

Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan

East Central Vermont Economic Development District

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Primary Authors:

Kevin W. Geiger, AICP, CFM, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission
Sarah Wraight, AICP, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission

The eligible members of the ECVEDD are 40 towns within Addison, Orange, Rutland, and Windsor Counties as well as the following partner organizations:

- [Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation](#) (GMEDC)
- [Mount Ascutney Regional Commission](#) (MARC)
- [Springfield Regional Development Corporation](#) (SRDC)
- [Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission](#) (TRORC)

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Introduction

This Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan (ERRP) addresses the twin subjects of recovery and resilience for the forty communities and many businesses of the [East Central Vermont Economic Development District](#) (ECVEDD). Recovery functions help communities and businesses regain, to the extent possible, what was lost during and after a disaster event. Recovery work alone doesn't address the underlying vulnerabilities that existed prior to the disaster and that exacerbated the disaster's impacts on the community. To mitigate the impacts of future disasters, recovery must be paired with resilience.

Resilience is an attribute of systems that means they are resistant to damage from disaster events, and when such events do happen, they have coping and adaptive mechanisms that help them absorb shocks and find opportunities to not only survive but improve. The ERRP is meant to specifically address the stresses imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to strengthen the District against other disasters. The ERRP is complemen-

tary and integrated with the [2020-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\)](#), which is its foundation. The CEDS has six primary goals, with the first being "A Resilient Region."

The CEDS was finalized during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic and briefly acknowledges the need for economic recovery work. This plan is not a furthering of all parts of the CEDS, but is focused on recovery and resilience. Thus, this ERRP is centered primarily around Goal 1 of the CEDS (A Resilient Region): "a resilient region in the face of economic shocks and climate disasters (and) . . . that is rapidly resilient in the face of such challenges." To a lesser extent, other CEDS goals are also addressed.

The CEDS lays out strategies to support each goal, and then actions and tasks under these. Not all strategies are relevant to the particular issue of resilience to a pandemic, but many are. The CEDS strategies and actions that are relevant to the ERRP are cross-referenced in the Appendix of this plan.

ECVEDD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2020-2025 Goals:

- A Resilient Region
- An Innovative Business Environment
- A Robust and Ready Workforce
- Infrastructure and Homes for Growth
- Quality of Life and Place
- Healthy Communities

Resilience Planning

Resilience is the ability to withstand the impacts of an incident and return reasonably quickly to a normal state, or preferably to a different state that is even better at thriving under difficult circumstances in the future. For example, restaurants that have seen less in-person dining during the Covid-19 pandemic have increased their take-out service. This can continue after the pandemic and produce income from a market that was not as fully tapped before, allowing more meal sales than the existing seating would allow under any circumstance.

Resilient systems are not overly specialized, and have 'slack'; they are not efficient in the classical sense. Any system that is strong in multiple ways will fare better under stress than a weak one will. If we are healthy, our bodies do better when challenged by an illness. And health has multiple dimensions (e.g., physical, mental, emotional). The same is true for an economy. It is not simply a matter that there are sufficient jobs that pay well, but that these are diversified, that the workforce is nimble and talented, and that all of the underlying support systems are stable. The same is also true for the businesses that make up the economy, both on their own and in their interrelationships.

Seen in this light, recovery and resilience planning to a particular stressor, in this case the global Covid-19 pandemic, can and should be done in such a way that it also serves to protect the region and its businesses and people against other stressors as well. It would be poor planning (and not very resilient) to craft a plan that works for



Floating Bridge, Brookfield, VT

one type of disaster but not for another. This is widely recognized in the disaster field, and most disaster planning is built around creating core capacities that are useful in many scenarios, rather than just getting really good at responding to a single type of disaster (known as an 'incident' in emergency management).

Impacts of COVID-19

Resilience and recovery planning begins with asking, what does one need to be resilient from and recover from? The impacts of the particular incident of a pandemic are different than other expected types of incidents, but they are not all unique. The duration of each impact varies, and not all impacts are negative. Below are some of the particular impacts of Covid-19:

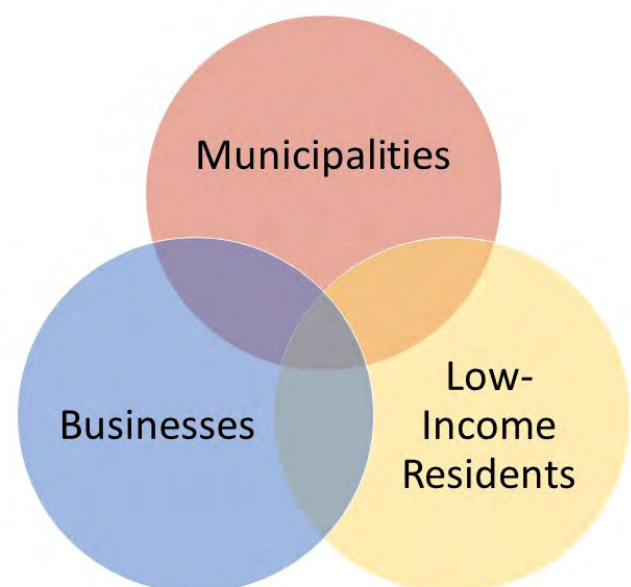
- Limited ability to travel and congregate
 - Resulting in an increased need for broadband to support remote working, learning, telemedicine, social connection
 - Resulting in less travel and tourism economic activity, and lower room and meals and sales taxes

- Increased demand on delivery services
 - Resulting in an increased need for drivers
 - Underscoring the importance of road maintenance as deliveries became increasingly essential
- Greater focus on public health
- Supply shortages of 'upstream' suppliers to businesses
 - Resulting in supply disruptions, lack of specific products, and higher prices at times.
- Worsening of the preexisting trucking shortage (including backhaul shortage and lack of full load demand)
 - Resulting in an increased need to create export businesses
 - Resulting in increased demand for drivers
- Increased demand for housing
 - Resulting in an increased need for broadband and cell service by new residents
 - Resulting in increased cost in building supplies and continued construction trades labor shortage
 - Resulting in elevated rental and sale prices, and exacerbated scarcity of affordable housing
- Total non-farm private employment fell sharply, with the worst losses in the leisure and hospitality sector. The Vermont Department of Labor's seasonally-adjusted employment data show that many sectors are regaining jobs, but leisure and hospitality sector employment is experiencing the slowest recovery.¹
 - Labor supply shortages are impacting many small businesses' ability to sustain or grow their operations.
- Exodus of women from workforce as childcare and schools closed

Systemic Approach

In devising resilience strategies, it is important to understand interrelationships. Optimally, resilience actions designed for an incident such as the pandemic also function well across a wide range of other incidents. Anytime one is planning to make one system better, it is important to be aware that there may be a corresponding effect on other systems where they overlap. Optimally, the effects on other systems should be synergistic and in line with other desired outcomes.

To bring this to the local level, municipalities, in practice, are just a legal way of creating an organization that serves the needs of their residents and businesses. If the municipality is poorly run, the residents and businesses suffer. Conversely, the municipality is funded (in Vermont) in large part through property taxes, and these are paid by residents and businesses located in town, and so a municipality is also dependent on the financial soundness of the properties within its bor-



¹ December 2021 employment numbers for accommodation and food services were 21.4% below January 2020 levels. For arts, entertainment, and recreation, employment was 14% lower. (Source: <http://www.vtlmi.info/ces.cfm>)

ders. All businesses depend upon residents as consumers and employees, and upon their municipality for basic services such as road maintenance, fire protection, etc. Each entity is interdependent on the other.

Some places forget that lower-income households are an integral part of their success, thinking that only high-value property and high-income residents contribute to economic well-being. However, that is because they have narrowly bounded the 'community' or simply failed to see the 'essential' support systems that underly modern life. An equitable community does not shift its burdens onto other places or people. As the pandemic has shown, all households and businesses (and hence their communities) are dependent on grocery store clerks, delivery drivers, road maintenance workers, broadband installers, butchers, farmers, child care providers, cleaners, garbage collectors, etc. Our communities would not be able to function without them. Yet so many of our essential workers are disproportionately burdened with risks to their well-being, and have the least access to resources to mitigate those risks. Local governments and businesses have important roles to play in identifying systemic inequities and changing systems or creating new systems to support and empower marginalized community members.

Action Areas

To address the impacts noted above, and within the context of the current CEDS and in a synergistic manner, four action areas stand out:

Action Area #1: Support creatives, farmers and other working landscape businesses, and makers.

This approach relies on the strength of Vermont's place-based economy, making it less vulnerable to outside shocks. It strengthens local production capacity of essential goods such as food and lumber. It adds value to raw materials instead of just exporting them as low-value feedstock for outside businesses. It increases local business profitability, which in turn supports local households and municipalities, versus supporting extractive corporations that do not recycle wealth at the small scale.

Action Area #2: Support low-income renters and homeowners.

This approach focuses on the foundational side of the economy. Low-income renters and homeowners are all customers and many are essential workers. Discredited economic theories such as 'trickle-down' posit that by having a strong, but tiny top, the structure of the economy below it will be sound, whereas a foundational ap-

ERRP Action Areas

- **Support creatives, makers, working landscape businesses**
- **Support low-income renters and homeowners**
- **Create resilient municipalities**
- **Improve workforce development and support systems**



Weathersfield, VT

proach first ensures that the bottom of a structure is stable before worrying about the upper floors. Lower-income households not only provide essential workers to make the economy function, they also tend to spend their dollars close to home and they contribute to community life in diverse and valuable ways. In a just and equitable world, they should be equal beneficiaries of society, but the reality is that systemic injustice operates in nearly every aspect of society. Supporting low-income households in having stable homes (be they owned or rented) is crucial for their well-being and helps them continue contributing to the well-being of our communities.

Action Area #3: Create resilient municipalities.

Most towns in the ECVEDD area have minimal staff. These staff are essential, and need to be well-trained. Towns can be thought of as providers of services – primarily of mobility (over

a road network) and of emergency services. (Towns are also thought of as providing schools, but these are technically separate school districts that use town boundaries to elect board members.) Every town struggles to keep roads in good shape and emergency services going, and in most places they are deficient or steadily degrading (due to underfunded capital programs and a withering volunteer base). Roads are also at risk from severe rain events, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

This situation is the opposite of what is needed going into a disaster situation. You don't want to go in with a lean operation; you want spare capacity. Municipalities have to take a clear hard look at ways to cut costs and increase revenue. Some of this will be through using what infrastructure they do invest in more wisely (such as building more densely in sewered areas), cutting costs (such as downgrading Class

3 roads that go to one house), doing things a new way (such as using regional services more), and increasing capital reserves.

Action Area #4: Improve workforce development and support systems.

This approach recognizes that the workforce is foundational to the local and regional economy. Workforce shortages and high employee turnover were identified as regional concerns even before COVID-19 arrived. Businesses cannot recover from the pandemic or become resilient to future disasters if they cannot attract or retain employees. Necessity is driving employers to think more holistically about the personal and professional needs of their workers, and many are embracing innovative solutions to make work commitments more livable and sustainable. From an equity standpoint, such systemic changes are especially important for helping low-income and other marginalized community members access the resources they need to work towards their goals on their own terms.

**Action Area #1:
Support creatives, farmers
and other working landscape
businesses, and makers.**

Our region is full of businesses that are based off the working landscape and that use our residents' creative juices in everything from pottery to coding. Many of these small business owners are managing all aspects of their business by themselves, which requires an exceptionally diverse skill set and puts tremendous strain on their time and resources. That strain is intensified in times of personal or community crisis. Strengthening business owners' skill sets and connecting them with community support systems will increase their resilience in the face of stressors, which in turn helps sustain their families and the critical economic functions their businesses provide in our communities.



Bethel, VT

Strengthen Foundational Business Skills

Regardless of what a business does, a well-run business is financially stable, uses the best practices available, and limits its risks from shocks. For all types of businesses, basic bookkeeping is needed to have a realistic and accurate sense of how the business is faring and where it makes and loses money. Too many businesses do not take advantage of available resources in terms of training or assistance programs that would improve their financial literacy. Moreover, when serious crises hit, many businesses are ill-prepared to continue providing goods/ services in a new and more challenging environment. Training for businesses, especially small operations that cannot free up staff during working hours, needs to be done in a manner that businesses can access.

TASK 1A: Provide low-cost, accessible business needs assessments and basic financial literacy training. Work with community partners to provide direct assistance through channels that are trusted and culturally competent.

Partners: Springfield Regional Development Corporation (SRDC), Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation (GMEDC), Chambers of Commerce, Vermont Small Business Development Center, area banks, Cooperative Extension, Better Business Bureau, Vermont Professionals of Color Network, and others

TASK 1B: Provide low-cost, accessible training in basic continuity of operations planning for businesses.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRO-RC), Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC), Chambers of Commerce, SBDC, Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), and others



Chester, VT

Hit the market / Fit the market

Some businesses have a product or service they think is great, but that does not have a market. They may just need better marketing to get the word out; too many of our local businesses lack an effective digital presence for their products or services. In this day and age, if your product or service is not found in a web search, it is very difficult to be successful. It may also be that the product or service is not really what consumers want. In this case, the business needs to see if it can align better with market demand trends.

TASK 1C: Provide occasional market analysis by sector for the benefit of area businesses. Large companies can do this alone, but smaller companies can best access this as a group. Factor in climate change as a business driver.

Partners: SBDC, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, SRDC, GMEDC

TASK 1D: Provide low-cost, accessible training in basic digital marketing, digital record-keeping, and other skills critical for long-term business success and growth. Work with community partners to provide direct assistance

through channels that are trusted and culturally competent.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Chambers of Commerce, Vermont Professionals of Color Network, local web services, and others

TASK 1E: Conduct digital searches for area businesses and identify those that searches do not find. Work to update business listing data to yield better search engine results.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Chambers of Commerce

TASK 1F: Create a broader regional brand and means of attracting customers to the area/multiple businesses, rather than just individual businesses.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Chambers of Commerce

TASK 1G: Connect small business owners and employees with sector-specific skills training opportunities that will empower them to adapt their operations or service/product offerings in the event of disruptions, with particular emphasis on market niches that are under-developed in our region. Identify and address financial and other barriers in order to maximize access by marginalized community members.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Chambers of Commerce, Vermont Professionals of Color Network

Learn / Support

Specialized training and classes can be useful, but they are often expensive. Networking with peers may be much more fruitful, enjoyable, and much less expensive. Many business owners are not natural networkers, nor have ready-made ways to mingle. Others may even fear sharing knowledge with

their “competition.” There are ways for firms to collaborate without jeopardizing their respective market shares or their brand image as local small businesses. A fine furniture maker from Vermont creates more opportunity for other makers at various points of the supply chain, can band together with other makers on marketing to hit larger audiences, and can even refer clients to other firms in times of disaster or overbooked work.

TASK 1H: Create social events by sector as opportunities for knowledge sharing, networking, and establishing mentor/mentee relationships.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, TRORC, MARC, Chambers of Commerce, industry/trade associations, others

TASK 1I: Encourage/facilitate subsidization and/or cooperative models for providing services to very small businesses. Possible examples include joint purchasing, reduced-cost legal services, shared websites or ordering/delivery systems, etc.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Chambers of Commerce, industry/trade associations

TASK 1J: Create supply chain/service symbiosis so that area loggers feed area woodworkers, farmers supply restaurants, lodging establishments feature local products, etc.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Chambers of Commerce, industry/trade associations

TASK 1K: Facilitate the creation and expansion of formal networks that connect our region’s small business owners with capital investors, and lower the barriers to local investment.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Vermont Community Loan Fund, Vital Communities

TASK 1L: Provide technical assistance to help small businesses access assistance from state and federal programs.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, TRORC, MARC

Action Area #2: Support low-income renters and homeowners

Low-income renters and homeowners are valued community members and are a critical piece of the regional economy. They are disproportionately impacted by the lack of physical mobility options, digital access, and safe and affordable housing in our communities. Improving access to these basic resources is essential for the health and well-being of all our residents.

TASK 2A: Improve and expand transit services in the region. This will lower transportation costs for residents and provide mobility to those who cannot drive or don't have a car.

Partners: TRORC, MARC, Tri-Valley Transit (Stagecoach), Advance Transit, and Southeast Vermont Transit

TASK 2B: Expand broadband access to all residents.

Partners: TRORC, MARC, Vermont Department of Public Service, Communication Union Districts

TASK 2C: Review area zoning bylaws to identify regulations that prevent or deter the creation of affordable housing and propose revisions to correct these areas.

Partners: TRORC and MARC



Thetford, VT

TASK 2D: Continue regional coordination to produce affordable housing options.

Partners: TRORC, MARC, Twin Pines Housing Trust, and Windham & Windsor Housing Trust

TASK 2E: Continue the Keys to the Valley project, including exploring the possibility of creating a non-profit housing production “utility” to produce small-scale housing solutions; expanding the Work United program to small businesses; expanding Homeshare; and preserving mobile home parks.

Partners: TRORC and MARC

TASK 2F: Continue to provide weatherization services to improve indoor air quality and reduce energy costs for residents.

Partners: Capstone Community Action, Southeastern Vermont Community Action

Action Area #3: Create resilient communities.

Towns are important providers of services (e.g. roads, emergency response, planning and permitting, etc.) that dramatically impact quality of life and capacity for economic development. Towns may benefit from joining together to provide services. Town leadership also helps set the “tone” for the area, projecting stability and welcome, or infighting. Towns can also be active participants in their local economy, and this will subsequently strengthen the towns.

TASK 3A: Provide assistance to towns on capital budgeting in order to properly fund services and avoid abrupt tax increases.

Partners: TRORC and MARC

TASK 3B: Inventory road systems for municipalities so that they can be better maintained.

Partners: TRORC and MARC

TASK 3C: Work with towns to access regular and emergency funding to repair and improve road systems to withstand the projected increases in frequency and severity of flood events.

Partners: TRORC and MARC

TASK 3D: Continue training local officials in basic management skills (holding meetings, conducting outreach, managing staff, permitting, communicating to the public, etc.) so that towns are well-run.

Partners: TRORC, MARC, VLCT, others

TASK 3E: Improve intermunicipal regional disaster coordination through mutual aid systems or formally regionalized emergency services.

Partners: TRORC, MARC, VEM, others

TASK 3F: Provide technical assistance to municipalities in their efforts to support local businesses. Town support could take the form of grant or loan funds (RLFs, facade improvement funds, etc.), space, events, revisions to ordinances or regulations (if needed and appropriate), etc.

Partners: Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT), MARC, TRORC

Action Area #4: Improve workforce development and support systems

Increasing numbers of employers are recognizing that support systems for potential and current workers make good business sense. People who have what they need to grow and thrive are best positioned to make valuable contributions to their workplaces and their communities. Moreover, there is a growing understanding that training and professional development are necessary but not sufficient for building a robust and resilient workforce. Life outside of work impacts work life, and vice versa. Employees who are managing crises outside of work must struggle harder than their co-workers to meet job demands. Creative dialogue between workers, employers, and social service providers can help identify opportunities for innovation in workforce management to make our communities more equitable and livable.

TASK 4A: Work with employers to evaluate what workforce gaps exist within their respective sectors.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, Chambers of Commerce, SBDC, industry associations and leaders

TASK 4B: Bring together employers and educators from diverse settings to evaluate training needs and to build and/or strengthen workforce training pathways.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, industry associations and leaders, Vermont Technical College, area vocational programs and other educational institutions

TASK 4C: Work with employers to

strengthen apprenticeship programs and other structured opportunities for entry-level employees to train while on the job.

Partners: SRDC, GMEDC, industry associations and leaders, educational institutions, Vital Communities Corporate Council

TASK 4D: Coordinate dialogue among social service providers to share lessons learned about the goals and needs of low-wage workers, entry-level workers, and workers with significant barriers to employment (e.g., criminal records, recovery needs, long-term unemployment, racial and ethnic discrimination, etc.).

Partners: MARC, TRORC, SRDC, GMEDC, social service providers, Vermont Professionals of Color Network

TASK 4E: Coordinate dialogue among workers, social service providers, housing agencies or non-profit developers, and employers to develop innovative ways of collaborating to support workers' basic needs (workforce housing, transportation, childcare, food access, medical/recovery needs, etc.).

Partners: MARC, TRORC, SRDC, GMEDC, social service providers, health care providers, housing agencies/developers, industry associations and leaders, Vermont Professionals of Color Network, childcare providers, and others

TASK 4F: Organize forums and produce informational materials for employers to share ideas and experiences of innovative models for employee support (e.g., flexible and autonomous scheduling systems, employee cohorts for mutual aid, recovery-friendly workplaces, company counselor services, etc.).

Partners: MARC, TRORC, SRDC, GMEDC, industry associations and leaders

Appendix

Crosswalk to the 2020-2025 ECVEDD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

ERRP TASK	CEDS ACTION PLAN ITEM
Task 1A: Business needs assessments and basic financial literacy training for businesses	Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 1 Goal 2, Strategy 2.3, Action 1
Task 1B: Continuity of operations training for businesses	Goal 1, Strategy 1.2, Action 1
Task 1C: Market analysis by sector	Goal 2, Strategy 2.1, Action 1
Task 1D: Digital literacy and other critical skills training for businesses	Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 1 Goal 2, Strategy 2.3, Action 1
Task 1E: Digital listing updates	Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 1
Task 1F: Regional branding and marketing	Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 1 Goal 2, Strategy 2.3, Actions 1 and 2 Goal 5, Strategy 5.1, Actions 2 and 3
Task 1G: Sector-specific skills training for business resilience	Goal 1, Strategy 1.5, Action 1 Goal 1, Strategy 1.7, Action 3 Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 1
Task 1H: Sector-specific networking events	Goal 1, Strategy 1.7, Action 3 Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 2 Goal 2, Strategy 2.3, Action 1
Task 1I: Subsidization and/or cooperative models for service provision to small businesses	Goal 1, Strategy 1.7, Action 3 Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 1 Goal 2, Strategy 2.3, Action 1
Task 1J: Regional supply chain/service symbiosis	Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 2 Goal 2, Strategy 2.3, Action 1 Goal 5, Strategy 5.2, Action 3 Goal 6, Strategy 6.2, Action 3
Task 1K: Connect small business owners with capital investors	Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 1
Task 1L: Technical assistance to help small businesses access government assistance	Goal 1, Strategy 1.7, Action 1
Task 2A: Improve and expand regional transit	Goal 4, Strategy 4.2, Action 1
Task 2B: Expand broadband access	Goal 4, Strategy 4.2, Action 4
Task 2C: Revise local zoning to facilitate affordable housing development	Goal 4, Strategy 4.2, Action 2 Goal 5, Strategy 5.1, Action 1
Task 2D: Affordable housing development	
Task 2E: Implement Keys to the Valley Plan	

ERRP TASK	CEDS ACTION PLAN ITEM
Task 2F: Weatherization services for residents	Goal 4, Strategy 4.2, Action 2
Task 3A: Assist Towns with capital budgeting	Goal 4, Strategy 4.1 Goal 4, Strategy 4.2, Action 1
Task 3B: Road inventories	Goal 1, Strategy 1.4, Action 1
Task 3C: Assist Towns in accessing road funding	
Task 3D: Train local officials in basic management skills	Goals 1 and 4
Task 3E: Intermunicipal disaster response coordination	Goal 1, Strategy 1.6, Action 1
Task 3F: Technical assistance to Towns for supporting small businesses	Goal 1, Strategy 1.7, Actions 2 and 3 Goal 2, Strategy 2.2, Action 1
Task 4A: Evaluate workforce gaps by sector	Goal 3, Strategy 3.1, Actions 1 and 3 Goal 3, Strategy 3.2, Action 1
Task 4B: Evaluate workforce training needs and build/strengthen training pathways	Goal 3, Strategy 3.1, Actions 1-3 Goal 3, Strategy 3.2, Actions 1-2
Task 4C: Apprenticeships and on-the-job training	Goal 3, Strategy 3.2, Action 2
Task 4D: Facilitate dialogue about goals and needs of workers who face the greatest barriers to job access and sustainability	Goal 3, Strategy 3.2
Task 4E: Facilitate dialogue about innovative ways to support workers' basic needs	Goal 3, Strategy 3.2
Task 4F: Facilitate communication among employers about innovative models for employee support	Goal 3, Strategy 3.2