

Northwest North Carolina Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Alleghany County Economic Development Strategy

December 2003

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The CEDS consulting team from AngelouEconomics included Angelos Angelou, Amy Holloway, Sean Garretson, Chris Engle, Nicole Urbis, Travis Warziniack, and Kristin Boyd.

The illustration on the cover of this strategy depicts art and craftwork created by Northwest North Carolina residents Audrey Hash-Hamm, Archie Powers, Elkland Handwerke, Delta Peterson, and Jeff and Betty Thomas.

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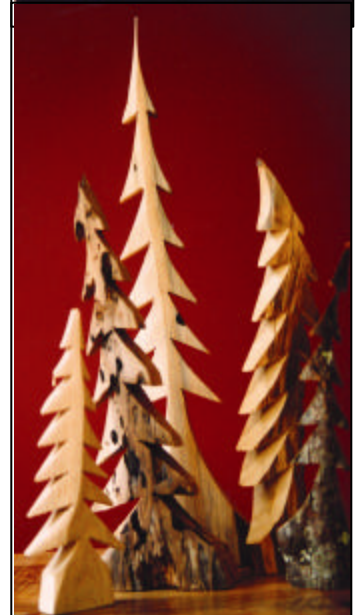
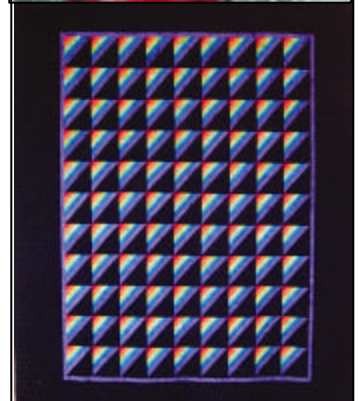
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Introduction

Alleghany County has experienced significant economic downturn in the past few years but new victories with the Blue Ridge Business Development Center and Martin Marrietta bring a sense of optimism and camaraderie in the county that if sustained will surely bring prosperity to the county. More than 300 participants have provided input towards the development of this plan. These recommendations are not only those of Angelou Economics, but leaders within the county also agree on working towards to achieve these goals.

The project priorities are intended to give immediate guidance to each county for projects that will have the most significant impact on the county's economy. Some of these projects will take resources that the county does not have. For these projects, suggestions for funding sources have been listed for the county to pursue. A regional grants team has been developed to assist each county in gathering information for the county to pursue their funding strategies.

One of Alleghany County's greatest strengths is its leadership. Residents, elected officials and business owners in Alleghany County have rallied to deal with a tremendous amount of economic adversity. This commitment by the leadership will be necessary to help the county make up for the job losses that the county has experienced over the past several years.

Vision

"Located at the edge of the Appalachian Mountains, Alleghany provides a scenic setting in which to raise a family and start a business."

Goals

The economic development strategy contains recommendations that will increase the region's opportunities for growing its target industries and other high impact businesses. AE has identified five goals for each county's economic development efforts. Each goal relates to each section of the ED plan. These goals are the same for each county in the eight-county area. The goals are:

- Goal One: **Workforce development and education** programs are focused on preparing the workforce for the County's target industries.
- Goal Two: **Entrepreneurship** and small business growth are significant drivers of the economy.
- Goal Three: Alleghany County offers a place for its residents to **live, play, and work**, and County is an appealing place to live for young professionals and individuals employed by **target industry companies**.
- Goal Four: Alleghany County's **sites and infrastructure** meet the needs of target industries and a growing population.
- Goal Five: Alleghany County is engaged in a proactive, targeted **marketing** campaign to send a clear message that the county is dedicated to these goals and the importance of these strategies to improving the economy.

Implementation

AE recommends that the county formalize the economic development initiatives by developing a non-profit public/private partnership that is located and run by the Blue Ridge Business Development Center. This Center has been a tremendous success and has the respect of both the public and private stakeholders and the public. One of the first priorities for the County will be to convene a stakeholder meeting to focus on the implementation of this plan. A facilitator should be used for this meeting and the outcome of the meeting should be to gain a consensus on the organizational and funding strategy for implementation. All strategies within this plan should be led by this organization. Through consensus, specific groups should be identified for specific implementation roles.

County Priorities

This plan is a roadmap for Alleghany County to use which will lead the county to a sustained healthy economy. However, when resources are scarce within the county or at the state and federal level, the following prioritized project list will assist the county in directing resources to the most critical needs and to areas that will have the biggest impact in the county:

1. **Develop a shovel ready site for a business or industrial park site.** Obtain land and provide infrastructure for an additional business or industrial park in the County. In developing this park, county leaders should maintain to the same standard of technology that the County has adhered to in developing Business Development Center. Make the park high-end and begin an aggressive marketing campaign geared towards the Materials industry and in conjunction with business leaders of Martin Marrieta as ambassadors for that industry in Alleghany County. The County would need to purchase or own land but needs additional funds for infrastructure improvements to the site. A feasibility study has been performed, site plans have been developed, and cost estimates have been prepared.

Funding: \$2 million. Potential funding source include: EDA, Golden Leaf, Private Sector Investment, NCDOC

Timing: Begin developing funding applications in early 2004 to secure funding and begin development in 2005

2. **Improve downtown Sparta.** Embrace the Teapot Museum and begin aggressive internal and external marketing campaign targeting tourism. This growth could sustain several jobs during this transition. Additionally, road, sidewalk, façade, and landscaping improvements in Sparta are necessary to draw attention of visitors to the County. Provide a pleasant place for visitors to enjoy when visiting Sparta and the Teapot Museum. Utilize the revolving loan fund but fund it exponentially with non-profit, private and public sector support. Sparta should engage a downtown planner with national recognition to create with input from the community and county residents, as well as tourists and businesses, a place that everyone could experience and that would create a thriving area for them to enjoy. Hiring a national urban designer with ties to downtown developers of mixed use development will help Sparta not only create a plan for the city but also begin to stir interest in private sector development downtown.

Funding: \$100,000 Potential funding source: EDA, Golden Leaf, Private Sector Investment, NCDOC

Timing: Continue to engage owner of teapot collection. Finalize funding strategy in 2004 and begin development in 2005. It may be worthwhile to develop a master plan for the downtown prior to finalizing plans for the Teapot Museum.

3. **Revamp the vocational wing of the high school.** The high school has a very good technology training program but should improve upon the existing technological infrastructure at the school and update the vocational programs to meet the future workforce skills needed in the County. A feasibility study needs to be undertaken as well as architectural and structural drawings developed to determine a cost for this expansion.

Funding: \$75,000. Potential funding source include :EDA, Golden Leaf, Private Sector Investment, NCDOC, NC Department of Education, Other foundations, Other state or federal

Timing: Secure funding for feasibility study in 2004. Secure additional funding in 2005/6 and develop wing in 2006.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

GOAL: Workforce development and education programs are focused on preparing a workforce for Alleghany County's target industries.

Alleghany County has made significant progress in K-12 Education and Community College infrastructure and program development over the last several years. The Blue Ridge Business Development Center is one of the premier community college and business incubator facilities in North Carolina. The high school system offers children the opportunity to earn community college credit (students can graduate with a 2-year Community College Degree or several credits towards a 4-year degree) as well as several technological skill-training programs. This area is certainly an asset for the county.

However, there still remain several areas that the county can focus on to address the changing economy and the job losses that the county has experienced over the past few years. The following are the most critical areas for Alleghany County to focus workforce and education efforts:

- **Ensure K-12 Education is as strong as possible.**
- **Improve adult education for workers in transition**
- **Adopt and enhance programs at Wilkes Community College that create workers to supply target industries**
- **Continue to invest in the Blue Ridge Business Development Center**
- **Develop workforce training programs geared towards Hispanic population.**

Workforce Strategy 1: Ensure K-12 education is as strong as possible.

Basic education should be considered the foundation of successful economic development. Those regions across the U.S. who have invested in basic education are also the most successful in growing high tech, high wage employers. The two go hand in hand. Northwest North Carolina has suffered significant job lay offs and economic decline in the past decade. Before an aggressive external economic development campaign is launched, it is essential that all NWNC counties invest in the core of their communities: K-12 education, the revitalization of their downtowns, and infrastructure that supports new economy businesses. This investment will have much greater pay off long term by helping each county retain its current employers and high skilled workers, as well as renew a positive spirit across the community. Businesses in the target industries that have been recommended by AE demand that the best possible K-12 education system and workforce training programs are in place that are preparing the workforce to succeed in targeted industry businesses. This ensures that they will be able to recruit and retain young professionals who demand that their children receive excellent education. It also shows them that the community is willing to invest in itself, its future, and therefore will support them into the future.

Action 1: Revamp the vocational wing of the high school to improve upon the existing technological infrastructure at the school and update the vocational programs to meet the future workforce skills needed in the County.

- The high school currently has a model program for students interested in receiving college credit before graduation. The distance learning facility is also exceptional. However, the vocational wing of the high school is outdated and could provide much more of an impact on students' education if the facilities were updated.
- Obtain grant funding from EDA or another grant source to do a feasibility study to estimate cost for the necessary improvements.
- Ask Martin Marrietta to provide some assistance so that Alleghany County begins training students for work in the Composite Materials industry.
- Look at innovative programs such as the Center for Advanced Research and Technology in the Fresno and Clovis Unified School Districts in California as a prime example of the future face of education.
www.CART.org
- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation \$11 million grant recently awarded to the State of North Carolina. This is the first part of North Carolina's \$30 million initiative to create more than 40 redesigned high schools throughout the state. Alleghany County should attempt to be a recipient of a portion of these funds.
- Invite student teams to help school officials brainstorm on how to use new school bond revenue. Students can, for example, envision what an ideal computer laboratory would look like. This will help school officials plan facilities that are tuned into student needs while empowering students.
- Adopt a take home computer program. In this program, schools lend computers to parents for 4-6 weeks at a time. To be eligible for the program, parents are required to take an orientation workshop that teaches them the basics of operating a computer, common software packages, and using the Internet.
- Over time, create W-FI networks on the Community College and all school campuses.
- Evaluate arts programs and classes in K-12 education. Incorporate design-oriented activities into these programs. For example, arts training for elementary school children could include a segment on the rules of good design. As children progress through school, introduce computer-aided design, graphic design, and animation, for example.

Funding: \$100,000 (feasibility study)

Timeline: Begin early 2004

Action 2: Inform students, teachers, and parents of post-graduation options other than college. These programs will help keep graduates in the county, fill workforce needs and keep students from dropping out of high school.

- Early in high school, identify students who may be interested in a different track other than college.
- Track these students into apprenticeship programs for occupations that are growing but currently not being pursued (electricians, truck drivers, and graphic designers for example).

- Develop programs to assist these students achieve success in careers that may not require college.

Funding: To be determined; Possible sources: Golden Leaf

Timing: Work should begin in 2004. New school programs will take 3-4 years to initiate.

Action 3: Develop workforce training programs for youth.

Youth employment programs, more than those designed for adults, must take a comprehensive approach integrating education, work experience, recreation and social development. The best youth employment programs are concerned with developing the whole person, rather than simply imparting job skills or making placements. As Karen Pittman, director of the International Youth Foundation, explains, "We have to broaden the goals of youth development beyond school and jobs to include health, social and civic competencies. While achieving various competencies is important for youth, we must also help youth develop the confidence and connectedness needed to use those competencies well."

Many youth programs try to work with all elements of a young person's environment: family, communities, schools, social networks and other institutions that contribute to a person's development. Much of a youth employment program's focus is preventative rather than remedial. By instilling confidence and skills that lead to labor market attachment, programs can help young people steer a course to successful adulthood.

Action 4: Develop pilot youth workforce training programs tailored for target industries.

The chart below illustrates the current technological programs available at the Allegheny High School. More focus should be placed on the Health and Industrial Education rather than Agriculture (except for homeopathic and Christmas tree production).

County and Name of School	Vocational Program (K-12)					
	Agriculture	Business Education	Family and Consumer Sciences	Health Occupation Education	Techonology Education	Trade and Industrial Education
Allegheny						
Allegheny HS	X	X	X		X	

Action 5: Involve the Duke Foundation and the Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative as key players in this effort to establish programs geared towards the social development (leadership development) of pilot program participants.

- Develop a youth leadership program (similar to "Youth Speak" described in the marketing plan)

Funding:\$TBD. Potential funding sources include:Golden Leaf Foundation, Department of Labor, Department of Education, and private

sector These pilot programs could later be funded by the state if measurable results can be proven.

Timeline: *Begin immediately*

Workforce Strategy 2: Adopt programs such as Project QUEST (San Antonio), STRIVE (Baltimore) or HOPE (Detroit) to improve adult education for workers in transition that have not received a high school degree or who need to update their skills to prepare for new job opportunities.

Workforce training programs need to be holistic, encompassing not just formal education and skill development but also Healthcare, Affordable housing, Transportation, Daycare, and Monthly Stipend. In order to effectively transition displaced workers into target industries, coordinating workforce development programs with these other types of services will yield the most positive results.

Action 1: Develop proposal for program

- Consider locating multiple service organizations in a common facility, creating stronger partnerships between service providers, and establishing a common intake, orientation, and eligibility assessment protocol, one-stop job centers seek to simplify the bureaucracy for job seekers.
- Consider a regional transportation program that will be more effective than the existing program.
- Seek input from Ministerial Alliance, so that faith-based programs can become integral part of program.

Action 2: Seek funding for program development

- Although there are some federal and state funds to support some of this, philanthropic funds would be more flexible to use. The most successful programs (such as HOPE) are community-based approaches.

Action 3: Inform the community that these programs are available.

- Encourage people in need to participate, and ensure that all leadership and economic development professionals fully understand the new workforce program delivery at all levels so that they can talk intelligently about these programs in their business development and expansion efforts..
- Include a brief discussion of how a community-wide informational program is needed to funnel these, often hesitant, older workers into new vocational programs. The reason they have not worked in the past is because these workers were forced back into a traditional educational environment in which they did not feel comfortable.
- Include details about where and how to distribute information throughout the community (e.g. libraries, churches, chambers, employers, local media).

Funding: *TBD (after program proposal has been developed)*

Timeline: *Begin in 2004/5*

Workforce Strategy 3: Adopt and enhance programs at Wilkes Community College that create workers to supply target industries.

The following chart illustrates the skills that are currently being addressed and that need to be developed at the Business Development Center/Wilkes Community College to develop a workforce for the targeted industries recommended by AE to Allegheny:

	Target Industries				
	Design	Materials	Transportation Equipment	Value-Added Agriculture	Hospitality
Wilkes Community College, BDC Campus					
Architectural Technology (A,D,C)	⊙				
Auto Systems Technology (A,D)			⊙		
Broadcast and Production Technology (A,D)	⊙				
Building and Construction Technology (A,D,C)	⊙	⊙			
Computer Engineering Technology (A)					
Computer Programming (A,D,C)					
Heavy Equip. and Trans. Technology (A,D,C)		⊙	⊙		
Horticulture Technology (A,D,C)				⊙	
Industrial Systems Technology (A,D,C)					
Machining Technology (A,D,C)		⊙	⊙		
Welding Technology (D)			⊙		

*A- Associate's Degree; D- Diploma; C- Certificate

Action 1: Educate Wilkes Community College about target industry workforce needs.

- Provide CC leaders information on the target industries, such as the types of businesses within these industries and specific training needs that these businesses will need.
- Seek existing target industry businesses within the County to express their interest in these programs.

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Immediate

Action 2: Enhance workforce training for the health care industry.

Education and training is in place that is geared towards the health care industry. The primary hurdle to overcome in this area is that a nursing certificate generally requires a two-year curriculum commitment, and that is only before students meet the minimum requirements. Wilkes CC should ensure that their programs are not just geared towards nursing and similar fields, but also for assisted living.

- The medical transcription program is a model program that could be expanded. Seek businesses within Allegheny County who may take advantage of these workers so that graduates of this program can work within the county.

Funding: \$TBD
Timeline: Immediate

Workforce Strategy 4: Continue to invest in the Blue Ridge Business Development Center

Action 1: Market the BDC

- Develop signage to BDC from Sparta Main Street
- Submit applications to present at national conferences on workforce training and entrepreneurship

Funding: \$5,000
Timeline: Immediate

Action 2: Expand BDC programs to meet existing and future business needs (private sector driven training)

- Seek input from major businesses within county about their existing and future needs.
- Seek resources from businesses to help support training programs.

Funding: \$TBD
Timeline: Immediate

Workforce Strategy 5: Develop workforce-training programs for Hispanic population.

Alleghany County has seen an increase in Hispanic population during the past decade. This trend will only continue, so efforts to address workforce training for Hispanics needs to be developed.

Action 1: Develop extension program geared towards educating the Christmas tree migrant worker population about these programs.

- Utilize the Hispanic Ministry, Family Resource Center, and health providers as resources for program development.

Funding: \$TBD
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 2: Develop cultural awareness programs for all Alleghany County residents and businesses.

- Make learning about the Hispanic culture fun. Invite leaders from the Hispanic community within Alleghany, or the region, to co-organize an Mexican-American event at which cuisine, traditions, and art work are showcased.
- Work with local banks to become more flexible to the needs of Hispanic workers. Provide information on banking in Spanish. Be more flexible on the type of identification required to open a savings account.

Funding: \$TBD
Timeline: Begin immediately

ENTREPRENEURSHIP STRATEGIES

GOAL THREE: Entrepreneurship and small business growth are significant drivers of the economy.

A critical aspect of building sustainable economic competitiveness is linking economic performance with social cohesion. The NWNC region is very diverse in terms of education, workforce skills and natural features yet the region must strive to reduce economic disparities among the counties. The stimulation of entrepreneurship through the formation and development of new commercial businesses and social enterprises can play a key role in employing underutilized resources in the distressed areas of the region and reducing this disparity.

The entrepreneur in the community is a primary contributor and mobilizer of resources to develop the economy, a provider of employment for others, and a stabilizing factor in the society. **The following are some of the major benefits of entrepreneurship:**

- ✓ Provide a productive outlet for energies of enterprising and energetic people
- ✓ Creation of jobs at relatively low capital cost, especially in the fast growing service sector.
- ✓ Development of a pool of skilled and semi skilled workers who are the base for industrial expansion
- ✓ Small businesses are a source of innovation in products, services and techniques
- ✓ Contributing to increased participation of all communities in the economic activities of the region.
- ✓ Serve a social function by creating career opportunities and upward social mobility, and by preserving, in many instances, a set of values increasingly needed in these days of large impersonal firm

Where is the opportunity?

Several entities currently provide services for entrepreneurship within the NWNC region with programs ranging from training, technical assistance, funding, and networking. Although there are numerous groups providing an aspect of entrepreneur development, the most overarching organizations in the region are **the Triad Entrepreneurial Initiative (TEI)**, serving Forsyth, Davie, Yadkin, Surry, Stokes, and Rockingham Counties, and the **Blue Ridge Entrepreneurial Council (BREC)**, serving Western North Carolina and including Alleghany and Ashe counties.

TEI's primary mission is to promote economic development in the North Carolina Piedmont Triad region by fostering the start-up and success of high-growth companies. The Winston-Salem Alliance along with Action Greensboro fund the Triad Entrepreneurial Initiative with a focus on creating high-growth companies in the North Carolina Piedmont Triad region. Although most of the focus for this fledgling organization is within the immediate W-S/Greensboro/High Point MSA, a regional entrepreneurship program could be incorporated into their workplan after a few more years of success in the metropolitan area.

BREC is a nurturing organization for entrepreneurs in Western North Carolina, creating homegrown jobs and growing the region's economy. BREC supports entrepreneurs through the following four focus areas: education, mentoring and networking, communications and capital formation. BREC meets monthly, and provides quarterly opportunities for qualified

entrepreneurial businesses to present plans before a group of local investors, the Blue Ridge Angel Investors Network.

The following are the most critical areas for Alleghany County to focus entrepreneurial efforts:

- **Educate local population about entrepreneurship and what is required to open a business.**
- **Create a Small Business/Entrepreneurial Alliance**
- **Create a Youth Entrepreneurship Program**
- **Better connect venture capital and angel investors across the region with Alleghany County Entrepreneurs**
- **Provide local banks with resources that educate them on the best way to support small and start up companies**
- **Create a virtual arts market for arts and crafts created in the Greater Winston area.**

Entrepreneurship Strategy One: Educate local population about entrepreneurship and what is required to open a business.

Action 1: Expand and promote Entrepreneurship training at Wilkes Community College.

- Individuals seeking assistance from workforce service providers should be provided with information making a case that starting a new business is a feasible working alternative.
- Use computers at the BDC to link to online small business information (provide very clear icons/links to such information)
- Analyze why the Hispanic model and Agriculture model from the REAL program has not been more popular and adjust programs and outreach accordingly.

Funding: \$20,000 (feasibility study)
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 2: Support the Small Business Resource Center.

- The center should include a library of information on entrepreneurship and consulting to small and startup businesses.
- Invite retired business people to staff the Resource Center.
- Invite local business owners and financiers to contribute to the Small Business Resource Center, making their knowledge available to potential entrepreneurs.

Funding: \$TBD
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 3: Provide specific information and training in Spanish to the growing Hispanic Market.

- Many immigrants have a natural entrepreneurial inclination and should be recognized as good potential sources for entrepreneurs.
- Utilize radio, Hispanic churches, and health workers as a medium to provide information to this segment of the population about these programs.
- Provide training in Spanish.

Entrepreneurship Strategy Two: Create a Small Business/Entrepreneur Alliance

Action 1: Meet regularly to exchange ideas and network with investors.

Meet monthly with a guest speaker to educate the audience. Practice business plan presentations, enable connections with local investors and banks, and develop connections to other EA groups across the US.

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: *Begin immediately*

Entrepreneurship Strategy Three: Create a Youth Entrepreneurship Program

One demographic in entrepreneurship development that is often overlooked is youth. Seven out of ten high school students want to start their own businesses, according to the first national Gallup poll on entrepreneurship education commissioned and co-developed by the Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership (CEL) of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation [1994]. Young people no longer believe that corporate America will take care of them. Today's high school students watched their parents invest years of hard work and loyalty in companies that promised job growth and security in return. These same youngsters are observing in dismay as corporation after corporation downsizes its workforce and drastically abandons the assumptions that used to constitute the unwritten contract between the long-term employee and the corporate employer.

The channeling of our nation's youth into the "employed-by-somebody-else" marketplace is particularly damaging for our at-risk youth populations. Access to entrepreneurship knowledge occurs primarily in the home or family environment. When children pick it up at all, they do so informally by observation and by "conversational osmosis" at the dinner table of parents, grandparents, and other relatives. While these ad hoc opportunities provide some youths in specialized socio-economic circumstances a small chance to observe entrepreneurship role models and acquire entrepreneurship knowledge, at-risk youths in general have no such opportunities in their extended family. The education to which they do have access typically focuses on job skill training and conspires with their social circumstances to confine their vision of productive employment. That vision tends to be a very narrow "take-a-job" playing field bounded by low-skill minimum-wage jobs on one end and low-level supervisory and middle management jobs on the other end.

Action 1: Hold focus group at high school to determine interest.

Action 2: Identify best medium for entrepreneurship training

Action 3: Seek Retired Business Executive within County to provide free training and mentoring to youths in this program

Action 4: Hold Annual event honoring the best youth entrepreneurial project, with a prize (eg., funding) for best idea.

Funding: \$10,000 (business donations)
Timeline: *Begin immediately*

Entrepreneurship Strategy Four: Better connect venture capital and angel investors across the region with Alleghany County entrepreneurs.

Funding for business startup is also one of the biggest impediments to furthering entrepreneurship in Alleghany County. As mentioned above, there are organizations such as the Piedmont Angel Network near the Winston-Salem market that is one of the only angel investor groups in the Piedmont Triad region, yet resources are not yet available to provide a benefit to rural counties.

Action 1: Develop a local business plan competition

- Obtain private funding from local investors to help fund marketing, promotion and awards for competition.
- Get local entrepreneurial network to support competition.

Action 1: Send a representative from Alleghany County to the regional entrepreneurial network events.

- Someone from the Business Development Center should represent the County initially.
- Draw attention to the BDC as a resource and model for rural entrepreneur initiatives.
- Consider hosting a conference or event in Roaring Gap for some of the regional entrepreneur groups and angel investors and host a mobile workshop at the BDC to draw attention to the facility.

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Begin immediately

Entrepreneurship Strategy Five: Provide local banks with resources that educate them on the best way to support small and start up companies.

Action 1: Host a workshop for local and regional banks on types of financing available for entrepreneurs.

The Business & Industry ServiCenter was established by the North Carolina Department of Commerce in partnership with the Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC), the North Carolina Community College System, and the North Carolina Industrial Extension Service to support and guide North Carolina businesses in their efforts to succeed and grow. The ServiCenter does this by providing information to existing business on existing programs and resources that are designed to improve the profitability of companies.

- Ask Department of Commerce to provide a presentation and handouts for an information meeting.
- Get business leaders to support the event and market event widely to all sectors of Alleghany County (students, young professionals, Hispanics, churches)

Funding: \$5,000 (private donations)
Timeline: Begin immediately

Entrepreneurship Strategy Six: Create a virtual arts market for arts and crafts created in the Greater Winston area.

Although Alleghany County, with the New River Community Partners, has done an incredible job in developing the New River Arts and Crafts website, a regional strategy will have a larger impact on the arts and crafts sales from a regional perspective.

Similar to the New River Arts and Crafts site, the virtual arts market would be a place for small businesses and individual artists to sell their products. Create a student artist section. Could be funded by a combination of occupancy tax and COGS money.

Action 1: Expand the Arts Cooperative through the New River Arts and Crafts

- Determine Funding to expand program

Action 2: See Regional Strategies Section for more information on the Virtual Arts Market

Funding: \$(See regional strategies)

Timeline: *Begin immediately*

QUALITY OF LIFE STRATEGIES

GOAL FOUR: Alleghany County is an appealing place to live for young professionals and individuals employed by target industry companies.

The most successful economic development regions in the U.S. also contain very high quality of life amenities. In addition to quality education, a quality environment plays a large part in the choice of young, skilled professionals in where they move. It also plays a significant role in retaining good citizens.

A high quality of life is also directly connected to the region's ability to attract tourists. Through the choice of investments in quality of life amenities, the region will be able to target the specific type of tourist that visits. Tourists should be considered an economic development audience. These are actual prospects coming to your front door. Ensure that they overlap with the audience you have for your economic development efforts.

One of the easiest ways for NWNC to become top of mind for executives in its target industries is for those individuals to visit the region and enjoy their time. Therefore, tourist activities should portray a certain image of the county, one that is appealing to those executives and other decision makers. Make sure all tourist attractions showcase the county's creativity, natural beauty, and unique lifestyle.

Quality of life includes many attributes, including healthcare, safety, parks and recreation, arts and culture, and environmental cleanliness. NWNC excels in quality of life. From the urban culture of Forsyth County to the scenic beauty and mountainous terrain of more rural counties, NWNC contains many qualities that will be appealing to young professionals.

Additional investment and a continued focus on quality of life fits well with the target industries that have been identified for Alleghany County. Areas already successful in the design and biotech industries, for example, are areas that have vibrant downtowns – both large and small – have well preserved green space, and quality housing

Community development strategies will be aimed at those counties with a high population of people commuting outside of the county each day for work. Actions are geared at marketing the county's business advantages to executives currently residing in the county but commuting out for work. Other Actions will be aimed at tooling local residents with entrepreneurial resources to start their own businesses so that they can work from home.

The following are the most critical areas for Alleghany County to focus community development efforts:

- **Develop zoning ordinance**
- **Invest in the redevelopment and beautification of downtown Sparta**
- **Support / expand health care facilities**
- **Expand parks and recreation and preserve open space**
- **Become nationally recognized as a center for arts and culture.**
- **Help young professionals network and feel engaged in the community**

Quality of Life Strategy One: Develop Zoning Ordinance

Allegheny County has a land use plan, but the land use plan is difficult to implement without a zoning ordinance in place (outside of Sparta). Preserving the quality of growth in Allegheny County should be a high priority since tourism (drawn to the area's natural beauty) is such an important factor for the economy.

Action 1: Build countywide support for developing a zoning ordinance.

Consider getting leaders from neighboring counties who have recently adopted zoning (eg., Yadkin County) to provide feedback to Allegheny County leaders on the benefits of such an ordinance.

Action 2: Obtain funding for professional services to develop the ordinance

Action 3: Develop and adopt the ordinance that corresponds to the Land Use Plan that was recently approved.

Funding: \$75,000 (EDA, State of NC)

Timeline: *Begin immediately*

Quality of Life Strategy Two: Invest in the redevelopment and beautification of Downtown Sparta

Active, beautiful downtowns are an essential quality of successful economies. They provide a space in which locals can convene, create an immediate, visual impression of the health of the local economy, and draw in tourists.

Action 1: Develop Master Plan for Downtown Sparta

- Seek funding for master plan development
- Obtain professional expertise from nationally recognized Landscape Architect and/or Urban Designer
- Use Designer for TEA-21 grant.
- Implement TEA-21 grant, as well as other master plan elements.

Funding: \$15,000 (EDA, State of NC)

Timeline: *Begin immediately*

Action 2: Incentivize business growth in CBDs

- Develop and adopt specialized incentives that assist existing and future retail, commercial and office business downtown (see Resource Section).
- Reduce permitting fees (or eliminate) for businesses downtown
- Invest in wireless infrastructure downtown

Funding: \$NA

Timeline: *Begin immediately*

Action 3: Facilitate and Embrace the Tea Pot museum in downtown Sparta.

- Consider signage and marketing of the facility outside of Allegheny County in key areas along the Blue Ridge Parkway (not on the parkway)
- Link to other tourist attractions along the Parkway (Asheville, Blowing Rock, Vineyards, Tea Pot Museum).
- Launch a PR campaign announcing the opening of the museum in higher end gourmet, wine, and travel publications.

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 4: Encourage residential development in downtowns

- Allow mixed-use development in all city and county zoning ordinances

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 5: Signage

- Adopt and enforce strict billboard control ordinances – limiting size, increasing distance between billboards
- Develop thematic and uniform city signage in Sparta that goes with County and City marketing theme.
- Develop sign ordinance for Sparta that promotes signage that is similar in scale.

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 6: Develop Downtown Tourism Amenities

- Develop 1-2 kiosks (linked to wireless Internet access and tourism promotion), downtown walking tours, specific tourist attractions (with artistic attractions), maps, and other visitor amenities such as benches.

Funding: \$TBD
Timeline: Begin immediately

Quality of Life Strategy Three: Support / expand healthcare facilities.

Action 1: Increase the number of specialty healthcare providers available in the county.

This is especially important to the more rural counties, such as Ashe and Alleghany Counties, whose population of retirees is growing, but specialty health care services are located 1-2 hours away.

- Market the need to specialty care providers.
- Provide tourist packages to specialty care providers in urban markets to come to Alleghany County.

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 2: Promote Alternative healthcare

The popularity of alternative health care is on the rise and is appealing to young, creative workers. It fits well with the quality environment in the mountain counties, as well as with target industries of tourism and value added agriculture.

- Facilitate a discussion with those individuals in the County currently operating a business of homeopathic medicine, growing alternative medicines (eg., galax leaves, ginger, Queen Anne Lace)

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Begin immediately

Quality of Life Strategy Four: Expand parks and recreation opportunities.

The word "Alleghany" is said to be derived from the Indian name meaning "fine stream", a suitable name for these scenic hills drained by the New River, the second oldest river in the world. Legend has it that the New River was discovered by Peter Jefferson, relative of Thomas Jefferson. Leading a party of surveyors, he was surprised to come upon a "new" river behind the mountains. Tools and artifacts have been found in the New River Valley dating back to the Paleo-Indian culture. Native American tribes that have occupied the area include the Cherokee and Shawnee.

Preserving the river and creating more river access points for public enjoyment should be a priority for the County.

Action 1: Further develop park access within the County.

- Develop a park master plan for the County
- Investigate the possibility of a state park with park access within the County

Funding: \$75,000 (EDA)
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 2: Further develop the New River riverfront as a recreation destination.

Funding: \$TBD
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 3: Sponsor annual, national sporting events together with locally owned sport businesses.

- Although the event may not be held in Alleghany County, portions of a mountain bike race, bicycle road race, kayak race or adventure sports event may go through Alleghany County.
- Collaborate with neighboring counties towards this action.
- Investigate the possibility of utilizing the Blue Ridge Parkway for a sports race

Quality of Life Strategy Five: Become nationally recognized as a center for arts and culture.

Alleghany County has recently launched a new initiative, the New River Arts and Crafts. This program will certainly bring recognition to the county for its arts and crafts background, and it fits perfectly with the design industry target.

Action 1: Recognize local artistic ventures as economic development prospects.

- Arts schools, artists, and skilled crafts workers are each their own engines of economic development and entrepreneurship.

Funding: \$ TBD

Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 2: Utilize vacant downtown space as arts and design centers.

- The Tea Pot Museum and associated uses will certainly draw other artistic interests downtown. Seek local artists interest in developing a cooperative studio and gallery downtown
- Examine neighboring communities who have developed arts studios downtown, such as Asheville.
- These Design Centers include studio space, education, and retail space.

Funding: \$NA

Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 3: Ask local artists to commit to a single “brand name” for all products originating in NWNC.

- See Marketing Section

Quality of Life Strategy Six: Help young professionals network and feel engaged in the community

Action 1: Launch a Greater Winston Young Professionals Club (see Regional Recommendations Section)

SITES AND INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIES

GOAL FIVE: Alleghany County's sites and infrastructure meet the needs of target industries and a growing population.

When firms are queried as to which factors are musts when selecting a state or region while making location decisions, labor considerations are by far the most important, followed by proximity to markets, and residential amenities for managers and engineers. The only infrastructure that is often mentioned in a regional context is transportation.

When choosing a specific development location within a state or region, however, the availability of infrastructure grows in importance. As infrastructure is available in almost every city, business prospects will look to compare a region's or city's infrastructure (availability and pricing). It becomes especially enticing to a company when key systems are found complemented by adequate land priced lower than acreage near a regional economic core, without problems associated with urban congestion.

The reason for the apparent contradiction in the importance of regional infrastructure versus specific sites is that most large areas such as regions or states possess sufficient infrastructure somewhere. So, it is not a major corporate consideration until after the general location is picked. Therefore, although not the top priority to get a company to choose a region, once they have chosen the NWNC region, it is imperative that adequate infrastructure - water, sewers, bridges, streets and mass transit – be available to support business growth and development – and that this infrastructure fair competitively with that of another region.

The following are the most critical areas for Alleghany County to focus sites and infrastructure efforts:

- **Utilize new Development Financing Legislation**
- **Develop and Market sites**
- **Improve Transportation Infrastructure**
- **Improve telecommunications capacity**

Sites and Infrastructure Strategy One: Utilize New Development Financing

Senate Bill 725 (Local Option Project Development Financing), ratified by the North Carolina Legislature during the 2003 Session. This new legislation allows local governments to borrow money to finance public infrastructure (for example, a public parking deck) associated with private development projects within defined development districts. A portion of the property tax proceeds from the district are set aside to pay for the debt incurred for the public infrastructure associated with the project. The amount set aside is the difference between the property tax proceeds based on the current value of the property in the development district compared to the value before the district was established. The higher property tax value realized from private development in the district pays for the public investment. Financing would proceed only if an agreement is reached with the private sector to bring an investment to an area, and the Local Government Commission would have to approve the agreement

Action 1: Utilize TIF Financing to facilitate development of TeaPot Museum and other public improvements in downtown Sparta

Sites and Infrastructure Strategy Two: Develop and Market sites

Action 1: Provide infrastructure to Identified Industrial Site

Alleghany County has no available sites at this time for business development, and the topography in the county precludes additional site development. However, the county has done a feasibility study on 133 acre site close to the county's capital, Sparta. Alleghany County wishes to develop this site into an industrial park, but needs funding to extend water and wastewater lines to the site. This site could be developed into 6 lots ranging in size from 6 to 20 acres per lot.

Funding: \$1.6 million (see Project Priorities section)
Timeline: Begin immediately

Sites and Infrastructure Strategy Three: Improve Transportation Infrastructure

Action 1: Upgrade 21 South from Sparta to Roaring Gap, and down to Elkin

- Seek state and federal support for this improvement and obtain priority funding to implement.

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Begin immediately

Action 1: Complete Sparta Parkway

- Seek state and federal support for this improvement and obtain priority funding to implement.

Funding: \$NA
Timeline: Begin immediately

Sites and Infrastructure Strategy Four: Improve telecommunications capacity.

Action 1: Improve cellular phone capacity

- Obtain information from various cellular phone providers on how they could improve cell phone reception.
- Develop a plan to improve capacity.

- Seek funding if necessary and implement plan

Funding: \$TBD

Timeline: *Begin immediately*

Action 2: Improve Wireless Internet and/or Broadband capacity.

- Research current capacity to develop a wireless infrastructure throughout Downtown Sparta.
- Research how to improve broadband infrastructure throughout County, if possible given the terrain of the county.

Funding: \$TBD

Timeline: *Begin immediately*

MARKETING STRATEGIES

GOAL: Alleghany County is engaged in a proactive, targeted marketing campaign to send a clear message that the county is dedicated to these goals and the importance of these strategies to improving the economy.

In this fierce time of corporate and economic development competition, winning marketers create a strong brand, communicate a unique message, and commit to a targeted marketing plan that leverages technology. In order for Alleghany County to enhance its prospects for economic growth, a more proactive targeted marketing campaign is required.

Communities benefit from a well-orchestrated marketing strategy that is managed by a single organization and well-integrated team, in this case, the **Blue Ridge Business Development Center**. Before marketing, a community needs a marketing strategy to guide efforts. First and foremost, communities need to market internally. Internal marketing informs citizens and business leaders of the economic development vision and trains individuals to promote the community with a single message, rather than numerous confusing messages. Internal marketing builds local awareness and buy-in so that when a community markets outside of its region, it has a strong team to get the message out. The use of local media and personal meetings are good avenues for “building local awareness.” With strong internal support, the chances of successful external marketing increase considerably.

Once a community succeeds with internal marketing efforts, it should incorporate external marketing activities aimed at recruiting targeted businesses outside of the region. External marketing, for most communities, should begin one to two years after internal efforts are complete. Then, the trick is to balance both internal and external activities to get the most return – awareness and business. External marketing is vital to diversifying an economy. It can make huge impacts on a community by attracting high quality development, diversifying the tax base, providing more jobs, and creating more quality of life amenities for citizens. For communities today, it is important to have a Web site as primary collateral and to also have material to distribute at conferences and meetings. An integrated approach to external marketing that includes the right frequency of word-of-mouth, publicity, and personal meetings is the key to successful marketing.

Review of Existing Marketing Efforts

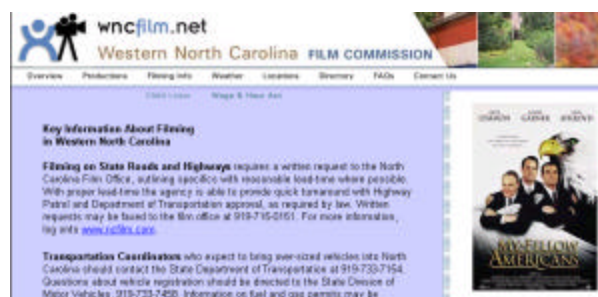
Alleghany County has moderate internal and external economic development marketing. Most efforts are dedicated to promoting tourism and workforce training facilities. The High Country Host organization promotes a six-county area to tourists and has cooperative marketing tools in place to assist local businesses with promotion. New River Community Partners is launching a new transactional Web site (a virtual farmers market) to market and sell locally made arts and crafts, value-added agriculture, and additional design-related products. This is an excellent initiative to brand and help local businesses expand.



The Alleghany County Chamber of Commerce primarily markets to internal audiences, tourists, local businesses and citizens, but also does some external marketing to businesses that are considering relocating. Advantage West is the main external marketing engine for business recruitment. There is an opportunity for Alleghany County to present its new marketing message and target industry information on Advantage West's Web site. The county can also better leverage two marketing tools that Advantage



West has created to promote film and workforce. The site, <http://www.wncfilm.net/overview.html> is an excellent tool to use in marketing to film companies who are looking for a site for their next movie. Advantage West's on-line promotion of workforce capabilities, <http://www.workready.net/about.mv>, is an excellent tool to communicate the regions resources for employers and employees.



The Blue Ridge Business Development Center (BDC) does an effective job of promoting workforce development programs. The collateral is nicely done and can be better linked to the economic development theme and messaging.

Overall, economic development organizations in Alleghany County use Web sites as a primary marketing tool, which is the preferred tool for site selectors and targeted industry business prospects. The County should designate a single Web site for economic development and link to each of the partnering organizations. Each organization should make sure contact information is easily available and agree to a consistent marketing message.

Marketing Strategies

The remaining section provides actions necessary for Alleghany County to engage in a targeted marketing plan, beginning with internal marketing, external activities, and readjusting the plan.

There are seven recommended strategies, including:

1. **Establish a lead economic development organization and commit to a marketing strategy**
2. **Brand the region and each county**
3. **Better understand the needs of the target audiences**
4. **Gain local media support**
5. **Launch internal marketing campaign**
6. **Implement external marketing campaign**
7. **Measure and readjust the plan**

AE is providing a Marketing Guide (MG) that contains information to assist the Northwest North Carolina region and each county in implementing the economic development strategies over the next five years. It is meant to be used in conjunction with the NWNC Economic Development Strategic Report and specifically to support leaders who will execute the marketing campaigns.

Strategy 1: Establish a lead economic development organization and commit to marketing strategy

In the past, Alleghany County has had sufficient efforts towards economic development marketing, but it can be elevated. Today, leaders recognize the importance of having a unified plan, led by one economic development organization. The County needs to commit to a long-term vision and marketing strategy to shape its economic future. Although several local organizations have been charged with various elements of marketing, no single body is responsible for overseeing activities. **Blue Ridge Business Development Center (BDC) should be Alleghany County's primary economic development organization** leading its marketing efforts. All other economic development entities such as the Alleghany Chamber of Commerce and New River Community Partners should participate and support a unified message. BDC will need to obtain \$41,000 funding for implementation of this marketing plan during the first year. By year three, the county should double its marketing budget.

Alleghany County's marketing strategy should be to promote a single message, create community-wide marketing ambassadors, and then to market to target industry businesses through the right combination of publicity, direct marketing, and collateral.

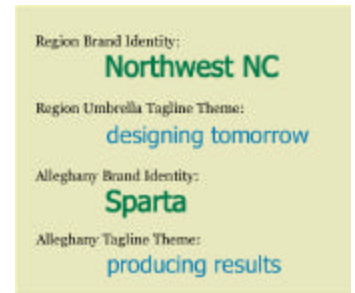
Action 1: Local economic development leaders should agree on BDC being the lead organization to implement marketing.

Action 2: BDC and other local economic development leaders should approve the marketing strategy.

Strategy 2: Brand the county

Communities that establish a marketing theme that differentiates have greater chances of attracting economic growth. Alleghany County is primarily marketing to make consumers aware of the region.

A brand theme conveys “who”, “where” or “what” the county offers. Local leaders feel that the most marketable attribute of Alleghany County is “the artistic, the natural beauty, and the entrepreneurial spirit.” With Design being a recommended target industry that differentiates the region, this is the most appropriate position to build upon. As a phase, “Producing results,” reflects a unique aspect of Alleghany – it has been a community that has the ability to dream up interesting concepts and “bring it to life.” Marvelous arts and crafts have been produced from talented artists in Alleghany County. Sparta is the county’s brand identity. This is the name that most people associate with the county. Alleghany County’s leaders are progressive and show it by the success of Martin Marietta and the BDC. The proposed theme is meant for economic development leaders to use when developing the logo and a marketing message to use in communication.

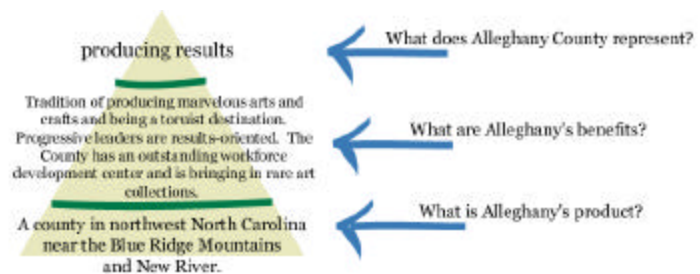


The three essences, or positive attributes, that best describe Alleghany County are:

- Free to explore - nature is breathtaking
- Progressive - a community of creative and visionary leaders
- Result-oriented - focused on results – making it happen

AE views Alleghany County’s economic development mission to be, “To cultivate business by leveraging our strengths in recreation, workforce development, arts and agriculture.”

To stand out compared to competitors, Alleghany County should communicate a primary message centered on a unique quality of the community such as “producing results.” A positioning pyramid is a technique used to determine the message. It answers three questions and is the foundation of all future promotional activities, although the idea or words themselves might not be specifically stated in marketing materials.



Action 1: BDC, Alleghany Chamber of Commerce, New River Arts and Crafts, other economic development organizations should discuss and approve a county theme.

Action 2: Local economic development organizations should agree on using a consistent message to promote the county to local businesses, tourists, and new businesses.

Action 3: BDC should hire an advertising firm to develop a logo.

Action 4: All economic development organizations should revamp marketing collateral to convey this primary message.

Strategy 3: Better understand the needs of the target audiences

Understanding how Alleghany County satisfies the needs of each target audience will help economic development leaders craft the secondary message for marketing communication. A secondary message occurs after initial inquiry and provides more valuable information.

First, understand the needs of internal audiences and inform them of the county's economic development vision. Local employers, the current workforce, influencers, and entrepreneurs are an important aspect to economic development. Recognizing these segments as a target audience and understanding their needs, is sometimes overlooked. For instance, entrepreneurs residing within the county desire information on how to start a business. This audience also prefers to stay in its "home" location. Economic development marketing should communicate that Alleghany County is less costly, has a strong workforce, and balance to life and work. The BDC should improve relationships with local businesses and provide additional services that can help them be more successful. The use of local media and personal meetings are good avenues for building awareness and demand for economic development services.

Once the county succeeds with addressing internal audiences' needs, it should become familiar with targeted industry businesses, external audiences. Identify target industry champions, who are business leaders that have expert knowledge of a particular industry. These champions understand industry players, trends, challenges and opportunities. These individuals have powerful connections within an industry and are willing to be called on to meet with site selectors, volunteer to speak at events promoting the county, and share industry knowledge with economic development leaders. The county should have at least three industry champions for each target industry. The MG list industry associations that can be a resource on target industry trends and prospects. The target audiences include: value-added agriculture, hospitality and tourism, materials, and design.

Alleghany County should use the targeted messaging in the MG and the main "proof points" in this section when crafting secondary messaging for marketing communication.

Alleghany County can use these selling points in secondary marketing messaging:

- Rural region with a strong agricultural tradition
- Home to many unique, talented artists
- Close proximity to a large metropolitan area—1 ½ hours from Winston-Salem/Charlotte
- Blue Ridge Business Development Center provides first-rate training
- Beautiful natural resources – New River and Blue Ridge Parkway (Over 44 million people visited the state in 2002, making NC the sixth most visited state in the country)
- Entrepreneur-minded individuals
- Good supply of both production and technical workers
- Affordable cost of living

Action 1: The BDC and other local economic development leaders should get familiar with the characteristics and needs of each target audience.

Action 2: Revamped marketing communication with targeted message.

Action 3: Identify target industry champions.

Action 4: Become industry experts.

Strategy 4: Gain local media support

Allegheny County needs media champions to gain support of all local news companies. Local newspapers, radio stations, company newsletters, and Web sites are good tools for communicating information about the economic development initiative to residents. Throughout this project, Allegheny economic development leaders strengthened relationships with the local media and we encourage this to continue. It is imperative that local media companies speak positively about the county and provide coverage. Accomplishing the strategy requires publicity that educates and creates excitement within Allegheny County. Private and public leaders should regularly meet with the media and provide updates on economic development successes. The local media is the first avenue for “building the local buzz.”

Allegheny County should continue to leverage Allegheny News and WCOK to get the message out. The Winston-Salem Journal and Greensboro News & Record can help the county reach a regional audience. An excellent example of the local media supporting economic development is, The Mountain Times in Ashe County. The Mountain Times just announced that it is going to dedicate a weekly section of its paper to informing citizens on small business and entrepreneurial resources and successes. It will provide information on resources, such as Wilkes Community College, that can assist local businesses. This type of initiative can also benefit Allegheny County.

Action 1: BDC and the Implementer Committee should identify local media champions that can assist with persuading the local media to communicate economic development stories to the public.

Action 2: Local media champions should assist the county with writing and distributing press announcements to local news companies.

Strategy 5: Launch internal marketing campaign

Allegheny County needs to market internally. Internal marketing informs citizens and business leaders of the economic development vision and trains individuals to promote the county with a single message, rather than numerous confusing messages. Internal marketing builds local awareness and buy-in so that when a community markets outside of its region, it has a strong team to get the message out. With strong internal support, the chances of successful recruitment increase considerably. For many communities, internal marketing take a year or two to accomplish.

Internal marketing activities should be launched during a roll out event. **At a local rollout event, Allegheny County should announce its three major goals:**

- Develop a shovel ready site for a business or industrial park site
- Improve downtown Sparta
- Revamp the vocational wing of the high school

Publicity, promotion, and collateral are the three vehicles recommended to reach Allegheny County's internal audience. The goal is to build awareness among each target audience in a cost effective and quick manner.

Publicity is one of the best vehicles to cost effectively reach Allegheny County's internal audience and generate a buzz. Allegheny County should leverage Channel 50 to get the message out. By distributing press announcements and persuading news companies to “pick-up” a story, Allegheny County can gain publicity. Other ways to communicate to the public include: delivering newsletters to residents and businesses, posting news in church bulletins, high school papers, regional business journals, bylined articles, and community Web sites. Newsletter topics can be stories that inform residents and create awareness about: How to promote the county, Planning for our youths' careers, and Why diversifying an economy is a good thing.

Promotion includes spreading information by word-of-mouth, attending regional industry events with local businesses, speaking at business networking events with key influencers, forming relationships with regional E.D. teams to sell Allegheny County, and calling prospects to provide information on why do business in Allegheny County, available business park space, and the benefits of operating a business in the county. Some regional organization events to consider attending include North Carolina Textile Manufacturing Association, North Carolina Arts Council, and the Western North Carolina Film Commission.

The primary economic development collateral piece should be the BDC Web site. By revamping the Web site to contain the new marketing message, this can be a strong piece to reach both internal and external audiences. The Web site should have section dedicated to offering information to local businesses, tourists, and businesses outside of the region. Allegheny County should ask local businesses to mention this Web site to employees, on local businesses Intranet, and in their corporate material when appropriate.

Action 1: BDC and other economic development organizations approve the internal marketing plan.

Action 2: BDC should ask for volunteers to assist with implementation.

Action 3: Individuals from the community with a passion for economic development and marketing should volunteer and become apart of the marketing team.

Reference the MG for more detailed recommendations including Web site layout and content and PR headlines and distribution vehicles.

During the first year of receiving this plan, the BDC should implement activities that increase local awareness.

Internal Activities

1. Develop a publicity campaign.
 - *What economic development is, why it's important, and how to market Alleghany County. Contribute \$8,000 a year to hiring a PR firm.*
 - *Discuss powerful topics in newsletter and on Web site. See MG.*
 - *Negotiate with the local newspaper to get a weekly section dedicated to economic development. For instance, 50 words on important economic development topics.*
 - *Implement a utility billing campaign (e.g. use this to announce Web site URL, news Web page with PR).*
2. *Revamp primary ED Web site. Hire Web design firm. Approximate cost \$7,000 - 12,000.*
3. *Prepare a welcome package for newcomers. Send to new residents when they sign up for utilities.*
4. *Speak at local business associations and provide updates on Alleghany County's economic development and marketing efforts.*
5. *Establish a "Meet and Greet" program. This is a program for the county's economic development team to improve its relationship with local businesses by meeting with them in person and conducting business "needs" surveys*
6. *Create a high school group. To better understand what teens are looking for when it comes to working in Alleghany County in five years. Consider calling the group "TeensTalk."*

Strategy 6: Develop and implement external marketing campaign

External marketing promotes Alleghany County to identified targeted industry businesses whom complement the current economy and help Alleghany County meet its economic development vision. Most likely for Alleghany County, external marketing campaigns will begin in 2005.

Web sites, publicity, and targeted direct marketing are the most cost effective for communities to “get their message out.” Alleghany County should balance these activities, be consistent in the message it conveys, and focus on campaigns that will directly reach prospects. The primary vehicle and one that should be used throughout external efforts is publicity. Then, Alleghany should begin to incorporate collateral (Web site and brochure), marketing missions, and industry associations & conferences.

Publicity

Publicity may be the most effective form of economic development promotion. Alleghany County could significantly increase the amount of publicity the city receives in publications, and ultimately reach the city’s target industry companies by having a PR firm on retainer or a PR Manager to develop and distribute releases and bylined articles.

Collateral (Web site and Brochures)

Resources should be invested in redeveloping the primary Web site that promote economic development in Alleghany County and better linking content on regional economic development Web sites. The county’s main economic development organization’s URL and phone number should be incorporated in every activity that promotes Alleghany County.

Marketing Missions

Alleghany County leaders need to engage in marketing missions to recruit target industry companies from other regions and to see first hand benchmark communities efforts. Schedule marketing missions each year to a region with a high concentration of its target industries and to benchmark cities to view first hand what is working and not working in their business community. Volunteer representatives from business, government, and academia should attend marketing missions. The missions should involve a series of meetings with local companies to sell Alleghany County’s great location for business. For example, visit regional neighbor benchmark cities such as Charlotte and Asheville. In the second year, consider visiting national such as Boise and Ft. Collins.

Industry Associations and Conferences

Industry associations offer the opportunity to learn and track trends and they are also a trusted source of information for member companies, prospects. Alleghany County should consider joining top associations of its target industries. Place articles in industry association newsletters and sponsor two industry conferences per year to get face time with prospects. Face-to-face marketing is recommended to supplement other marketing efforts. Alleghany can attend, sponsor, and exhibit at conferences.

An example of a campaign to grow tourism is targeting travel agents in South Carolina and Virginia with an electronic promotion. Book “X” vacations to Alleghany, Rockingham, or Yadkin and win a 5-day trip for yourself and a companion. Try to reach

the end consumer by getting an article in the Northeast circulation of Travel + Leisure publication.

Action 1: BDC and other economic developments organizations approve external marketing plan

Action 2: BDC should approve local campaigns and ask for volunteers to assist with implementation.

Action 3 Individuals from the community with a passion for economic development and marketing should volunteer and become apart of the marketing team.

Reference the MG for more information on these vehicles.

Allegheny County should consider implementing activities that increase awareness for the county with external audiences.

External Activities

1. Develop a publicity campaign targeted to national publications. *Budget \$15,000*
2. Train a recruitment ready team. *Budget \$1,500*
3. Obtain target business database and send electronic campaign mail.
Get leads through network
4. Develop collateral (annual report) piece. *Budget \$10,000*
5. Sponsor industry conference. *Spend face time with prospects. \$2,000 per conference*

Strategy 7: Measure and improve plan

In the long term, a successful marketing initiative will result in an increase in the number and quality of companies expanding and starting operations in Allegheny County. The economic development leaders should establish metrics to monitor the success of its marketing activities. These numbers should be calculated at least twice a year to assess whether Allegheny County's identity is better recognized at a local, regional, and state level. Performance measures are included in the regional report (*Metrics*) to provide guidelines for progress made on this goal.

Proposed Budget

Initially and each year, BDC needs community leaders to volunteer. Volunteers from the public, private, media, and academia (Implementation Team) should help implement this plan. Volunteers will donate time and participate in business development, public relations, and marketing missions. Some of these activities will require volunteers to make personal investment. For instance, 20 or more individuals should take a mission each year to a benchmark and be willing to pay for their accommodations. Budget figures are included in the regional report (Table of Strategies, Funding, Timing, and Responsibility) to provide guidelines for progress made on this goal.

Appendix 1:
Performance Metrics

Performance Metrics

An important component of the implementation of the Northwest North Carolina Strategic Plan is a monitoring system to track regional performance in the future. AngelouEconomics has identified several data sets that have been used during the strategic planning process that we believe will be good measures of economic performance. These data are easily found at state and national sources, are available at the county level, and should be considered good indicators of the overall economic health of the community and its citizens.

Many state and local economic development organizations already use performance metrics. These data are also called “benchmarks,” as local data is usually placed side-by-side state or national data for comparison. By committing to measuring its achievements, NWNC will be joining the ranks of communities in Oregon, North Carolina, Minnesota, and Indiana who have developed successful benchmarking systems to monitor their economic performance. The performance metrics proposed in this plan provides NWNC leadership an excellent opportunity to demonstrate positive results of their efforts and policies and build confidence among the general public that the economy is heading in the right direction.

AngelouEconomics has identified several performance metrics for each recommendation area of this plan that could be used by county leaders to track progress:

Workforce Development

- Job growth in non-manufacturing industries
- Average wage growth
- Unemployment rate
- SAT scores
- Educational attainment
- Drop out rates

Entrepreneurship

- Net firm creation
- Venture capital inflows
- Membership in entrepreneurs associations

Infrastructure & Sites

- Existence of business parks and sites
- Available developable acreage (with utility service)
- Commuter congestion
- Office and industrial vacancy rates

Quality of Life

- Percent of population in the 25-34 age group
- Net migration of new people to the county/region
- Poverty rate
- Per capita income
- Parkland acreage per capita

Marketing

- State or national media mentions relating to economic development
- Prospect activity (info requests or visits)
- Tourism revenues

Each county may choose some or all of these metrics, and may have additional metrics that fit well with the county’s goals. AngelouEconomics recommends that performance be measured on a county-by-county basis and that each metric is benchmarked against the U.S. where possible (or to North Carolina if not). Metrics are best used when they are calculated as a share of the U.S. average. For example: Forsyth County’s average wage is currently \$31,700 (2002), or 93% of the U.S. average. Forsyth can then set goals to bridge the gap over time with the U.S.

Performance metrics work best when they are easily updated on an annual basis, are easy to understand by the general public, and are measures of results not activity (such as measuring marketing calls or conference visits).

Most of this data can be easily found online at the North Carolina LINC system website: <http://linc.state.nc.us/> This site is extremely comprehensive and monitors hundreds of social, economic, and political progress measures. Most data, but not all, is available on an annual basis.

AngelouEconomics recommends that NWNC counties identify the set of benchmarks that they will track, set goals for when the county will reach parity with U.S. levels, and monitor their progress. We provide an example table with actual benchmark data that can be used to start this discussion:

Potential Performance Metrics Alleghany County

	Job growth (CAGR) 2000-02	Non-mftg job growth (CAGR) 2000-02	Average Wage 2002	Unemploy- ment Rate 2002	Poverty Rate 2000	Per Capita Income 2001
Alleghany County	-17.5%	-3.5%	\$25,632	9.0%	17.2%	\$24,798
North Carolina	-1.3%	0.2%	\$32,696	6.8%	12.3%	\$27,308
United States	-0.6%	0.7%	\$36,744	5.8%	12.4%	\$30,413
Alleghany as % of U.S.	0.0%	0.0%	69.8%	155.7%	138.7%	81.5%
Alleghany Target Benchmarks as a Percent of U.S.						
1997			70%	108%	--	88%
2000	107%		66%	175%	139%	85%
2002	0%		70%	156%	--	82%
2007	75%		73%	140%	--	86%
2012	90%		77%	130%	115%	90%
2017	95%		81%	120%	--	94%
2022	100%		85%	115%	110%	99%