Town of Cameron

Strategic Assessment and Recommendations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Cameron Strategic Assessment and Recommendations report is a plan for how to continue strategic planning work and find three priorities to work towards as a community over the next three to five years. The TJCOG team does not recommend the approach of building a sewer line at this stage because it is an extremely costly endeavor and may not be enough to attract business. Instead, we recommend the Town of Cameron take an incremental approach based on existing assets and shared community ambition.

The Town of Cameron has done a great deal of work already and should be commended for its proactive approach to signs of disinvestment and decline. The NC Main Street visioning project that was conducted in 2018 appears to yield significant qualitative resident sentiment data. Additionally, the town has recently updated the Unified Development Ordinance and zoning map, which will support future work.

Recommendations for an incremental strategic planning approach are organized in sequential order:
1. Asset and Human Capital Mapping and Reflection
2. Prioritization
3. Apply Strategic Framework
4. Build out Action Plan
5. Implementation and Management
6. Performance Measures and Accountability

TJCOG staff is available to support the approach recommended in this report. Additionally, members of TJCOG's Regional Strategy and Innovation Network may be available to assist with future efforts.

Building Cameron's Strategic Plan

1. Asset and Human Capital Mapping

2. Prioritization

3. Apply Strategic Framework

4. Build out action plan

5. Implementation and Management

6. Performance Management and Accountability
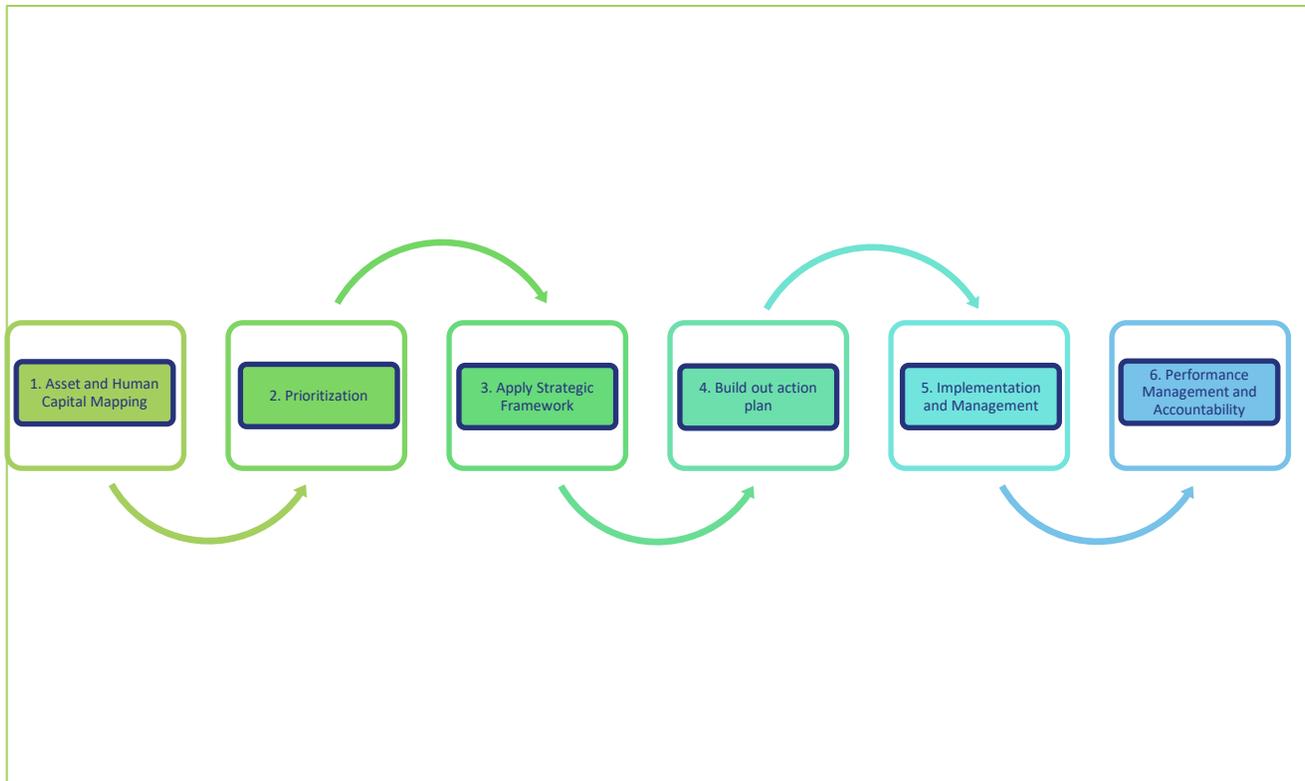
Asset and Human Capital Mapping and Reflection

Cameron has many existing assets to leverage in strategic planning and strategy implementation. Some assets are physical, such as the train depot and National Register of Historic Places properties. Some assets are people-based, such as the annual Cameron Antique Festival and the Tour de Moore bike ride. The TJCOG team recommends beginning the strategic planning process with a simple exercise to capture and document existing community assets that can be used in coming years to achieve the town's goals.

1. **Mapping community assets**. There are many frameworks for mapping community assets, both in terms of physical infrastructure and also people talent, or human capital. An example is the Americorps Vista program's VISTACampus website, which lists six types of community assets:
    a. physical assets
    b. economic assets
    c. stories
    d. local residents
    e. local associations, and;
    f. local institutions

2. **Learn from past efforts**. We encourage the Town Board to perform a simple analysis of the past community engagement efforts of the Department of Commerce's NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center. A quick reflection activity can be done internally by the Town Board and include questions such as:
    o What went well with and what were the measurable accomplishments from the NC Main Street effort?
    o What would the Town Board like to improve on or not repeat from the NC Main Street effort?
    o What activities, insights or ideas from the NC Main Street effort should be continued, started or tabled for future consideration?

Prioritization

While the elected officials are the leaders of the strategic planning effort, it is critical to establish community support for the decisions and investments that will need to be made to execute the strategic plan. The key to establishing support is to bring the community into the process of brainstorming and prioritizing ideas so they can have influence on the building blocks of the process. This section describes the steps recommended by the team to engage the community in this process.

1. **Brainstorm**. Fortunately, the Town of Cameron already has held a brainstorming session as a part of the Main Street planning effort. Elected officials can review the list of ideas from the report and add any ideas that are missing from the list.

2. **Feasibility/Impact**. Next, elected officials can evaluate the ideas using a simple feasibility/impact analysis. The example below uses the language of "effort by organization" to mean feasibility and "user value" to mean impact. The idea is to map the list of ideas onto this chart and select five to seven ideas that will be offered to the community for further prioritization.
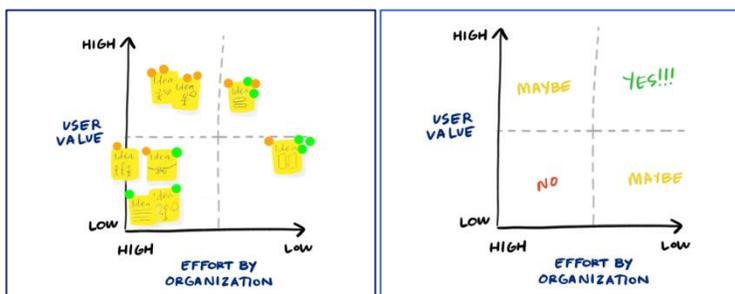
Source: Nielsen Norman Group

3. **Prioritize**. Elected officials can then host a community meeting to select the top three ideas to pursue in the strategic plan.

   a. Attendees would be provided the list of ideas and the results of the elected official's feasibility/impact analysis and allowed to re-introduce any ideas that were not brought forward as a top candidate for consideration by the elected officials.

   b. Attendees would also be invited to vote for their priority ideas and asked to provide further ideas about how to make the idea happen.

Apply Strategic Framework

Standard practice for developing a strategic plan would start with a community process to determine the community's Values, Vision and Mission. This step is foundational and should be taken, however given the elected officials' planning work and the focus of the Main Street community meeting, we recommend that the first point of entry into the strategic framework should be to build out the Town's Goals, Objectives and Tactics. This section will provide an explanation of these terms and an example of how they work together.

1. **Goals** address long-term issues and are broad statements about a desired future state. Cameron would draft goal statements from the three ideas that emerge from the community prioritization process.
2. **Objectives** are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based (SMART) statements of how the goals will be achieved.
3. **Tactics** are action steps that jurisdictions must undertake to achieve the measurements designated in each of the objectives.

Below is an example of how this framework may be used with a hypothetical idea to preserve historic structures in downtown Cameron.

Strategic Framework	Example	Notes
Goal	Enhance safety, attractiveness and aesthetics of Cameron by preserving downtown historic structures.	• Goals offer a reason about why as well as what. • Goals may take many years to accomplish.
Objective	Objective 1. By the end of FY 20, create database of property records for all properties that includes ownership, tenant, property management, assessed value and other relevant informant.	• SMART objectives are time bound and specific.
	Objective 2. Before the end of FY 20 conduct outreach to 100% of all property owners to discuss the status of their property and future interest.	• SMART objectives are measurable. That doesn't mean you always meet the measure!
	Objective 3. Before the end of FY 20, create a catalogue of public and private	• SMART objectives are realistic and achievable. It's ok to take

	funding sources that can be used to improve, purchase or demolish structures.	things a step at a time because you will use what you learn in that process to create further objectives.
Tactics	Tactics for Objective 1: T1. By March 1, 2020, select a volunteer to be the lead on this objective who has computer skills and the time to make phone calls during business hours. T2. Gather information from County Property Records. T2. Gather information from interviews and community connections. T3. Create database with information gathered. T4. Report to board on progress.	• Tactics can be simple and directive. • Tactics can be assigned. • Tactics are also called "actions" or "strategies" in strategic planning.

Build Out Action Plan

When the strategic framework is in a final draft, it is time to re-engage the community for finalization and transition into action. There is more information in the next section about implementation and management structures, so this section focuses on the formal and informal tactics for building community trust and support.

1. **Continuously engage community leaders.** As the Town completes its human capital mapping it will have a list of individuals that hold influence in the community. It is never too early to engage these leaders in the process. If they are supportive, offer them roles and responsibilities such as organizing the community meeting logistics or hosting small table discussions. If they are receptive, keep the lines of communication open and let them know organizers are using them as a sounding board. If they are hesitant or oppositional, they still add value! Let them know that critical feedback is just as helpful as supportive feedback and reach out when process organizers have content they can review or questions that they can answer. In short, seeking the input of community members is a highly effective tool for making the process run smoothly.

2. **Conduct formal engagement.** Provide the general public an opportunity to review the final draft and offer suggestions via email and/or public meeting. Once this step is taken to satisfaction, hold a formal event to kick off the plan. This can be both a celebration and a formal notice of transition out of the planning phase and into the action phase.

3. **Recruit volunteers.** The human capital mapping exercise should help to identify community members who have an interest or capability that matches an aspect of the strategic plan. Ideally process organizers want to engage potential community volunteers as they are applying the strategic framework so they can help craft the language for objectives and tactics.

4. **Build trust.** Whenever possible, provide community volunteers the opportunity to be the face and voice behind an initiative. Perhaps they take a formal role or lead a report-out of a meeting. Sharing leadership in this way builds investment on the part of the volunteer and increases feelings of transparency and shared ownership with the general public.

Implementation and Management

Before a strategic framework is put into place, the TJCOG team encourages leaders to develop an implementation and management structure to ensure accountability. That structure should consist of at least three key parts:

1. **Roles and Responsibilities**. Leaders will need to discern the parts of implementation accountability it will own versus any parts that may be owned, led or co-led by non-elected community members. For implementation to be successful, ownership will need to be devolved, with multiple people and organizations responsible for integral components. Implementation leaders will want to establish a charter that outlines roles and responsibilities and other management components, as noted below.

2. **Overarching Governance Structure**. Leaders will need to establish a high-level governance structure to manage strategic plan implementation. That approach would require a main governing group that could include elected and non-elected leaders; a cadence of pre-planned, agreed-upon community meetings and checkpoints during the year, including integration/alignment with the town's budget process and any other processes, and; transparency reporting to share tactic updates and chart performance measurement progress, which would yield opportunities both for celebration of achievements and also reflection on opportunities for improvement.

3. **Team Structure**. Leaders will need to develop a manageable structure of teams, working groups and committees responsible for various parts of implementation, including non-project roles like communication and community engagement and project-specific roles for short-to-mid-term groups responsible for carrying out specific tactics in the strategic plan.

Establishing Measures and Target

The last step of the strategic planning process is setting measurable indicators and targets. There are two reasons why this is important in strategic planning.

1. **Performance Management.** Strategic planning is an ongoing process of planning, review, evaluation and re-planning. After the final draft is finalized and the wheels of implementation are turning, the next step is to ask whether the actions and investments are working. It is helpful to establish performance measures at the outset of a plan to have a common framework for defining success. Data from the measures is used to evaluate whether the community is investing the right amount in the right actions to achieve community goals. The frequency of measurement is up to the elected officials.

2. **Communication.** Measurable costs and benefits of the strategic plan are points most of the general public will care about and follow. Setting measurable indicators and targets does not mean the results will always be positive! Some may indicate that the problem is worsening and needs more urgent attention. When this happens, use the data in the same way as you would a success story: to evaluate whether the community is investing the right amount in the right actions to achieve community goals.

Below is an example of using performance measures with the previous hypothetical idea to preserve historic structures in downtown Cameron.

• Strategic Framework	• Example	• Notes
• **Performance** • **Measure**	• Vacancy rate for downtown buildings • Property owner engagement • Visual assessment • Code violations issued/code violations addressed • Safety incidents reported in downtown • Real estate transactions • Public and private investment amount	• Performance measures should focus on outcomes and results as opposed to inputs and effort made. • Some performance measures serve as indicators of desired outcomes but cannot be directly controlled by local government.

Next Steps and Guidance

To recap, our TJCOG team believes that the Town has the opportunity to begin the strategic planning journey with these steps, as recommended below:

- Asset and Human Capital Mapping: This exercise, which can be done internally, will allow town leaders to identify and zero in on various people, organizations and other assets that could be leveraged in a strategic planning process.
- Analysis of NC Main Street Effort: This exercise, which also can be done internally, will generate reflections on elements of the past engagement effort that should be repeated and that should be replaced with a different style or tactic.
- Chunking and Devolution: Strategic planning processes can seem intimidating at first, but they do not have to be. The TJCOG team encourages town leaders to bite off small manageable chunks by breaking out a project plan into specific phases and discrete tasks. Be unafraid to seek and empower community volunteers to own key roles, from large to seemingly small. A devolved process with many owners and participants will increase the likelihood of forward momentum and incremental progress.
- TJCOG as a Resource: Continue to seek TJCOG's Jenny Halsey for technical assistance. Additionally, TJCOG's Regional Strategy and Innovation Network may be able to provide added short-term assistance to the town in the future, if there is mutual interest and agreement.

APPENDIX

Appendix I. Cameron SWOT Analysis

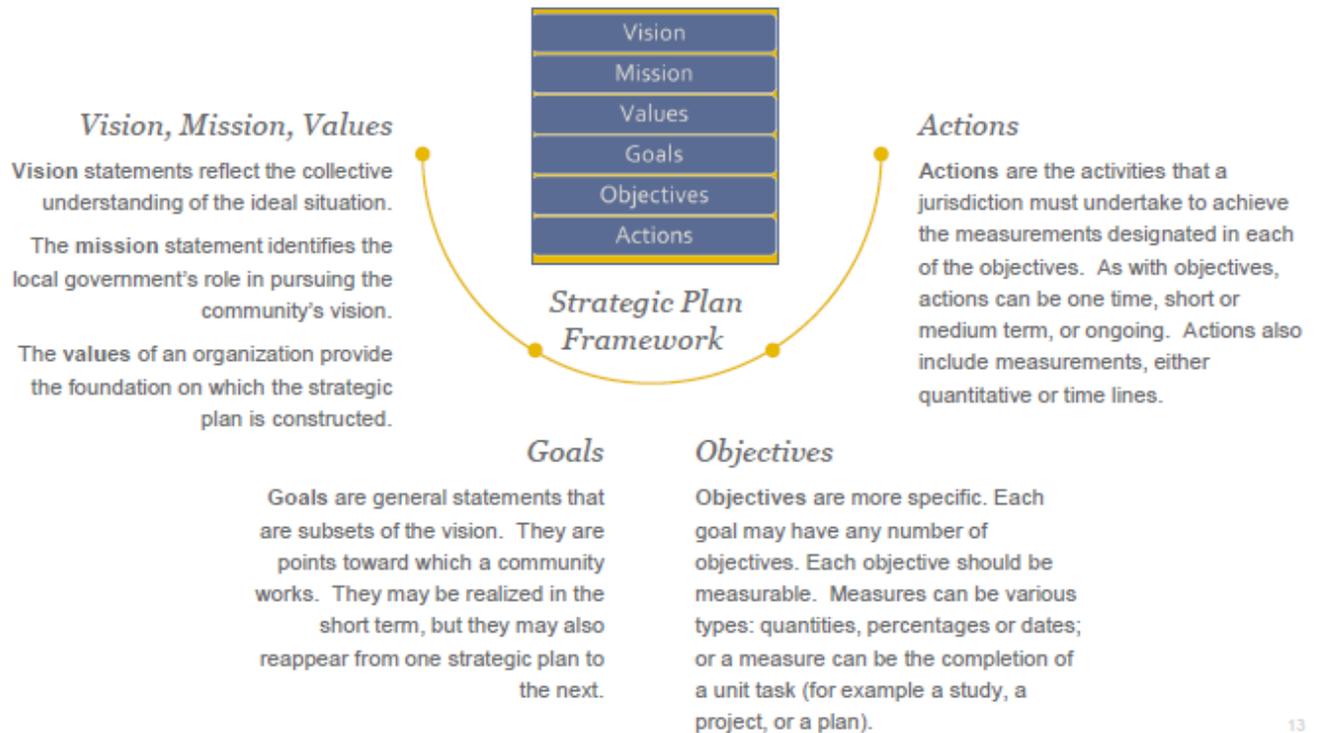Town of Cameron SWOT based on conversation with the board on November 7, 2019

1. It stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

2. **Purpose**: To create a synthesized view of your current state, an honest reflection of where you are at:

   a) Internal (where you have direct control), External (where you may only be able to influence.

   b) Strengths (Build), Weaknesses (Shore Up), Opportunities (Invest), Threats (Monitor)

Internal	External
Strength (Build)	Opportunities (Invest)
- Sense of community - Affordable - Close to employment - Small-Town - Equestrian reputation - Antiques - Quiet - Charming - Council is working well together and shares vision - Town meeting drew 70 people - Updates schedule of uses for zoning code	- Train Depot is being renovated - Trail behind school may lead somewhere - Properties on National Register
Weakness (Shore up)	Threats (Monitor)
- Lack sewage infrastructure and destination - Contingent that wants to keep town "in amber"	- Bypass reduces traffic through Town - Bamboo is taking over a lot of land - Historic downtown buildings are beyond repair without a lot of investment

Appendix II. Strategic Plan Framework

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK COMPONENTS...

While content may vary from municipality to municipality, the structure of strategic plans remains essentially the same. Included in this slide is a visual representation of the strategic plan hierarchy with a definition for each section taken from ICMA Strategic Planning for Local Government 2nd Edition.

Vision
Mission
Values
Goals
Objectives
Actions

Strategic Plan Framework

Vision, Mission, Values

Vision statements reflect the collective understanding of the ideal situation.

The **mission** statement identifies the local government's role in pursuing the community's vision.

The **values** of an organization provide the foundation on which the strategic plan is constructed.

Actions

Actions are the activities that a jurisdiction must undertake to achieve the measurements designated in each of the objectives. As with objectives, actions can be one time, short or medium term, or ongoing. Actions also include measurements, either quantitative or time lines.

Goals

Goals are general statements that are subsets of the vision. They are points toward which a community works. They may be realized in the short term, but they may also reappear from one strategic plan to the next.

Objectives

Objectives are more specific. Each goal may have any number of objectives. Each objective should be measurable. Measures can be various types: quantities, percentages or dates; or a measure can be the completion of a unit task (for example a study, a project, or a plan).

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Appendix III. Comparable Communities for Economic and Community Development Ideas

(Recommendations provided by the NC Rural Center)

Lansing, NC in Ashe County

- 150 population
- GLAD (Greater Lansing Area Development): https://www.glad-nc.org/
    - Has coordinated significantly with the town on economic development opportunities
    - STEP Loan Program for small businesses

Warrenton, NC in Warren County

- 850 population
- Capitalized on quilting industry
    - http://www.warrenton.nc.gov/page/tourism_home
    - http://heritagequilters.net/

Elizabethtown, NC in Bladen County

- 3,500 population
- Worked closely with the Bladen County Community College
- https://www.elizabethtownnc.org/

Appendix IV. Sources of Funding for Water and Sewer Infrastructure Projects

The State of North Carolina is recommending merger and regionalization of water and sewer infrastructure projects for smaller communities. This encouragers water and wastewater utilities to become viable and more proactive in the management of financing of their systems. The State has a Merger/Regionalization Feasibility Grant Program. This program provides grants for studies to evaluate the potential consolidation of two or more systems into one system and the potential physical interconnection with another system for regional wastewater treatment or regional water supply. For more information, here is the Statewide Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Master Plan.

https://files.nc.gov/ncdeq/WI/Authority/Statewide_Water_and_Wastewater_Infrastructure_Master_Plan_2017.pdf

These grants below are from the USDA Rural Development group, and are meant only for small, underserved communities. The Town of Cameron's statistics are in the table here.

*Unemployment is for the county in which the LGU resides. Yellow areas indicate LGUSs that cross county lines and where averages of the counties involved have been taken.

**Use the 2017 population to calculate property valuation per capita for your LGU.

***Use appropriate county rate for CDPs.

		Property Valuation per Capita 2017 North Carolina State Benchmark**: $			108,300

	Population (2017)	Percent Population Change (2013-2017)	Poverty Rate (%) (2017)	Median Household Income (2017)	% Unemployed (2017)*, ***
North Carolina Benchmark	10,052,564	4.16%	16.1	$50,320	4.3
Cameron town, North Carolina	333	-9.26%	9.0	$42,292	4.5
Candor town, North Carolina	1,147	57.99%	33.1	$38,125	4.6
Canton town, North Carolina	4,191	0.34%	13.2	$37,078	4.1
Cape Carteret town, North Carolina	2,217	7.31%	7.4	$77,917	4.5
Caroleen CDP, North Carolina	737	69.82%	9.4	$37,633	***
Carolina Beach town, North Carolina	6,116	5.14%	13.0	$61,997	4.2
Carolina Shores town, North Carolina	3,771	12.50%	6.7	$50,541	5.7
Carrboro town, North Carolina	21,099	5.05%	16.4	$56,573	3.8
Carthage town, North Carolina	2,580	40.29%	19.3	$36,354	4.5

The SEARCH program serves very small, financially distressed rural communities with predevelopment feasibility studies, design and technical assistance on proposed water and waste disposal projects.

https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/search-special-evaluation-assistance-rural-communities-and-households

The Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant fund, which helps eligible communities prepare, or recover from, an emergency (disaster, spill, line break, etc.) that threatens the availability of safe, reliable drinking water.

https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/emergency-community-water-assistance-grants

The Water & Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program is a long-term, low-interest loan program for funding clean and reliable drinking water projects to eligible communities.

https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-waste-disposal-loan-grant-program

Additional options:

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) program has a Southeast RCAP loan fund provides Community Development Loans to localities for water/wastewater infrastructure and community development needs, but they are small – up to $250,000

The State Division of Water Infrastructure funding that Cameron may qualty for:

- CDBG-Infrastructure grants fund the construction of public water and sewer infrastructure to mitigate public and environmental health problems in areas where the percentage of low to moderate income persons is at least 51 percent. The homes developed in Cameron's land that is available for expansion of the system would need to be residential and living in by a low to moderate persons.

 https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-infrastructure/i-need-funding/community-development-block-grant-infrastructure

Appendix X. Resources

Triangle J Council of Governments:

- Management, Financial, Stormwater and Planning technical assistance
- Data & GIS Mapping
- Facilitation services

NC Rural Center: Multiple programs and resources for rural communities including:

- Food and Community Development
- STEP Program
- Faith in Rural Communities (if Cameron has a United Methodist Church)
- REDI: Rural Economic Development Institute (Rural Leadership Training Program)

Department of Commerce's NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center

- Moore County Contact:
    - Grace Lawrence, Community Economic Development Planner
    - 910.391.1298 (mobile)
    - grace.lawrence@nccommerce.com
    - 414 Ray Avenue, Fayetteville, NC 28301

Golden LEAF Foundation

- Variety of economic development funding opportunities
    - Sandhills Prosperity Zone: https://www.goldenleaf.org/sandhills-prosperity-zone/

UNC School of Government

- Technical assistance
- Training for elected officials
- Possible student consulting projects