

## **Strategic Plan 2021-2023**

### **Vision**

To promote economic and community prosperity throughout the region by providing **high impact services** to our local government members, establishing **beneficial relationships** with partner organizations, and building **strong organizational capacity** while being recognized as a model organization for regional development.

### **Mission**

To partner with our local government members to effectively identify, address, and leverage challenges and opportunities in Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties while providing innovative solutions and beneficial services for our region.

### **Organizational Overview and Executive Summary**

The High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) is an association of seven counties and nineteen municipalities located in the northern mountains of North Carolina. HCCOG is one of sixteen multi-county planning regions in North Carolina and serves as a cooperative extension of local governments in the High Country region. HCCOG was established in 1974 by the seven counties as provided in NC General Statute Part 2, Article 20, Chapter 160-A.

Both the federal and state governments have designated HCCOG as the official agency for the administration of various funds and programs which directly support HCCOG's member governments in northwestern North Carolina. HCCOG is a designated Local Development District of the Appalachian Regional Commission, an Economic Development District of the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, and an Area Agency on Aging designated by the State of North Carolina.

HCCOG is designated by the State of North Carolina as the Lead Regional Organization for the region's seven counties (Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey) and by the Governor as the Local Area for administering the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The HCCOG Region D Development Corporation, Inc. is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that assists new and existing businesses in the region with an array of financial and economic development services.

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter: January 1 – March 31

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter: April 1 – June 30

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter: July 1 – September 30

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter: October 1 – December 31

HCCOG is involved in the communities of northwestern North Carolina in many ways; from the care of older adults (HCCOG Area Agency on Aging Department) to water, sewer, GIS services, transportation planning (HCCOG Planning Department), and workforce development (HCCOG – Workforce Development Department). HCCOG provides regional solutions to local problems and services and/or resources which might not otherwise be affordable or available to the local governments making up the High Country.

## **Strategic Planning Overview**

In November of 2019, the HCCOG Executive Board and management staff met at High Country Council of Governments' office and participated in a comprehensive strategic planning workshop facilitated by Dr. Patricia Mitchell with Appalachian State University. The information and priorities cultivated from this Executive Board work session was disseminated to management staff in December of 2019. From January to March of 2020 this information was further refined for the development of priority areas and was utilized to formulate the elements of this Strategic Plan.

## **Strategic Priorities**

### **1. High Impact Services**

Deliver high impact services by strengthening existing services and exploring opportunities for new services by soliciting input on customer satisfaction, evaluating regional local government needs, and assessing the services portfolio for improvements, additions, and promotion.

### **2. Beneficial Relationships**

Cultivate beneficial relationships that focus on opportunities for collaboration with regional local governments, other councils of government, state and federal agencies, and stakeholders by communicating effectively and focusing on opportunities for collaboration.

### **3. Strong Organizational Capacity**

Enhance organizational capacity to serve regional needs by focusing on staff development, talent recruitment, and sustainable revenue streams.

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## **Strategic Plan**

### **1. High Impact Services**

Deliver high impact services by strengthening existing services and exploring opportunities for new services by soliciting input on customer satisfaction, evaluating regional local government needs, and assessing the services portfolio for improvements, additions, and promotion.

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter: January 1 – March 31

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**Goal 1.1:** Obtain input from the region’s local governments on the value and overall satisfaction with existing services and needs for additional or new services.

**Strategy:**

- Develop and distribute a yearly survey to measure the impact of services and to evaluate local government needs.

	<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Completion Target</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>
1.1	Develop survey instrument	4 <sup>th</sup> quarter 2021	Executive Director, Leadership Team
1.2	Distribute survey instrument	1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director, Leadership Team
1.3	Develop presentation of survey results	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director
1.4	Present to Executive Board	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director

**Goal 1.2:** Develop and carry out a process to obtain input from the region’s partners, stakeholders, and service providers on the value and relevance of existing services and needs for additional or new services.

**Strategy:**

- Develop a yearly survey to measure impact of services and to evaluate local government needs.

	<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Completion Target</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>
1.5	Identify region’s partners, stakeholders, and service providers to be surveyed	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2021	Executive Director, Leadership Team
1.6	Develop survey instrument	4 <sup>th</sup> quarter 2021	Executive Director, Leadership Team
1.7	Distribute survey instrument	1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director, Leadership Team
1.8	Develop presentation of survey results	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director
1.9	Present to Executive Board	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director

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**Goal 1.3:** Based on input from local governments, regional partners, stakeholders, and service providers, design a menu of services and develop a communication plan.

	Action Item	Completion Target	Responsible Party
1.10	Convene work group tasked with evaluating modifications of existing services and identifying new services that could be offered to local governments	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director, Leadership Team
1.11	Determine feasibility for modified or new services by analyzing fee for services structure, interest in services by local governments, capacity of staff to deliver services, and other measurements	4 <sup>th</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director, Leadership Team
1.12	Complete menu of services descriptions	1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2023	Executive Director, Leadership Team
1.13	Develop communication and promotions campaign	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2023	Executive Director, Leadership Team

## 2. Beneficial Relationships

Cultivate beneficial relationships that focus on opportunities for collaboration with regional local governments, other councils of government, state and federal agencies, and stakeholders by communicating effectively and focusing on opportunities for collaboration.

**Goal 2.1:** Support strong relationships with regional local governments, other councils of government, state and federal agencies, and stakeholders by developing actions for communicating effectively about local and regional needs.

### Strategies:

- Establish a more active role in relationship-building and advocacy efforts at the state and federal levels.
- Serve as an economic development liaison between granting agencies and federal, state, and local governments.

	Action Item	Completion Target	Responsible Party
2.1	Create a legislative committee	4 <sup>th</sup> quarter each year	Executive Board, Executive Director
2.2	Develop a regional legislative priorities list	1 <sup>st</sup> quarter each year	Executive Board, Executive Director

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2.3	Convene legislative day with local government leaders and state federal legislators	1 <sup>st</sup> quarter each year	Executive Board, Executive Director
2.4	Convene local government leaders and state and federal agency staff on a regular basis	Ongoing	Executive Board, Executive Director
2.5	Maintain and distribute list of potential grants to members	Ongoing	Executive Director, Leadership Team
2.6	Develop local government-based projects related to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)	Ongoing	Executive Director, Leadership Team

### 3. Strong Organizational Capacity

Enhance organizational capacity to serve regional needs by focusing on staff and board development, talent recruitment, and sustainable revenue streams.

**Goal 3.1:** Expand and adapt organizational capacity to meet local and regional needs.

#### Strategy:

- Assess current capabilities of HCCOG organization, identify skill sets that need improvement, and provide high quality professional development.

	Action Item	Completion Target	Responsible Party
3.1	Conduct an annual review of staff capabilities	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter annually	Executive Director, Department Heads
3.2	Create a list of professional development skills needed by HCCOG	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter annually	Executive Director, Department Heads
3.3	Solicit information on best practices from other councils of government (or similar organizations) on effective staff and board training programs	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2021	Executive Director
3.4	Identify feasible, high quality training resources and providers	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2021	Executive Director
3.5	Establish an organizational training program for staff and board development	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director

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**Goal 3.2:** Become the local government training center for the Northwest Region of North Carolina.

**Strategy:**

- Develop a local government training program based on input from local governments, regional partners, stakeholders, and service providers.

	<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Completion Target</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>
3.6	Create a list of training services needed by local governments	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director
3.7	Create a list of professional development skills needed by HCCOG staff to deliver local government training programs	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director, Leadership Team
3.8	Work with Appalachian State University, UNC School of Government, and other organizations to leverage existing local government training resource providers	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director, Leadership Team
3.9	Develop a local government training program utilizing HCCOG staff and other resource providers	4 <sup>th</sup> quarter 2022	Executive Director, Leadership Team

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## **Conclusion**

The first step in implementation of the HCCOG Strategic Plan is to communicate its elements to organizational leaders and adopt the plan as the central policy document for the organization. Identifying who will be engaged in the implementation of the various parts of the plan is the next critical step. This step can be accomplished through forming work groups and committees needed for the responsible parties to carry out tasks to complete action items in a timely manner. Although the goals and strategies should be fixed once the plan is adopted, adjustments in the action items, completion targets, and responsible parties should be expected throughout implementation of the plan.

Consistent evaluation of the goals, strategies, and action steps, via regular review sessions with staff and other organizational leadership, is critical to ensuring the Strategic Plan remains viable and relevant. The HCCOG should continually monitor progress on how successful it is at managing projects, meeting deadlines, and overall implementation of the plan and this progress should be communicated internally and to external partners.

The Strategic Plan is a living document used to prioritize the needs of the organization and its members as defined by its leadership. The goals found in the plan ultimately implement the mission of HCCOG. The value of the plan lies in the ability of HCCOG to set realistic goals and implement innovative strategies against which progress can be measured. It also allows the HCCOG to gauge its ongoing value to its membership.

The HCCOG should revisit the plan and review progress at least twice yearly (at budget time, and in November) to mark progress and adjust it, as necessary. The plan should be updated annually.

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