



Adopted by the High Country Council of Governments' Executive Board on July 20, 2015.

Vision Statement

The High Country Council of Governments will be the leader in initiating and providing solutions to regional and local challenges, supporting a bright future for the High Country.

Mission Statement

The High Country Council of Governments serves local government members and stakeholders with professional services by effectively maximizing resources to meet ever-changing needs that improve the quality of life and economic prosperity of the High Country.

Executive Summary

Organizational Overview

The High Country Council of Governments 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 region (Region D). HCCOG was established in 1974 by the member regional governments as provided in NC General Statute Part 2, Article 20, Chapter 160-A.

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

High Country Council of Governments is designated by the State of North Carolina as the Lead Regional Organization for the seven counties making up Region D (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.

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), workforce development

(HCCOG Workforce Development Department), and IT services. High Country Council of Governments 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 Region D.

Strategic Plan Overview

In the summer of 2014, the High Country Council of Governments' Executive Committee approved the first strategic planning process and selected a Steering Committee composed of nine (9) governmental and educational leaders within the region:

Strategic Plan Facilitators

Dr. Mickey N. Duvall, HCCOG Executive Director

Tanna Greathouse, Clerk to the Board, Assistant to Executive Director

Voting Members

Don Adams, Alleghany County Manager

Gary D. Blevins, Wilkes County Commissioner, Executive Board Chairman

David Burleson, Superintendent, Avery County Schools

Robert L. Johnson, North Wilkesboro Mayor, Executive Board Member

J. B. Lawrence, Blowing Rock Mayor, Executive Board Member

Jason Robinson, Clerk to the Board, Assistant to the County Manager, Human Resources Manager for Yancey County

Bill Slagle, Mitchell County Commissioner, Executive Board Member

Adam Stumb, Planning Director, Ashe County

Charles Vines, Mitchell County Manager, Executive Board Member

Ex-Officio Members

Beth Norris, Finance Officer, HCCOG

Adrian Tait, Workforce Development Director, HCCOG

Phil Trew, Planning and Development Director, HCCOG

Julie Wiggins, Area Agency on Aging Director, HCCOG

Prior to any formal committee meetings, a detailed Pre-Strategic Planning Online Survey was sent to all members which offered invaluable feed-back with sixty (60) responses from county/municipal elected officials, managers, planners, staff, stakeholders, and HCCOG staff over a one month period. The survey information was organized and distributed to all HCCOG members, as well as to members of the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee met for the first time on October 22, 2014 going over detailed information from the Strategic Planning Survey and then working to hammer out Vision and

Mission Statements. The Committee met a second time on December 5, 2014 conducting an analysis of organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The group also identified five (5) key Goals and Priorities they felt should be accomplished by the organization within 18-24 months. The Committee met for a third time on March 5, 2015 and began work on objectives for each goal, along with specific strategies for achieving each goal/objective against specific filters and constraints. The Steering Committee met for a final meeting on May 28, 2015 to finalize the objectives and strategies for each goal and recommended a timeline of approval by the HCCOG Advisory Committee and Executive Board.

The Steering Committee recommended that the Strategic Plan (once approved by the Executive Board) be evaluated each year at the HCCOG Advisory Committee's Annual Retreat, and any changes or updates be brought back to the full HCCOG Executive Board for final formal approval.

Accolades:

I would like to thank each and every member of the Steering Committee for their service. Each committee member sacrificed numerous hours of time and dedication to High Country Council of Governments and worked diligently to provide a clear-cut direction for the organization going forward. Your service is appreciated, and the future citizens of the High Country of northwestern North Carolina will benefit from the fruits of your labor.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Michael N. Duvall
HCCOG Executive Director
Strategic Plan Facilitator

Filters and Constraints:

Each objective and strategy will continue to be measured against the following filters and constraints to determine feasibility.

- Time Frame: 18-24 Months
- Cost
- Staff/Member Time Commitments
- Local/Regional Support
- State and Federal Program/Funding Guidelines (meaning we have no Local Government control or authority to make changes)
- Measurable

Strategic Plan Proposed Committees:

*HCCOG Fee Structure Committee (for current and added future services). This committee is being proposed as a temporary “ad hoc” committee selected from the Executive Board Membership.

Goal One

HCCOG must become more self-sufficient. Since 2013, there has been no state funding appropriated to support COGs, and there continues to be no evidence those funds will be returning or replenished (Area Agency on Aging and Workforce Development federal pass-through state funding has also continued to diminished significantly).

Objective 1: Grant compliance and administration

Strategies:

- a. Continue to distribute grant opportunity information via the HCCOG Weekly Bulletin (a weekly email to all members and stakeholders and permanent web page)
- b. Offer Semi-Annual Grant Information and Communication Workshops which bring granting agencies and member local governments together (local government project lists completed and communicated to all granting agencies)
- c. HCCOG to assume a more active role in grant administration and compliance by consistently promoting this service to all local member governments and NGAs

Objective 2: HCCOG Departments will explore opportunities to direct charge for existing and future services

Strategies:

- a. *Form ad hoc committee(s) from HCCOG Executive Board membership
- b. Manager meetings to target common services to be administered by the COG (competitive); include all stakeholders' information
- c. Partner with and engage other agencies when possible

Objective 3: Explore regional IT services to members

Strategies:

- a. Manager meetings to target common services to be administered by the COG (competitive); include all stakeholders' information
- b. Determine next steps and feasibility by engaging specialized consultants

Objective 4: Secure grants for regional projects

Strategies:

- a. Poll/survey local governments to identify desired regional projects
- b. Explore available grants for regional projects
- c. Consistently distribute updated grant information to local governments

Goal Two

Evaluate, maintain, and enhance core services.

Objective 1: Ensure the integrity of the various programs and services provided by each department

Strategies:

- a. Develop a yearly survey for HCCOG member governments and stakeholders to evaluate core services
- b. Round-table discussion groups for needs analysis and feedback on services and programs

Objective 2: Provide HCCOG staff with clear direction for tasks

Strategies:

- a. Develop annual work plan for all HCCOG departments which support the organizational vision, mission, and goals
- b. Cooperation with local government staff and other stakeholders to delineate clear direction for who will be responsible for performing outlined tasks

Goal Three

HCCOG will be a leader in actively promoting economic development, business retention and recruitment, and workforce development efforts in the High Country.

Objective 1: HCCOG to act as an economic development liaison/convener/initiator between granting agencies and federal, state, and local governments (possibly Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs))

Strategies:

- a. Convene local government leaders and state and federal agency staff on a regular basis. Continue to convene spring and fall grants workshops with local governments and lead granting agency representatives exchanging key economic development and project information
- b. Maintain and distribute list of potential grants to members (engage Appalachian State University for assistance if needed)
- c. Charge fees to NGOs for grant writing (approve fee structure – if time is available in HCCOG departmental work plans)

Objective 2: HCCOG to increase interaction with private sector existing and potential businesses

Strategies:

- a. Promote business and industry regional recruitment programs
 - i. Interaction with International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) and other business recruitment organizations
 - ii. Work closely with Northwestern Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina's Business and Industry Retention Manager in the coordination of services to existing businesses (grant procurement and compliance, knowledge-industry workshops involving local universities and community colleges, etc.)
 - iii. Work closely with the Chambers of Commerce in the region (semi-annual economic development strategy meetings)
 - iv. Promote closer coordination between HCCOG Workforce Development and regional Chambers of Commerce
 - v. Support IT to expand business recruitment
 - vi. Take advantage of all available grants to expand telecommunications in the High Country region

Objective 3: HCCOG Region D Development Corporation (RDDC) to promote existing business and industry retention programs (especially for those member governments that request this service and/or cannot afford planning and economic development programs and staff). This service would require an additional fee structure for member governments wishing to participate.

Strategies:

- a. RDDC to assume the function of Regional Economic Development. RDDC is to develop a regional economic development strategy to support existing businesses and recruit new businesses to the area. The RDDC's new economic development focus will include:
 - i. Regional Branding (create brand for the 7-county HCCOG Region; Business Recruitment and Retention; approach Economic Development and Tourism from a regional perspective)
 - ii. Work closely with Chambers of Commerce, Tourism Development Authorities, and other regional economic development organizations and task forces (such as the High Country Host, Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corporation, Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, etc.)
 - iii. Communicate with and visit current area businesses to assess needs
 - iv. RDDC to develop a Strategic Regional Branding and Marketing Plan

**HCCOG / RDDC major initiatives and programs to follow HCCOG established policies and protocols being approved first by the HCCOG Advisory Committee and then moved to the HCCOG Executive Board for final approval.*

Goal Four

Promote excellence in communication and collaboration among member governments, other COGs, State and Federal Agencies.

Objective 1: Promote all forms of information exchange with key legislative decision-makers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels.

Strategies:

- a. Convene meetings with local, state, and federal legislative delegations and stakeholders (NC Association of County Commissioners, NC League of Municipalities, National Association of Development Organizations, etc.) both in Raleigh and in the Northwestern NC region
- b. Continue to promote the HCCOG Weekly Bulletin to all member governments, legislative delegations in Raleigh and Washington, and all interested stakeholders
- c. HCCOG to continue to take the lead in increasing issue advocacy efforts engaging legislators at the local, state, and federal levels (NC Tomorrow state-wide summit of all sixteen regional Councils of Government and state leaders and an annual summit for the Northwestern North Carolina region organized by HCCOG). Possible topics include: education, economic development, agriculture, broadband, tourism, etc.
- d. Continue to partner with the other fifteen COGs across NC through quarterly meetings, ARC-COG regional meetings, annual COG summits, COG "Forum" meetings and miscellaneous COG advocacy efforts
- e. Continue to market HCCOG to members and the public (press releases, Facebook page, member government visitation schedule by HCCOG Director and other staff, partner with Appalachian State University Media Department, streaming live board meetings, reach out to non-traditional populations, director talking points distributed at monthly Executive Board meetings, Spot-Light On program at Executive Board meetings, periodic announcements to media outlets
- f. Continue to measure perception/impact of HCCOG through periodic surveys to members, staff, and stakeholders

- g. A critical need exists to expand HCCOG's IT services to achieve almost all HCCOG communication strategies

Objective 2: HCCOG to become a regional leader in IT and GIS services to member governments (fee-based)

Strategies:

- a. HCCOG to offer and expand IT and GIS services to our member governments as an additional fee-based service (tax software, inspections software, etc.).
- b. Continue to offer GIS specialized mapping services

Goal Five

HCCOG to become a Regional Training Center

Objective 1: HCCOG to host multiple training event opportunities for member local governments' elected officials, staff, and interested stakeholders

Strategies:

- a. HCCOG's Departments (AAA, Planning, Workforce, and Finance) will host at least (2) training events per year for member governments and interested stakeholders
- b. HCCOG will recruit and host ongoing UNC School of Government Training (coordinate with Appalachian State when possible). Executive Boardroom is now being upgraded to offer this specialized training (survey membership to determine specific training needs)
- c. Prioritize required training vs. informative training
- d. HCCOG to host one (1) Annual Regional Summit per year beginning in 2016
- e. Determine long-range training schedule when possible along with applicable fee schedule
- f. Reach out to NCACC, NCLM, EDPNC, and other stakeholder organizations to host district and other regional meetings at the HCCOG training facility or in the High Country area
- g. Promote classes, informal meetings, and training for county and municipal government staff

