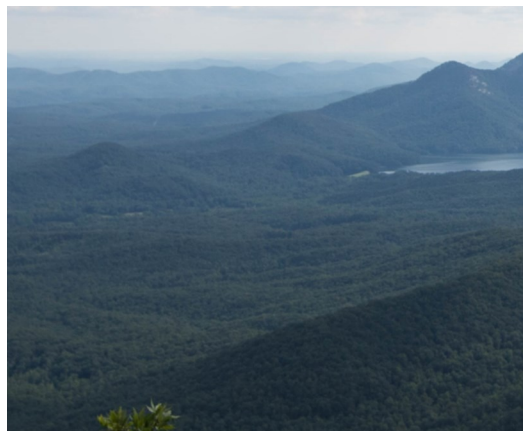


2023-2027

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



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INTRODUCTION

Planning for a **THRIVING,** **RESILIENT** Region

The SC Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG) is a voluntary organization of local governments in the northwest corner of South Carolina, serving a region which includes the counties of Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens, and Spartanburg, as well as the 42 municipalities therein. Since its formation in 1965, the ACOG has served the dual mission of tackling issues of regional significance and providing services to local governments. Economic and community development, transportation, infrastructure development, resource management, aging services, and workforce development are all issues of regional importance in which ACOG takes an active role. At the local level, the agency's services include general administration, technical assistance, training, planning, grant writing & administration, and information & mapping services.

Partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies are essential to ACOG's success. One such partnership is with the US Economic Development Administration (EDA). As one of more than 500 EDA-designated Economic Development Districts throughout the United

States, ACOG is responsible for developing and maintaining a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region. The CEDS serves as a strategic blueprint for economic development and provides a foundation for capacity-building across the region's six counties. In order to maintain eligibility for EDA grants and programs, the CEDS must be rewritten every five years, and performance progress reports must be submitted to EDA annually. The 2023-2027 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the SC Appalachian Region will be in effect from January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2027.

The Appalachian Council of Governments is very appreciative of the support our communities have received from the EDA. Over the last five years, ACOG has helped secure nearly \$24 million dollars in EDA grant funding for 8 projects in the region that will support economic development for years to come.

EDA

Grant Projects

2019

Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority

\$3,700,000 for sewer improvements

City of Walhalla

\$473,000 for water improvements

2020

Powersville Water District

\$2,000,000 for water improvements

2021

Greer CPW

\$2,000,000 for BMW pump station replacement

City of Woodruff

\$2,283,920 for sewer improvements

2022

City of Gaffney

\$3,263,569 for Revolutionary War Discovery Ctr.

GSP International Airport

\$5,232,611 for air cargo infrastructure

SC Technology and Aviation Center

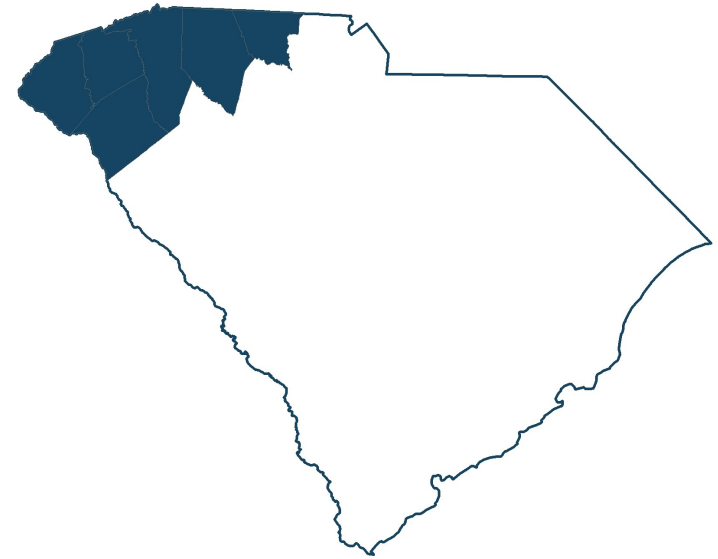
\$5,000,000 for high-speed loop infrastructure

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

LOCATION

The Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG) region is nestled in the lush foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the northwest corner of South Carolina. Located midway between Atlanta and Charlotte along the I-85 corridor, the region is two hours from the two largest business centers in the southeast. Offering new and existing businesses a network of highways and rail lines, proximity to major U.S. airports, access to Inland Port Greer, and proximity to the Port of Charleston, the ACOG region is highly connected, making it a logistically cost effective location for regional, national, and international companies.

The geographic location also contributes to the outstanding quality of life for residents. A temperate climate and frequent sunny days make it easy for outdoor recreation enthusiasts to enjoy the region's numerous rivers, lakes, waterfalls, parks, and trails. Average highs range from 51° to 89°, while average lows range from 31° to 69° with January being the coldest month and July being the hottest. Total days with rainfall average 8 or fewer per month, with March and July having the most total rainfall.



REGIONAL OVERVIEW

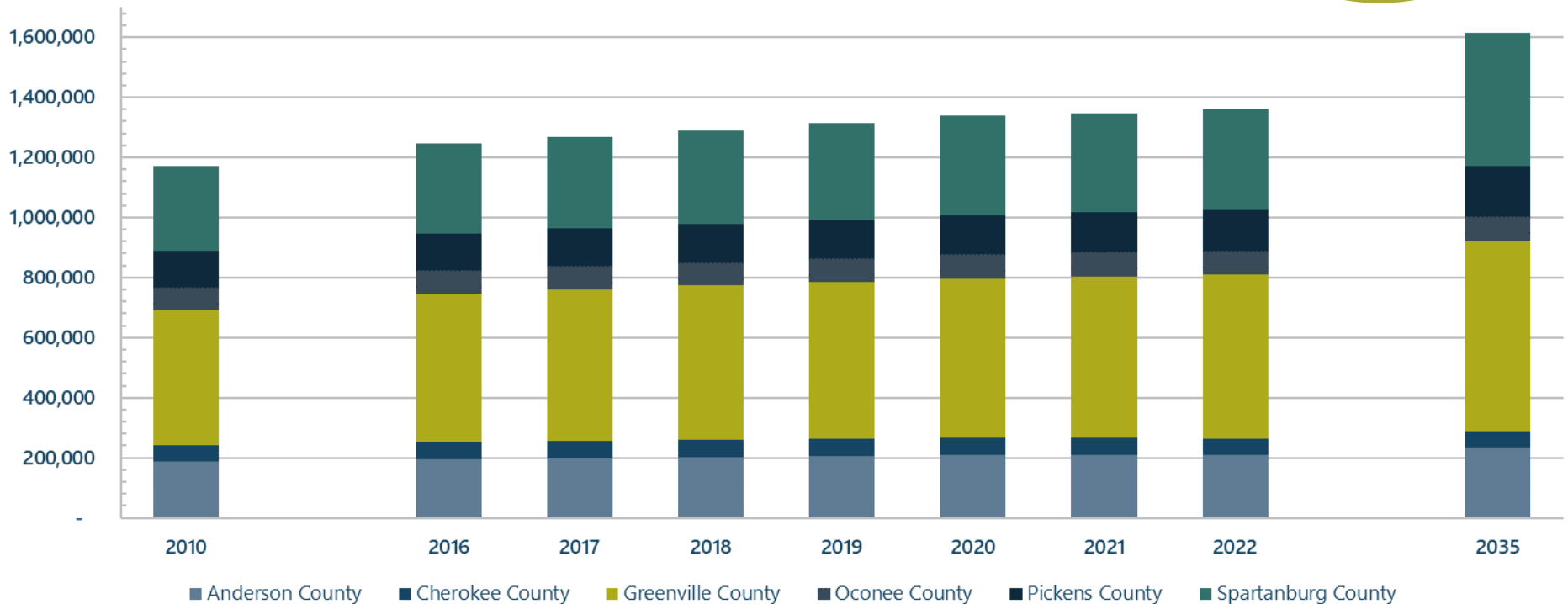
POPULATION and Growth Rates

Currently home to over 1.3 million people, the ACOG region has experienced significant population growth in recent years. Between 2010 and 2022, the region grew 16.3%, adding nearly 191,000 residents. This growth is due to both natural increase and significant inbound migration. The most recent data available from the US Census Bureau (2019) estimates that 53,174 people moved into the region from counties outside the region and 6,731 people moved from abroad in one year alone. This growth is expected to continue as projections from the SC Department of Revenue and Fiscal Affairs predict the region will grow another 19% between 2020 and 2035, bringing the population to 1.6 million.

annual growth
rate in the region

1.29%

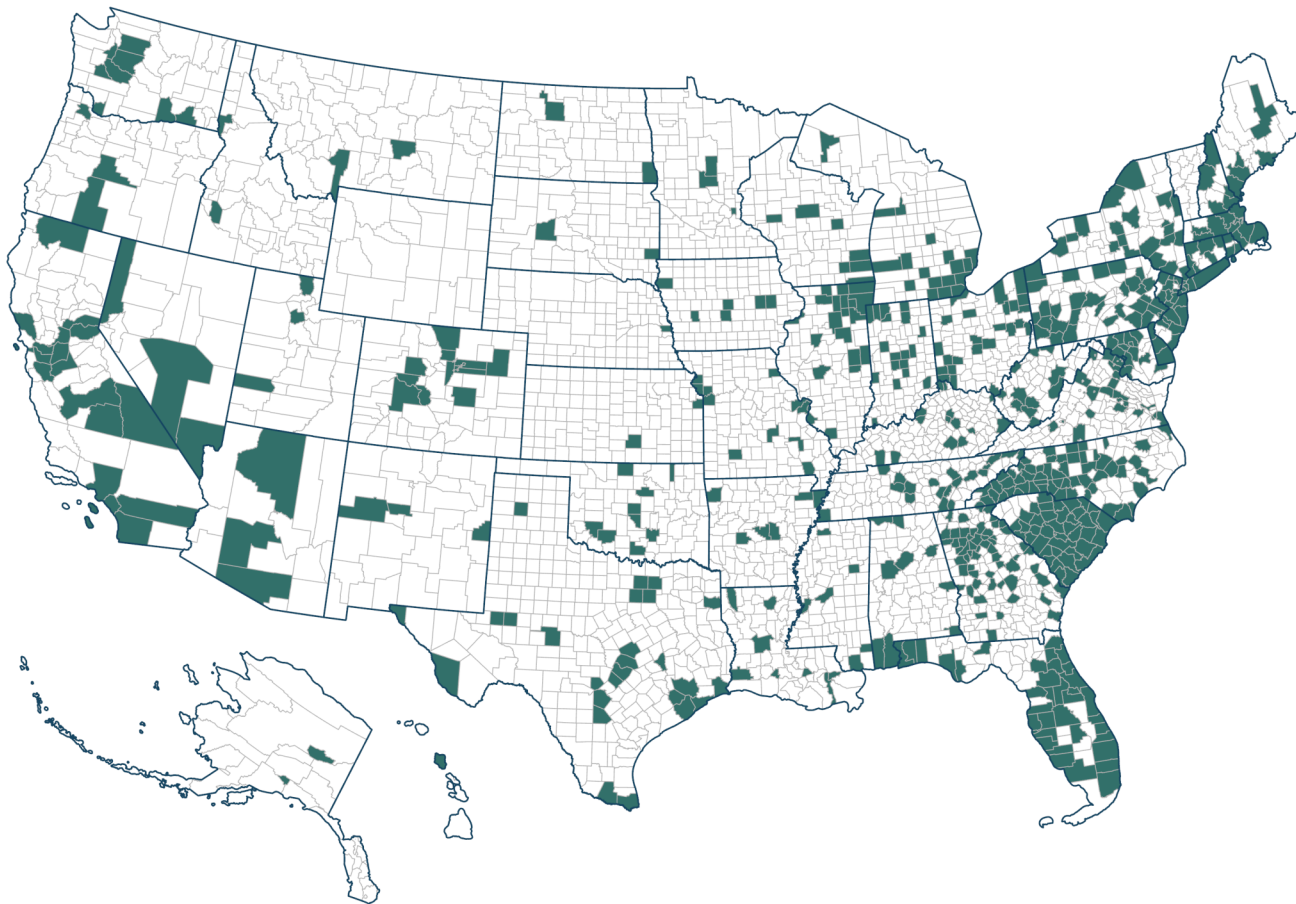
2010 - 2035



REGIONAL OVERVIEW

IN-MIGRATION by US County

ACOG Region In-Migration by County

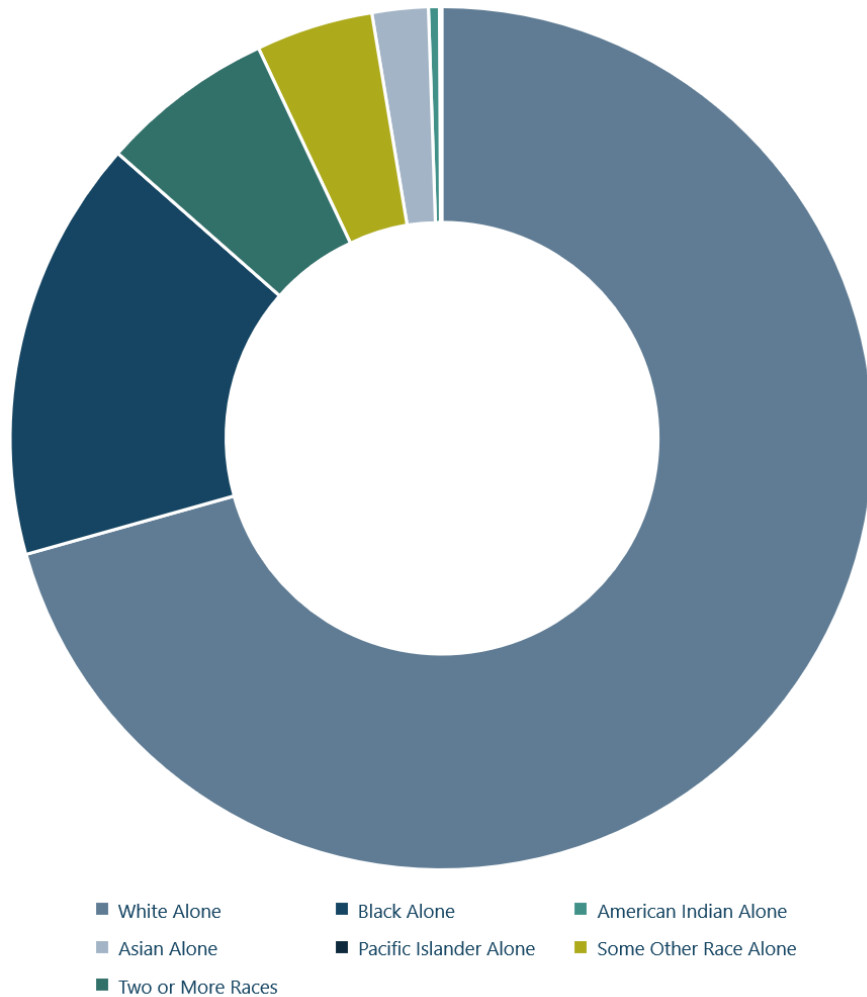


**Over 53,000
people from 622
counties across
the US moved to
the region in
2019.**

Source: US Census Bureau County-to County Migration Flows

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Population by RACE & ETHNICITY



As the region's population has increased, there has been a shift in demographics. The population has grown more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, although it is not as diverse as either the state or the nation. White residents make up 70.6% of the population in the region, Black residents 15.8%, and Asian residents 2.1%. The percentage of people who are multiracial is 6.5%. The Hispanic population of 8.3% is higher than that of South Carolina with Greenville County having the largest percentage of Hispanic residents at 11.1%. Since 2010, the Hispanic population has increased by 45,156 people.



Sources: US Census Bureau, Esri Business Analyst
Photo Credit: Hispanic Alliance

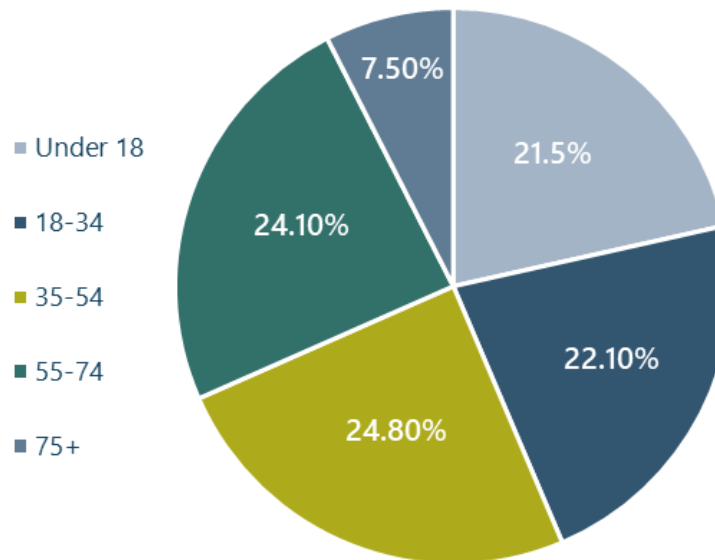
REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Population by AGE

The population in the ACOG region is slightly older than that of both the state and the nation with a median age of 40 years. As is the case at the national level, younger age cohorts are shrinking and older ones are growing as the large Baby Boomer generation ages and birth rates slow. Between 2010 and 2022, the percentage of children under 18 decreased from 23.7% to 21.5% while the percentage of seniors in the region grew from 13.8% to 18.3%. Greenville County has the highest percentage of children under 18 while Oconee County is home to the most residents of retirement age. Not surprisingly, the highest percentage of college-age residents can be found in Pickens County, home of Clemson University.

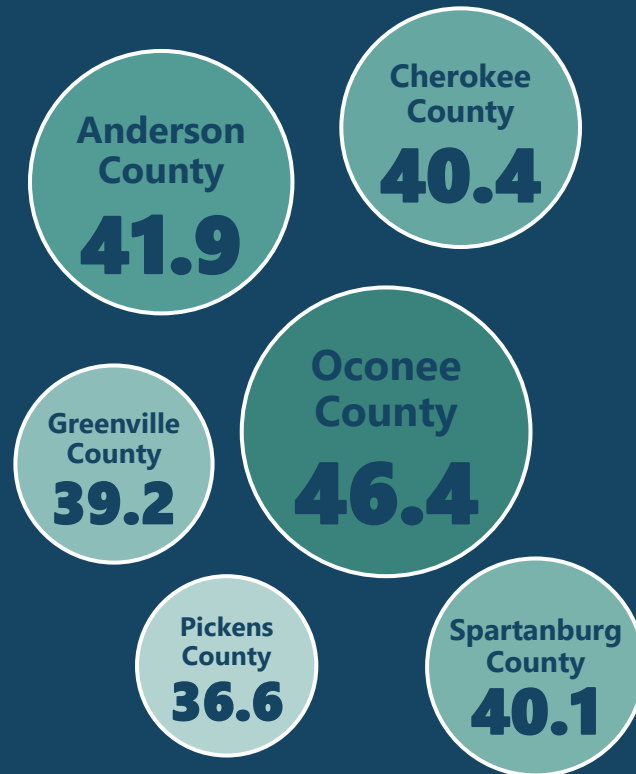
**Prime Working Age
Population (25-54):
37.7%**

**Number of
Seniors 65+:
249,310**



Sources: US Census Bureau, Esri Business Analyst

Median Age by County



Median Age by Region

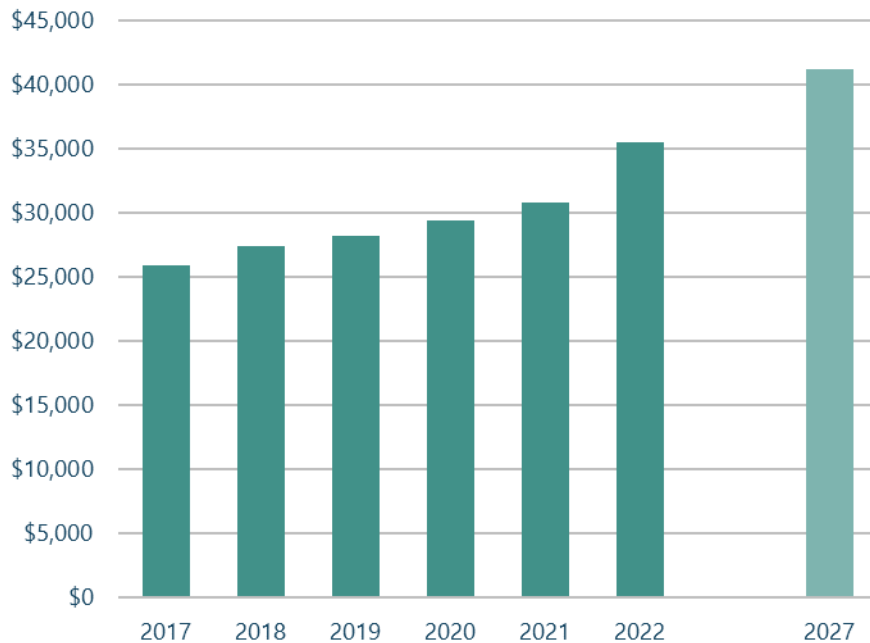


REGIONAL OVERVIEW

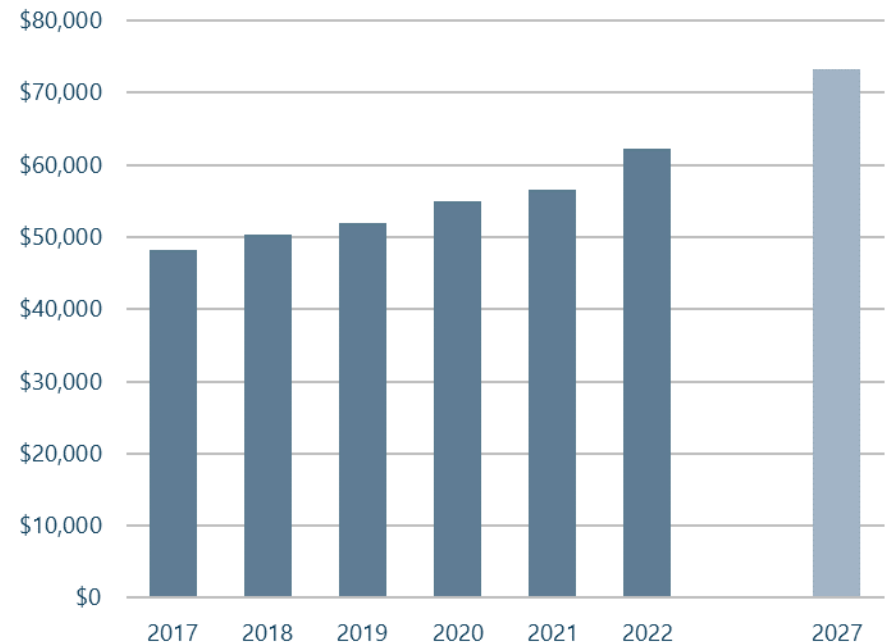
INCOME and Poverty Rates

Per capita and median household incomes continue to rise across the region, increasing 37% and 29%, respectively, over the last five years. In the first quarter of 2022, the average annual salary across all industries in the ACOG region was \$51,762, an increase of more than \$8,000 since 2017. Despite these large gains, incomes still lag behind those of the US as a whole and income disparities across the region are significant with pockets of poverty found in every county. There is a positive trend in the poverty data, however. Between 2016 and 2020, poverty rates in every county in the region decreased as much or more than that of the US. This brought the region-wide poverty rate down to 13.4%, less than 1% above the national rate.

Per Capita Income 2017 –2027



Median Household Income 2017 –2027

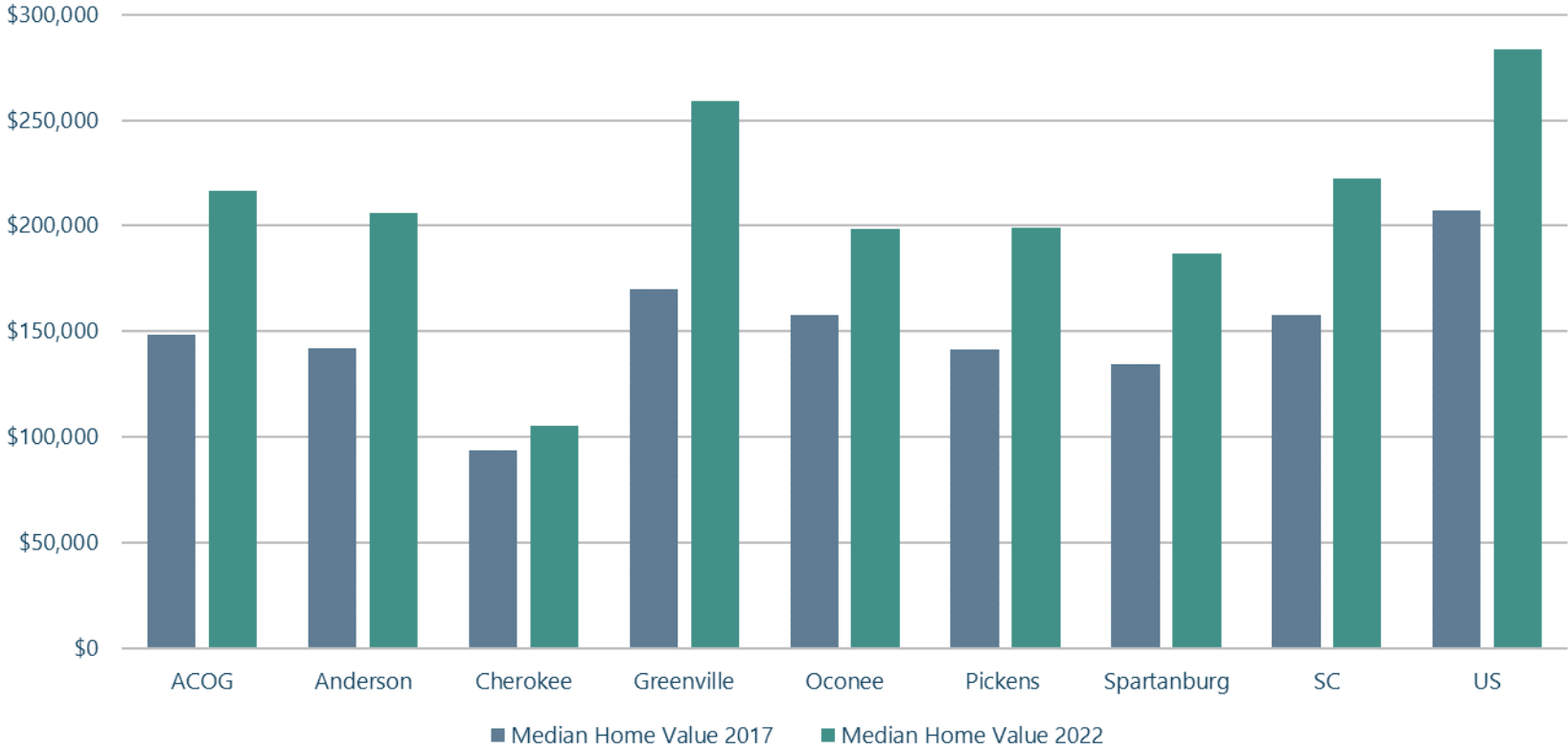


Source: Esri Business Analyst, Chmura JobsEQ

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

HOUSING

Over the last five years, the housing market has surged across the region with median home values up 46% between 2017 and 2022. Greenville County has the region’s most expensive housing market while Cherokee County is the most affordable with median home prices being \$258,855 and \$105,301, respectively. The number of housing units in the region is estimated to be 592,301 representing a 7% increase over 2017. Housing starts have not kept up with demand and that is particularly true for housing units below the median price. The lack of affordable housing coupled with a steep rise in mortgage rates in 2022 has left many potential homebuyers on the sidelines. This is of concern as it limits housing options near employment centers in the region, forcing workers to live further away from their jobs than they may prefer.

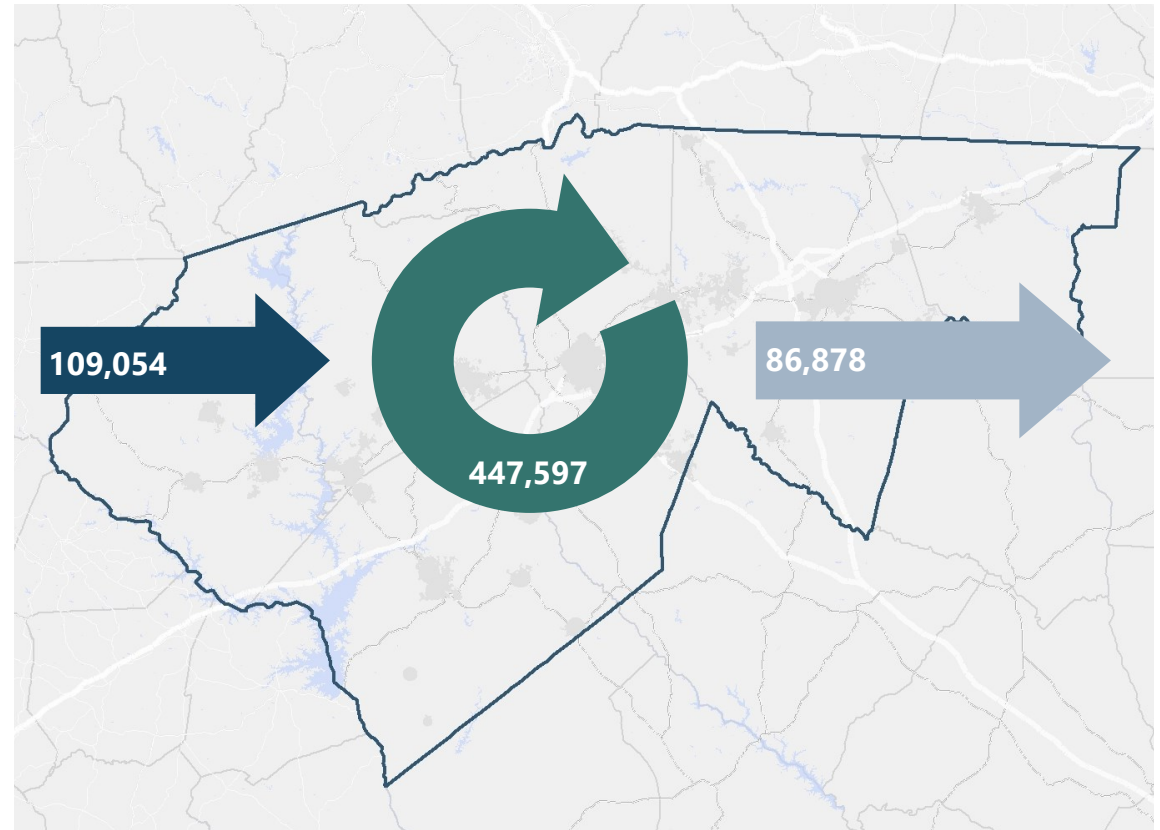


Source: Esri Business Analyst

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

COMMUTING

Commuting is part of modern daily life in the ACOG region. Gone are the days of textile mill villages where residents lived, worked, and shopped within their community. Today, major employers are frequently found along interstates and highways, far away from the suburban residential development that houses most of the population. Workers commute not only within the county they live in, but also among the counties in the region and to different regions altogether. The most recent available data from the US Census Bureau revealed that 83.7% of workers in the region are employed in one of the six ACOG counties with the remainder commuting to counties outside the region. Fortunately, the high quality of jobs in the region draws nearly 110,000 workers from outside the region to help meet employer demand. As the number of commuters in the region has increased, so too have commute times. In 2016, 63.5% of workers reported a commute time of less than 25 minutes, but by 2020, that number had decreased to 60.4%. Although commuters may now be spending more time in the car, average travel time to work is still less in the ACOG region than in SC or the US.



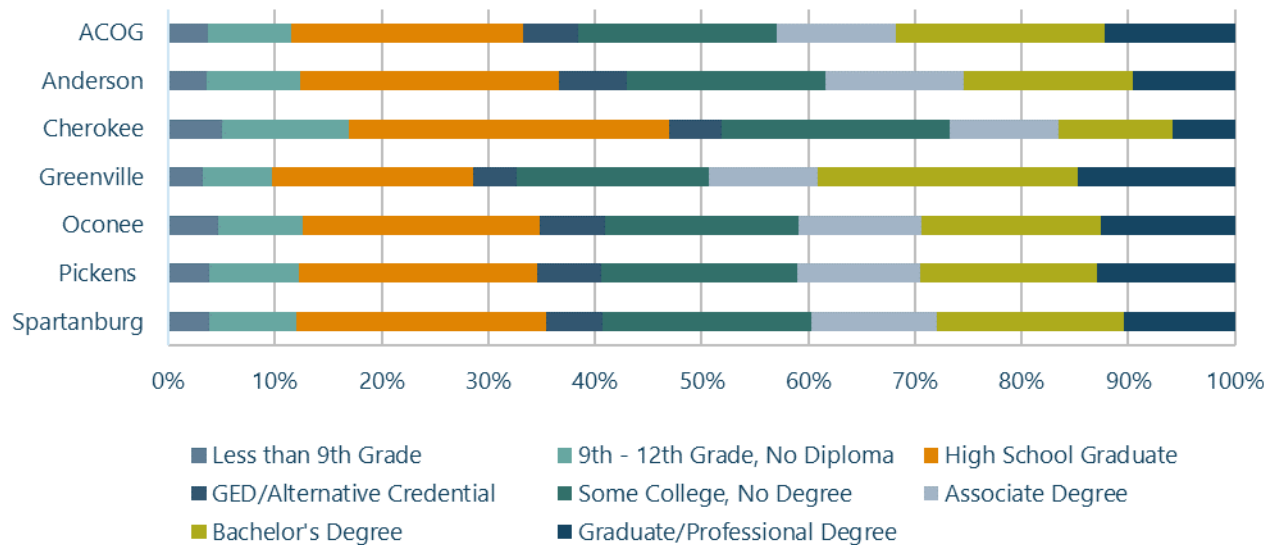
How do workers in the ACOG region get to their jobs? Over 90% travel to work in an automobile. 82% of workers drive alone and 9.4% carpool. Walking (1.3%) ranks third among modes of transportation to work coming in at three times that of workers who take public transportation (0.4%).

Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics and 2016-2020 5-Yr ACS Data

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

EDUCATION

Educational attainment continues to improve across the region, but remains just below state and national averages. Almost 62% of the population 25 and over has at least some post-secondary education and 31.8% has a bachelor's degree or higher, both representing about a 5% increase since 2017. According to research from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, 65% of jobs in the US require education and training beyond high school. This is particularly relevant in the ACOG region as there is a large concentration of jobs that require technical skills and specialized training. Over the next ten years, occupations in the region that typically need a 2-year degree or certificate are expected to grow 1.6% per year, those requiring a bachelor's degree are forecast to grow 1.7%, and occupations typically requiring a postgraduate degree are expected to grow 1.8% per year. While the region is fortunate to have an abundance of institutions of higher education, workforce development success will be predicated upon the alignment of the programs offered and the needs of industry in the region.



Source: Esri Business Analyst



High School Diploma or Higher



Bachelor's Degree or Higher

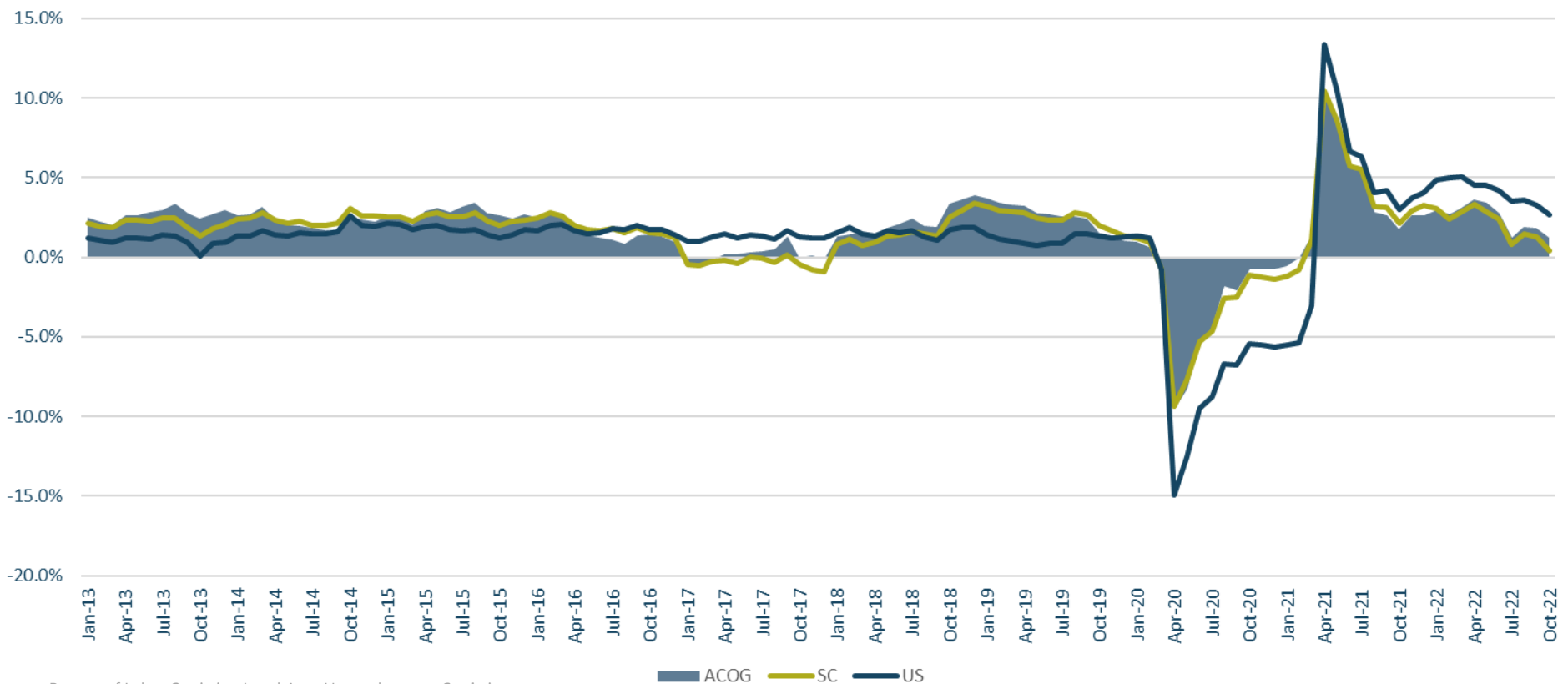
REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Employment Trends

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT

As of the second quarter of 2022, total employment for the ACOG region was 623,833, based on a four-quarter moving average. This is an increase of 3.6% over the previous year.

Year-Over-Year Change in Regional, State, and National Employment Rates by Month: 2012 - 2022



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

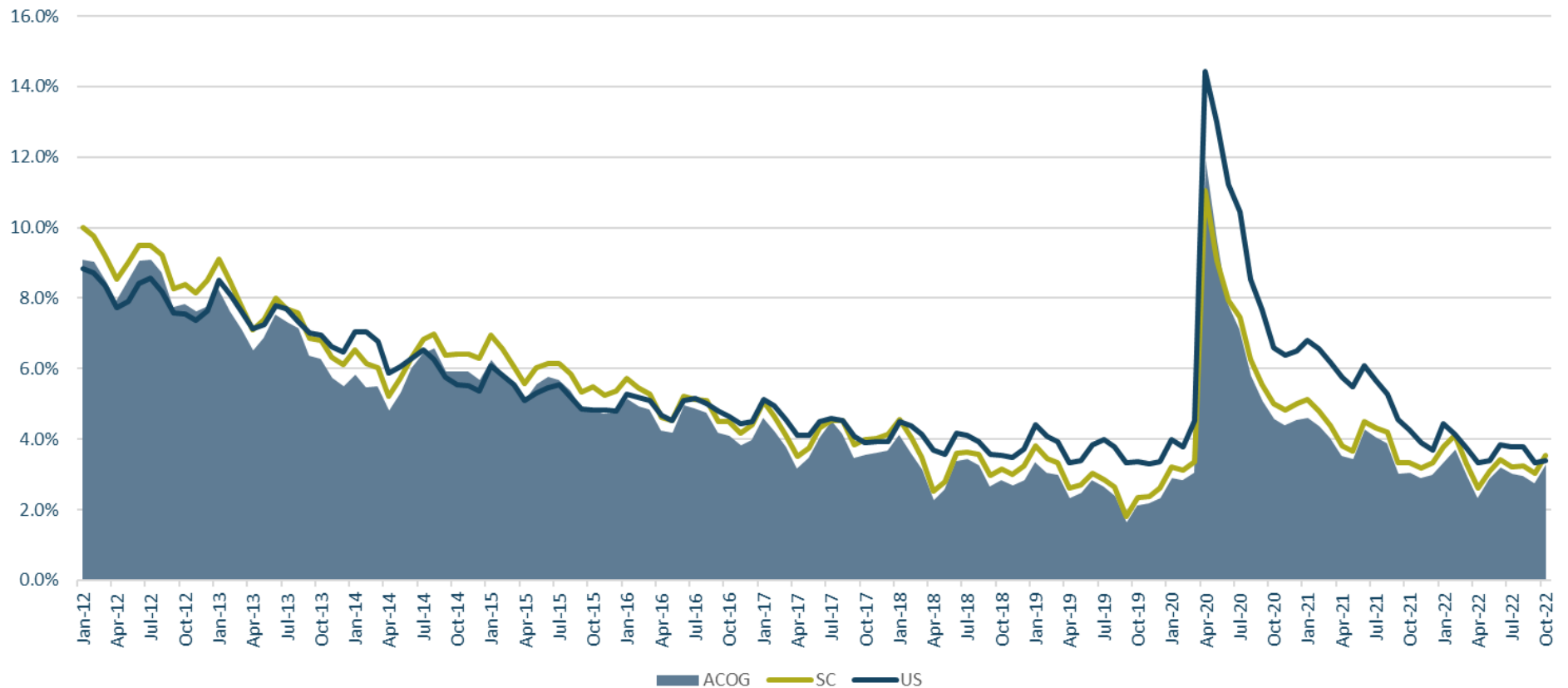
REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Employment Trends

UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate for the ACOG region was 2.8% as of September 2022, down slightly from 3.0% a year earlier and below both the state (3.0%) and the nation (3.3%).

Regional, State, and National Unemployment Rates by Month: 2012 - 2022



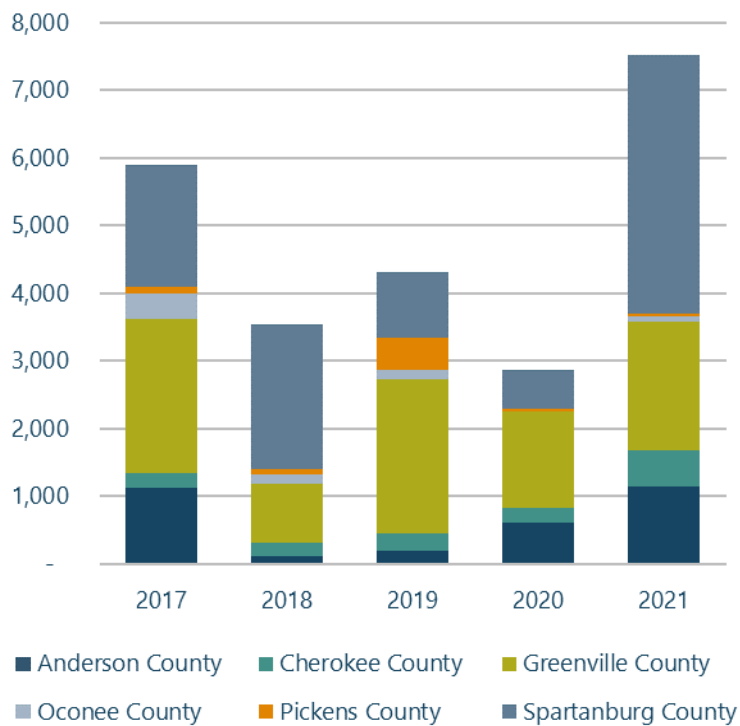
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

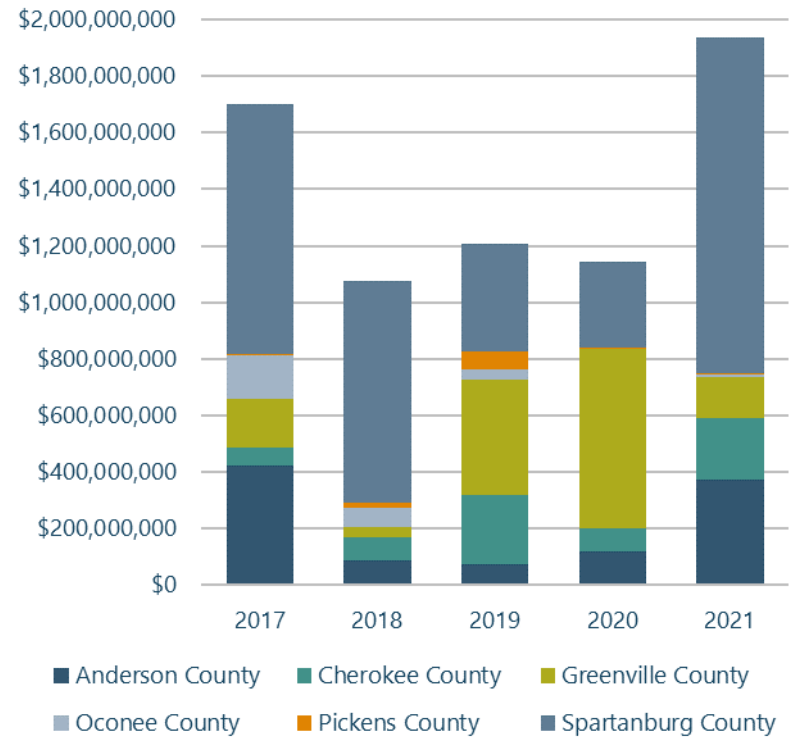
CAPITAL INVESTMENT & JOB CREATION

From 2017 - 2021, county economic development offices announced over \$7 billion in capital investment and the creation of more than 24,000 new jobs across the ACOG region. These announcements came from a mix of existing and new businesses from the US and abroad, and span a variety of industries including advanced materials, aerospace, automotive, biosciences, corporate and professional services, distribution, energy, and food and beverage manufacturing.

Announced Job Creation 2017 - 2021



Announced Capital Investment 2017 - 2021



Source: County economic development offices and the Upstate SC Alliance

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

INDUSTRY

Snapshot

The ACOG region has long been a manufacturing hub, so it is not surprising that the largest industry sector in the region is Manufacturing, employing 98,543 workers. The next-largest sectors in the region are Health Care & Social Assistance (80,485 workers) and Retail Trade (68,375). The sectors with the largest location quotients* in the region are Manufacturing (LQ = 1.95), Administrative & Support and Waste Management & Remediation Services (1.34), and Utilities (1.13).

Sectors in the ACOG region with the highest average wages per worker are Management of Companies & Enterprises (\$105,250), Utilities (\$88,115), and Finance & Insurance (\$86,400). Regional sectors with the best job growth over the last 5 years are Manufacturing (+8,669 jobs), Health Care & Social Assistance (+6,802), and Transportation & Warehousing (+5,631).

Over the next 5 years, employment in the ACOG is projected to expand by 46,464 jobs. The fastest growing sector in the region is expected to be Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation with a +3.9% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Health Care & Social Assistance (+8,206 jobs), Accommodation & Food Services (+7,878), and Manufacturing (+5,255).

**High location quotients (LQs) indicate sectors in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average.*

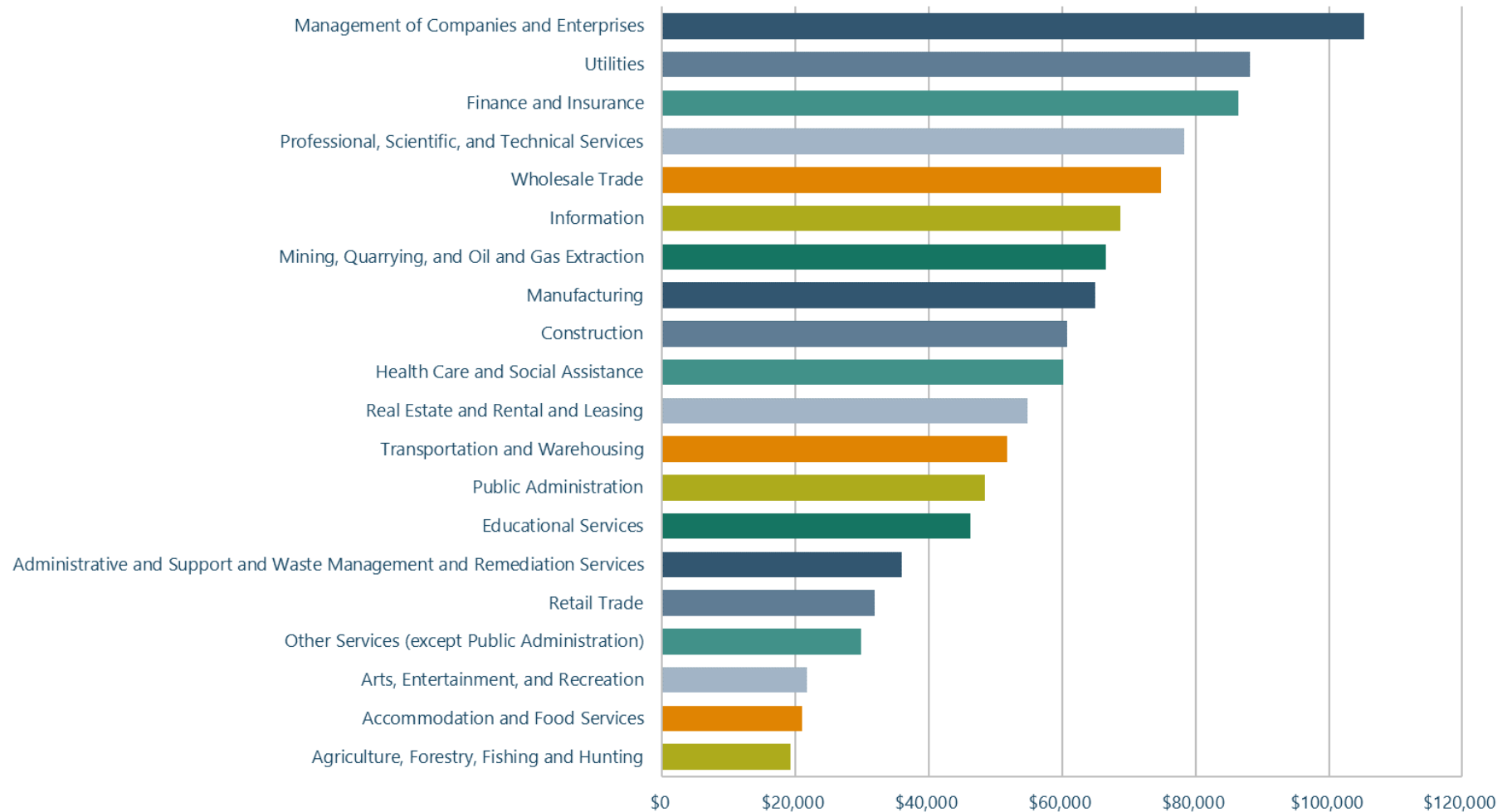


Source: Chmura JobsEQ

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Wages by INDUSTRY

Average Annual Wages by High-Level Industry

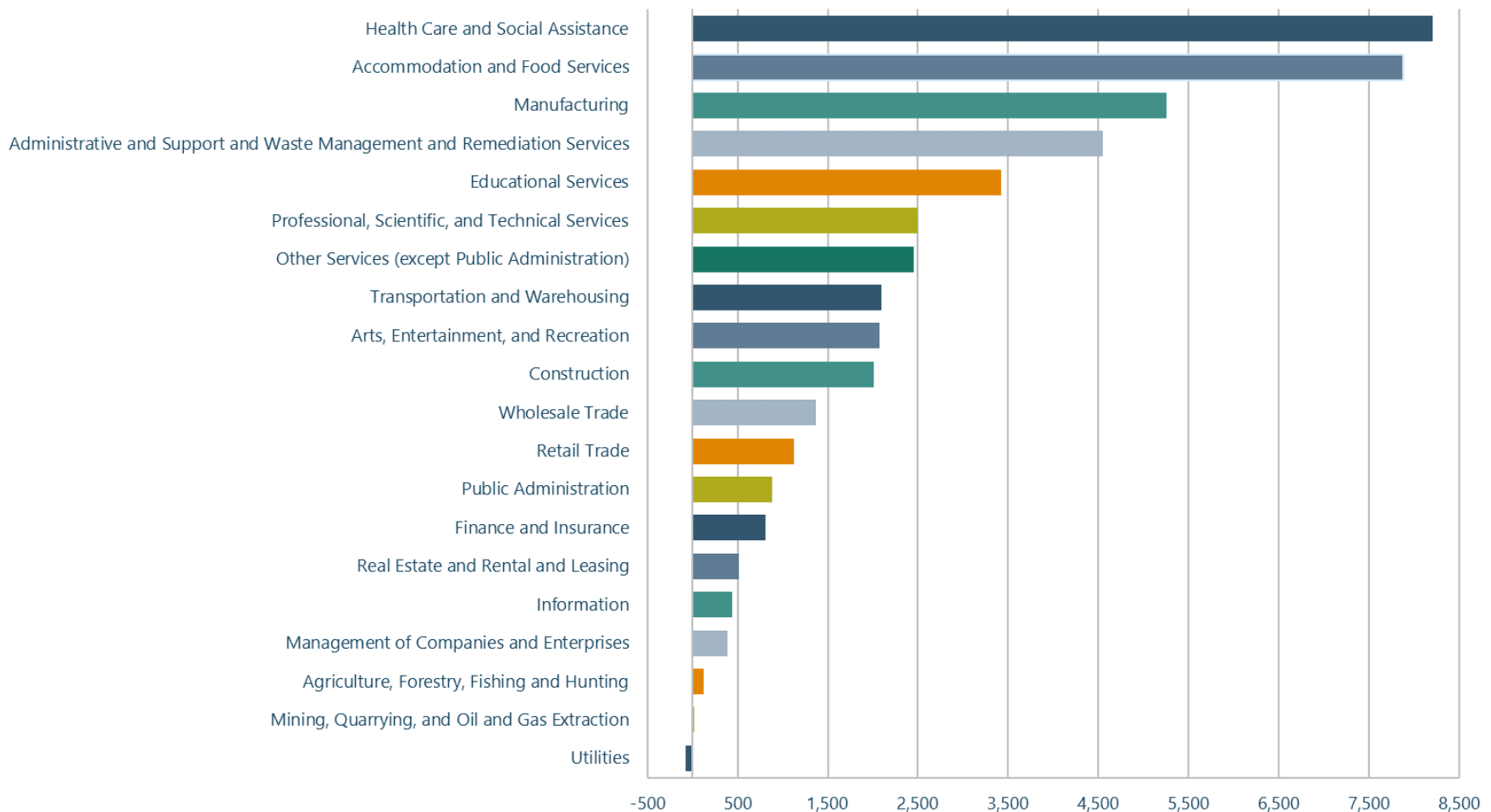


Source: Chmura JobsEQ

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Job Growth by INDUSTRY

Job Growth Forecast by High-Level Industry: 2022-2027



Source: Chmura JobsEQ

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

OCCUPATION Snapshot

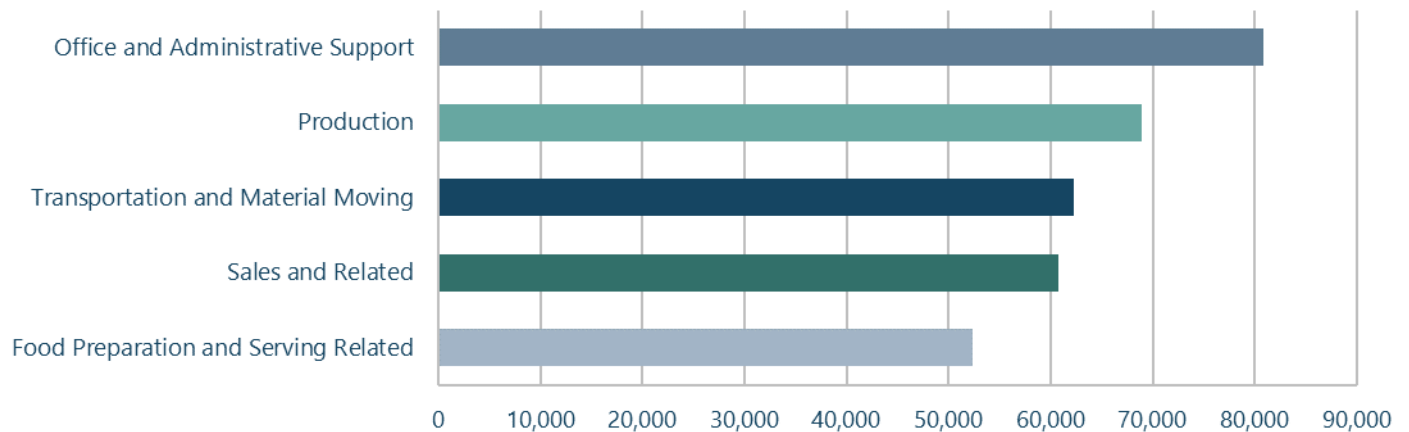
The largest major occupation group in the ACOG is Office & Administrative Support occupations, employing 80,823 workers. The next-largest occupation groups in the region are Production Occupations (68,876 workers) and Transportation & Material Moving occupations (62,294). The major groups with the largest location quotients in the region are Production occupations (LQ = 1.95), Architecture & Engineering occupations (1.26), and Transportation & Material Moving occupations (1.14).

The highest average wages per worker can be found in the following major occupation groups in the ACOG region: Management occupations (\$103,600), Legal occupations (\$94,200), and Architecture & Engineering occupations (\$83,200). The unemployment rate varied among the major groups from 0.9% among Healthcare Practitioners & Technical occupations to 5.6% among Food Preparation & Serving Related occupations.

Over the next 5 years, the fastest growing occupation group in the ACOG is expected to be Personal Care and Service occupations with a +2.8% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Food Preparation & Serving related occupations (+7,197 jobs) and Transportation & Material Moving (+5,013). Over the same period, the highest separation demand (occupation demand due to retirements and workers moving from one occupation to another) is expected in Food Preparation & Serving Related occupations (51,341 jobs) and Office & Administrative Support occupations (45,595).

The region's top 5
occupation groups
employ
52%
of workers

Top 5 Occupation Groups by Employment

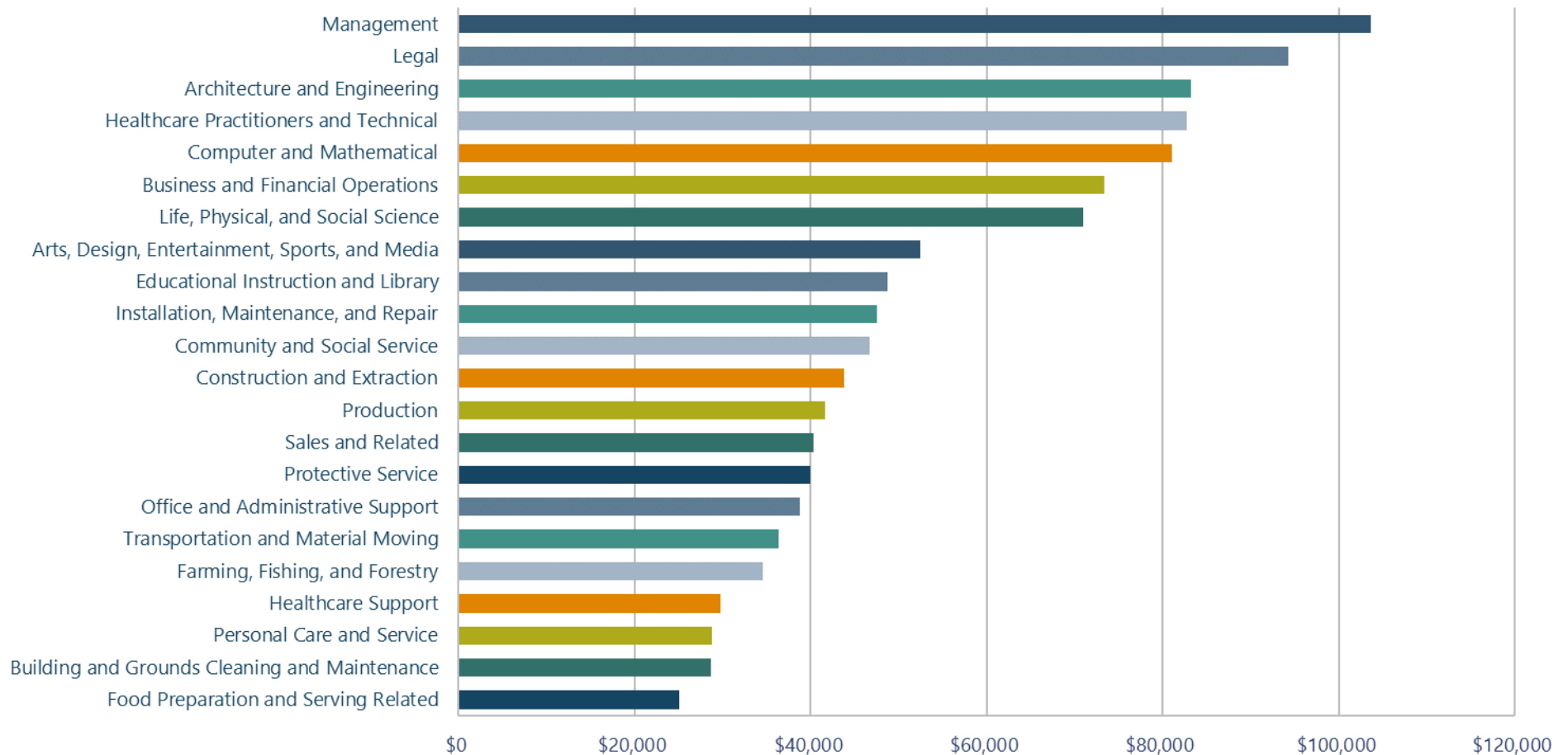


Source: Chmura JobsEQ

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Wages by OCCUPATION

Average Annual Wages by Occupation

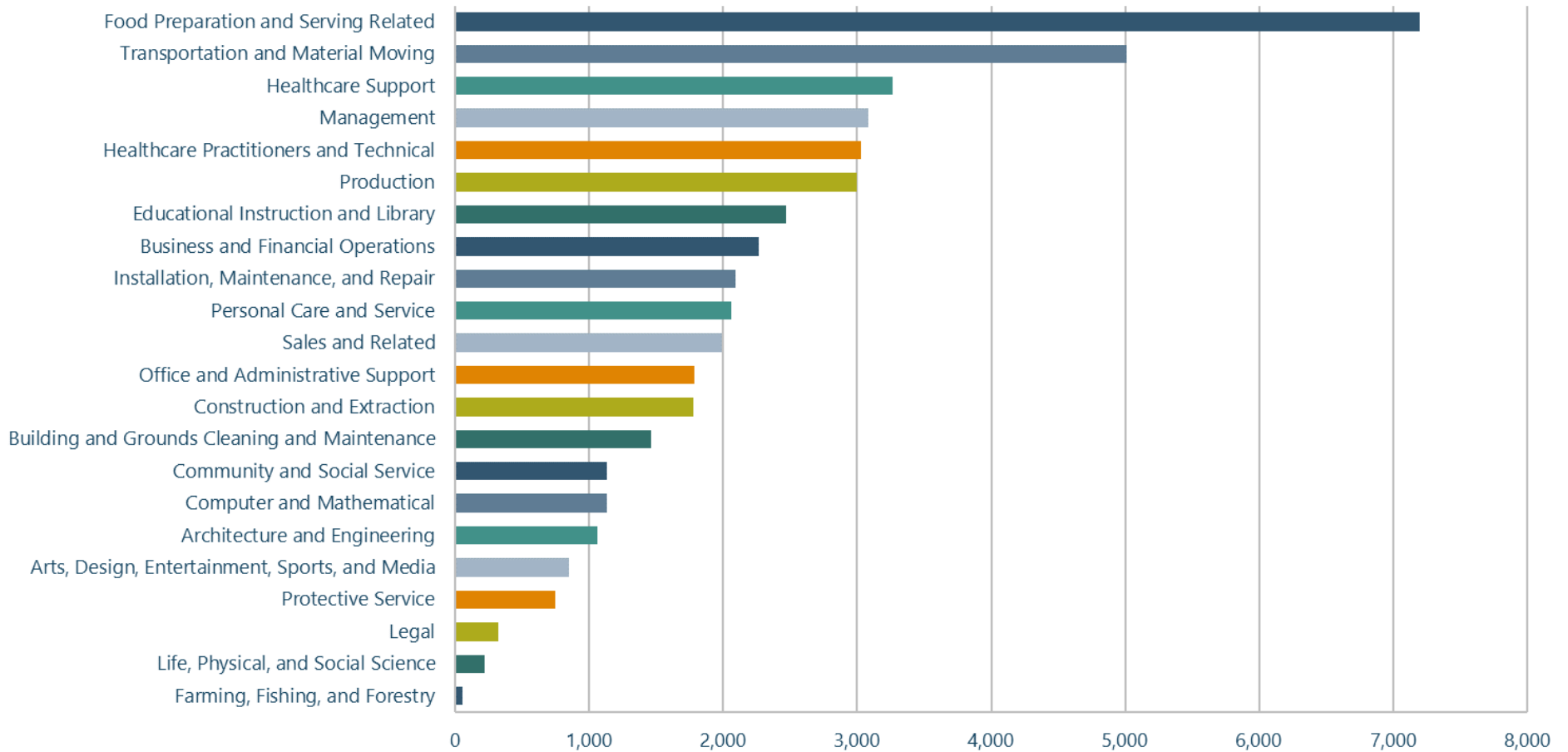


Source: Chmura JobsEQ

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Job Growth by OCCUPATION

Job Growth Forecast by Occupation 2022-2027



Source: Chmura JobsEQ

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

What is Economic Resilience?

Economic resilience, as defined by the US Economic Development Administration, is an area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions to its economic base. Such disruptions may include general economic downturns, downturns in industries critical to an area's economy, or other externalities such as natural disasters, climate change, the loss of a major employer, or a public health emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strategies for economic resilience fall into two general categories: steady-state (pre-incident) and responsive (post-incident). Steady-state initiatives focus on long-term strategies to enable a community to withstand or avoid shocks altogether. These may include:

- industry diversification initiatives that build on the assets of the region and ensure stability when a single industry/cluster is impacted,
- workforce development programs that enable workers to transfer their skills to different industries,
- business retention programs that can adapt to assist businesses with recovery, and
- comprehensive planning efforts that incorporate resiliency strategies and/or align with hazard mitigation or other relevant plans.

Responsive initiatives focus on the community's ability to react to a shock in the short term and immediate recovery needs. These may include:

- engaging in pre-disaster planning efforts to identify stakeholders and define roles and responsibilities,

- developing a system for regular communication monitoring, and updating business community needs for use after or during an incident, and
- creating coordination mechanisms and leadership succession plans for short, middle, and long-term recovery needs.

Understanding the importance of active work towards a more resilient region, economic resilience initiatives are incorporated into the economic development priority areas of this document to the extent possible, particularly around industry diversification, infrastructure, workforce development, business retention, and comprehensive planning. To support our partners in the region in their individual initiatives, ACOG staff will continue to provide technical assistance, planning, and grant-writing services to communities as they engage in their own resilience and hazard mitigation planning.

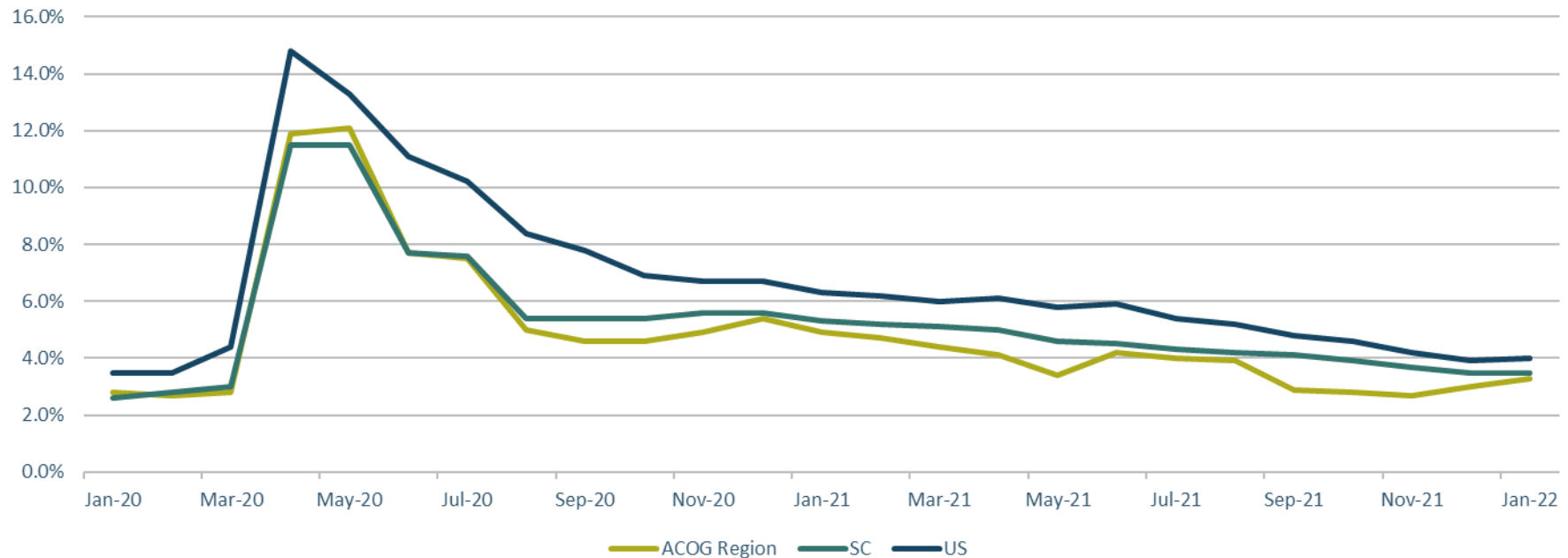


Photo credit: Josh Morgan, USA Today

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the economic landscape of the US in ways that would have been unimaginable at the start of 2020 and the Appalachian region of South Carolina was no exception. The first cases of the virus in SC were announced on March 6th and by the following week, the state's first COVID death was recorded. Governor McMaster acted swiftly and issued a stay at home order on March 19th in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus and limit its impact in South Carolina. At that time, unemployment rates across the region were at or near historic lows. By April, unemployment rates had skyrocketed to double digits as the six counties lost nearly 55,000 jobs. Fortunately, most of the job losses were short-lived. As stay at home orders began lifting in May, people went back to work and employment levels began to recover. By July 2020, unemployment in the region had fallen to 7.5% and fell further to 4.6% by September. For the next twelve months, unemployment continued to fall until returning to pre-pandemic levels in September 2021.

Unemployment Rates: January 2020 - January 2022



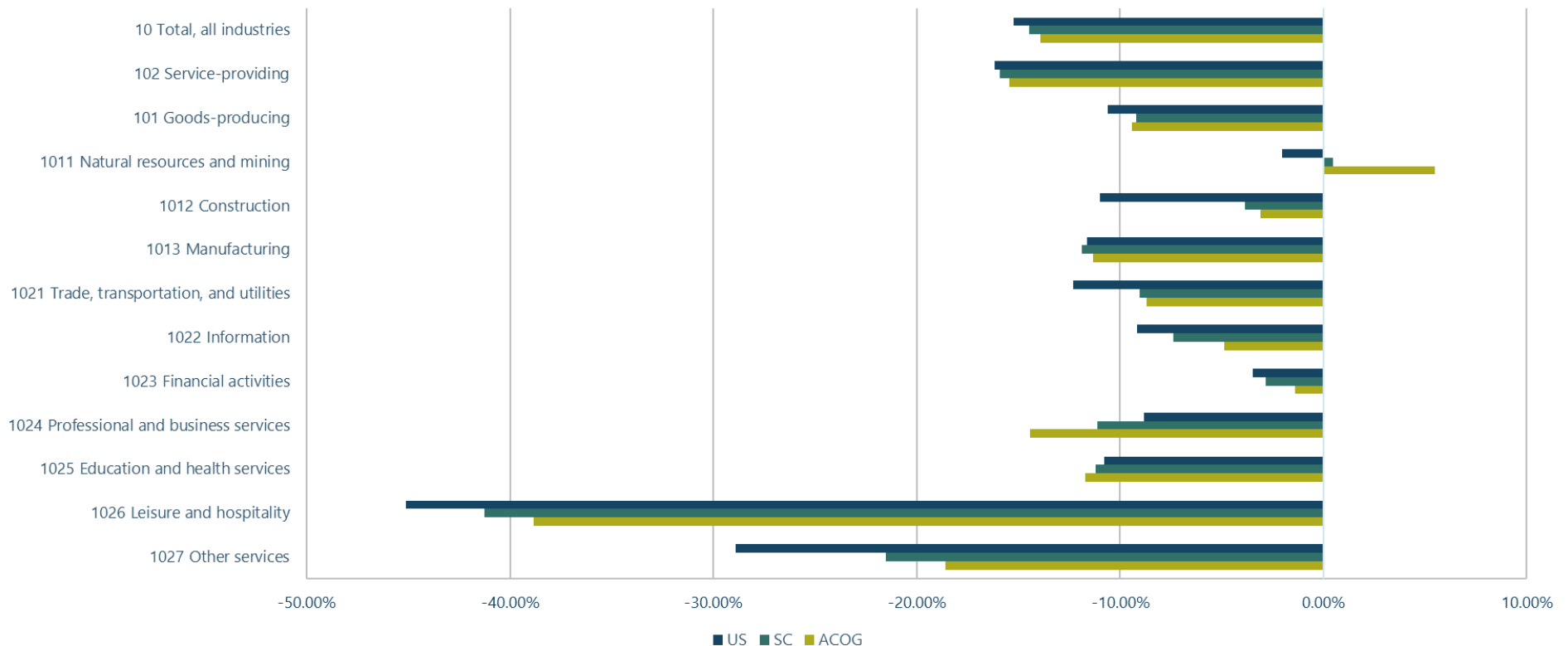
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, cont'd

In order to have a more complete picture of job losses in the region, it is helpful to look at employment by industry. It comes as no surprise that leisure & hospitality suffered the greatest job losses as the industry was hard hit by closures and social distancing policies. Nearly 39% of jobs in that sector were lost in between March and April of 2020. The second-highest losses were seen in the other services industry. This sector is comprised of things such as hair salons, dry cleaners, and automotive repair shops which faced many of the same challenges as businesses in the Leisure & Hospitality industry. By the end of 2021, all industries were at or above pre-pandemic employment levels with the exception of three: 1) Natural Resources & Mining, 2) Leisure & Hospitality, and 3) Other Services.

Change in Employment by Industry: March 2020 - April 2020



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, cont'd

The region’s quick recovery compared to other areas of the country is attributable to multiple factors, among them quick infusion of capital into the small businesses of the region via Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. Established by the CARES Act in March of 2020, the Small Business Administration approved 32,661 PPP loans totaling \$2.25 billion. Of those loans, 28,180 were forgiven resulting in \$2.1 billion dollars in grant funds to small businesses representing all industries in the region. The top five industries by number of loans issued were 1) Health Care & Social Assistance, 2) Retail Trade, 3) Construction, 4) Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services, and 5) Other Services (Except Public Administration). The top five industries by sum of loan forgiveness were 1) Manufacturing, 2) Construction, 3) Accommodation & Food Services, 4) Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services, and 5) Health Care & Social Assistance. The loans in each of these categories accounted for over half of all those approved or forgiven.

Local governments in the ACOG region responded to the COVID-19 pandemic swiftly and aggressively. Communities across the six counties took an active role in recovery efforts and have or are in the process of integrating lessons-learned into emergency operations and hazard mitigation plans. As more resilience measures are incorporated into planning and development activities, the region will be well-positioned when the next disaster strikes.

Paycheck Protection Program Loans Summary

| | Anderson County | Cherokee County | Greenville County | Oconee County | Pickens County | Spartanburg County | ACOG Region Totals |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Number of Loans Approved | 3,794 | 864 | 17,071 | 1,171 | 2,286 | 7,475 | 32,661 |
| Sum of Approval Amount | \$205,961,867 | \$56,686,904 | \$1,277,849,970 | \$69,490,422 | \$138,167,435 | \$504,885,214 | \$2,253,041,812 |
| Number of Loans Forgiven | 3,242 | 698 | 14,884 | 1,028 | 1,999 | 6,329 | 28,180 |
| Sum of Forgiven Amount | \$191,606,457 | \$52,277,604 | \$1,175,761,098 | \$64,345,878 | \$128,954,168 | \$453,200,206 | \$2,066,145,411 |

Data Source: US Small Business Administration

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

SWOT ANALYSIS

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis identifies the factors that are likely to influence the economic success of the ACOG region in the context of both its internal and external environments. Input was provided by economic development professionals across the region and is rooted in their professional experience. The results of the analysis and current, relevant data describing the region were then used to develop the six economic development priorities and implementation strategies found in the next section.

Strengths to Build On

- Robust manufacturing and engineering workforce
- Workforce training resources and programs
- Diverse industries and clusters
- Vibrant downtowns
- International business community (FDI)
- Leadership
- Business friendliness
- Entrepreneurial ecosystem
- Infrastructure connectivity
- Low utility costs
- Low taxes
- Low unionization rate
- Geographic location
- Climate
- Natural and cultural resources

Opportunities to Leverage

- Public investment in industrial sites
- Embrace innovation
- I.T. workforce growth through education and recruitment
- Expand workforce analysis capabilities
- Infrastructure investment and improvements
- More incubator spaces, entrepreneur-focused initiatives
- Inter-university collaboration to expand entrepreneurial activity
- Industry 4.0
- State and local incentives for smaller projects with higher wages
- EV and smart cities concepts

Weaknesses to Address

- Infrastructure
- Lack of publicly-owned land for long-term industrial development
- Worker shortages in critical professions (e.g., education, I.T.)
- Lack of zoning to control/direct growth
- Lack of development-ready industrial sites
- Little to no venture capital in the region
- K-12 education system
- Labor force participation
- Economic prosperity not inclusive
- Public transportation system
- Inadequate workforce housing
- Diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI) and environmental, social & governance (ESG)

Threats to Mitigate

- Unplanned growth
- Large utility users that strain infrastructure
- State tax reforms that add to local fiscal burdens
- Non-competitive wages in some industries
- Exodus of innovative companies
- Loss of talent
- Increasing traffic
- Rising housing costs
- Pressure of population growth on land prices and availability
- Resident opposition to any growth
- Development pressures on natural resources

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

PRIORITY ONE

Foster economic prosperity by supporting the growth of regional clusters and encouraging local asset-based economic development.

For the ACOG region as a whole to prosper, economic development strategies at both the regional and community levels are essential. This can be accomplished in part by 1) supporting the growth of the six regional clusters of advanced materials, aerospace, automotive, biosciences, corporate & professional services, and food & beverage manufacturing, and 2) the development of economic development plans to leverage the unique assets of communities in the region. To that end, the following strategies are suggested:

- Market the region to both out-of-state and international companies who would contribute to the success of the existing clusters in the region.
- Pursue strategies to build on cross linkages and convergences among clusters.
- Support research and development initiatives that target regional clusters.
- Support development of and funding for business retention and expansion programs in each county to ensure continued success of existing industry.
- Ensure available business incentives are aligned with local and regional economic development goals.
- With county and regional economic developers, routinely review and update cluster analyses.
- Encourage asset-based economic development planning throughout the region and support those efforts with grant-writing and technical assistance.
- Identify and leverage unique assets in the region.

INDICATORS

- Number of economic development announcements
- Amount of announced capital investment
- Number of announced jobs
- Layoffs and closures
- Job growth by industry & cluster
- Amount of foreign direct investment

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

PRIORITY TWO

Develop a highly-skilled workforce through education, training, and talent recruitment.

Talent shortages are among the biggest threats to successful economic development in the region. To address the current and future needs of businesses in the region, it is critical to support workforce development, retention, and recruitment. The following strategies represent a multi-pronged approach:

- Foster collaboration among workforce development entities, institutions of higher education, and private industry.
- Encourage apprenticeship and certificate programs to upskill existing workers and expand opportunities for economic mobility.
- Identify opportunities for partnerships with neighboring economic development districts/organizations and workforce development entities to enhance the skills of and resources for workers throughout the laborshed.
- Support innovative strategies to develop and retain talent to support industry clusters and other high-growth industries.
- Develop a comprehensive list of workforce development resources and tools available in the region and identify opportunities to improve navigation thereof for both employers and workers.
- Encourage industry engagement with students, parents, and educators in K-12 schools.
- Identify barriers to workforce participation and develop solutions to expand access to employment.
- Support and amplify talent attraction marketing campaigns.
- Assist employers with identifying opportunities to attract nontraditional workers.
- Strengthen partnerships between businesses and non-profit organizations engaged in workforce development.

INDICATORS

- Labor market data
- Educational attainment
- Post-secondary enrollment
- Number of apprenticeship and certificate programs
- Per capita and median household income
- Poverty rates
- Implementation of solutions to barriers to workforce participation

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

PRIORITY THREE

Build, maintain, and enhance physical infrastructure to support economic development success.

Physical infrastructure capacity plays an important role in regional economic development success. The ability to attract and retain both companies and people is largely predicated on the presence of adequate infrastructure. The following strategies will help address both existing and future infrastructure needs:

- Ensure critical infrastructure is adequate for existing and future industrial, commercial, and residential development.
- Modernize aging infrastructure that diminishes service capacity.
- Support multi-modal transportation planning initiatives that facilitate the movement of both people and goods.
- Improve existing highways and interchanges to decrease congestion and increase safety.
- Facilitate coordination among MPOs in the region.
- Support projects at Inland Port Greer and GSP International airport to increase the capacity for the movement of goods.
- Identify gaps in utility coverage for future large-scale industrial and office development and proactively plan for extension of service.
- Identify gaps in broadband and digital infrastructure and support initiatives to extend and improve coverage.
- Encourage construction of resilient infrastructure that has built-in redundancies and is less vulnerable to disruption.
- Identify opportunities for cross-jurisdictional coordination among service providers.

INDICATORS

- Amount of new public investment in water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure
- Amount of grant funding awarded for infrastructure projects
- Changes in level of service for major thoroughfares

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

PRIORITY FOUR

Cultivate a thriving, inclusive entrepreneurial community that encourages small-business development, innovation, and emerging industries & technologies.

Small businesses are an anchor of the regional economy. It is critical to support increased capacity building for entrepreneurship to ensure the pathway to starting a business is clear and that innovative entrepreneurs are able to operate in a supportive environment. To that end, the following strategies are recommended:

- Encourage creation or expansion of entrepreneurial support programs to assist with market/business development, incubator development, mentoring, and supply-chain resiliency.
- Educate local elected and public officials about the importance of entrepreneur-friendly communities, highlighting the impact of small business.
- Identify and expand programs or strategies that increase access to capital for historically underserved communities.
- Engage the business community in entrepreneurial programs to create opportunities for entrepreneurs in the region to solve industry problems.
- Promote region-wide connectivity among entrepreneurial support programs and between those programs and the entrepreneurial community.
- Support business incubator, landing pad, and co-work spaces throughout the region.

INDICATORS

- Number of small businesses
- Number of new patents
- Number of business incubator, landing pad, and co-work spaces
- Number of minority-owned businesses

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

PRIORITY FIVE

Improve economic development capacity by increasing the quality and quantity of development-ready sites and buildings for businesses of all sizes.

While many factors play into a business' location decision, regions with a healthy inventory of available sites and buildings are better positioned to recruit new businesses and help existing businesses expand. The following strategies aim to increase the supply of sites and buildings across the region:

- Encourage public-private partnerships to facilitate product development.
- Market available sites to developers both within and outside the region.
- Provide grant-writing and technical assistance for due diligence studies, infrastructure extensions/improvements, hazard mitigation projects, etc. to increase speed to market.
- Assist local government partners with identification of potential industrial and office sites and redevelopment opportunities.
- Identify potential incubator and co-work space development opportunities.
- Research best practices for public investment in industrial development to share with interested local governments.
- Encourage the preservation of land for future industrial and commercial development.

INDICATORS

- Number of sites and buildings marketed by economic development organizations
- Number speculative buildings constructed
- Acres of land zoned for industrial uses
- Number of grant applications prepared for due diligence studies, infrastructure extensions/improvements, and hazard mitigation projects

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

PRIORITY SIX

Create healthy, vibrant, resilient communities that increase the overall quality of life in the region.

The economic development success of the ACOG region would not be possible without the communities that make it a desirable place to live and work. The following strategies aim to plan for future growth, advance health and wellness, enhance quality of life, and ensure opportunities for all:

- Encourage local and regional land use planning that balances economic, social, and environmental considerations.
- Identify and share best practices for compact development from other high-growth regions with limited land availability.
- Support affordable housing programs to address the workforce housing shortage and overall housing costs.
- Promote access to quality healthcare and identify and address healthcare deserts.
- Increase access to healthy foods by supporting community gardens, farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), and similar initiatives.
- Support programs to allow seniors to age in place and remain active in their communities.
- Encourage inclusive community and economic development.
- Facilitate opportunities for collaboration among planners, emergency management professionals, and stakeholders and encourage coordination of plans.

INDICATORS

- Number of planning initiatives
- Number residential building permits
- Affordable housing initiatives
- Food deserts – change over time
- Number of farmers markets and CSAs
- Healthcare deserts – change over time



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