



## A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY FOR THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

The Mississippi Gulf Coast economy is innovative and resilient. After experiencing back-to-back natural and man-made disasters, the coast has shown signs of recovery and stability. However, the Gulf Coast is not predicted to reach pre-recession employment numbers until 2018. Growth in target industries, such as aerospace and defense, data and call centers, marine science, energy, and tourism, will help the return to a pre-recession economy.

A focus on higher wage industries is necessary to decrease the prevalence of low-wage jobs and increase the purchasing power of households, which will stimulate economic growth. Regions are the key economic unit in the global economy. Working together as One Coast will ensure a strong economy for the future of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.



## KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES



Between 2008 and 2018, the region is forecast to gain 23,570 jobs. The recovery from the national recession will continue to have a slow pace and pre-recession job numbers will not occur in Mississippi before 2018.



15 percent of all Mississippi Gulf Coast residents live below the poverty line. For a family of four, this equals a household income of \$23,550 or less per year.



While the Gulf Coast has experienced only modest population growth in the last 10 years, the region has become more racially diverse. Diversity in the workforce leads to a more adaptable economy by combining multiple skill sets for improved creativity, innovation, and productivity.



**9.1%    8.7%    9.6%**  
**2012-2013 unemployment  
rates for the 3 coastal counties**

# 13%

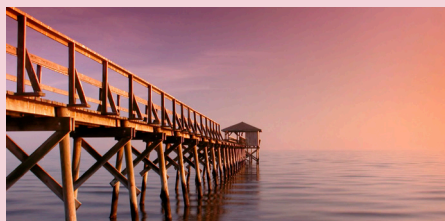
higher per capita  
income in the 3  
coastal counties  
than the state  
average



A net increase  
of **372**  
businesses has  
been created in  
the Mississippi  
Gulf Coast  
between 2001  
and 2011



## STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES



A roundtable discussion of private and public sector economic developers identified “brain drain” as a key issue for the workforce, with graduates being drawn to out-of-state companies, especially in regards to technical jobs. The discussion also identified quality of life factors as more important than salary in retaining and recruiting workers.

Economic developers report that there is still a mismatch between jobs available and the skill sets of the existing workforce. For instance, there are many tech jobs available but graduates are not aware of them and leave the area instead.

A focus group of Main Street Managers of the downtowns in the Mississippi Gulf Coast region found that all managers agree that downtown development should be a top priority for local leaders and economic development agencies. All managers were supportive of mixed-use downtowns, including housing. They also noted there are opportunities for large, empty buildings in downtowns to be used as retail incubators for local artists, antiques, grocers, and other small businesses.

## PROPOSED REGIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES



### Develop an Educated, Trained and Diverse Workforce Able to Earn a Livable Wage

- Target industries/employers paying higher than average wages
- Coordinate regular meetings between economic development organizations and housing organizations
- Commission a job and housing balance analysis



### Preserve and Strengthen Downtowns in the Region

- Organize a coast-wide public arts project in downtowns
- Reuse vacant and underutilized lots for recreation and community gardens
- Coordinate regional efforts to increase tourist-based industries
- Market downtowns to local companies and entrepreneurs as a place to locate their businesses



### Foster the Creation and Growth of Small Businesses

- Encourage marketing efforts to highlight local entrepreneurial success stories
- Expand the permitting of food sales to increase locally grown food, farm stands, urban agriculture, and mobile vehicles serving food
- Improve connections between small businesses and entrepreneurship assistance providers



### Support Infrastructure that Balances Growth with Sustainability

- Evaluate the specific needs to enhance fiber optic and broadband networks
- Incentivize development to locate near existing infrastructure, transportation, and employment
- Encourage jurisdictions to promote infill development and investment in revitalization

## NEXT STEPS

The Plan for Opportunity partnership will engage residents and communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in dialogue about the role the economy and other elements play in a more vibrant, healthy and prosperous region. You can share your ideas and perspectives by visiting the [gulfcoastplan.org](http://gulfcoastplan.org) and by taking part at festivals and community forums.

The draft plan – to be completed in the fall – will outline specific actions steps, strategies and responsibilities to address the region’s needs. Making the plan a reality will take a continuing commitment of the public, private and non-profit organizations working on the Gulf Coast. Every small part contributes to a more successful and livable Gulf Coast region.

**“We need to increase job opportunities to make sure people don’t have to work two jobs in order to reach the average income of the rest of America”**

—Ed Daniels, COAAC



[facebook.com/planforopportunity](https://facebook.com/planforopportunity)

[gulfcoastplan.org](http://gulfcoastplan.org)

The **Plan for Opportunity** is a collaborative planning project led by the Gulf Coast Regional Planning Commission that is intended to guide the economic growth and development of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and to improve housing, employment and transportation opportunities throughout the region. The Plan for Opportunity is key to strengthening the economy, improving quality of life for residents, and creating a more sustainable future for the region.



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