



# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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Serving the Counties of Upstate South Carolina

Anderson | Cherokee | Greenville | Oconee | Pickens | Spartanburg





# LETTER FROM THE BOARD

**Mike Forrester | Board Chair**

ACOG Board of Directors

Our purpose is to enhance the lives of people living in the six-county South Carolina Appalachian Region. Since our establishment in 1965, we have maintained a commitment to provide quality services to local governments and special purpose districts in Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens, and Spartanburg County.

The heart of the organization is its team of board members and staff who are trusted, committed, multi-disciplined, analytical, and solutions oriented individuals who love the Appalachian Region they serve. We build and foster regional relationships, provide solutions for communities, and fill gaps in staff and administrative resources. The team serves as a regional facilitator, bringing diverse stakeholders to the table to address the most important issues facing the region.

While the global pandemic changed our focus in 2020, the Appalachian Council of Governments continued to improve the lives of the region's citizens through economic and community development, transportation, infrastructure development, resource management, senior advocacy, and workforce development. Our programs for the elderly, such as home-delivered

meals, congregate dining, transportation, and counseling, benefit seniors across our region every day. Over the past year, services to the aging expanded greatly to meet challenges presented by COVID-19. Our focus on work skills development ensures people in our region keep up with the ever changing skill sets required by business and industry. Our focus on economic development through our InfoMentum economic development support system, assistance with grant funding for infrastructure, workforce development programs, and transportation planning, ensures our region is equipped to compete in a global economy.

While our programs are broad and widely varied, they all come back to serving the people of the Upstate. Whether it is general administration, assistance with grants, planning, or economic development support, we want to be a key resource for getting the job done.

We are pleased to provide this Annual Report for the Appalachian Council of Governments, covering our activities and accomplishments in 2020. I hope that you find it informative and thank you for supporting our region.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Forrester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike Forrester  
ACOG Board Chair

# ACOG BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Ray Graham  
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Jeff Roberts

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Representative Steven Long  
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Manning Lynch  
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## REGIONAL

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Henry Jolly | Cherokee County  
George Fletcher | Greenville County  
Ernest Riley | Oconee County  
Tom Ponder | Pickens County  
Jane Hall | Spartanburg County

ACOG Board Member roster as of February 2021

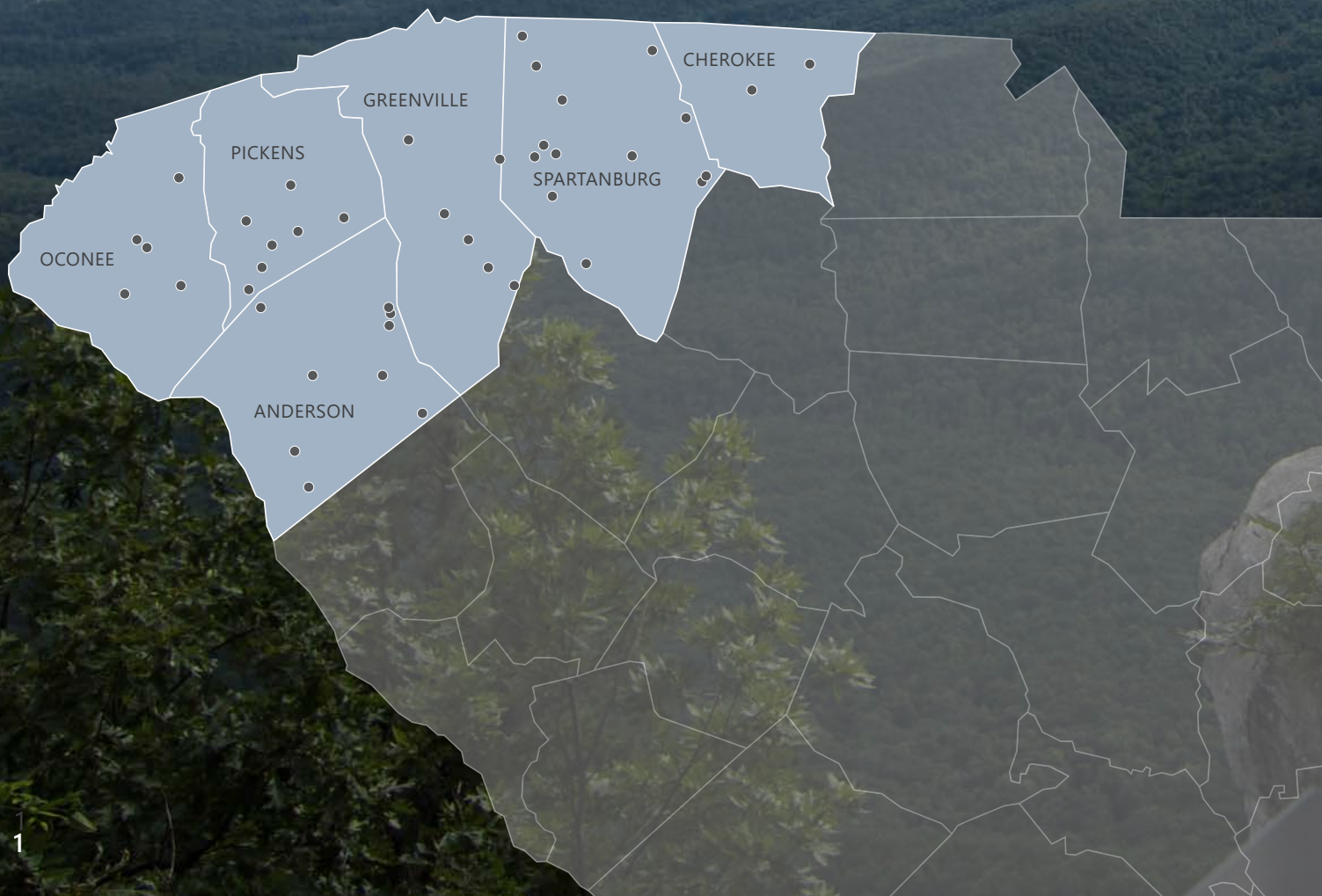
# CONTENTS

ABOUT ACOG.....	1
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT .....	3
GRANTS .....	5
GOVERNMENT SERVICES.....	6
PLANNING SERVICES.....	7
Transportation Planning.....	7
SENIOR ADVOCACY .....	9
Nutrition Program.....	9
Family Caregiver Program.....	10
Home Care Program .....	10
Information and Referral .....	10
State Health Insurance Program.....	10
Ombudsman Program.....	10
Volunteer Ombudsman Program.....	10
WORKLINK .....	13
APPALACHIAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.....	14

# ABOUT ACOG

The Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG) was established in 1965 to advise the Governor on the use of Appalachian Regional Commission funds. In 1971, the organization became one of 10 COG districts created by the South Carolina General Assembly. ACOG represents a 6 county area that includes Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens, and Spartanburg counties in the Appalachian Region of South Carolina.

ACOG operates as a multifaceted service organization for local governments providing a regional forum where elected officials, industry experts, community leaders, and community members come together to discuss issues and share ideas to solve local challenges. ACOG works in close collaboration with our community partners toward building a competitive economy and promoting healthy, livable communities.





# SERVICES

In carrying out this mission, ACOG convenes elected officials and local practitioners to develop strategies for improving quality of life; prioritizing state and federal investments into social services and public infrastructure throughout the region. We provide comprehensive expertise and resources to support and facilitate a wide variety of programs and services for citizens and leaders.

Funding for ACOG's programs and services comes from a variety of sources, including grants from federal and state agencies, as well as dues from member local governments. In 2020, approximately 75% of ACOG revenue came from federal sources, allowing us to provide many services at reduced or no charge. The total financial return to the region from ACOG programs in 2020 exceeded \$53 million.

## PROGRAM AREAS

The Council of Governments provide services through five program areas and two partner organizations;

Economic Development

Grants Services

Government Services

Planning Services

Senior Advocacy

WorkLink – Workforce Development

Appalachian Development Corporation

**55**  
Years of Service

**6**  
Counties

**42**  
Municipalities

**5**  
Program Areas

**41**  
Employees

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



The Economic Development Program supports regional community and economic development through professional planning, grant support, and the delivery of InfoMentum, a national award-winning suite of services that includes customized GIS-based tools, web applications, research, and technical support. By providing assistance to communities and organizations in the six ACOG counties and beyond, the Economic Development Program strives to facilitate growth and development, improving the quality of life of our communities throughout the region.

**217**

Data Layers Created

**59**

Custom Maps

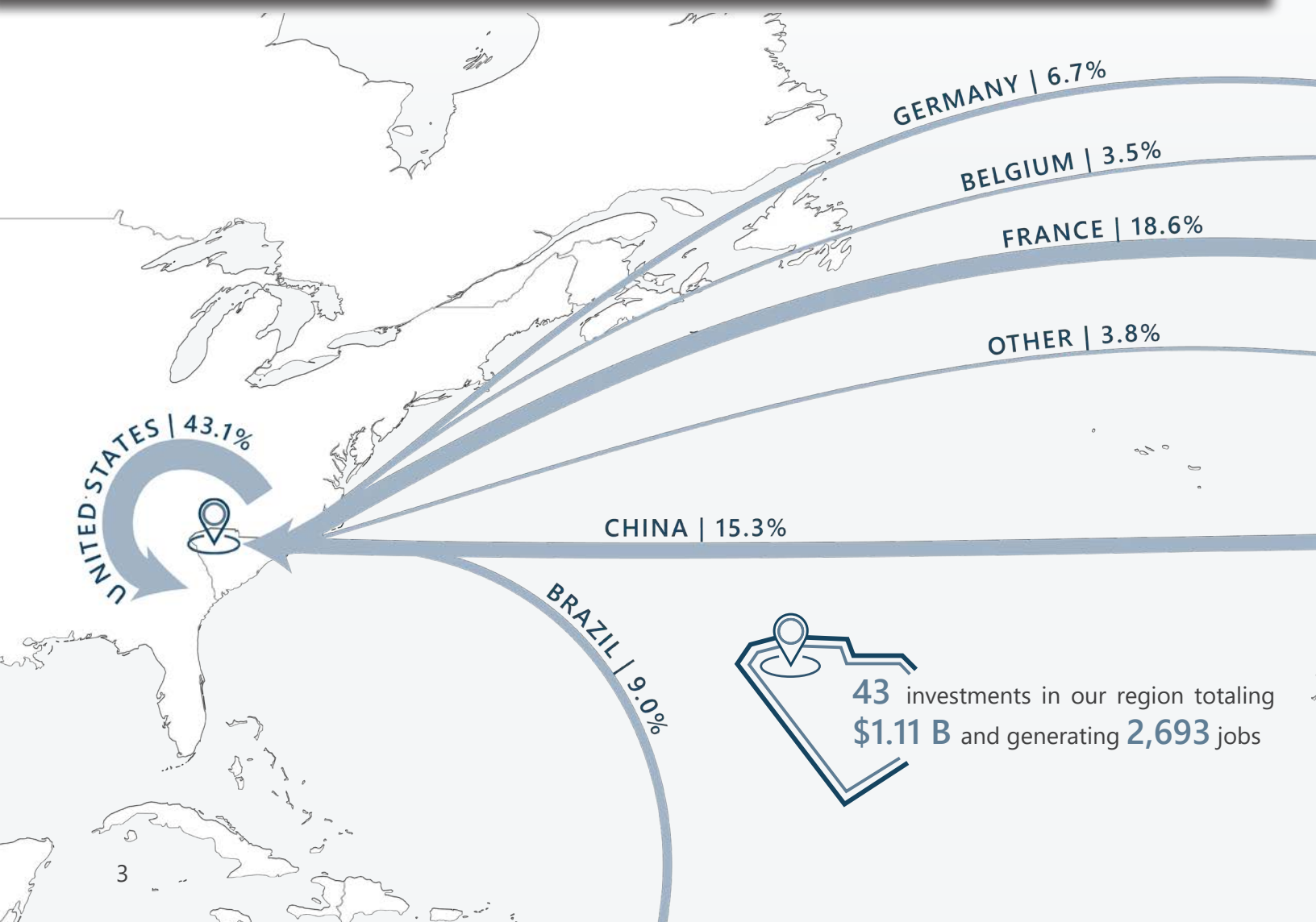
**2,142**

Data Interactions

**2,493**

Reports Generated

## 2020 Capital Investments in the Region

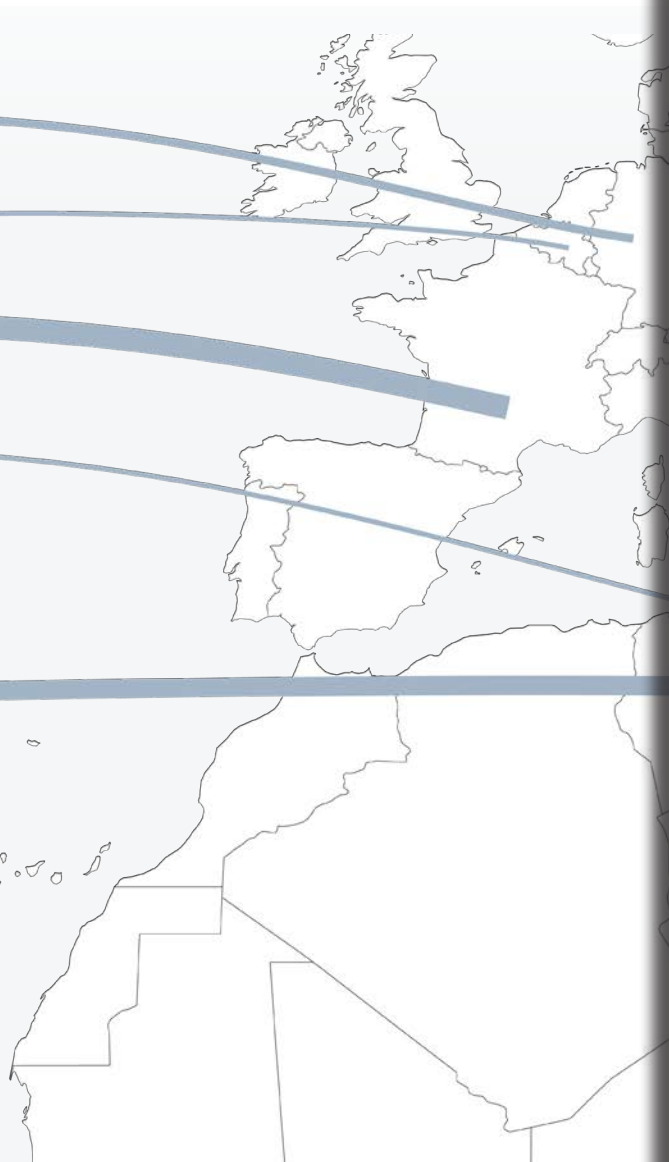
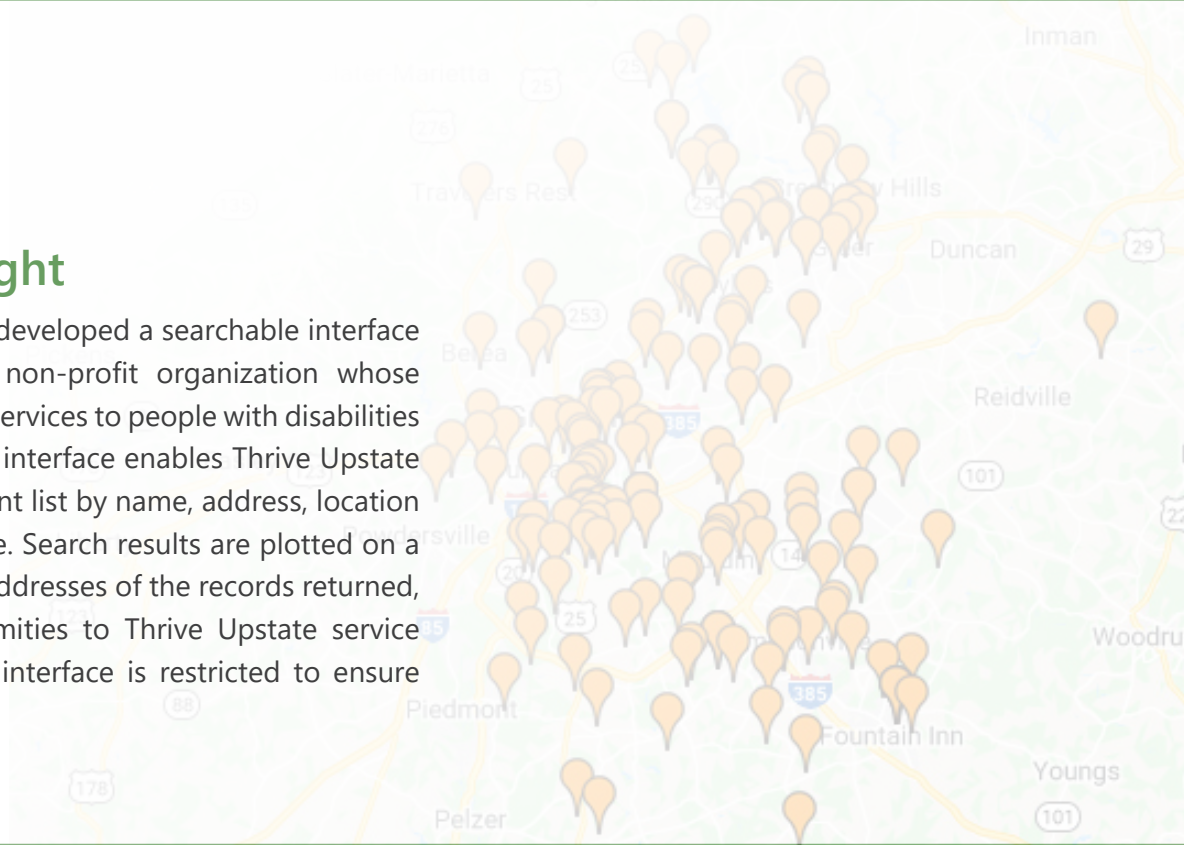


**43** investments in our region totaling **\$1.11 B** and generating **2,693** jobs



## Project Highlight

The InfoMentum team developed a searchable interface for Thrive Upstate, a non-profit organization whose mission it is to provide services to people with disabilities and special needs. This interface enables Thrive Upstate staff to search their client list by name, address, location served, and service type. Search results are plotted on a map which shows the addresses of the records returned, along with their proximities to Thrive Upstate service centers. Access to the interface is restricted to ensure client confidentiality.



## 2020 Capital Investments by County

### ANDERSON

Announcements | 4  
Investment | \$119.8 M  
Jobs | 612

### OCONEE

Inquiries | 52  
Industry Visits | 16  
Site Visits | 7

### CHEROKEE

Announcements | 3  
Investment | \$82.5 M  
Jobs | 218

### PICKENS

Announcements | 1  
Investment | \$5.6 M  
Jobs | 35

### GREENVILLE

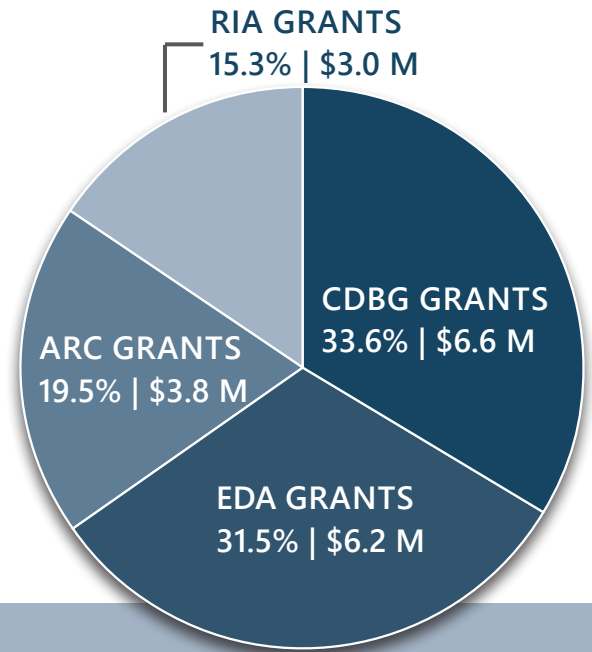
Announcements | 21  
Investment | \$631.5 M  
Jobs | 1,422

### SPARTANBURG

Announcements | 14  
Investment | \$269.0 M  
Jobs | 406

# GRANTS

The Grants Services team collaborates with local elected leaders, economic development officials, and state and federal agencies to identify, secure, and administer grant funds for a wide range of community and economic development activities. Staff brings expertise and the capacity to help communities receive grants and assists in building a strong, resilient regional economy. Services include assisting communities with planning and packaging grant applications to address community needs. Staff support includes structuring the application, organizing target area surveys, holding public hearings, and completing the full application. The team also provides grant administration after they are awarded.



## 2020 In Review

**26**

Grant projects facilitated

**39,346**

Residents benefiting

**1,696**

Students and workers trained and educated

**929**

Jobs created and retained

**\$500,000**

**Ready Workforce**

Increase residents' education, knowledge, and skills

**\$4.2 Million**

**Economic Opportunity**

Maximize economic opportunities through infrastructure improvements

**\$10.7 Million**

**Critical Infrastructure**

Improve and develop critical water and wastewater infrastructure

**\$1.4 Million**

**Community Enrichment**

Build a better future for communities through neighborhood revitalization

**\$2.8 Million**

**Natural & Cultural Assets**

Leverage the economic potential of the region's natural and cultural heritage

**\$19.6 Million**

**Total**

Improve the region's economy and the quality of life of its residents

\*ARC: Appalachian Regional Commission, CDBG: Community Development Block Grant, RIA: SC Rural Infrastructure Authority



Information on COVID-19 related guidance was provided to regional administrators and managers to help navigate the CARES Act requirements, Accelerate SC Programs, and CDC guidance. ACOG worked with communities to help navigate challenges from shifting public meetings to virtual platforms to holding socially distanced parades, festivals and special events.

## GOVERNMENT SERVICES

The Government Services Program offers technical assistance for local jurisdictions in the areas of personnel, utilities, finance and budgeting, and general administration issues. Services included serving as interim administrator for a community, facilitating staffing searches, and providing training for local government officials. Staff provides a range of services to meet the needs of our communities.

In 2020, when the Town of Inman's administrator stepped down, ACOG staff stepped in as interim administrator while also facilitating the Town's search for a new administrator. This helped the Town continue progress on several projects that were at crucial stages. It also provided leaders with the time necessary to conduct a proper search for a new administrator that fit the needs of the community.

**28** | attendees at our seven-week Supervisory and Management Training course

**12** | local governments received administrative services and support

**3** | communities asked us to facilitate planning retreats and goal setting sessions

**6** | local governments received training on annexation, leadership, and sexual harassment

**8** | communities were assisted with staffing searches and budgeting assistance

# PLANNING SERVICES

Planning staff works with local governments on the development of community plans and ordinances, as well as provides administration services and technical assistance. In addition to working with local communities, planning services also focus on multi-county and regional projects. Challenges presented by COVID-19 required staff to adapt interactive planning processes to comply with social distancing and limited in-person meetings. The team was able to shift to virtual and online meeting platforms and successfully continued serving local governments.

**4**

Comprehensive Plan updates

**3**

Zoning Ordinances updates

**79**

Attendees at planning education and training courses

**201**

Section 208 Water Quality Conformance Reviews

**3**

Served as staff for 3 communities

**\$352,860**

Invested in 14 homes Rehabilitated through Anderson HOME Consortium



## Transportation Planning

Over the last year, staff worked with the ACOG Transportation Committee to update the region's Transportation Improvement Program, coordinated with SCDOT on the implementation of identified projects, and undertook a Regional Freight Study process to identify longer term investments to improve the area transportation system.

**\$350,000**

Funding awarded to the region for the purchase of human service transit vehicles

**\$6.67 Million**

Funding to counties for improvements to local roads and construction of access roads

## Regional Freight Mobility Plan

Significant growth in both population and industry has impacted the Region's roadways in the last 20 years. Freight traffic has contributed to those impacts. In March 2020, ACOG kicked off a Regional Freight Mobility Plan to address logistical, infrastructure, and economic related issues associated with the movement of goods.

This effort is a collaboration between ACOG and the region's Metropolitan Planning Organizations in Anderson, Greenville-Pickens, and Spartanburg. The process is guided by two regional committees who have identified public and private sector freight issues and will review proposed strategies. Recommendations will include specific

improvement projects (i.e. intersection and roadway improvements), regional policies (regional traffic operations and incident management), and freight policy (freight design criteria and truck parking requirements).

This is the first true region-wide transportation planning process the region has undertaken. A regional focus is important given the impact traffic has on all communities. Increasing regional collaborations in planning efforts is an important part of addressing transportation issues associated with regional growth. It is our hope that this effort will lay the groundwork for more collaborative efforts in the future.

**"The economic impacts associated with the Appalachian Region freight system users represent 46-60% of the region's economy"**

### Economic Impact

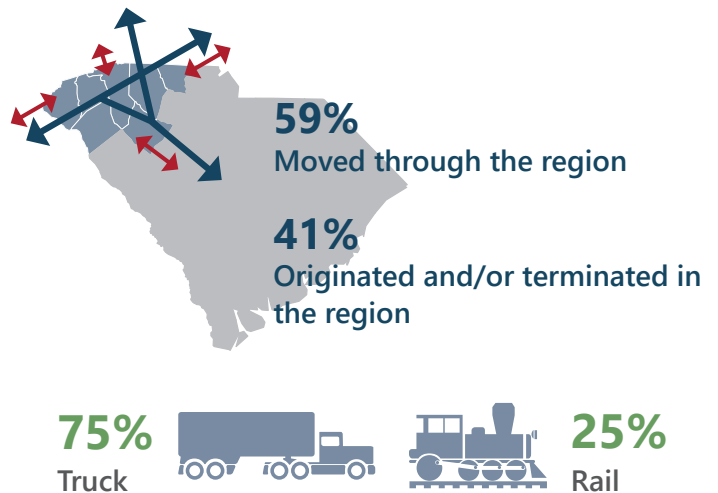
Accommodated **364,200** jobs

Produced **\$34.5 Billion** in gross regional product (GRP)

Sold **\$88.2 Billion** worth of goods and services

Earned **\$19.4 Billion** in income

### Freight Movement





# SENIOR ADVOCACY

The ACOG serves as the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) for the Appalachian Region to advocate for seniors. Senior Advocacy's goal is to empower older adults and adults with physical disabilities to maintain a high quality of life in their homes and communities. Programs provide information and support services that focus on the physical, mental, and relational health of seniors throughout the Region.

Direct assistance includes staff working with the elderly to conduct assessments and determine the level of need for clients. Identified needs are then addressed through partnerships with providers for In-Home and Community Based Services. This includes arranging for group dining and home delivered meals, transportation, home care, and health promotion programs. Primary programs available to seniors are the Information and Referral Assistance, Family Caregiver, Home Care, Long Term Care Ombudsman, Nutrition Programs, and the State Health Insurance Program.

**\$6.58 Million**

In funding for senior services

**54,628**

Seniors served

## Nutrition Program

The Nutrition Program and its partners provide nutritionally balanced meals to seniors. The meals are delivered to their homes or served at congregate meal sites.

**391,315**

Hot, frozen, and shelf-stable meals were delivered to 15,396 seniors

**"Some things you miss, some things you don't, but I really miss going to the center and seeing my friends. You bringing these meals and stopping by really brightens my day."**

**— Senior receiving home delivered meals**

**702**

Families received \$745,188 of respite relief from caregiving responsibilities

**27,714**

Hours of in-home help to 350 seniors

**17,390**

Seniors and caregivers' concerns and questions were answered by our specialists

**4,190**

Seniors advised for Medicare enrollment

**6,700**

Seniors received information on making informed Medicare decisions through 89 informational mail-outs

**648**

Cases investigated concerning quality of care issues

**210+**

Volunteer hours spent with long-term care residents in 30 of our region's facilities

## Family Caregiver Program

The Family Caregiver Support Program is focused on preventing burn-out and social isolation for caregivers of older adults and seniors raising children through the provision of respite services.

## Home Care Program

The Home Care program connects older adults with caregiver services for everyday activities.

## Information and Referral

Information and Referral Assistance specialists provide information about resources available in the region for challenges faced by seniors and their caregivers.

## State Health Insurance Program

The State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) provides up-to-date information on Medicare, supplements, and health insurance to older adults and their caregivers.

## Ombudsman Program

The Ombudsman Program investigates and works to resolve problems or complaints affecting long-term care facility residents. Ombudsman staff advocate for individuals living in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. For the safety of residents, investigation of complaints and the resolution process has moved to virtual platforms to keep the line of communication open between residents, their families, facilities, and our staff.

## Volunteer Ombudsman Program

Volunteer Ombudsmen visit facilities and provide a voice for long-term care residents. They provide information about resident rights, observe conditions, and advocate for residents. COVID-19 has prevented in-person visits and volunteers shifted to phone and video chats over the past year.



## EMERGENCY MEALS

Due to COVID-19, seniors in our communities have faced food insecurity issues due to increased isolation and limited resources. While social distancing has been necessary to limit the spread of the virus, it has prevented seniors from accessing group meals at congregate sites putting them in danger of malnutrition and hunger. Some cannot afford to stock up on food or supplies and those who could, often find themselves without transportation assistance to and from grocery stores or are simply afraid due to the risks associated with the spread of COVID-19.

In light of this, state and local agencies across the region explored solutions to ensure food-insecure and socially isolated older adults are fed and healthy during the crisis. Although dining sites are closed due to COVID-19, meal distribution has expanded by shifting to meal pickup options in all six ACOG counties. Dining sites now distribute meals several times weekly to their clients who drive in for pickup. Most recipients receive 7 days of meals instead of just the days the dining sites were open. Many of the most vulnerable clients were transitioned from dining site clients to Home Delivered Meal Services.

Another effort to combat food insecurity was a partnership between several of our meal providers in Anderson, Oconee and Greenville Counties and Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina and their Foundation. Working together these agencies provided 6 weeks of emergency meals to those 60 and older in their counties during a 6-week period early in the pandemic.

Anderson County Meals on Wheels, Greenville County Meals on Wheels, and Senior Solutions Oconee County served over 10,000 meals. They set up multiple distribution locations throughout the counties to make participation as accessible as possible. Recipients were required to be 60 years of age and reside in the county where they picked up their meals through a drive through process. Agency staff and volunteers practiced social distancing and ensured a touch free process during pick up. Recipients received 5 frozen meals and a bag of fresh fruit weekly. Pick up locations also distributed ACOG agency brochures and educational literature.





**Agency Staff and volunteers practiced social distancing and ensured a touch free process during pick up.**

**Seniors received 5 frozen meals and a bag of fresh fruit weekly. Additionally, each pick up location distributed ACOG agency brochures and educational literature.**



**“I’m so bored and lonely here since I’m stuck inside because of the virus. It’s just me and the newspaper until you bring the food by and smile at me. Thank you!”**

**— Senior receiving home delivered meals**

# WORKLINK

WorkLink develops the link between employers and employees in Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens Counties through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The Act is designed to help job seekers access education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market.

WorkLink, partners with local service providers to administer programs for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. These services increase the

**234**

Soft skills workshops and activities

**417**

Dislocated workers assisted

quality and accessibility of programs provided to job seekers and employers. WorkLink's goal is to ensure the local workforce development system is market-driven and meets the employment and training needs of employers and job seekers.

**329**

Occupational and GED trainees

**175**

Credentials earned

**\$423,467**

WIOA scholarships

**\$134,188**

Outside scholarships

## HELP DURING COVID

Hope T. took advantage of the services of the WIOA program when she found herself suddenly unemployed. After 15 years as a Certified Pharmacy Technician she sought a career change as a dental technician. She successfully applied for a position in a dental office and gave two-week's notice with the pharmacy.

However, the position at the dental office fell through and she found herself out of work. Devastated, Hope heard about WorkLink and gained access to their services. She was teamed up with her

Career Coach, Jeff, who helped her receive training to become a medical assistant. After successfully completing her clinicals to become a medical assistant, Hope was hired as an ophthalmic medical assistant at Family Vision.

The support of the WorkLink team helped support Hope and her family during a difficult time. Those services not only helped Hope find employment, but guided her to services and training that ultimately helped improve her skills and employment opportunities.

**"I am forever grateful for all of the work and time that my Career Coach Jeff put into my case and how passionate he was to help me."**

**— Hope T.**



The pandemic posed a unique challenge as it increased unemployment dramatically while also limiting traditional programs. WorkLink adapted by holding 5 drive-thru job fairs to connect job seekers with companies and ensure those job seekers have the skills needed to find employment.

## APPALACHIAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Appalachian Development Corporation (ADC) is a nonprofit economic development lender established to support economic development in the Appalachian Region. Business lending programs include multiple financing options. The goal of ADC is to work in conjunction with local lending institutions to structure "gap-financing" loans that improves the applicant's overall debt service requirements. The funding comes primarily from public dollars and the primary purpose is to leverage local investments to maximize the applicant's resources to create jobs for our area.

The ADC manages the Appalachian Loan Fund (ALF) on behalf of the ACOG. The ALF loan pool is capitalized by grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the State of South Carolina. The ALF is a source of low-cost, long-term, fixed-rate financing for businesses whose projects will result in the creation of permanent full-time jobs and leverage private sector investment.

**2**

Loans Closed

**\$597,250**

Loaned

**\$683,282**

Private Capital Leveraged

**36**

Jobs Retained



  
**APPALACHIAN**  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

[www.scacog.org](http://www.scacog.org)