



# Economic Development Strategy Overview

Prepared for the  
Laurens County Development Corporation

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# Introduction

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The following Economic Development Strategy Overview serves as a coordinating document to advance economic growth and prosperity in Laurens County, South Carolina. The planning process included an evaluation of the community's economy, development of a vision and goals, and the creation of an action plan, all guided by broad stakeholder input. During the process, the consulting team at EY (formerly Avalanche Consulting) engaged nearly 600 stakeholders through interviews; focus groups; a community survey; and workshops with a 28-member Steering Committee, the Laurens County Council, and a broader community leaders group. With the Laurens County Development Corporation (LCDC) serving as the county's lead economic development organization, this Strategy aims to align its work with multiple partner organizations and together elevate economic growth and prosperity in Laurens County to its highest-ever level.

## **Laurens County on the rise**

The post-recession years have been good for Laurens County. Its forward-thinking investments in product development and workforce training paved the way for the creation of more than 3,600 manufacturing jobs and a 38% growth in total payroll. Even today, the prospect pipeline remains full while many neighboring counties are starting to see a decline.

Laurens County has the foundation for a promising future. It is growing jobs. It is well-positioned geographically as part of a fast growing and world-renowned region. It has excellent education and training resources, with Presbyterian College, Piedmont Technical College and two school systems on the rise. The historic downtowns of Clinton and Laurens are primed for revitalization.

Despite these assets, the stakeholder input portion of this strategic planning process revealed that many residents do not share feelings of pride and prosperity about the community. Stakeholders voiced concerns that population growth is stagnant, there is a shortage of retail and restaurants, public schools perform poorly, poverty is high, and housing options are limited. The research indicates that there is a lack of awareness about job opportunities in Laurens County. Also, there is a common belief that leaders across Laurens County are not working together as effectively as the community wants.

## **An unexpected challenge**

The COVID-19 pandemic struck towards the end of this strategic planning effort. Its long-term impact to Laurens County and the global economy is unknown at present, but we have certainly seen this pandemic magnify the weaknesses in many communities, like economic disparity and weak broadband infrastructure. It has also provided an opportunity for companies, communities and their supporting organizations to showcase their strengths, most notably in their ability to innovate, collaborate and advocate.

At this point in time, most all elements of the current strategy remain relevant though certain tactics will increase in urgency. Other tactics should be adapted slightly to reflect new normals in social distancing. Most importantly, both the pandemic and this strategy have demonstrated the importance of working together to ensure prosperity for all.

# Introduction

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## **The path forward**

Undoubtedly, Laurens County has plenty of reasons to celebrate, but there is much work to be done. This strategy calls for the community to maintain its strong commitment to growing the manufacturing base while encouraging additional support for small business and innovation. To drive business growth and prosperity for all residents, the community must also continue developing its talent pipeline and expand efforts to bring discouraged workers back into the workforce. Growth will also require prioritizing infrastructure needs in roads, water and sewer, and broadband while also emphasizing placemaking investments that spur vibrancy in the historic downtowns. However, none of this can happen without a strong base of leaders willing to work together for the greater good of Laurens County and a community that is willing to invest in its own future.

It must be noted that the Economic Development Strategic Plan is not the sole responsibility of the Laurens County Development Corporation (LCDC). Successful implementation will require close collaboration among numerous organizations and individuals. Economic developers, educators, elected officials, business leaders, nonprofit leaders, and many others must all work in concert to achieve the vision outlined in this plan. The result will be a prosperous Laurens County where all residents and industry thrive.



# About the strategic planning process

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This Economic Development Strategy for the Laurens County Development Corporation (LCDC) identifies top opportunities to increase growth and prosperity in Laurens County over the next five years. While this plan was created by the LCDC, its initiatives are meant to be implemented by many stakeholders across the county. Working together, leaders and residents can build on the community's strong economic momentum to create prosperity for generations to come

## Phase 1: Discovery

The Discovery phase of the project began with an in-depth review of existing studies and information to ensure this strategy is cohesive with current city and regional initiatives. The consulting team then conducted a thorough evaluation of the region's economic and demographic conditions, including benchmarking against the Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin, SC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), and South Carolina. The team also evaluated the county's current target clusters to determine which industries are best suited to catalyze growth in Laurens County. In addition to examining quantitative data, the consultants collected qualitative data via interviews, focus groups, steering committee meetings, a community survey, leadership meetings, and a workshop with the Laurens County Council. Based on the results of this research, the consulting team developed a description of top opportunities, a SWOT Analysis, and new target industry clusters to become the focus of future economic development efforts.

## Phase 2: Strategy

The Strategy begins with a shared vision for economic development, followed by goals that support the vision, and a strategic framework for structuring implementation. Thoughtful and creative recommendations are layered under each goal of the Strategy, along with best practices from similar communities to inspire activities going forward. The Strategy concludes with an Implementation Plan that recommends specific projects and tactics for the years 1-5 of implementation, including assigned project team members, timeframe, and performance metrics. Profiles of the new target clusters were also created to pinpoint strengths and opportunities within each of the identified clusters.

### Phase one: Discovery

- Information Review
- Economic & Demographic Scan
- Stakeholder Input
- SWOT Analysis
- Target Cluster Evaluation

### Phase two: Strategy

- Best Practices
- Vision, Goals & Strategic Framework
- Recommendations
- Target Cluster Profiles
- Implementation Plan
- Performance Metrics

## Chapter 2

### Strategic framework

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# Summary of input

This Economic Development Strategy serves as a coordinating document to drive economic growth and prosperity in Laurens County, South Carolina. Strengthening economic competitiveness cannot be accomplished by one organization alone – it depends on collaboration and coordination among many stakeholders. This Strategy, championed by the Laurens County Development Corporation, aims to align the work of multiple organizations that together can increase economic growth and prosperity in Laurens County.

This Strategy consists of a multi-level strategic framework:

- ▶ A vision statement that provides the long-term, overarching focus for the community's economic development activities. The vision should remain in place for decades to come.
- ▶ A mission statement specifies the LCDC's role in achieving the shared vision for economic development.
- ▶ Three goals that support the vision statement, as illustrated to the right. Accomplishing these goals will help the community realize its vision. While this is a five-year strategy, the goals may or may not be achieved within five years. Those that are not attained should continue to be goals for Laurens County's next five-year strategy.
- ▶ Each goal is accompanied by priorities and specific tactics. Tactical projects are designed to be completed in the next five years. However, they may evolve over time as the market changes and new opportunities surface. The ability to update tactical projects while keeping the goals and vision in place allows the strategy to be flexible without losing sight of the county's top priorities.

The report concludes with an implementation plan that contains more detail on timing, responsibilities, and performance metrics. The performance metrics extend beyond traditional measures of jobs and capital investment. The quality of jobs created is as important as job quantity, and sheer job creation should not be the single measure (or goal) of economic development. Local economic development efforts must focus on attracting and retaining primary industries that infuse new wealth into the economy and support wage growth. The holistic metrics recommended in this strategy provide Laurens County with a more well-rounded view of the the community's economic health and competitiveness.

Three goals of this strategy



Shared economic prosperity,  
rich in livability  
and business opportunity

# Vision and mission statement

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An economic development vision provides a foundation to inspire and guide specific goals, tactics, and investments made in the community. A vision statement is founded in the existing culture and assets of a community while also providing an aspirational view of the future. The feedback from Laurens County stakeholders heard throughout the strategic planning process inspired the following vision statement for the community:

## **Vision**

Laurens County is building a future of shared economic prosperity,  
rich in livability and business opportunity.

The revised LCDC Mission Statement is meant to clearly articulate the organization's role in achieving the community's vision for economic development. The LCDC supports the vision for shared economic prosperity through its direct and supportive efforts to drive primary industry growth, all in a spirit of greater collaboration.

## **LCDC Mission**

The Laurens County Development Corporation builds prosperity for all residents  
through collaborative efforts that drive business growth in primary industries.



# Priorities and strategies

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The following is an overview of Laurens County's economic development strategy for the next five years. Successful implementation of this strategy will lead the community in achieving its vision for shared economic prosperity.

## **Lift up Laurens County**

Laurens County grows in pride and prosperity

- Enhance efforts to build prosperity and the talent pipeline.
- Amplify leadership with a spirit of collaboration and shared vision for the future.
- Unite Laurens County in celebration of its numerous achievements and assets.

## **Invested in growth**

Laurens County is proactive and invested in its future growth potential

- Prioritize plans for current and future infrastructure needs.
- Boost quality of life and tourism through strategic placemaking investments.
- Position Laurens County as a prime location for residential development.

## **Strengthen all business**

Laurens County Thrives with a Diversity of Industry and Small Business Opportunities

- Support the needs of Laurens County's growing industrial base.
- Focus business attraction efforts in the target clusters.
- Improve resources for growing local businesses and ideas.

# A team approach

The field of economic and community development has evolved over the last half century, but in its purest of form, economic development is the process of creating jobs and investing capital in primary industries.

The emergence of economic development in the 1970s began as trophy hunting with large, capital-intensive projects driven primarily by incentives and cost savings. Then, in the 2000s, economic development groups began adding programs to grow their economies locally through business retention and expansion, as well as programs to support entrepreneurship. Since the end of the recession, jobs requiring technical skills have grown exponentially, leading to a world where talent is king. In the past eight years, economic developers have begun adding talent attraction campaigns and various workforce initiatives to their scopes of work while continuing existing efforts around business attraction, retention, and expansion, and entrepreneurial support.

Today, communities are better understanding the linkages between business attraction and talent attraction, development, and retention. This has resulted in a new, modern form of economic development which recognizes that people and business are inexorably linked. The goal is to create communities where both people and business can thrive. Strong partnerships are required to achieve this.

Economic development has and will continue to be a team sport. But nowadays, the team has grown to address the broader needs of business and residents. As this team has grown in numbers and the issues in complexity, collaboration, cooperation, and communication among various stakeholders in every community have become more important than ever.

The LCDC is at the center of this new form of economic development. As explained on the next page, its role is not to play all positions but, instead, to lead the community in its journey to prosperity for all.



Economic development 4.0  
Prosperity for all

Economic development 3.0  
Talent is king

Economic development 2.0  
Grow local

Economic development 1.0  
Trophy hunting

# The role of the LCDC

The traditional missions of economic development entities - chambers of commerce and economic development organizations - do not always match the needs of communities today. Each spoke of the modern wheel of economic development illustrated on the previous page requires collaboration and support from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to succeed. Economic development organizations should set the vision for economic prosperity, lead efforts directly related to their missions, and support the efforts of other community partners by convening stakeholders, advocating for shared goals, and providing thought leadership and market intelligence.

First and foremost, the LCDC will remain the driver of initiatives to grow primary jobs in the community. But as it relates to this strategy, the LCDC is also the convener, activator and communicator for the priorities outlined herein.

These roles can be explained as follows:

- ▶ **Owner** - The LCDC is the owner of this economic development strategy. Its job is to communicate the priorities of the plan to the community and to report progress accordingly.
- ▶ **Activator** - The LCDC is proactive in driving the implementation of the priorities outlined in this strategy. Its role is to convene stakeholders and activate the task forces necessary to move forward.
- ▶ **Connector** - The LCDC is plugged into networks and resources from a local to global level. It is the LCDC's responsibility to leverage this strength to connect stakeholders and task force members to the networks and resources vital to the goals outlined in this strategy.
- ▶ **Communicator** - The LCDC has a strong platform for communications, and this strategy calls for the organization to expand its reach with partners from across the county. The LCDC should continue to drive content with the help of partners while also encouraging shared successes.



# Chapter 3

## Economic development strategy



# Lift up Laurens County

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## Goal: Laurens County grows in pride and prosperity

Laurens County's recent economic development achievements have been remarkable. The significant increase in jobs and investment over the past five years alone has led to a 38% growth in total payroll in the county. In addition to a growing economy, Laurens County has many assets in place for a promising future, including excellent education and training resources, historic downtowns primed for revitalization, and recent investments into the local health system. These are only a few examples of local success. However, despite all its assets and achievements, Laurens County was overwhelmingly rated "average" on almost every measurement by residents in the community survey.

Community pride and prosperity have seemingly escaped many residents in Laurens County. Some of this may be attributed to the fact that nearly 20% of residents in Laurens County live in poverty. Additionally, it is difficult to share positive local stories without a daily newspaper, with weak internet service, and with the county's expansive geographic area. Residents also point to perceived tensions among the municipalities in Laurens County as a barrier to improving its success.

From our experience, communities that work collaboratively towards a shared vision have a much higher rate of success than those that do not. This strategy is a step toward uniting the community and its leadership in a shared vision for economic prosperity. The goals in this Pride & Prosperity section focus on strengthening opportunities for prosperity for all residents, building pride for the community, and driving leaders and residents to collaborate and celebrate more together.

### Sample metrics

- Unemployment rates
- Labor force participation rates
- Household Income
- Poverty rates
- Student enrollment in special programs - CTE classes, dual enrollment, internships, apprenticeships, etc.
- Website traffic (number of visitors, length of stay, click-through rates)
- Social media engagement (followers, mentions)
- Ambassador and influencer engagement on social media
- Positive media mentions

### Sample leaders & partners

- Laurens County Development Corporation
- Laurens County Chamber of Commerce
- Main Street Clinton, Laurens & Fountain Inn
- Upstate SC Alliance
- Education & workforce partners at all levels
- Nonprofits such as United Way, YMCA, etc.
- Media partners
- City & County Governments
- Local employers
- Residents

# Lift up Laurens County

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## **Priority: Enhance efforts to build prosperity and the talent pipeline.**

More than 1,200 jobs have been created in Laurens County over the last five years, which would lead many to assume the population was booming and the people were prosperous. However, this is not the case in Laurens County. To build prosperity and the talent pipeline, the community must unite around efforts to develop its local talent pipeline, raise awareness of local career and training opportunities, and ensure all residents have a path to prosperity.

1. Invest in developing the talent pipeline
2. Build greater awareness for career & training opportunities
3. Develop & promote resources to bring prosperity to more residents in Laurens County

## **Priority: Amplify leadership with a spirit of collaboration and shared vision for the future.**

Residents in Laurens County are spread across 715 square miles, making it the 16th largest county by area in South Carolina. Communities within Laurens County feel more disconnected from each other than physical distance explains. Community stakeholders expressed overwhelming concern about competition between municipalities hindering overall progress. Breaking down these silos and aligning leadership around this strategy is a positive first step toward elevating Laurens County.

1. Unite leadership toward a shared vision of prosperity
2. Develop a pipeline of future leaders committed to increased collaboration

## **Priority: Unite Laurens County in celebration of its numerous achievements and assets.**

A community's residents can and should be its greatest cheerleaders. In Laurens County, however, it is outsiders rather than residents who tend to have a higher opinion of the community. Efforts to increase awareness for Laurens County's numerous assets and achievements are the first steps to generating a stronger sense of pride among residents.

1. Engage businesses & residents in celebrating achievements in Laurens County
2. Develop a dedicated strategy to market economic development efforts internally
3. Engage businesses & residents in celebrating achievements in Laurens County



# Invested in growth

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## Goal: Laurens County is proactive and invested in its future growth potential.

Laurens County is an excellent place for business, but residential developers are hesitant to build because they feel the county has not invested enough in its roads, schools, other infrastructure, and resident-oriented assets. Communities that are not willing to invest in themselves have a much harder time getting outside organizations, such as developers, business owners, and residents, to invest in the community. Under the leadership of LCDC and its partners, Laurens County should begin to invest and vocalize support for the infrastructure and amenities needed to make the community even more attractive to both businesses and residents.

Prioritizing projects and finding funding options can be a big challenge when trying to advance infrastructure investments. This strategy addresses both issues by recommending different funding options for community investments and outlining projects or areas that were most often cited by stakeholders as in need of investment.

Although different strategies for funding and projects are recommended, it is imperative that LCDC and its partners collectively vocalize support for the needs of Laurens County. The Invested in Growth goals also address the importance of actively communicating the real-life impacts of these investments. Once outsiders see that Laurens County is proactive about investing in its infrastructure, quality of life, business climate, and residents' well-being, obtaining outside investment will become easier.

### Sample metrics

- Population growth
- Housing growth - both new homes and multifamily
- Median mortgage payment and rent
- Tax revenues
- Number of new small businesses such as shops or restaurants

### Sample leaders & partners

- Laurens County Development Corporation
- Laurens County Chamber of Commerce
- Main Street Clinton, Laurens & Fountain Inn
- The Laurens County Trails Association
- City & County Governments
- Laurens County School Districts 55 and 56
- Nonprofits such as United Way
- Utilities
- SC Economic Developers' Association
- SC Manufacturers Alliance
- Upstate SC Alliance & Upstate Chamber Coalition

# Invested in growth

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## **Priority: Prioritize plans for current and future infrastructure needs.**

Laurens County's geographic location and booming manufacturing industry poise the county for tremendous business and population growth. Proper planning and proactive investments in infrastructure will make it easier for new businesses or housing developments to come to fruition quickly. This priority makes specific recommendations about what kinds of infrastructure improvements will be most advantageous for current and future residents and businesses, while also providing recommendations for funding and methods to gain community support.

1. Develop a countywide infrastructure agenda to guide future investments
2. Capitalize on opportunities that support future growth in Laurens County

## **Priority: Boost quality of life and tourism through strategic placemaking investments.**

A lack of quality of life amenities was mentioned by stakeholders as a significant, perhaps even the most significant, issue facing Laurens County. Tens of thousands of workers are leaving Laurens County for work or commuting through the county, but few stay to eat or shop. Making Laurens County a more desirable place to live and recreate is key to both retaining and attracting residents - which is critical to attracting businesses. There are several existing quality of life amenities that residents enjoy, such as Lake Greenwood, cultural offerings from Presbyterian College, and historic downtown, but work must be done to improve these existing amenities while also investing in new ones that make the county more attractive to all types of residents.

1. Support efforts to increase growth & vibrancy in the historic downtown areas
2. Encourage investment & increase awareness of attractions across the county

## **Priority: Position Laurens County as a prime location for responsible residential development.**

Limited housing availability and high costs restrict a community's ability to grow its population. Data on building permits and the average age of the housing stock highlights this issue in Laurens County. Stakeholders in the community felt that a lack of housing was especially detrimental to the county's efforts to attract young talent - noting there are few nice rentals or smaller houses more suitable for first-time buyers or early career professionals. It is imperative that Laurens County leadership drive a concerted effort to position the county as a prime location for responsible residential development.

1. Gather people, research, and resources to determine housing needs
2. Incentivize certain residential developments, especially workforce housing or multifamily in key areas
3. Invest in a dedicated marketing effort to position Laurens county for responsible residential development

# Strengthen all business

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## Goal: Laurens County thrives with a diversity of industry and small business opportunities.

The textile industry was once the backbone of Laurens County's economy and way of life. Like many of its sister communities in the Upstate, the closure of textile mills decades ago left Laurens County struggling to reestablish its economy and identity. BMW's arrival in the region in the early nineties laid the foundation for a resurgence of manufacturing. Today, manufacturing is the leading economic driver in Laurens County, representing more than 36% of total employment. Manufacturing has also added 3,600 jobs to the county since the end of the Great Recession and is the county's highest-paying industry.

But manufacturers of all sizes face extreme challenges as they shift to Industry 4.0 and smarter manufacturing practices. These companies will need strong community partners to ensure they have the talent, infrastructure, and resources to make this transition. Laurens County must stand ready to convene partners and connect these industries to the resources they need to succeed.

Moreover, manufacturing alone cannot lead Laurens County to economic prosperity. The vibrancy of this community must be restored with the help of small business and a renewed spirit of innovation. Innovation is key to growing a pipeline of future makers and problem solvers. Similarly, small businesses will enhance the county's livability by providing shopping, dining, and other amenities sought by talented individuals.

The proposed action items in Strengthen All Business describe how best to support existing businesses, how to focus attraction and investment efforts to optimize resources, and how to support a more innovative and entrepreneurial economy such that the community can thrive with a greater diversity of industry and opportunity.

### Sample metrics

- Capital investment in target clusters
- Jobs created in target clusters
- Business expansions (jobs and capital investment)
- Prospect inquiries, leads, visits by target industry
- Enrollment in target-related education & training programs
- Average wage growth
- Small & mid-sized business growth and share of overall employment
- Small Business Development Center (SBDC) inquiries

### Sample leaders & partners

- Laurens County Development Corporation
- City of Clinton EDC
- Upstate SC Alliance
- SC Department of Commerce
- Education & Workforce Partners
- Main Street Clinton, Laurens, and Fountain Inn
- Small Business Development Center
- SC Office of Innovation (SCRIBBLE)
- Existing Small Business Owners
- Piedmont SCORE
- SC Economic Developers' Association
- SC Manufacturers Alliance
- Upstate Chamber Coalition

# Strengthen all business

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## **Priority: Support the needs of Laurens County's growing industrial base.**

Manufacturing is the leading economic driver in Laurens County, representing more than 36% of total employment. Manufacturing has also added 3,600 jobs to the county since the end of the Great Recession, and it is the county's highest-paying industry. Supporting the needs of this ever-expanding, ever-changing industrial base is essential to future economic success in Laurens County. Existing businesses in this industry not only represent potential growth through expansion activity, but they can serve as the strongest ambassadors when recruiting future companies to the area. Supporting existing industry means sharing vital information and resources, being their advocate on the local, state, and national level, and raising awareness of their contributions within the community.

1. Continue to be the conduit of useful resources and connections for industry
2. Vocalize support for the needs of industry at the local, state and national level
3. Increase awareness for the presence and impact of manufacturing in Laurens County

## **Priority: Focus business attraction efforts in the target clusters.**

South Carolina, and particularly the Upstate, have been hotbeds of manufacturing growth over the last decade. To continue this path of success, Laurens County should focus future economic development efforts towards the identified target clusters of automotive, engineered materials, and food manufacturing. These clusters closely align to the targets identified and globally marketed by the South Carolina Department of Commerce and the Upstate SC Alliance. Focused efforts in these target areas will not only help maximize resources in marketing but will also better optimize talent development efforts and the planning and development of critical infrastructure needs.

1. Elevate infrastructure needs in support of target industry growth
2. Develop a pipeline of talent in support of the target clusters
3. Conduct strategic efforts to globally market Laurens County to the identified clusters

# Strengthen all business

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## **Priority: Improve resources for growing local businesses and ideas.**

Growth in Laurens County has not been shared by businesses of all sizes. Large industry has succeeded, strongly due to the support of the LCDC and the foresight of Laurens County to invest in product and workforce development. Meanwhile, small business and entrepreneurs have struggled due to a lack of dedicated and coordinated resources. Investment resources needed to grow local businesses and ideas are critical to the vibrancy and future economy of Laurens County. Small businesses play an integral role in the revitalization of historic downtowns. Additionally, the community's manufacturing prowess could inspire a generation of innovators creating the next big thing if they have the guidance and support to take an idea to market.

1. Align and expand resources for growing local business
2. Establish outlets for nurturing innovation in the community
3. Increase recognition and connection for small business and ideas

## Chapter 4

### Target cluster identification



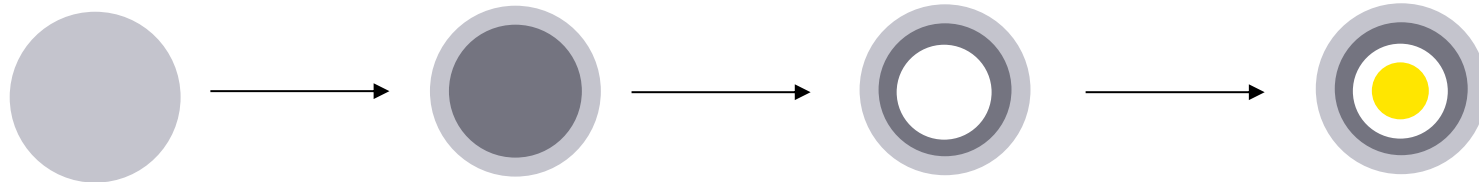


# Target cluster identification

## Target cluster recommendations

Target identification is not a perfect science. Numerous factors inform business location decisions. As a result, there is no single mathematical formula for determining the eligibility of potential target industries for a community. Through a process of data analysis, a review of state and regional targets, and conversations with stakeholders, a set of target clusters have been identified as the focus for Laurens County's economic development efforts over the next five years. These clusters are tailored to the community assets and aspirations and represent the strongest opportunities for driving economic growth and wealth creation in the future. The full methodology and target evaluation are included in Appendix 2. Detailed profiles of each cluster - including specific strategies and the "Why Laurens County?" sales messages for each - will be provided as part of the final strategy report.

Four filters are examined when identifying target industries, illustrated below. The analysis begins with a global view of whether an industry is growing, and then it filters through an increasingly local lens until a target industry is confirmed. Throughout the process of identifying targets, the consulting team considers whether the industry will increase diversity in the region's economy and provide career pathways for residents with different skill levels. Although this process appears linear, the consulting team considers numerous additional factors throughout the assessment of potential target industries.



**1. Is the industry growing and projected to grow within the community and U.S.?**

Examining global and national trends helps determine if the target industry will continue to grow and create future opportunities in Laurens County.

**2. Which industry clusters have an existing presence in the community and region?**

Industry clusters with an existing concentration in the Laurens County and the Upstate region demonstrate that there are local competitive strengths. They present some of the best opportunities for future expansion, recruitment, and startup growth.

**3. Which industry clusters match the community's current and potential future assets?**

During the Discovery phase, the consulting team examined assets across a wide variety of categories. Whether Laurens County has the assets needed (current or planned) to support future industry cluster growth is an important target selection filter.

**4. Which industry clusters align with the community's goals and values?**

Each cluster was evaluated on whether it reinforces the goals and values that were voiced by community stakeholders during interviews, focus groups, Steering Committee workshops, and the survey.

# Target cluster identification

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## Target cluster recommendations

Three recommended target clusters for Laurens County are primary employers, those that export goods and services outside of the local economy. Primary employers are the focus of economic development initiatives because their exports inject new dollars into the economy, resulting in increased wages and jobs as revenue earned by the business is spent on employee salaries, as well as goods and services purchased from local suppliers. As more money is earned and spent, it is redistributed throughout the rest of the economy, multiplying in impact. In essence, primary employers offer the highest potential economic impact.



### Automotive

The Automotive cluster involves the development and fabrication of entire automobiles as well as the production of individual components. Automotive plants have among the most extensive supply chains of any cluster.



### Engineered Materials

Engineered Materials are considered the building blocks of advanced manufacturing. This cluster encompasses the research, development, manufacturing, and application of materials derived from innovations in metal, polymers, glasses, composites, and textiles. These materials are involved in the production of automobile, airplanes, healthcare devices, food packaging, construction materials and technical apparel, to name just a few.



### Food Manufacturing

Food Production generally describes the process of turning purchased ingredients into packaged food and beverages for human and animal consumption. Food production and packaging has become increasingly technical over the past 30 years, with new technologies and machinery assisting the processing, cooking and packaging of products.

The last target falls into the category of secondary employers, which serve the local community. A majority of the goods and services created by secondary employers is consumed within the community. While the multiplier effect of spending is less than that by primary employers, these goods and services are important staples of a community. They enhance the community's quality of life, which helps retain and attract residents – a topic particularly important to Laurens County.



### Experiential Retail, Recreation & Tourism

Experiential Retail, Recreation & Tourism involves unique leisure-oriented experiences. For Experiential Retail, this may involve distinctive in-store experiences unavailable from an online retailer. Recreation & Tourism may include traditional sightseeing destinations such as a museum or historical site, or pursuits such as a corn maze, hiking or crafting workshop.

# Target cluster identification

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## Target cluster recommendations - COVID-19 considerations

The impact of COVID-19 on industry is yet to be determined. However, the strengthening of supply chains across all industry and the reshoring of biomedical companies is likely to drive job growth in the U.S. in the coming years. Assisting existing industry should be the LCDC's priority first and foremost. Then, any supply chain gaps, as identified by existing industry, should be used for targeted business attraction efforts. From there, attraction efforts should focus on Laurens County's identified target industries and the Biomedical sectors outlined below.



### Biomedical

Biomedical describes a variety of products and services related to both biology and medicine. It includes industries engaged in researching, developing, manufacturing or processing a broad range of biological, chemical and medicinal products. The supply chain disruptions of critical biomedical industries during this pandemic - specifically in production of pharmaceuticals, medical devices and medical supplies - is expected to increase demand for more local and national sourcing moving forward. These sectors are described below.

- ▶ **Medical device and supplies** includes the design, development and production of a variety of equipment, devices, supplies and medical products. This includes everything from medical instruments, drug delivery systems, diagnostic equipment, cardiovascular and orthopedic devices and hospital supplies, like the personal protective equipment which has faced critical shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ **Pharmaceutical manufacturing** is the process of creating drugs and other products on an industrial scale. It includes drugs created from compounds to treat or prevent disease and the production of basic chemicals and biological compounds utilized in the manufacture of drugs and other products, like baby formula or meal supplements.

Competition for projects in these sectors will be steep as their anticipated reshoring has garnered the attention of most economic development organizations. Laurens County does not currently have a significant presence in the biomedical sector, except for its bio-related materials' companies and an over-the-counter pharmaceutical products and consumer healthcare goods manufacturer. With that said, the LCDC should lean heavily on the Upstate SC Alliance, SC Commerce and SCBIO for attraction efforts. The following sales messages should be utilized in conversations with those allies and prospects:

- Proven track record in manufacturing, especially precision manufacturing
- Rural location with direct access to major population centers
- Access to a major medical system
- Competitive business climate
- Support from the SCBIO, the state's bioscience industry cluster
- Education and workforce training through local institutions like Presbyterian College and Piedmont Technical College
- Access to the talent pipelines of Clemson University, the University of South Carolina and numerous others

# Chapter 5

## Discovery narratives



# Discovery narratives

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When the findings of the Discovery analyses were taken as a whole, several clear opportunities were revealed for Laurens County. These discoveries were drawn from the data analysis, the SWOT Analysis, findings from the community survey, conversations with stakeholders, and the consulting team's perspective on global trends in economic development. These opportunities provided the foundation for the strategic framework. Additional information on each one is presented in the following pages. They include:

- ▶ Manufacturing rebounds
- ▶ Growth in jeopardy
- ▶ Increasing overall prosperity
- ▶ Better than average
- ▶ Unifying Laurens County

# Discovery narratives

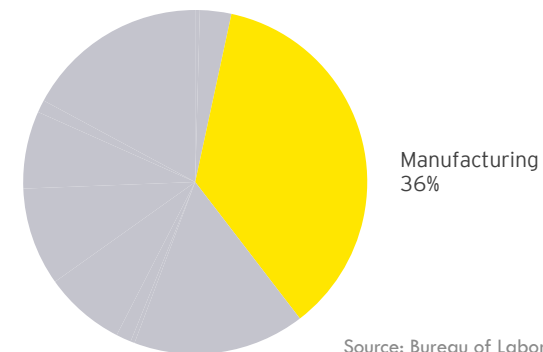
## Manufacturing rebounds

The textile industry was once the backbone of Laurens County's economy and its way of life. Like many of its sister communities in the Upstate, the closure of these mills decades ago left Laurens County struggling to reestablish its economy and identity. BMW's arrival to the region in the early nineties laid the foundation for the resurgence of manufacturing. Today, manufacturing is the leading economic driver in Laurens County, representing more than 36% of total employment. Manufacturing has also added 3,600 jobs to the county since the end of the Great Recession and is the county's highest paying industry.

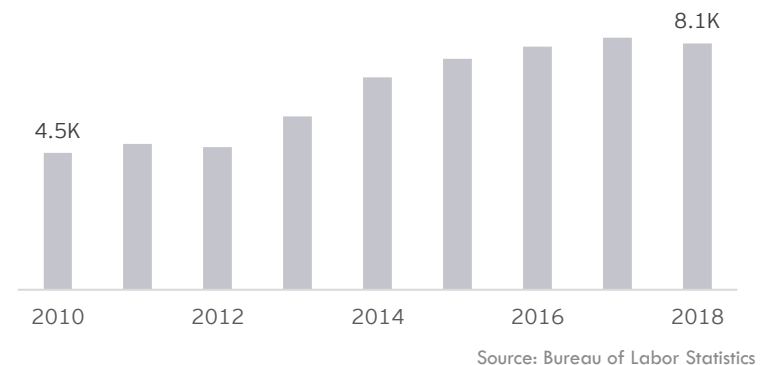
Laurens County is ideal for manufacturing. It is well-positioned in a state and region which are manufacturing powerhouses. The county's location is also very important because it provides easy access to the interstate and inland port and has strong rail infrastructure. Laurens County has been very proactive in investing in product development over the years, both in industrial parks and speculative buildings. One of the most strategic investments, however, was the establishment of the Piedmont Technical College Center for Advanced Manufacturing. This unique educational institution provides local students and workers with skills needed to be successful in manufacturing right in their hometown. The industry is also supported by numerous other local and state-level workforce initiatives.

It is important that LCDC and its partners continue to proactively strengthen and diversify this industry to ensure economic resiliency in the future. This Strategy will identify tactics related to growing and developing a pipeline of talented workers, preparing workers for automation and other advances in the industry, maintaining diversity in the industry to protect from shakeups, and investing in local infrastructure, like roads and broadband, needed to support modern manufacturing operations.

Manufacturing % share of total employment  
Laurens County, 2018



Manufacturing employment growth  
Laurens County, 2010 - 2018





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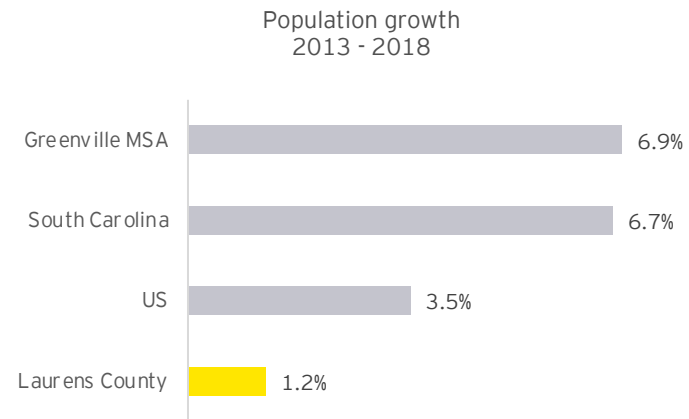
## Growth in jeopardy

Both the Upstate region and the state of South Carolina experienced strong population growth over the past five years. Unfortunately, during a period of 7% growth in the Greenville MSA and South Carolina, Laurens County's population growth has remained relatively stagnant at just above 1%. Notably, communities bordering Laurens County - Fountain Inn, Woodruff and Enoree - experienced double-digit increases which, over time, is anticipated to spill over into Laurens County. Given these conditions, it is imperative that Laurens County both accelerate its own growth and proactively plan for the growth that trickles in from its neighboring counties.

Laurens County should be seeing more population inflow than it is, especially considering the region's growth. It offers career opportunities in high-growth fields like Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Logistics. It also offers a lower cost of living. This begs the question: what is preventing growth from occurring?

Quality of life appears to be an impediment to growth in Laurens County. Stakeholders participating in this strategic planning process cited a lack of housing variety, especially affordable housing, as a barrier to attracting residents. They also mentioned the negative perception of Laurens County schools as compared to other schools in the region. Other factors include higher rates of crime, a shortage of shopping, dining, and entertainment amenities, and incohesive land use.

Laurens County leaders must work together to attract the population needed to spur vibrancy in its communities and to support its economy. In the Strategy, recommendations around this theme will focus on preparing the County for future growth, making investments in infrastructure and quality of life amenities, and positioning Laurens County as not just a desirable place to work, but also a desirable place to live, raise a family, start a business, and be part of a community.



Source: United States Census Bureau

What one thing would you change?  
Excerpts from the community survey

*"More retail options and dining options other than fast food. People drive 30-45 mins just to shop and eat a good meal."*

*"We need to have zoning to create better diversification across the county."*

*"More housing in general, as well as affordable housing options for residents 25-35."*

*"Improve image as a business-friendly destination."*

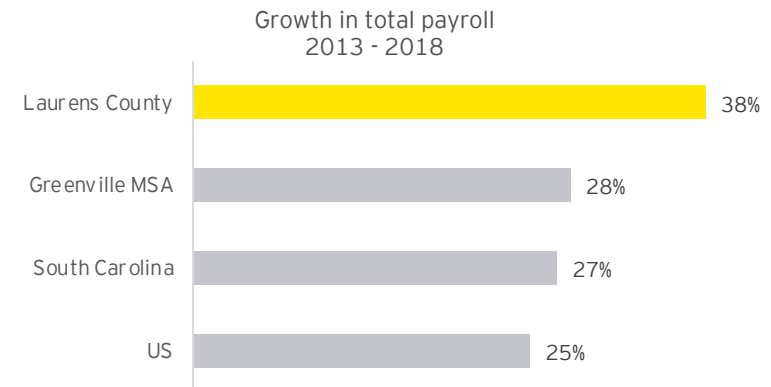
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## Increasing overall prosperity

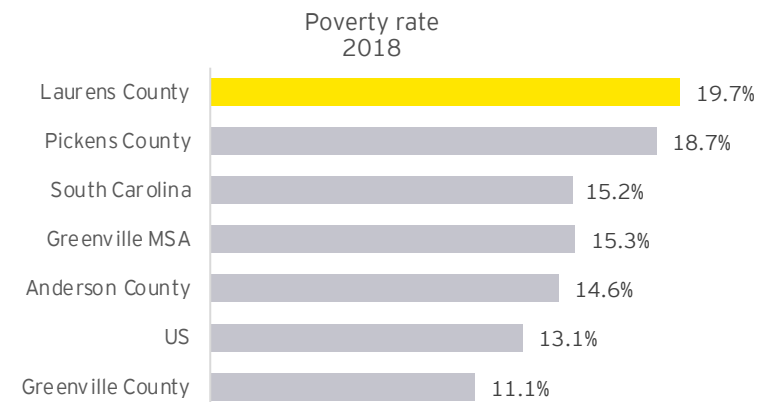
Laurens County's recent economic development achievements have been remarkable. The significant increase in jobs and investment over the past five years alone have led to a 38% growth in total payroll by employers in the county. Unfortunately, not all residents have benefitted from this wealth of opportunity. As of 2018, nearly 20% of residents in Laurens County lived in poverty. When asked, participants in this planning process believe that this is largely generational poverty that resulted from the fall of the textile industry. Once those operations shuttered, workers did not have the skills or education to transition into different industries.

Generational poverty can be even more difficult to address in rural areas where access to jobs, resources, and public transportation are scarcer. Additionally, children who grow up in poverty often face greater struggles with their health, academic achievement, and overall well-being. While there is no easy solution, providing high-quality education for all children with awareness and pathways to local career opportunities, much like the Higher Opportunity and Laurens County Future Scholarship initiatives, is a great place to start.

Boosting prosperity is somewhat outside of the LCDC's traditional role of economic development, but the LCDC can leverage its position to convene community-wide partners - like nonprofits, faith leaders, social services, educators, workforce developers, and select private sector partners - in a conversation about how this topic is relevant to economic development. An increased focus on boosting prosperity in Laurens County will require finding opportunities to enhance resources for underserved residents and communities, tailoring the promotion of training and career opportunities to both children and adults, planning for more affordable housing, and investing in quality of life amenities that benefit the entire community.



Source: Bureau Of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages



Source: U.S. Census Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates

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## Better than just average

Laurens County was overwhelmingly rated “average” on almost every measurement on the community survey. Even the LCDC’s performance was given average ratings, which was surprising given its success generating new capital investment and job growth. While there is always room for improvement, to say that Laurens County is “average” across the board likely speaks to a greater need for communication and celebration in many areas. It should also be recognized that creating more jobs and investments is not the only answer to the community’s challenges and that everyone has a role in increasing overall prosperity in Laurens County.

Internal communications has become an increased focus for economic development organizations (EDOs) in recent years. Previously, communication efforts were primarily externally focused to audiences like site selectors or prospective companies. However, a lack of internal communication leads to misunderstandings about an EDO’s role and impact in the community. In Laurens County, this may have contributed to the LCDC’s “average” rating - locals are not aware of the significant rate of job growth and the LCDC’s role. Residents and workers have the potential to be strong cheerleaders for the community. Raising awareness of victories at home can also extend to and resonate with external audiences. It is important that the narrative shared by internal audiences is a positive one.

This Strategy promotes a holistic economic development effort for which there are many partners and performance measures. In addition to greater internal communications and celebrations, the need for a clearer articulation of goals, roles and responsibilities, initiatives, and their impact will be addressed in the Strategy.

### Ratings from the community survey

#### Laurens County as a place to live



3.4 out of 5 stars

#### Laurens County as a place to work



3.2 out of 5 stars

#### Performance of LCDC



3.2 out of 5 stars

“Publicize your county development more with info around town, flyer, advertisement in the mailbox or on TV. Most people probably don't even know this exists.”

-Survey respondent

# Discovery narratives

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## Unifying Laurens County

Laurens County has many assets in place for a promising future. It is growing jobs. It has excellent education and training resources, with Presbyterian College, Piedmont Technical College and two school systems on the rise. The historic downtowns of Clinton and Laurens show potential for revitalization. There have been recent investments by Prisma Health into the local hospital. And these are only a few examples. However, a perceived undercurrent of tension between municipalities and leadership across the county hold it back.

Survey respondents, focus group attendees, and interviewees all cited the tension in Laurens County as a barrier to improving its economic and overall performance. Communities that work collaboratively towards a shared vision have a much higher rate of success than those that do not. These communities are more efficient with resources, more effective at advocating for key issues, have greater support and engagement from residents, and are more attractive to potential businesses and residents.

This Strategy is an opportunity to unite government officials, community leaders, major institutions, and local employers in a shared vision to be a place where residents thrive, businesses of all sizes grow, downtowns are vibrant, and quality of life soars. Since the success of this Strategy depends on Laurens County coming together, recommendations will look at how to improve communications, better align actions and resources, measure progress, and celebrate success.

### Comments from the community survey


*"Identify strengths and weaknesses of development across the county and strategically drive industries, local government, and other stakeholders toward common goals of economic development and equity."*

*"Get Clinton and Laurens to work together!"*

*"Local government lacks vision as far as moving forward to improve economic development within the county."*

*"More interaction between residents and businesses would help both the LCDC as well as the residents by putting us on the same page and task."*

*"Continue to educate decision makers and elected officials on what it takes to land industry here. Help convince this group that raising taxes to improve life and enhance economic growth of the County is a good thing."*



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