



Gulf Coast Economic Development District Semiannual Progress Report to the EDA

Project Title	Austin Partnership Planning Program FY 2018
Award No.	EDA20AUS3020021
Performance Period	01/01/2018 – 12/31/2020
Reporting Period	01/01/2020 – 06/30/2020

From January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020 the Gulf Coast Economic Development District (GCEDD) has worked diligently on activities that contribute to the economic competitiveness and job generation capacity of partners across the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning Region. The District has continued to serve the region by fulfilling its primary functions which are: to provide technical assistance to economic development organizations, provide planning assistance for regional economic development initiatives, and maintain the region's eligibility to apply for economic development grants and assistance from the EDA. These functions are achieved by supporting the revolving loan fund (RLF), providing technical assistance to EDA grant applicants, developing and implementing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region, administering District communications and meetings, and conducting other planning exercises, workshops, and research as requested by communities in the District.

Scope of Work Elements

CEDS

The GCEDD staff continued to work to implement the Draft 2020-2024 CEDS and convert the plan into annual action plans. Specifically, the GCEDD proactively worked to advance the following goals and strategies from the 2014-2018 GCEDD CEDS:

- A. Our Region is resilient and adaptive to economic downturns, natural disasters, and new opportunities.
- B. Our Region has a diverse economy and skilled workforces that support businesses, innovation, and entrepreneurship.
- C. Our region's local governments have access to data, tools, and solutions that facilitate informed decisions on funding and investment decisions.
- D. Our region's water infrastructure supports current and future demands, while promoting the growth of healthy and economically dynamic communities.
- E. Our region values its unique ecosystems and understands the ecological, economic and cultural benefits they provide.

ECONOMIC COORDINATION

The GCEDD continued to support regional coordination and planning throughout 2020 by convening quarterly meetings on January 31 and April 3—coordinating presentations from the Texas Back in Business Harvey Relief Program and Rice University's Kinder Institute in January and Metrostudy in April. GCEDD Staff coordinated with the Galveston Economic Partnership and Austin Regional Office of the EDA and to enhance awareness of the opportunities available to their communities through the EDA CARES Act in a workshop on June 18.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

GCEDD provided support through technical and planning assistance to communities in order to facilitate EDA grant applications and increase regional collaboration. The District released the Economic Development Digest every month—from January to June of 2020—which provides updates on regional developments and economic development trends. In August 2020, GCEDD staff wrote and released a Regional High Speed Internet Strategy for the benefit of District members and EDOs across the region which included: a high level overview of necessary communications infrastructure; a roadmap for forming necessary partnerships and procuring resources; maps of existing coverage in the thirteen counties (developed through a partnership with ConnectedNation), and; case studies on successful broadband expansion efforts in Southeast Texas. GCEDD staff were offered the opportunity to share strategies detailed in the 2018 Regional Economic Resilience Plan at the National Association of Development Organization's Stronger CEDS, Stronger Regions summer webinar series and were able to collaborate on takeaways and future improvements to our resilience planning efforts. The District was also engaged by local leaders in Texas City to conduct research on the global and national impacts of their community's infrastructure, economic competitiveness assets and key industry sectors to assist in state and regional government collaboration efforts.

We have continued to provide technical assistance and advisement on emerging projects potentially eligible for a range of public works and innovation grants in Kendleton, Brazosport, Palacios, Harris County and regional workforce development partners. GCEDD Staff actively participated in the Houston Housing Working Group to advance housing needs across the region. We collaborate with the Houston Regional Economic Development Alliance on economic development marketing in partnership with the Greater Houston Partnership. And we continue to work with the Houston Food System Collaborative to advance the regional food production and sustainable agriculture initiatives, including an emerging regional food shed assets and opportunities assessment project.

SUDDEN & SEVERE ECONOMIC DISLOCATION

The Houston-Galveston region is still recovering economically from the Coronavirus Pandemic (DR-4485). While we were able to provide information on CARES Act funding in June, the GCEDD is addressing the long-term economic recovery from the Coronavirus Pandemic under a separate EDA grant beginning on July 1.

MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITY

The GCEDD continues to participate in the Houston Housing Collaborative, examining ways that housing can support economic development activities. The GCEDD is working towards the development of the local food system with a focus on emerging businesses with its participation in the Houston Food System Collaborative.