Land of Sky Regional Council – NCEDA Graduate Fellow Project Proposal

Host Organization

Land of Sky Regional Council of Governments (LOSRC)
Department: Economic & Community Development
Location: Asheville, North Carolina
Project Supervisor: Brian White, Regional Project Manager – Economic Development; Erica Anderson, Deputy Executive Director

Project Description

Land of Sky Regional Council (LOSRC) seeks to host a **NCEDA Graduate Fellow** to assist in implementing the recently awarded **Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant for the Western North Carolina Economic Readiness Strategy and Implementation Plan**. This multi-county initiative will help Western North Carolina recover from the catastrophic effects of Hurricane Helene by identifying key assets, gaps, and opportunities to build a resilient, future-ready economy.

The Fellow will play a central role in coordinating research, stakeholder engagement, and data analysis that support the region's **Economic Readiness Strategy**, which focuses on connecting the region's high-growth sectors—**Mobility (automotive and aviation), Health (biotech and biosciences), and Agriculture (agritech and biomass)**—with a skilled and adaptable workforce. This project directly aligns with Land of Sky's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and federal investment priorities in **resilience, workforce development, and manufacturing competitiveness**.

In addition to supporting the Economic Readiness Strategy, the Fellow will contribute to related regional initiatives, including:

- Supporting the development of a **Regional Industry Cluster Strategy** to identify supply chain strengths and innovation opportunities.

- Assisting with **Foreign Trade Zone 301 (FTZ 301)** program administration, marketing and industry engagement.
- Collaborating with regional partners such as the **Southwestern Commission, CarolinaWest Economic Development Alliance, local EDCs, and higher education institutions** to advance shared economic goals.

This fellowship offers the student a hands-on opportunity to engage with regional leaders, conduct applied research, and participate in strategy development that will shape Western North Carolina's economic future.

Project Deliverables

Over the course of the summer, the NCEDA Graduate Fellow will produce the following deliverables:

1. **Regional Economic Readiness Assessment**
    a. Compile and synthesize quantitative and qualitative data on industry assets, workforce capacity, and post-Helene economic recovery trends.
    b. Develop data visualizations and maps (with guidance from LOSRC's GIS team) to inform regional analysis and stakeholder engagement.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement Support**
    a. Assist in organizing and facilitating regional convenings and interviews with public, private, and educational partners to identify needs and opportunities across sectors.
    b. Prepare summary reports and meeting documentation to feed into the consultant's work and the broader EDA project deliverables.
3. **Industry Cluster Analysis**
    a. Conduct research on targeted sectors (Mobility, Health, Agriculture) to identify comparative advantages, workforce gaps, and opportunities for collaboration across Western North Carolina.
    b. Draft briefing materials or memos for use by regional economic development partners and EDA consultants.
4. **Foreign Trade Zone 301 Engagement**
    a. Support the FTZ 301 administrator in outreach to local manufacturers, compiling data on import/export activities, and identifying potential FTZ users.

   b. Assist in preparing public-facing materials to explain FTZ benefits for regional businesses.
5. **Administrative and Marketing Support for CarolinaWest**
   a. Assist with the preparation for board meeting and provide updates to the board on regional economic development projects and research.
   b. Assist with developing marketing materials that present a shared regional vision for economic development.
6. **Economic Resilience and Workforce Reports**
   a. Prepare short reports summarizing recovery progress, workforce trends, and best practices for resilience planning.
   b. Contribute to the development of the Economic Readiness Strategy's Implementation Plan and associated communication materials.

Fellowship Learning Outcomes

By the end of the fellowship, the student will:

- Gain experience in **regional economic planning, data-driven strategy development, and interagency collaboration**.
- Learn about the **administration of federal grants**, including EDA project reporting and stakeholder coordination.
- Understand the relationship between **international trade (FTZ operations)** and local economic development.
- Develop professional skills in research, communication, and project management while contributing to **disaster recovery and long-term resilience planning**.