



# Western North Carolina Economic Recovery and Rebuilding Services

Updated January 16, 2025

“Engaging, enhancing, and helping transform rural communities” is the mission of the North Carolina Department of Commerce’s Rural Economic Development Division (REDD). The Division helps communities build a solid foundation for economic growth and increase economic resiliency to expand rural prosperity. It does so with a staff of community and economic development specialists, collectively known as “Team REDD,” that helps communities plan for and make infrastructure and other strategic investments to attract and retain businesses and spur economic growth. Team REDD also builds and maintains strong partnerships to fulfill its mission in support of rural North Carolina.

The NC Main Street & Rural Planning (MS&RP) Center and the North Carolina Appalachian Regional Commission (NC ARC) program are sections within the REDD team. The MS&RP Center works in counties, cities, rural towns, downtown districts, and designated North Carolina Main Street communities to inspire placemaking through building asset-based economic development strategies that achieve measurable results such as investment, business growth, and jobs. The ARC program’s mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia. The NC ARC program collaborates with a variety of stakeholders, including local governments, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations to foster economic development, enhance workforce skills, improve infrastructure, and encourage investments that stimulate growth and lessen economic disparities in the region. By working with these partners, the NC ARC program helps strengthen the region's economy.

Together, the MS&RP Center and NC ARC program support rural North Carolina by providing strategic economic development planning, technical assistance, training and education, and grant resources. In late 2024, the MS&RP Center and NC ARC program developed the Western North Carolina Economic Recovery and Rebuilding Services initiative to help rural communities in the western region of the state address economic challenges brought on by the devastating impacts of Hurricane Helene.

Affected communities that elect to receive services will benefit from economic recovery and resilience planning, community engagement and capacity-building assistance, as well as related training, resources, and other support. Assistance will be delivered primarily by MS&RP Center and NC ARC staff as well as key partners, such as regional councils of government (COGs), other state and federal agencies, universities, and economic development organizations.

This initiative will provide tools and resources for communities and their partners to develop and implement economic recovery strategies. MS&RP Center and NC ARC program staff will work with communities to facilitate economic assessments, create tailored economic recovery plans, update existing plans to strengthen local economic resilience, and provide technical assistance for hurricane recovery and rebuilding efforts.

The Western North Carolina Economic Recovery and Rebuilding Services initiative will be flexible to meet impacted communities' needs and will include:

## **I. Community Engagement**

Establish/strengthen relationships with western North Carolina communities and partners that have been impacted by Hurricane Helene to gain understanding, build trust, and develop connections to engage in/assist with economic recovery and rebuilding work.

- A. Collaborate with local governments and partners involved in recovery efforts to coordinate/attend regional and local listening sessions to learn about Helene's economic and other impacts from affected communities.
- B. Follow up with local governments and partners to determine if there is interest in having further conversations about economic recovery and rebuilding assistance available through the MS&RP Center and the NC ARC program.
- C. Engage communities in initial conversations to discuss what they need to address the economic impacts of Helene.
- D. Work with communities to assess whether their economic recovery efforts might benefit from MS&RP Center and NC ARC program services.
- E. Help communities identify stakeholders and partners to involve in economic recovery and rebuilding work.

## **II. Economic Recovery & Rebuilding Planning**

Provide economic planning services to help communities develop strategies to effectively guide economic recovery and rebuilding efforts.

- A. Facilitate and participate in regional and local conversations about rebuilding asset-based economies and their business components, such as agriculture, artisan/craft, health and wellness, manufacturing, mining and other natural resources, outdoor recreation, and tourism.
  - 1. Work with communities to identify and assess their economies' assets, needs, issues, and opportunities, including review of available data and maps.
  - 2. Engage partners to assist with session coordination and facilitation.
  - 3. Develop reports for communities and partners on the results/outcomes of sessions and potential next steps.
- B. Assess existing economic development and related plans and consider updates to address opportunities for resilience.
  - 1. Gather and review existing economic development and related plans and summarize findings.
  - 2. Obtain new maps and data to inform updates to existing economic development plans.
  - 3. Pinpoint and incorporate new and evolving economic opportunities in communities due to disasters, such as Helene (e.g., infrastructure, landscape changes, and buyouts).
  - 4. Prepare updates to economic development plans to incorporate new or additional priorities, strategies, and projects.
  - 5. Provide support to communities with plan implementation, including potential funding

- C. Provide local economic development planning services, including community economic development assessments, five-year economic development strategic plans, and workshops on visioning, goal setting, partnership identification, etc.
  - 1. Work with communities to assess their economic planning needs.
  - 2. Offer communities options for planning services based on established MS&RP Center and NC ARC planning processes and workshop types/formats, with modifications, if needed.

### **III. Capacity Building**

Empower communities to lead and sustain recovery and rebuilding initiatives by equipping them with training, tools, and resources.

- A. Facilitate meetings and coordinate training on economic resilience strategies for local leaders and businesses that address preparation before, response during, and recovery after a disaster.
- B. Document and analyze community experiences to identify critical economic needs to be addressed through deeper engagement and improved capacity.
- C. Identify and extend capacity through partnerships with non-profits, COGs, state and federal agencies, universities, and similar groups.
- D. Research and share best practices with communities and their partners.

### **IV. Resources & Support**

Provide ongoing technical assistance and resources to help communities execute recovery strategies successfully and achieve long-term economic resilience.

- A. Connect communities and businesses with resources and information to rebuild a resilient Western North Carolina economy.
- B. Assist communities with project development and implementation.
- C. Match community needs with appropriate agencies and/or resources.
- D. Provide guidance regarding federal, state, and other grant programs.

This Western North Carolina Economic Recovery and Rebuilding Services initiative embodies a commitment to helping communities recover and rebuild by leveraging the expertise of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center and the North Carolina Appalachian Regional Commission program, alongside a network of dedicated partners.

#### **Contacts:**

**Elizabeth (Liz) H. Parham, CMSM**  
Director, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center  
North Carolina Department of Commerce  
919 805 2067 mobile  
[lparham@commerce.nc.gov](mailto:lparham@commerce.nc.gov)

**Olivia A. Collier**  
Director, Regional Development Commissions  
North Carolina Department of Commerce  
919 218 3623 mobile  
[ocollier@commerce.nc.gov](mailto:ocollier@commerce.nc.gov)