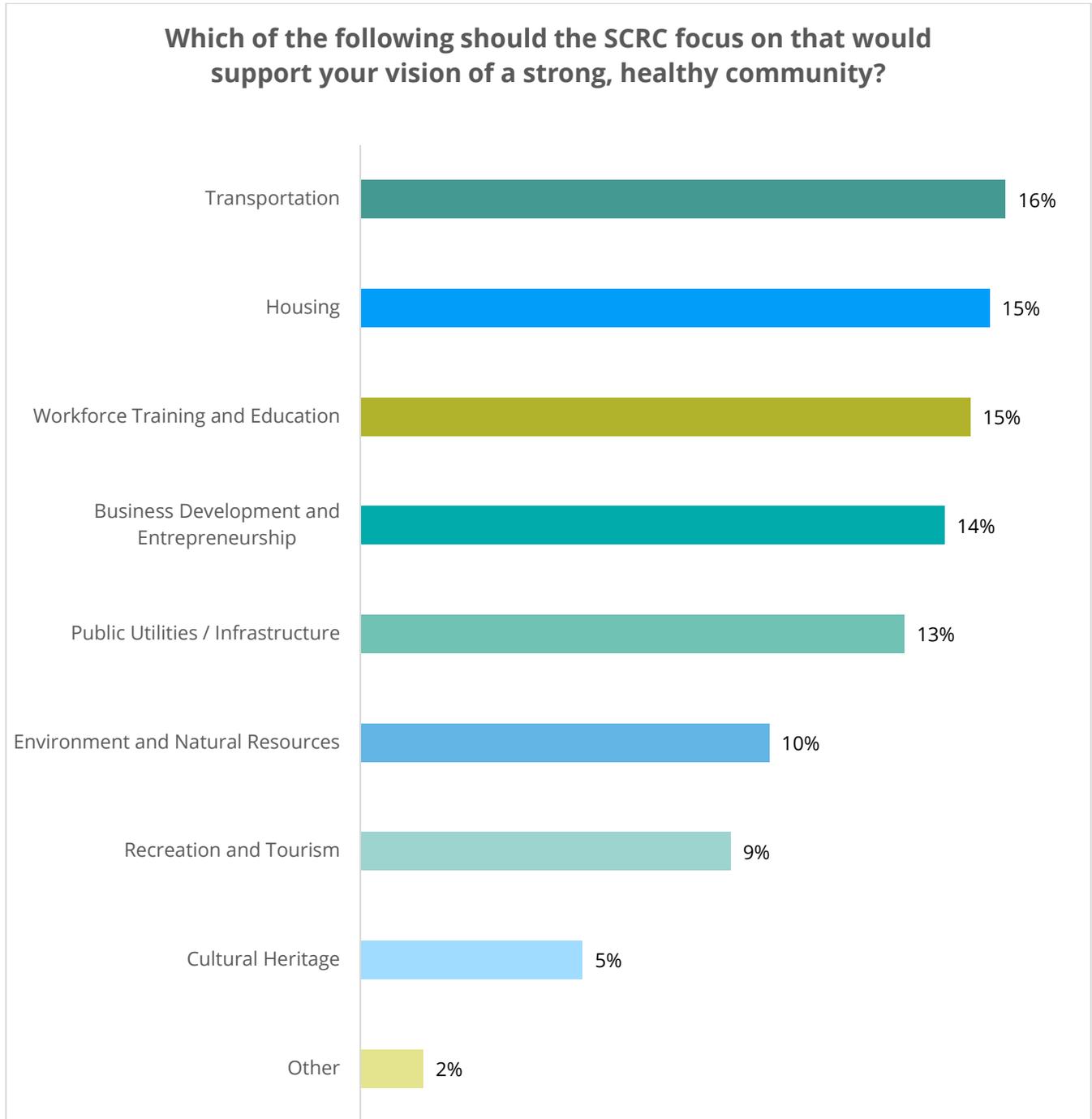
**Question 5: When it comes to economic development and growth, what are your community’s greatest challenges? Choose up to three.**

*Wages and Job Opportunities as well as Housing are top challenges to economic growth and development.*



**Question 6: Which of the following should the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission focus on that would support your vision of a strong, healthy community? Choose up to three.**

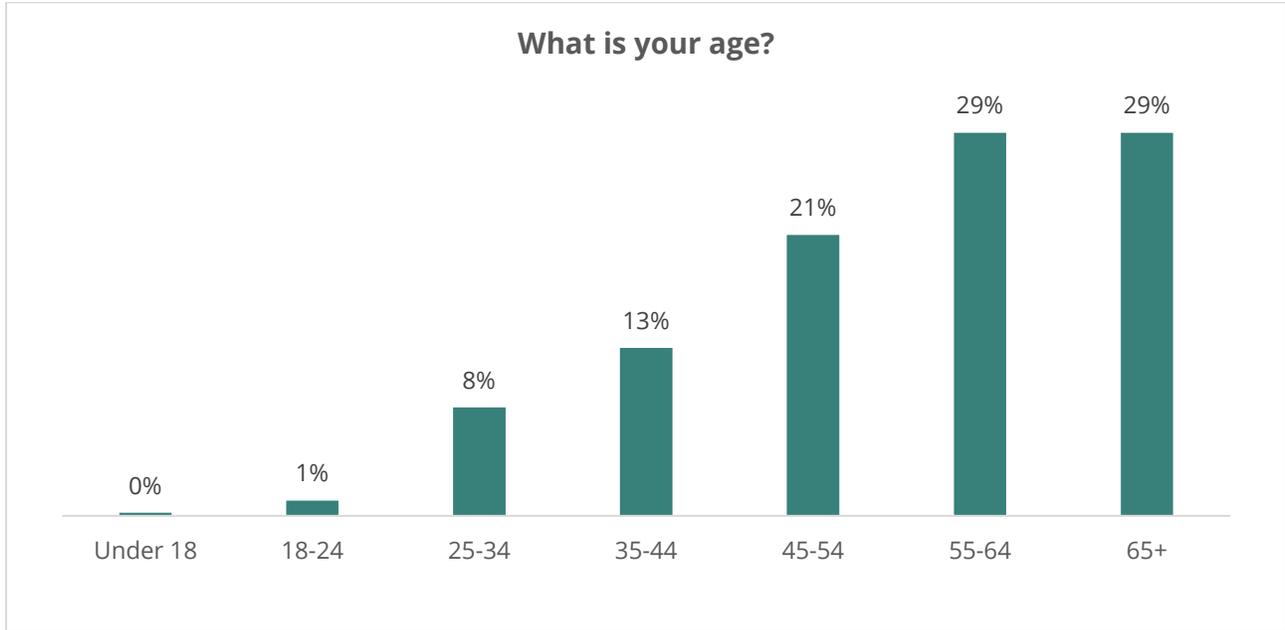
*Respondents were closely split on where SCRC should focus, including Infrastructure (Transportation, Public Utilities), Housing, and Economic Development and Mobility.*





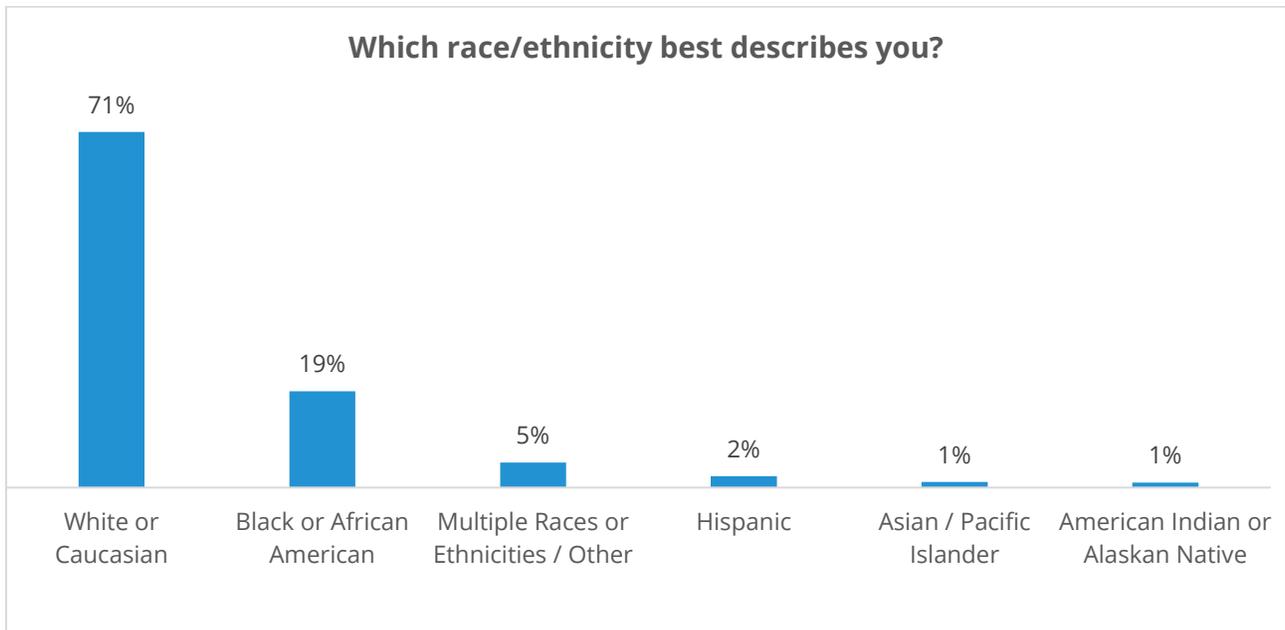
**Question 9: What is your age?**

*79% of survey respondents were over the age of 45. Only 1.3% identified as up to 24 years old, while Millennials (25-44) accounted for 21% of respondents.*



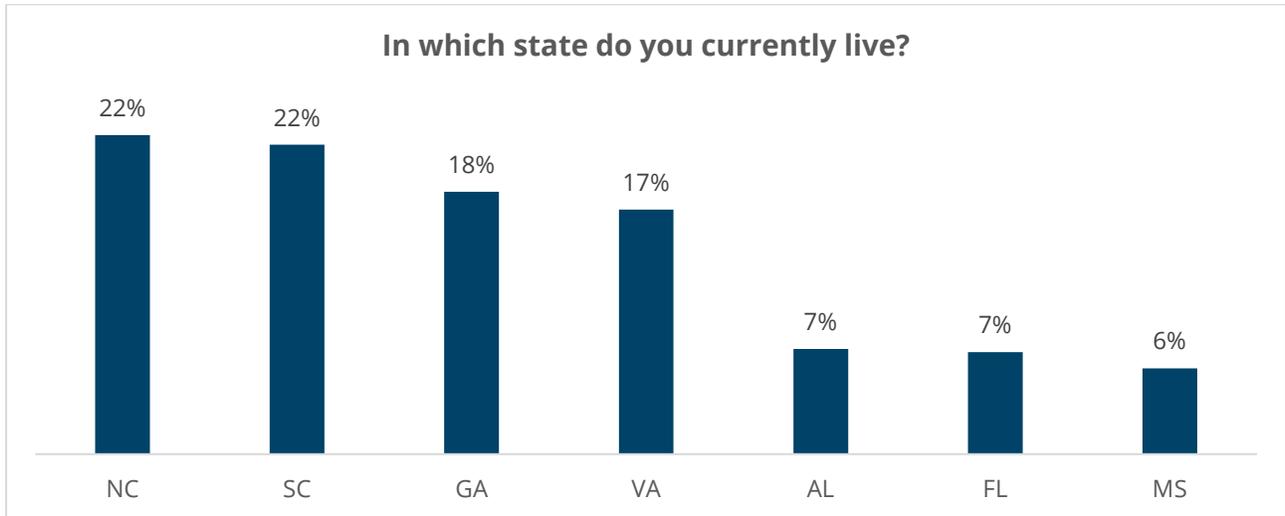
**Question 10: Which race/ethnicity best describes you? Please choose only one.**

*Almost 3/4 of respondents identify as White or Caucasian, followed by 19% identifying as Black or African American. Those who identify as multiple races or ethnicities, Hispanic, AAPI, AIAN, or Other accounted for 10% of respondents.*



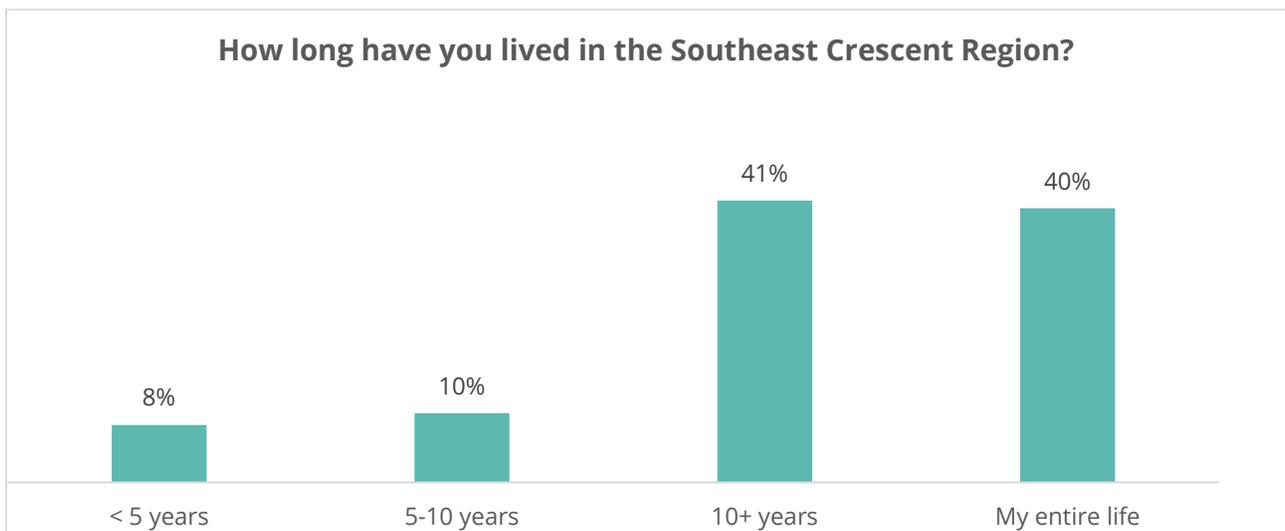
**Question 11: In which state do you currently live?**

*The greatest number of responses came from North Carolina (22.3%), South Carolina (21.7%), Georgia (18.4%), and Virginia (17.1%), followed by Alabama (7.4%), Florida (7.1%), and Mississippi (6%).*



**Question 12: How long have you lived in the Southeast Crescent Region?**

*An overwhelmingly majority of respondents have lived in the Southeast Crescent region for more than 10 years (81%). Only 8% have lived there for less than 5 years, while 10% of respondents have lived there between 5 and 10 years.*



## Appendix II: Approach to Developing the Strategic Plan

SCRC developed its inaugural strategic plan through extensive engagement and consensus building with partners at the federal, state, and local levels. This approach ensures that the plan is rooted in and informed by the priorities, needs, and perspectives of member states, communities, representatives, and residents living in the region. SCRC conducted: (1) Qualitative Research and Analysis to uncover SCRC member state priorities, challenges, and opportunities; (2) Quantitative Research and Analysis to explore comparative, economic and social mobility data and trends; (3) Community Engagement and Synthesis through the SCRC survey to understand resident perspectives on community strengths, challenges, and needs; and (4) Collaboration Sessions with SCRC stakeholders and partners from across the seven states to co-create, validate, and ensure the plan's alignment with state interests.

**Qualitative Research & Analysis:** Qualitative research enabled SCRC to understand current regional needs and challenges as well as member states' priorities and to ensure alignment of SCRC and state-level priority areas. State-level information was captured through sources outlined below, while additional reviews of academic literature further bolstered the Commission's focus on addressing persistent poverty and economic development using innovative methods.

### Alabama:

- "Priorities." *Office of the Governor of Alabama*, 1 Sept. 2022, <https://governor.alabama.gov/priorities/>.

### Florida:

- "Governor Ron DeSantis Announces the Freedom First Budget." *Florida Governor Ron DeSantis*, 9 Dec. 2021, <https://www.flgov.com/2021/12/09/governor-ron-desantis-announces-the-freedom-first-budget/>.

### Georgia:

- "Initiatives and Priorities." *Governor Brian P. Kemp Office of the Governor*, <https://gov.georgia.gov/about-us/initiatives-and-priorities>.

### Mississippi:

- "Key Initiatives." *Office of Governor Tate Reeves*, 2 Oct. 2020, <https://governorreeves.ms.gov/key-initiatives/>.

### North Carolina:

- "Issues." *NC Gov. Cooper*, <https://governor.nc.gov/issues>.

### South Carolina:

- "South Carolina Office of the Governor Henry McMaster." *Governor Henry McMaster's 2022 State of the State Address | S.C. Governor Henry McMaster*, 19 Jan. 2022,

<https://governor.sc.gov/news/2022-01/governor-henry-mcmasters-2022-state-state-address>.

- “South Carolina Office of the Governor Henry McMaster.” *Recent News / S.C. Governor Henry McMaster*, <https://governor.sc.gov/news>.

**Virginia:**

- “Governor Glenn Youngkin Celebrates Signing of Virginia State Budget.” *Governor of Virginia - Glenn Youngkin*, 21 June 2022, <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/news-releases/2022/june/name-935061-en.html>.
- “Governor Glenn Youngkin Letter to General Assembly Budget Conferees.” *Governor of Virginia - Glenn Youngkin*, 4 Mar. 2022, <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/news-releases/2022/march/name-929803-en.html>.

**Quantitative Research & Analysis:** SCRC conducted quantitative and comparative analyses to dive deeper into economic and social mobility data, trends, and patterns across SCRC member states and communities.

**Community Engagement & Synthesis:** In April 2022, SCRC launched a community-centered survey soliciting resident perspectives. Participants were asked to respond to a combination of multiple choice and open-ended questions and to provide feedback and insights into their community; this ensured that SCRC’s Strategic Goals aligned with community priorities. See [Appendix I](#) for additional information on survey insights.

**Collaboration Sessions:** Four collaboration sessions were hosted with a variety of regional partners and stakeholders to: (1) refine and confirm Strategic Goals; (2) determine key measures of impact and success; (3) refine and confirm objectives and activities for each goal; and (4) establish target outcomes using budget and funding projections.

Over 60 stakeholders from all seven member states participated in collaboration sessions to offer insights, suggestions, and ideas. These were used to inform the development of the final strategic plan.

1. **Session 1:** Participants discussed their state- and/or community-level challenges and priorities. Participants were asked to consider:
  - What are the greatest challenges when it comes to economic development?
  - What specific investments has your state made that align to each strategic goal or its related challenges?
  - What are local considerations related to each strategic goal that have significant impact on the quality of life of your community members?
2. **Session 2:** Stakeholders from all seven states discussed key measures of impact and success across strategic goals. Participants were asked to consider:
  - What impact do you want to see on your community related to each goal?

- What does success look like?
  - What does “good” mean for your community?
  - What outcomes are needed to achieve this aspiration?
3. **Session 3:** The third collaboration session brought together stakeholders from all seven states to refine and validate objectives and activities. Participants were asked to review previously shared ideas, identify and fill gaps, and prioritize key initiatives and actions based on their community needs and experiences.
  4. **Session 4:** The final collaboration session brought stakeholders from all seven states together to establish funding needs and estimates. Participants were asked to consider how SCRC should allocate funds across strategic goals to maximize impact and improve outcomes for communities.

## Appendix III: Counties of the SCRC

**Alabama (13 counties):** Autauga, Baldwin, Coffee, Covington, Crenshaw, Dale, Geneva, Henry, Houston, Lee, Mobile, Montgomery County, Pike

**Georgia (122 counties):** Appling, Atkinson, Bacon, Baker, Baldwin, Ben Hill, Berrien, Bibb, Bleckley, Brantley, Brooks, Bryan, Bulloch, Burke, Butts, Calhoun, Camden, Candler, Charlton, Chatham, Chattahoochee, Clarke, Clay, Clayton, Clinch, Cobb, Coffee, Colquitt, Columbia, Cook, Coweta, Crawford, Crisp, De Kalb, Decatur, Dodge, Dooly, Dougherty, Early, Echols, Effingham, Emanuel, Evans, Fayette, Fulton, Glascock, Glynn, Grady, Greene, Hancock, Harris, Henry, Houston, Irwin, Jasper, Jeff Davis, Jefferson, Jenkins, Johnson, Jones, Lamar, Lanier, Laurens, Lee, Liberty, Lincoln, Long, Lowndes, Macon, Marion, McDuffie, McIntosh, Meriwether, Miller, Mitchell, Monroe, Montgomery, Morgan, Muscogee, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Peach, Pierce, Pike, Pulaski, Putnam, Quitman, Randolph, Richmond, Rockdale, Schley, Screven, Seminole, Spalding, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Taliaferro, Tattnall, Taylor, Telfair, Terrell, Thomas, Tift, Toombs, Treutlen, Troup, Turner, Twiggs, Upson, Walton, Ware, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Webster, Wheeler, Wilcox, Wilkes, Wilkinson, Worth

**Florida (67 counties):** Alachua, Baker, Bay, Bradford, Brevard, Broward, Calhoun, Charlotte, Citrus, Clay, Collier, Columbia, DeSoto, Dixie, Duval, Escambia, Flagler, Franklin, Gadsden, Gilchrist, Glades, Gulf, Hamilton, Hardee, Hendry, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Holmes, Indian River, Jackson, Jefferson, Lafayette, Lake, Lee, Leon, Levy, Liberty, Madison, Manatee, Marion, Martin, Miami-Dade, Monroe, Nassau, Okaloosa, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, Palm Beach, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Putnam, Santa Rosa, Sarasota, Seminole, St. Johns, St. Lucie, Sumter, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, Volusia, Wakulla, Walton, Washington

**Mississippi (18 counties):** Clarke, Forrest, George, Greene, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Jones, Lamar, Lauderdale, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Pearl River, Perry, Scott, Stone, Wayne

**North Carolina (69 counties):** Alamance, Anson, Beaufort, Bertie, Bladen, Brunswick, Cabarrus, Camden, Carteret, Caswell, Chatham, Chowan, Columbus, Craven, Cumberland, Currituck, Dare, Davidson, Duplin, Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Gaston, Gates, Granville, Greene, Guilford, Halifax, Harnett, Hertford, Hoke, Hyde, Iredell, Johnston, Jones, Lee, Lenoir, Lincoln, Martin, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Moore, Nash, New Hanover, Northampton, Onslow, Orange, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Pender, Perquimans, Person, Pitt, Randolph, Richmond, Robeson, Rockingham, Rowan, Sampson, Scotland, Stanly, Tyrrell, Union, Vance, Wake, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Wilson

**South Carolina (39 counties):** Abbeville, Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Beaufort, Berkeley, Calhoun, Charleston, Chester, Chesterfield, Clarendon, Colleton, Darlington, Dillon, Dorchester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Florence, Georgetown, Greenwood, Hampton, Horry, Jasper, Kershaw, Lancaster, Laurens, Lee, Lexington, Marion, Marlboro, McCormick, Newberry, Orangeburg, Richland, Saluda, Sumter, Williamsburg, York

**Virginia (100 counties):** Accomack, Albemarle, **Alexandria city**, Amelia, Amherst, Appomattox, Arlington, Augusta, Bedford, Brunswick, Buckingham, Campbell, Caroline, Charles City, Charlotte, **Charlottesville city**, **Chesapeake city**, Chesterfield, Clarke, **Colonial Heights city**, Culpeper, Cumberland, **Danville city**, Dinwiddie, **Emporia city**, Essex, Fairfax, **Fairfax City**, Falls Church city, Fauquier, Fluvanna, Franklin, **Franklin city**, Frederick, **Fredericksburg city**, Gloucester, Goochland, Greene, Greensville, Halifax, **Hampton city**, Hanover, **Harrisonburg city**, Henrico, **Hopewell city**, Isle Of Wight, King And Queen, King George, King William, Lancaster, Loudoun, Louisa, Lunenburg, **Lynchburg city**, Madison, **Manassas city**, **Manassas Park city**, Mathews, Mecklenburg, Middlesex, Nelson, New Kent, **Newport News city**, **Norfolk city**, Northampton, Northumberland, Nottoway, Orange, Page, **Petersburg city**, Pittsylvania, **Poquoson city**, **Portsmouth city**, Powhatan, Prince Edward, Prince George, Prince William, Rappahannock, Richmond, **Richmond city**, Roanoke, **Roanoke city**, Rockingham, Salem City, Shenandoah, Southampton, Spotsylvania, Stafford, **Staunton city**, **Suffolk city**, Surry, Sussex, **Virginia Beach city**, Warren, **Waynesboro city**, Westmoreland, **Williamsburg city**, **Winchester city**, York

Source: Tabulated by CRS by cross-referencing relevant state counties against ARC and DRA jurisdictions. Notes: In Virginia, independent cities (in bold) are considered counties for U.S. census purposes and are eligible for independent inclusion.

## Appendix IV: End Notes

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