



**Gulf Coast Economic Development District
Quarterly Progress Report to the EDA**

Project Title	Gulf Coast Region CARES Act EAA Supplemental Recovery & Resiliency Assistance
Award No.	EDA20AUS3070090
Performance Period	07/01/2020 – 06/31/2022
Reporting Period	07/01/2020 – 09/30/2020

Background

The global coronavirus pandemic has ushered in unprecedented economic pressure on the 13-county region, particularly for local governments, small businesses, and manufacturing, retail, food & hospitality and healthcare sectors. According to the Workforce Solutions, since early March 1, the region's initial unemployment insurance (UI) claims are now approaching 1 million. As state and county officials cautiously navigate reopening parts of the economy, the peak unemployment rate in April of 14.7% has slowly come down to 6.8%, though in some rural counties remains above 8.5%. UI data also demonstrate that those with lower levels of educational attainment—such as less than a college degree or those who hold up to a high school diploma or GED—are overrepresented among newly unemployment populations, reinvigorating regional emphasis on workforce development as a key to resilience and recovery.

Small businesses and enterprises which require close interpersonal contact to conduct business remain on the precipice of failure as federal, state and local stimulus funds are running dry. While some businesses are managing to pivot by opening drive-through windows, e-commerce or last-mile delivery, state health official orders have opened and re-closed some sectors so frequently that navigating the process of finding the right information at the right time to stay in compliance remains an additional barrier to economic and business adjustment. As economic development organizations and public leaders are facing hiring freezes and trying to plug budget gaps, the need for resources to directly support businesses continues to rise as does the need for broadband infrastructure.

Activities Undertaken this Quarter

During this quarter, work was focused on research and communicating financial resources available to public entities, economic development organizations, workforce development providers, non-profits, Chambers, and businesses. This information was reported in our weekly economic recovery resources newsletter every week since July 1. Additionally, we have focused on initial technical assistance for communities seeking competitive CARES Act grant funding for recovery efforts to achieve Oct 1 deadlines. The GCEDD provided technical assistance on identifying CARES Act grant-eligible projects and grant preparation to seven communities across 5 counties in the region. We have also developed a



2-year workplan and have already begun implementing a robust stakeholder outreach and subregional Covid-19 impacts data-sharing initiative.

Accomplishments this Quarter

So far, we have engaged in recovery interviews with 28 stakeholders in our 7 most rural communities. We have increased our interaction and coordination of efforts with Workforce Solutions to deliver 7 subregional data reports and continue to collaborate on findings, strategic alignment on support initiatives, and recovery opportunities identification. We have joined other peer economic development districts in the FEMA/EDA Region 6 Inter-Regional Coordination workgroup and on September 30 presented the Agency and District's coronavirus recovery efforts to boost regional coordination and awareness of opportunities to collaborate and enhance recovery for our region.

Project Timeline Analysis

Currently, the initial phases of delivering technical assistance and member outreach have been a challenge due to continued stay-at-home orders and pressure to cultivate sufficient employer support or data to complete competitive CARES Act grant applications by October 1. However, the overall project schedule is proceeding on pace and we foresee we will meet goals and deliverables on time.

Anticipated Developments Next Quarter

In the next quarter, we anticipate completing member engagement interviews and can shift into re-engaging partners and extending outreach directly to businesses on short to long-term strategic recovery planning. Early interviews with rural and underserved parts of the 13-county region indicate stakeholder interest in economic diversification, resilient supply chains and manufacturing sectors, agriculture, small business digital adoption and e-commerce, and expanding broadband access.