



Northwest Florida *FORWARD* is a strategic initiative that will drive economic vitality and growth for the region. It will take all of us – business, government, educational and community leaders –working together throughout the region to make this a reality.

VISION

A diverse and vibrant regional economy where Northwest Florida residents and businesses have a wealth of opportunities

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- SUSTAINABLE AND ENDURING ECONOMIC BASE
- DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIES AND HIGH WAGE EMPLOYMENT GROWTH
- GREATER ALIGNMENT OF PARTNER RESOURCES THROUGH REGIONAL COLLABORATION
- IMPROVING THE VITALITY OF ALL AREAS AND POPULATIONS IN THE REGION
- STRENGTHEN BEYOND TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC ENGINES

PROCESS

Northwest Florida *FORWARD* began with the **discovery phase** in Fall 2015, where existing strategic plans from the local, regional and state level were reviewed; a presentation on regional economic transformation was made to the Triumph Gulf Coast Board; and research was conducted on strategic plans and processes implemented by other regional entities in the U.S.

Florida's Great Northwest and University of West Florida received an EDA grant in Summer 2016, which allowed the **strategy development phase** to begin. Over the course of five months, a Northwest Florida *FORWARD* Steering Committee, consisting of **Apalachee Regional Planning Council, Florida's Great Northwest, Gulf Power, University of West Florida Haas Center and West Florida Regional Planning Council**, worked closely with a national consultant, TIP Strategies, to hold workshops, meetings and one-on-one interviews across Northwest Florida. More than 860 business, government, educational and community leaders provided their insights to identify the region's most promising opportunities for transformative economic growth. The Haas Center conducted research and provided a technical report and profiles of each county, which served as a strong foundation for the regional effort. Together, the region developed the Northwest Florida *FORWARD* Strategic Plan.

The strategic plan is built around five aspirational goals that will serve as the key focus areas for economic vitality and growth for the region. For the **implementation phase**, the Steering Committee developed **Northwest Florida FORWARD Councils** to ensure our strategy becomes a reality. Each Council is led and run by volunteers from across the region.

NORTHWEST FLORIDA FORWARD COUNCILS

The Councils have been charged with reviewing the regional strategic plan, prioritizing initiatives, identifying key players and champions from across the region to get engaged, and revising the strategy to better tailor the initiatives to uniquely fit Northwest Florida.

1) TALENT

Connect the talent assets of Northwest Florida to key industry clusters and ensure a dynamic and diverse workforce for new and growing businesses.

Co-Chairs: Kristie Kelley, Gulf Power
Michele Burns, CareerSource Okaloosa Walton

2) BUSINESS VITALITY

Strengthen the region's economy through targeted recruitment of new businesses and supporting existing business expansions.

Co-Chairs: Jennifer Conoley, Gulf Power
Scarlett Phaneuf, PowerSouth

3) INFRASTRUCTURE

Ensure that Northwest Florida's economic infrastructure is state of the art and connects communities in every part of the region.

Co-Chairs: Austin Mount, West Florida Regional Planning Council
Chris Rietow, Apalachee Regional Planning Council

4) ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

Foster robust entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems to drive future economic growth.

Co-Chairs: Jennifer McFarren, Gulf Power
Pamela Kidwell, Business Innovation Center

5) QUALITY OF PLACE

Make Northwest Florida a place appealing to existing residents and visitors as well as to a new generation of talented and creative individuals and companies.

Co-Chairs: Chris Rietow, Apalachee Regional Planning Council
Austin Mount, West Florida Regional Planning Council

MOVING FORWARD

The Steering Committee will provide oversight to the overall implementation process and provide strategic direction and support to the Council Co-Chairs. It will also be responsible for communicating and tracking progress, encouraging engagement and celebrating successes across the region.