

**TENNESSEE'S UPPER CUMBERLAND
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
2018 UPDATE**





2018 UPDATE

The Upper Cumberland is made up of small rural towns and a handful of micropolitan cities. The median household incomes in the region range between \$28,804 and \$44,272. Unemployment reached an all time low of 3.1% in May 2018. This is a drastic reduction from the 13.2% peak during the most recent recession. The Upper Cumberland is experiencing a slow turnaround from the job losses felt during the latest recession. The region has seen several industrial expansions and major job announcements which have turned the tides to a concern for available workforce. Excellent educational facilities including a premier engineering college, Tennessee Tech University, several Community Colleges, and TN Colleges of Applied Technology are available throughout the region. These institutions are striving to provide the needed workforce, but demand for skilled workers is still outnumbering the incoming labor force for certain sectors. Workforce is accompanied by advocacy, industrial development, retail development, and transportation infrastructure as regional goals.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Educated & Healthy Workforce Meeting All Employment Needs in the Region.

- Objective 1: Connect employers to employees.
- Objective 2: Increase the number of citizens with postsecondary degrees and certificates.

REGIONAL ADVOCACY

Legislative Members are Fully Educated on the Most Prominent Needs and Concerns of the Region.

- Objective 1: Local leadership identifies the most important legislative issues to the region.
- Objective 2: Increase legislator awareness of the region's stance on political subjects.



INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Prepared Communities, Competitive in Industrial Recruitment and Expansion.

- Objective 1: Increase inventory of industrial property across the region.
- Objective 2: Improve request for information responses (RFI) by participating in TVA RFI audit program, sharing responses across the region, and implementing regional marketing.
- Objective 3: Increase regional marketing efforts through industrial trade shows such as Select USA Investment Summit. Proactively share regional marketing material to develop awareness of the Upper Cumberland among business decision makers.
- Objective 4: Create local business retention & expansion programs in each county.

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

The Region Has Adequate, Thriving Retail Establishments Supporting the Quality of Place of the Upper Cumberland.

- Objective 1: Grow the community by attracting new retail space.
- Objective 2: Retain and grow existing commercial businesses.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The Region is Easily Accessible to Residents, Visitors and Businesses.

- Objective 1: Improve transportation network.
- Objective 2: Educate state and federal partners on the identified needs

The following document provides an update on the progress of the regional goals. Though significant progress has been made in each category there is still work to be done. The leadership of the Upper Cumberland is committed to continuing this work and moving towards a more prosperous region.

Goal 1

Educated & Healthy Workforce Meeting All Employment Needs in the Region

Mechatronics Program at Motlow State Community College - Warren County

The region has made great progress on the workforce development objectives to connect employers to employees and raise the educational attainment level, through a variety of avenues. First, the TN Reconnect program which was highlighted in the 2016 CEDS update has continued to grow. Over 1272 adults are currently registered in the program and paired with a mentor, 34 have completed their degree, and 364 are enrolled.

Secondly, community leaders and educational institutions are continuing to increase their available training for industries. For example, Motlow College has partnered with Warren County business and government leaders to pursue an Automation and Robotics Training Center. The facility is under construction and will begin training in May of 2019. Similarly, the TN College of Applied Technology in Livingston is adding a facility in Jackson County to offer lineman and Information Technology training.

Another tremendous impact on training support to the Upper Cumberland's existing and prospective industrial partners comes through the overhaul of the state WIOA program. The Workforce Development programs from the State of TN, including financial support for adult, youth, and dislocated workers, have gone through a complete restructuring and is receiving positive reviews from its governing body. The program relocated under the management of the Upper Cumberland Development District, a new One Stop Operator was selected through competitive bid, and many staff positions have turned over to experienced individuals well prepared to lead these programs proactively. Workforce Development is a nation-wide struggle, and it is believed that the region and state that address the issue most quickly will see the most benefit. The state of TN has led the way in workforce development through the Drive to 55, and the Upper Cumberland is committed to seizing that momentum with its own efforts to make a sizable impact on workforce and education in the region.

Additional action items to be considered under this goal such as internships and work study programs are still a critical need for the region. Students need the chance to learn what employment opportunities await in their communities and the ability to learn hands on in our businesses. Additionally, a regional marketing effort to recruit a qualified workforce is desired. There must also be a regional approach to tackling nation-wide barriers such as substance abuse, transportation, and childcare limitations.

A photograph of the Tennessee State Capitol Building, a large neoclassical structure with a prominent portico supported by tall columns and a central dome topped with a flag. The building is shown from a low angle, emphasizing its grandeur.

Goal 2

Legislative Members are Fully Educated on Most Prominent Needs and Concerns of the Region

Tennessee State Capitol Building

Advocacy is critical to express the concerns and needs of the citizens of the Upper Cumberland. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) has been an excellent way to gather this information from the communities directly and funnel it up to decision makers in the region. The success of the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy has inspired a statewide effort to develop a Tennessee CEDS document, to provide locally derived goals and objectives to state level officials. This information should be used to shape planning and program development. The state of TN will have a new Governor in 2019 and the state-wide CEDS will be a valuable tool as he learns about the needs of our state and sets administration goals and priorities.

Across the region there are a variety of advocacy efforts already taking place. Several city and county mayors take place in day on the hill events organized in Nashville among our state legislators. Additionally, many organizations send representatives and leaders to Washington DC to meet with our Federal legislators on the most pressing issues in the Upper Cumberland.

Recently, federal partners were able to help secure at-risk SHIP funding. The State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) is a program that offers local, personalized counseling and assistance to people with Medicare, and their families. Through joint advocacy efforts led by the Upper Cumberland Area Agency on Aging and Disability, SHIP funding was restored to the federal budget, assuring the opportunity to continue serving seniors by assisting them in navigating the very complex Medicare system.

Goal 3

Prepared Communities, Competitive in Industrial Recruitment and Expansion

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Industrial Development will always be a priority in the Upper Cumberland. Over 18 percent of individuals are employed in the manufacturing industry in this region. Creating designated industrial parks and sites is necessary for existing companies to have a location to expand in their current community as well as future industrial recruitments. The speed at which industry moves increases daily. Businesses no longer have the amount of time taken in the past to identify potential communities in which to locate and then develop the cow pasture on the edge of town. Communities must have sites identified, controlled, and developed with necessary infrastructure and environmental testing to be considered for any business location. Economic Development professionals refer to industrial sites and buildings as "inventory". The region lacks viable inventory for expansion and recruitment efforts. Several communities have invested in inventory but are at varying levels of completeness. The Upper Cumberland Region will continue to prioritize developing land suitable for manufacturing businesses to locate and grow.

When adequate inventory is available, communities must develop strong marketing material and submissions for company "requests for information". In a global environment each town no longer competes with their neighbor, but multiple states and even countries across the globe. TVA Economic Development offers an Economic Development Training for elected officials as well as an audit of current submissions. These resources can help prepare our communities to compete in the highly competitive recruitment environment. A new brand has been developed to unify the region's economic development marketing efforts. This platform has been used at the SelectUSA Investment Summit in Washington DC which is the highest profile foreign investment trade show in the United States.

Lastly, the Upper Cumberland counties will continue to prioritize existing businesses. More jobs are created through business expansion than business recruitment. Local and regional partners are passionate about providing all available resources to existing industries, allowing them to thrive and grow.

Goal 4

The Region Has Adequate, Thriving Retail Establishments Supporting the Quality of Place in the Upper Cumberland

Shoppes at Eagle Point - Putnam County

According to the National Retail Federation, retail is the largest employment sector in the state of Tennessee employing over 889,000 individuals. The 78,608 retail establishments in the state made a \$51.1 billion-dollar impact on Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In decades past many regions have not viewed retail as an industry that can be recruited and proactively pursued, but that trend is changing. With the help of the State of Tennessee's retail academy and the work of many private retail recruitment companies, communities are being educated on the steps that can be taken to further retail development.

Many Upper Cumberland communities participated in a two-day workshop entitled Retail Academy in 2017. These communities left with a wealth of demographic information identifying potential retailers that would succeed in the Upper Cumberland. A great deal was learned about the process of preparing for retailers. It is much more similar to preparing for industrial prospects than previously realized. It is vitally important to identify pieces of land that are suitable to these companies and to market directly to them. Several cities within the region have purchased marketing and recruitment services from national companies working daily with retail developers.

Retail recruitment efforts are a relatively new concept for the majority of the Upper Cumberland region and are a primary goal for the next four years. Communities are working to identify the proper individuals to use the valuable information attained and establish marketing plans. These plans will translate into specific material which can be targeted to appropriate retailers across the nation. This information will also be provided to existing business owners who may have the capacity to expand their current operation or open additional businesses. The ultimate goal is to have thriving retail establishments that support the quality of place in the Upper Cumberland. Retail Development efforts will continue to increase in the coming years.

Goal 5

The Region is Easily Accessible to Residents, Visitors and Businesses.

Collins River - Warren County

In the Upper Cumberland, only three of the fourteen counties have an interstate traveling through their corporate boundaries. The remaining communities must rely on their state highways to deliver citizens and visitors to and from the interstate. The region has many great state highways such as Highway 111 connecting north to south through the entire region and US 70, 70N and 70S which primarily move drivers east and west throughout the region. The state of Tennessee has proudly operated its transportation department with no debt. However, the past decade has seen a deterioration in quality as maintenance and expansion projects have been placed on hold. The effect has especially been felt in rural counties until the approval of a new transportation tax passed in the Improve Act of 2017.

The Upper Cumberland is in great need of upgrades and repair to many of our state routes such as Highway 127 which connects Fentress County to Interstate 40. This highway supports the industrial development of the Clarkrange Regional Business Park which is one of the largest industrial parks in the region and the state of Tennessee. The expansion of Highway 127 has taken over 20 years and is currently in Right-of-way acquisition. In addition, Clay County is working to reroute Hwy 53 to eliminate dangerous turns around the courthouse square and better serve the new industrial site in development.

Expanding the region's transportation infrastructure will continue to be a primary goal, both at the local and state level. The Improve Act will bring additional funds to each counties' highway department assisting with local maintenance efforts. Advocacy will play a key role in pursuing assistance with the region's state highway transportation needs.

UPPER CUMBERLAND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

Providing Solutions Through Regional Cooperation

The Upper Cumberland Development District (UCDD) was created by the Tennessee General Assembly to provide regional planning and assistance to the following counties: Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, Van Buren, Warren, and White. UCDD staff members are dedicated to providing quality services to the people of the Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee through the programs and services offered in each department: Area Agency on Aging and Disability, Economic and Community Development, Housing and Family Services and Workforce Development. It is UCDD's belief that the fourteen counties, along with the many municipalities contained within, are made stronger through regional cooperation and shared resources.

UCDD's Economic and Community Development staff members are well equipped to assist communities with a wide variety of services offered through our Economic and Community Development programs: Cumberland Area Investment Corporation, Economic Development, Geographical Information Systems, Grant Writing and Administration, Historic Preservation, Local Planning, Solid Waste Assistance, Statistical Information, Strategic Planning, Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, THDA Home Rehabilitation Program, and Transportation Rural Planning Organization.

The areas of expertise and unique skill sets represented within the staff position the Upper Cumberland Development District to be a strong asset to communities and enable the agency to serve as a driving force in economic development throughout the region.

