



LOWER SAVANNAH

Council of Governments

VISION & STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2024



LOWER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (LSCOG)

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

SOUTH CAROLINA, USA

JANUARY 2025





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This report summarizes the outcomes from the Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG) Strategic Action Planning process. This planning process ran from June through December 2024.

The process included a review of existing plans and surveys, a Situational Analysis study, Key Stakeholder interviews, a Stakeholder Survey, Think-Tank Workshop, Think-Tank report, Focus Groups, Community updates and Staff Sessions.

This process was designed to provide an open, inclusive, and transparent platform for community and LSCOG staff members to help create a shared vision and plan for the future of LSCOG, looking out to 2030.

These reports and the associated data analysis are available on the organization's website:

www.LSCOG.org

REPORT PREPARED BY:

future→iQ[®]
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»»»» SNAPSHOT | REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

This report outlines the strategic framework developed for the Lower Savannah Council of Governments, as part of the 2024 planning work. This process was designed to be stakeholder driven, with significant input from staff, Board and partners. The planning work has identified a series of key strategic focus areas and outlines some high-level initial actions. Key outcomes have included:



RECOGNITION THAT CHANGE IS COMING

There is a clear recognition that change is coming and is reshaping the region and the organizational role for LSCOG. This change spans across impacts of technology, population shifts and program funding. Overall, it was determined that the region has an important value proposition, that builds on its locations and amenities.



KEY ROLE FOR COG IN FACILITATING, CONVENING AND DISSEMINATION

As part of an elevated role in promoting and advocating for the region, it was identified that LSCOG has a pivotal role to convene groups in the region, facilitate important discussions and help disseminate information to local counties, cities and organizations.



REGION HAS A 'THREE-SPEED ECONOMY'

The Lower Savannah region has complexity based on its geography and economic drivers. The areas closer to the main population centers have strong growth, while areas the furthest out continue to face economic headwinds. The areas with high potential for economic growth in the short to medium term are in the intermediate zones such as Orangeburg and the Williston / Blackville / Barnwell areas.



NEED TO BUILD AN AGILE AND RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

The funding streams and program areas are likely to change as government priorities shift. There was encouragement from stakeholders to build an agile and responsive organization that can focus on creating and seizing new opportunities.



FOCUS ON INNOVATION

Throughout the planning process, stakeholders and staff expressed a strong desire to focus on innovation and building the capacity for bold programs and actions. This was supported at each step in the planning process and will become a key focus area.

For a complete account of the LSCOG Strategic Action Planning process and reports, please see the project portal at www.LSCOG.org.

The Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG) Strategic Action Plan project has been a robust, inclusive, and forward-looking planning process. The project’s objective was to produce the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan, which aims to position LSCOG on a path of continued growth and development over the coming five years.

The process explored the future strategic positioning of the organization and created an enduring, collaborative roadmap to the future. A fundamental premise is that the world is changing fast, and LSCOG needed decisive thinking to help envision how it will thrive over the coming five years.

- This initiative was focused on Strategic Foresight for the future of the organization. It explored where and how LSCOG could fit into a rapidly changing world and within the Lower Savannah Region, South Carolina.
- The process took a ‘future view’, looking out to 2030.
- A connected, collaborative approach was designed with the intention of including voices from across the LSCOG organization and associated stakeholder groups. There were various opportunities to participate, including a Think-Tank workshop, Stakeholder Survey and Focus Groups.

LSCOG STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG)
Strategic, Visioning and Planning Study





1.1 | LOWER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (LSCOG)

LSCOG, established in 1967, serves Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun and Orangeburg counties.

LSCOG is governed by a Board of Directors, composed of thirty-nine members, who are appointed by participating county governments. The Board set policy and provide direction to the COG’s programs, with guidance from the Executive Director and LSCOG staff.

LSCOG’s programs are divided into six departments: Administration; Aging, Disability and Transportation; Housing; Planning, Community and Economic Development; Tourism; and Workforce Development.

Staff assist the aging population of the region; administer regional transportation programs; plan for future land use in communities; provide grant writing and administration services; provide workforce training and development; and much more. All of the programs and services help local governments best serve their constituents.

Programs are funded through a variety of sources, including federal and state grants, and contributions from local governments. Major funding sources include the Economic Development Administration, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, SC Department of Transportation, SC Department of Commerce, SC Department on Aging, and SC Department of Employment and Workforce.

In addition to the major funding sources, LSCOG works with several partners throughout the region to administer or fund programs and services. These partnerships help the programs flourish in the region. Partners include the United Way of Aiken County, Savannah River Site Redevelopment Authority, school districts across the region and many others.

LSCOG covers a geographically extensive region, serving six counties. The Strategic Action Planning process has assisted LSCOG in its future direction and growth over the coming years.





1.2 | OBJECTIVES OF THE LSCOG STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN PROCESS

The presence of the Steering Committee ensured that the planning approach reached out to all parts of the Lower Savannah region and sought their input and involvement.

As part of initiating the strategic planning process, a Steering Committee consisting of 10 regional representatives was created in June 2024 to guide the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan project.

Committee members felt it was important to establish an overarching orientation for the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan process. The Committee members attended monthly meetings and assisted with the guidance of the project. Dr. William Molnar (Executive Director, LSCOG) and Ms Nora Sanders (Deputy Executive Director, LSCOG) headed up the project working with Future iQ on a weekly basis regarding the organization, content, and direction of the project.

The objectives of the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan process included:

- **Creating a common vision** that will energize and unite the Lower Savannah region around the Strategic Action Plan and its implementation while acknowledging that implementation of the Plan may look different in various parts of the region.
- **Concentrating on research and staff/stakeholder engagement** that focuses on LSCOG services for users, non-users, and stakeholders (including board and staff). This research and engagement identified the needs and wants of the region, as well as ways to raise awareness and provide clarification to the community on the scope of services provided by LSCOG.
- **Embracing, celebrating and leveraging the varied and diverse strengths**, at both staff and regional stakeholder levels.
- **Identifying areas for collaboration on economic development projects**, including ways existing assets and institutions can be leveraged for greater success across the region.
- **Identifying success markers** to promote collective accountability after plan adoption.



For a complete list of Steering Committee Members, please see the acknowledgments section at the end of this report. The Steering Committee represented an excellent cross section of the LSCOG organization and the wider region. Of special note within the engagement metrics was the engagement of all voices in the County. In addition, there was a wide range of perspectives with specialty interest areas that spanned economic development, municipal government and community focused not-for-profits. This broad perspective is reflected in the stated objectives.

2.0 | HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report lays out the findings from each key step in the Strategic Action Planning process.

The process moved from a background analysis and exploration, through to identifying key priorities for the future of LSCOG. This work represents robust 'future thinking' regarding where stakeholders and community members considered possible directions and the impacts and consequences of those directions for LSCOG in 2030. The process, and this Strategic Action Plan report, then drilled down deeper into what people saw as the optimal or preferred future. This understanding helped lay the groundwork for illustrating how the preferred future can be reached. The preferred future identified through this process presents a compelling and enticing vision for how LSCOG could evolve looking out to 2030. However, a vision needs actions, and this report provides actions.

The focus of the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan has been on research and in-depth community and stakeholder engagement that focuses on the future of LSCOG, looking out to 2030.

Steps in the Process



Sections of the Report



3.1 | DIFFERENCES ACROSS THE LSCOG REGION

The LSCOG region is fascinating in terms of its history and population distribution. A key defining feature of the region is its ‘three-speed’ economy. By looking at the region, and its proximity to population centers, it is possible to identify different areas that have quite different needs. Three broad zones can be identified as:

STRONG PERFORMING AREAS CLOSE TO POPULATION CENTERS

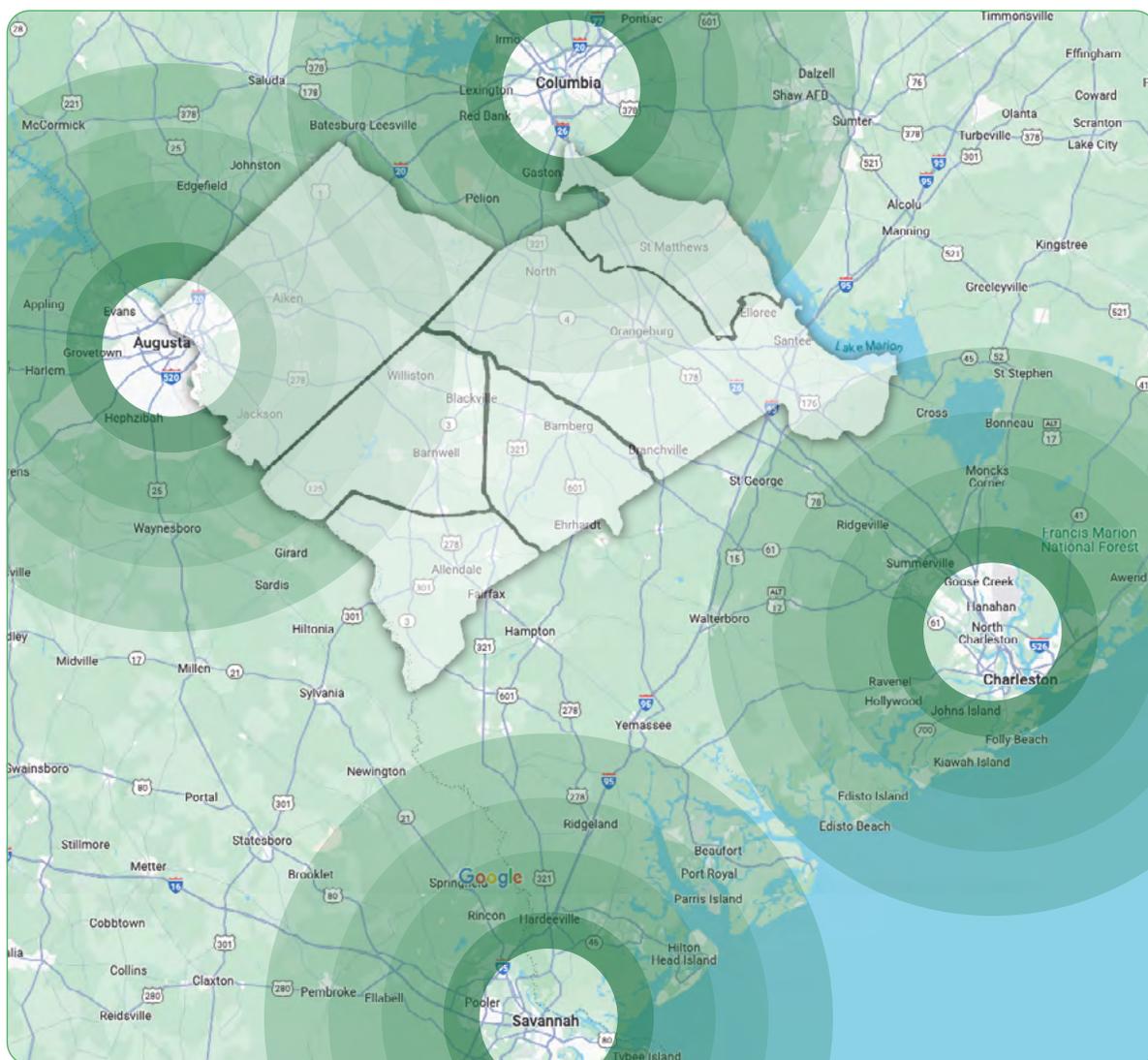
These areas are close to the larger populations and economic drivers of Augusta, Columbia and Charleston. These areas have strong local economies and high-capacity organizations.

HIGH POTENTIAL EMERGING AREAS

The areas with high potential for economic growth in the short to medium term are in the intermediate zones such as Orangeburg and Williston / Blackville / Barnwell areas. These areas have workforce capacity and are poised for growth.

DISTRESSED AND DISADVANTAGED AREAS

The areas further from the main population centers face unique challenges and therefore have special needs. Capacity building is a critical issue, to allow these communities to find creative solutions to building new opportunities.





3.2 | CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In creating the situational analysis, there were several important factors that emerged from research and stakeholder input. These included:

CHANGE IS COMING

This was clearly identified by the Board and stakeholders. This change is driven by external forces and trends as well as changing investment patterns within the region. A key change that could have significant implications is the larger impacts of climate change and how it might alter migration patterns, especially where retiree populations are headed. The region could be uniquely positioned to be a desirable location for residential growth.

FUNDING STREAMS WILL CHANGE

It is reasonable to presume that funding streams and priorities will change. This will require an organization that is able to seize new opportunities and can form creative partnerships to assemble new funding models and sources.

REGION HAS A 'THREE-SPEED ECONOMY'

The LSCOG region has complexity based on its geography and economic drivers. The areas closer to the main populations centers have strong growth, while areas the furthest out continue to face economic headwinds. The areas with high potential for economic growth in the short to medium term are in the intermediate zones such as the Orangeburg and Williston / Blackville / Barnwell areas. This requires different approaches for each of these areas.

STAFF ARE ACTIVATED AND COMMITTED

The staff and leadership at LSCOG are capable and activated. There is stable and effective leadership, and strong institutional knowledge. In addition, there is a desire in the staff team to take a more innovative approach and be highly effective in serving the regional communities.



Future Insights

- An overarching opportunity that has been identified is the idea of moving from an approach of 'meeting needs' to 'seizing opportunities'. This pivot would reflect the mandate that the LSCOG has to help build regional connectivity and prosperity.
- There is considerable opportunity for the LSCOG to lead on building the regional narrative and championing success in the region, bringing some attention and excitement.



4.0 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY & OUTCOMES

The LSCOG Strategic Action Plan has been built on community and stakeholder input, which was the intention at the project inception. This engagement was an integral and central design feature of the planning process.

The engagement and data-driven methodology progressively focused the discussion on emerging key themes and stakeholder aspirations for the future. The purpose of the process was to arrive at a ‘point of consensus’ that represented the shared vision for the future, and a comprehensive strategic plan – with actions - that propels the region towards that preferred future.

A key feature of the engagement and planning process was the amount of and participation at the various points of engagement.

LSCOG Strategic Action Plan Engagement Process



Data Insights

- Stakeholders had various options to input into the Strategic Action Plan process via the Stakeholder survey, Think-Tank Workshop and Focus Groups.
- The input represented a good cross section of the Board members, staff and key partners. There was a core group of participants who contributed to each step in the process that helped provide continuity.



4.1 | STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

The LSCOG Strategic Action Plan Stakeholder Survey ran through October 2024. The survey received 19 responses.

With a mixture of close-ended, ranking questions and open-ended questions, this survey asked how the LSCOG works and its regional impact, satisfaction with the work being carried out by LSCOG, the most effective and impactful work being done by the LSCOG team and how LSCOG could improve to deliver greater impact.

Respondents were asked 13 questions, and the results of the survey can be viewed in the Survey results section of the project portal at <https://lab2.future-iq.com/lscog-strategic-action-plan/lscog-stakeholder-survey/>.

Respondents gave rich and in-depth responses to the open-ended questions and plotted their thoughtful perspectives on the ranking questions.

The results from the Stakeholder Survey can be viewed on the project portal, together with reports from the planning work.



Key Insights from the Stakeholder Survey

- Overall, stakeholders were very supportive of the role and function of the LSCOG organization. This was reflected in very positive comments about the impact the organization has at the local community level, and with people who benefit from the services and programs.
- LSCOG is recognized as an impactful organization that brings significant resources to the region and helps facilitate important change processes.
- Despite the solid reputation, it was evident that the breadth of the LSCOG work is not well understood. This probably reflects the broad range of functions the organization covers and the large geographic size of the region.
- The overall vision, direction and function of the LSCOG was not clear to stakeholders and is an opportunity to help redefine the messaging about the organization.



Approximately 30 people attended the LSCOG Future Think-Tank, held at the Edisto Research Center, Clemson Extension, Blackville to work on four plausible futures for LSCOG, looking out to 2030.

4.2 | FUTURE THINK-TANK

To identify the preferred future of LSCOG, looking out to 2030, regional stakeholders participated in the scenario-planning LSCOG Future Think-Tank. The scenario-based Think-Tank event was held on September 18, 2024. Approximately 30 people attended including key business, education, government, non-profit stakeholders, and LSCOG staff and leadership.

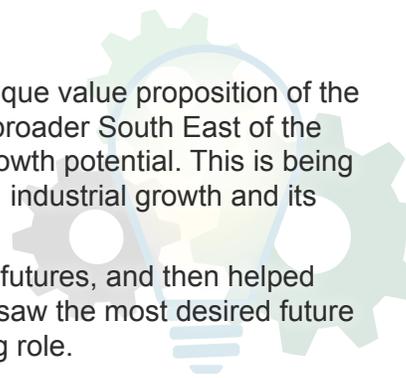
The Think-Tank was intended to build a vision for future planning for LSCOG that will guide the organization looking out to 2030 through scenario planning methodology. After Macro/Global Trends were presented to the group and related to LSCOG, participants worked through the scenario planning process to produce 4 plausible futures for LSCOG, looking out to 2030. This resulted in a least desired future, expected future and a preferred future.

More information on the content and outcomes from the LSCOG Future Think-Tank can be found in Section 4 of this Strategic Action Plan and also in the LSCOG Future Think-Tank report that was released in September 2024 and be viewed at <https://lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/LSCOG-SAP-Think-Tank-Report.pdf>.



Key Insights from the Think-Tank

- The Think Tank process helped begin to identify the unique value proposition of the region. It was determined the region, being part of the broader South East of the United States, is in a solid position in terms of future growth potential. This is being propelled by the desirability of the region for retirement, industrial growth and its proximity to large population centers.
- The scenario planning process identified four plausible futures, and then helped identify the preferred future. In particular, stakeholders saw the most desired future being one where collaboration and innovation play a big role.





4.3 | FOCUS GROUPS

Following on from the Think-Tank and from analysis of the results of the Stakeholder Survey, 6 Focus Groups were held to explore in greater detail the topics that had been generated in the process.

Six topics were identified as being critical to the future of LSCOG, in order to create the preferred future produced from the Think-Tank. Each topic was studied in a 90-minute session with experts and interested parties.

The topics were identified as:

- **Promote and Advocate** the Larger Regional Value Proposition
- **Activate** the Economic Development in Higher Potential Areas
- **Support** the Transition in Distressed and Disadvantaged Areas
- **Unleash** Staff and Organizational Capacity
- **Build** Larger Consortium of Partners and Funders
- **Build** a More Co-Operative and Flexible Organization

The Focus Group topics would form the six Strategic Pillars for this Strategic Action Plan.

The six Focus Group topics would form the basis of this Strategic Action Plan as the foundational Strategic Pillars.



Key Insights from the Focus Groups

- The Focus Group process created some excellent insights about the potential future direction of the organization.
- The Board Focus Group worked primarily on the outward facing topics, and the staff Focus Group worked on the internal organizational topics.
- The Focus Group discussions helped reinforce the appetite for bold and innovative thinking across the organization's operations and its overall direction. These sessions helped identify key priority high-level action areas.

5.0 | FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

5.1 | IDENTIFYING THE PREFERRED FUTURE FOR LSCOG

To identify the preferred future of LSCOG, looking out to 2030, regional stakeholders and LSCOG staff members and leadership participated in the scenario-planning Think-Tank.

The scenario framework created four different future scenarios, with varying degrees of change and trajectory. The scenarios were created using the scenario matrix framework, which was built around the two macro themes of Organizational Trajectory and Organizational Focus. This framework was used through the community engagement work and survey to identify a preferred future, and help inform the strategic plan.

The scenario planning process provides a method to explore plausible futures and consider the implications of various future scenarios. The Think-Tank workshop aimed to:

- **Deepen** the understanding and examination of how external events and local conditions could shape decision-making
- **Outline** the initial results from the LSCOG Stakeholder Survey
- **Identify and understand** the key influences, trends, and dynamics that will shape the region looking out to 2030
- **Create and describe** four plausible long-term scenarios for LSCOG
- **Explore** alignment around a shared future vision

The scenarios developed during the scenario planning process are important to provide a framework to discuss future possible outcomes and implications for strategies for LSCOG. In addition, the Think-Tank deliberations assisted in identifying key actions for the organization and explored how various groups might collaborate to best contribute to future policy making. The process involved an exploration of local trends and forces of change as well as the development of a scenario matrix defining four plausible scenario spaces for the future. The event concluded with discussion of the scenarios, selection of a preferred scenario, and the compilation of potential high-level strategic actions. For additional information and details on the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan Think-Tank, please read the [LSCOG Strategic Action Plan Think-Tank Report](#).

The scenario planning process encourages curiosity and collaboration by providing a way to explore plausible future scenarios from a speculative standpoint.



5.2 | SCENARIOS OF THE FUTURE FOR LSCOG – FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORATION

During the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan Think-Tank, four different future scenarios were created.

The scenarios were created using the scenario matrix framework that was built around the two macro themes of Organizational Focus, and Organizational Structure. The in-depth scenario planning process enabled the development of four potential future scenarios. For more details on the LSCOG Strategic Action Think-Tank, please refer to the published in-depth [Think-Tank Report](#).

The scenario development process at the Think-Tank allowed stakeholders to examine the implications and consequences of different and plausible future directions for LSCOG, looking out to 2030, against a backdrop of Macro Trends and the key drivers that are impacting LSCOG now and looking out to 2030.

The organization builds a flexible approach and structure. Programs and activities are delivered in a co-operative and seamless manner, with staff having broad skills and knowledge about services and the types of support. Resources are shifted rapidly to match emerging needs.

The organization responds to funding streams and focuses almost exclusively on delivering the related programs. The overall approach is responding and reacting to priority service needs and external priorities. The leadership focus is on delivering familiar programs in a reliable manner.



The organization is very proactive and works closely with local and regional partners to identify new opportunities and needs. Programs are innovative and designed to address emerging needs. The leadership focus is on helping position and promote the region and its value proposition.

The organization is built around strong departments, that focus on specific programs and services. Expertise is deeply embedded based on programs and topic areas. Resources are allocated based on the departmental framework.





5.4 | THE PREFERRED FUTURE FOR LSCOG IN 2030 – “INNOVATION AND BOLD ACTION”

The preferred future generated from the work carried out in the LSCOG Think-Tank was **Scenario B – Innovation and Bold Action**.

This scenario forecasts a future where the organizational structure of LSCOG shifts to a more co-operative and flexible approach with emphasis on staff skills and knowledge of LSCOG programs. At the same time the focus of LSCOG is on collaboration and being proactive as it works with local and regional partners to identify opportunities. There is a new focus on building and promoting a larger regional value proposition. The value of staff is recognized, and their capabilities are maximized.

In this new future, LSCOG has a focus on advocating for regional success.

Working in a measured manner with both local and regional partners ensures programs are innovative and thoughtfully designed to reach the emerging needs of all of the counties. There is also a proactive move to building a larger consortium of partners from across the region. The transition in more disadvantaged areas is focused upon and developed. Promotion and messaging/positioning of the region and its value proposition is key and ensures that LSCOG and its programs and services are well known and understood across the region. At the same time LSCOG moves to a more flexible approach and structure with well trained staff and a less fixed leadership model, incorporating rotating leadership and inclusion of local and regional partners. Staff feel more empowered and their capabilities are valued and expanded upon. This future ensures that LSCOG plans diligently for the future with more input from staff and local and regional partners and as a result is seen to be forward-thinking, innovative and bold.

The preferred future ‘Innovation and Bold Action’ outlines a shared vision for the organization. The trajectory from expected to preferred future constitutes the strategic actions needed to make this vision become a reality.



Future Insights

- The preferred future for LSCOG is one where it adopts an innovative approach to organizational development, as well as a more future ready strategic direction.



6.0 | STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS FRAMEWORK

The key organizing framework for this Strategic Action Plan is six Strategic Pillars.

The pillars represent the major theme or topic areas that underpin the preferred future for LSCOG. The key actions are structured around these six key strategic pillars, which are the fundamental building blocks that support the vision for the organization. This LSCOG Strategic Action presents a series of strategic actions that can be achieved in the short to medium term that will produce long-term results. They are intended to produce systemic and catalytic shifts that will drive the future economic growth, agility, and vitality of the organization and attract new people and investments. These actions are designed to build the future pathway to the preferred future.



6.1 | PROMOTE AND ADVOCATE THE LARGER REGIONAL VALUE PROPOSITION

Promote and Advocate the Larger Regional Value Proposition

6.1.1 | IMPORTANCE OF THIS PILLAR

The region must offer a value proposition that distinguishes its package of strengths and assets for prospective funding opportunities, as well as appeal for new residents, businesses and investment prospects.

To be effective in a highly competitive environment, the region must clearly define its assets that make it a desirable location. This will provide an important narrative to help communicate the value proposition to outside audiences and build a sense of pride and vision internally within the region. The LSCOG has an important role to help build the regional profile and narrative, and advocate for the region.

The planning work suggests that stakeholders believe the region is poised for growth and has an opportunity to seize on new opportunities. Building the profile and positive narrative about the region will be essential to future success and momentum.

"We need to look forward and embrace changes that are upon us and are coming to the region; and include other perspectives to overcome potential individual and group biases."
- Stakeholder Survey Respondent



Future Insights

- The LSCOG is an organization that is well placed to help define and promote a clear vision and narrative about the region. The region is home to some significant research facilities, business investments and amenities. Elevating the story about the region can be an important part of the LSCOG role.
- Within the region, the LSCOG has an important role to bring together key players to facilitate discussions about the future. This forward-leaning role can help distinguish LSCOG as an influential thought-leader in regards to the development of the region and its communities.



Promote and Advocate the Larger Regional Value Proposition

6.1.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

For this strategic pillar, two key action areas have been identified. These aim to deepen the leadership role that LSCOG has in the region, especially as a convener and advocate for the regional success.

The specific actions recommended to support this strategic pillar include:



BUILD THE REGIONAL NARRATIVE AND DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- There is a need to resource a full-time Communications staff member to focus on telling the ‘Regional Story’ in a consistent and energetic manner via coordinated marketing efforts. This regional story can draw from the numerous success stories in the region and help amplify the core messages from the LSCOG.
- The organization has a key role in building the regional narrative and advocating and championing success stories about the region. This work can help bring the needed excitement about the region, and the progress that is being made. This approach can be spread across the existing programs and communication platforms and bring a sense of celebration and enthusiasm.



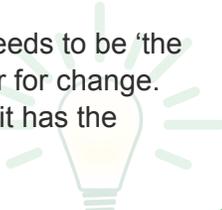
ELEVATE CONVENING ROLE OF LSCOG IN REGION

- It has been identified that the LSCOG has a key role in facilitating, convening and disseminating. The organization is well respected and is the ideal entity to lead the process of bringing players together. The LSCOG also has access to significant resources which can be used to bring people to the table.
- In the convening role, LSCOG can help provide thought-leadership on regional topics. This could include convening people to discuss important emerging trends or opportunities and help facilitate collaborative approaches.



BOLD IDEA

- To be successful in a rapidly changing world, the region needs to be ‘the region that is ready’ and LSCOG needs to be the facilitator for change. This is an elevation of the profile and role of LSCOG, and it has the credibility and respect to take on this leadership role.





Activate the Economic Development in High Potential Emerging Areas

6.2 | ACTIVATE THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER POTENTIAL AREAS

6.2.1 | IMPORTANCE OF THIS PILLAR

The areas with higher potential for economic growth, in the short to medium term, are in the intermediate zones such as Orangeburg, and Williston and Barnwell areas. These areas are geographically well placed and poised for growth.

Economic development is necessary to improve higher potential areas in the region to attract new businesses and residents, families and workers. Success in these higher potential areas of achievement will also help impact the more disadvantaged areas by bringing economic activity closer to their population.

The core issues for the higher potential areas will be housing, workforce development and transportation. Working on these core issues will help these areas become investment ready.

"We need to bring businesses to the region to develop land and generate cashflow. A Manufacturing facility will increase jobs and potential for housing in semi-urban areas."
- Focus Group Participant



Future Insights

- These intermediate areas are very promising, as they have reasonably large workforce pools, and still have affordability in terms of housing and land. There is good work being done to boost educational and vocational skill levels, which helps makes these locations even more attractive.
- Convening these communities together to explore opportunities will help accelerate the process of building readiness.



Activate the Economic Development in High Potential Emerging Areas

6.2.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

For this strategic pillar, two key action areas have been identified. These aim to build investment ready communities that are progressing on workforce development, housing and transportation.

The specific actions recommended to support this strategic pillar include:



CONVENE PARTNERS TO ASSIST GETTING THE HIGHER POTENTIAL COMMUNITIES 'INVESTMENT READY'

- An important part of being investment ready is to ensure that communities have the services and amenities in place that will appeal to future workforce and companies.
- This includes having good community spaces like downtown zones and enhanced green spaces via walking trails and parks. The LSCOG has a key role to play in this work by helping to facilitate support via programs such as Community Development Block Grants.



PRIORITIZE ACTION ON CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICE NEEDS

- The LSCOG helps bring resources to the table to make things happen. This is especially the case in core areas such as housing and transportation.
- In this capacity, the LSCOG can act as a convener of conversations between eco-developers, tech schools and local governments – to help communities move from planning to implementation.



BOLD IDEA

- The LSCOG could help host and convene regional partners in 'Future Summits' that allow people to explore big ideas and opportunities and help position these areas of the region as future ready.





Support
Transition and
Adaptation in
Distressed and
Disadvantaged
Areas

6.3 | SUPPORT TRANSITION IN DISTRESSED AND DISADVANTAGED AREAS

6.3.1 | IMPORTANCE OF THIS PILLAR

The areas further from the main population centers face unique challenges and therefore have special needs. Capacity building is a critical issue, to allow these communities to find creative solutions to building new opportunities.

This region has a challenge with the disparity between higher potential areas and more distressed and disadvantaged areas. This creates the challenge of delivering services and programs to areas that have very differing needs and challenges. In the more disadvantaged areas, there are the challenges of lack of infrastructure and capacity.

The more disadvantaged areas face a challenge of scale, where the size of challenges is large, and the pool of resources is small. Finding creative ways to pool and build resources will be a key step to achieve progress.

“There is a major difference between the counties – we need to address this. The counties need to be interconnected – 40% of Allendale residents are out of work”
- Stakeholder Survey Respondent





**Support
Transition and
Adaptation in
Distressed and
Disadvantaged
Areas**

6.3.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

For this strategic pillar, two key action areas have been identified. These aim to build capacity in these disadvantaged areas and help build the critical scale of resources.

The specific actions recommended to support this strategic pillar include:



FOCUS ON BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY

- It is proposed that LSCOG focus on offering opportunities including town hall meetings (to include residents) to help local leadership gather input and generate collaborative ideas at a sub-regional level. These ideas would be focused on priorities for local action.
- This work would be supported by enhancing access to grant writers or staff to help research other types of funding that may be available to provide services to the more rural areas. This could include support for resilience work to ensure well-functioning institutions and that local organizations have the capacity to administer and receive grant funding.



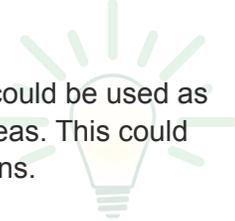
BUILD A STRONGER INTERNAL ALLIANCE BETWEEN ALLENDALE AND BAMBERG

- It is suggested that LSCOG take a role to facilitate between these two counties and partner the smaller counties and communities together. This would be focused on identifying areas where resources could be shared, or collaboration could help build critical scale for investments such as equipment.
- Explore potential for shared service and infrastructure projects between Allendale and Bamberg.
- Connect to other similar ‘case study’ communities; that have been able to build momentum. This could help identify initial action steps.



BOLD IDEA

- To access new ideas in these communities, novel ideas could be used as competitions for the best solutions to problems or new ideas. This could engage the community in an approach of creating solutions.





Unleash Staff and Organizational Capability

6.4 | UNLEASH STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITY

6.4.1 | IMPORTANCE OF THIS PILLAR

This pillar focuses on enhancing, maintaining and improving upon LSCOG’s current work and its capability to serve the region. This includes staff development and maximizing overall organizational and staff output.

During the staff stakeholder sessions, there was a clear desire to embrace more innovative approaches, and ‘lean into change’. This will potentially lead to the organization having greater relevance, spur innovation and create new opportunities for the region. Staff development will benefit from staff retention and their enhanced feeling of appreciation, buy in and connection to the organizational vision and purpose.

The LSCOG staff are capable and activated. The organization has strong and stable leadership, which is a solid foundation to explore new areas of innovation.

“LSCOG is able to advise municipalities about projects and funding. They are promoting counties and towns that do not have the ability to promote themselves.”
- Stakeholder Survey Respondent





Unleash Staff and Organizational Capability

6.4.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

For this strategic pillar, two key action areas have been identified. These aim to build the focus on innovation, and to better define the employment packages offered to staff.



The specific actions recommended to support this strategic pillar include:



CREATE A STRONG INNOVATION FOCUS

- It is proposed to set up an Innovation Committee within the organization, with a staff team focused on this topic. This would be complemented with an opportunity at quarterly staff meetings to enable the sharing of ideas, experiences and present ideas.
- As an overall approach, the organization should encourage staff input regarding what they see 'on the ground' and where innovation can occur and what improvements can be made. This will help make innovation part of the everyday thinking and ethos of the organization.



REDEFINE AND EXPAND EMPLOYMENT PACKAGES

- There has been an expressed desire to develop clearer potential Career pathways for staff members. This reflects the loyalty staff have to the organization and the wish to progress in their careers and roles.
- It is proposed to better define and promote the full employment benefits, including aspects beyond monetary benefits such as the package of entitlements.
- Staff have expressed a desire to explore the potential for more flexible work options, and possibly hybrid work options.



BOLD IDEA

- The LSCOG spans a significant geographic region. The potential for hybrid or flexible work options might offer the chance for some staff to be located throughout the region.





Build Larger Consortium of Partners and Funders

6.5 | BUILD LARGER CONSORTIUM OF PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

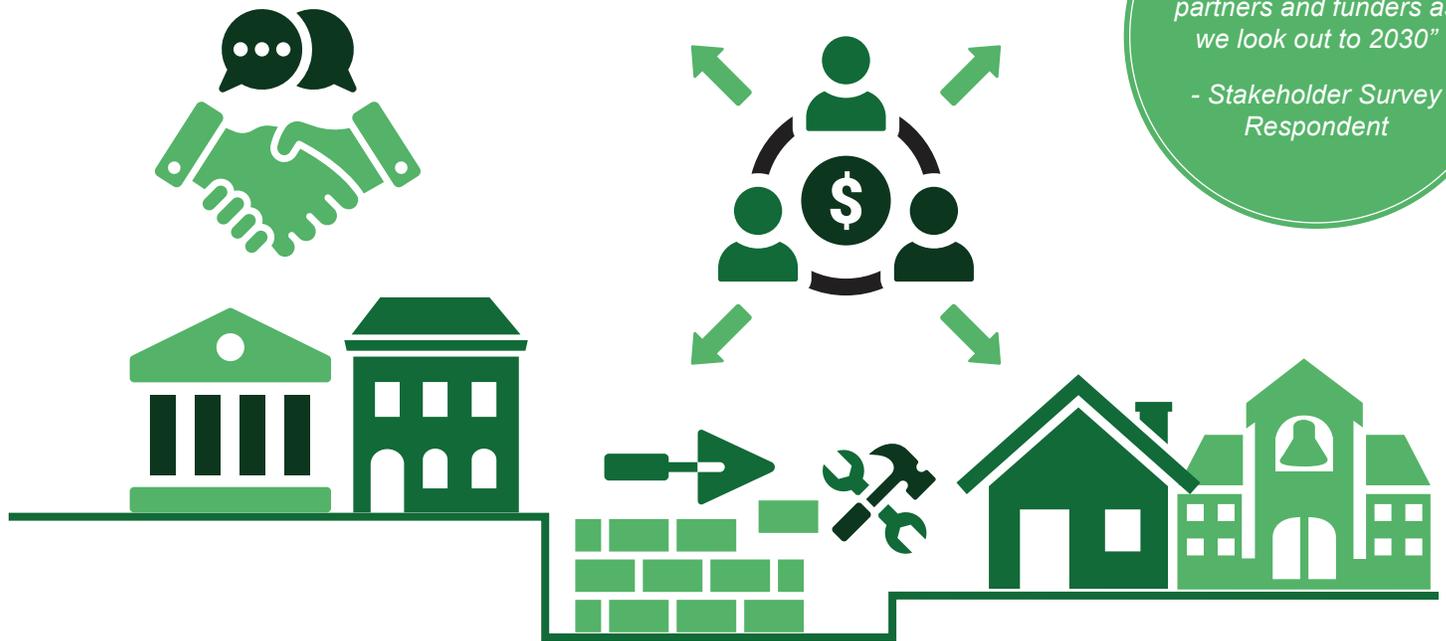
6.5.1 | IMPORTANCE OF THIS PILLAR

The planning process has identified an important strategic approach to expanding the funding streams for programs and services. This is partly to build resilience in regards funding stability, but also to pursue new opportunities.

To maintain the relevance and capability of LSCOG across the region, it is necessary to have a large and active consortium of partners and funders. LSCOG is well placed to reach out to potential new funders and position itself as a solution provider. This could help bring additional resources and efforts in to support core priorities.

Expanding the collaborative approach will help bring in new partners, and potentially help aggregate new resources to help with key elements of the LSCOG vision and purpose.

"We need to expand upon our current partners and funders as we look out to 2030"
- Stakeholder Survey Respondent





Build Larger Consortium of Partners and Funders

6.5.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

For this strategic pillar, two key action areas have been identified. These aim to build a broader consortium of partner organizations and help focus efforts around priority areas.

The specific actions recommended to support this strategic pillar include:



CREATE BROAD CONSORTIUMS WITH PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE FUTURE-FOCUSED

- The planning work has identified a priority action to build broad creative partnerships with other regional players such as charitable organizations, electric co-ops, private companies etc. This will bring more existing institutional players to the table, and LSCOG can utilize its resources and programs to help build the incentive for people to convene together.
• There is also the potential to partner with technology companies for future developments. For example, there could be interest in areas such as agricultural innovations, delivery via drones, remote service delivery and other novel applications of emerging technologies.



PRIORITIZE CONVENING WORK ON TRANSIT AND HOUSING SOLUTIONS

- The core of the LSCOG work is in the primary service areas. This should remain a focus and there is ample opportunity to enhance housing options across the region for workers and incoming residents including affordable housing.
• There is also a need to continue to support the transportation network to build access to a viable local workforce and connect workers to new employment opportunities.



BOLD IDEA
• LSCOG has identified innovation as a key focus for the future, and this could be a theme to help attract new future-focused partners and collaboration. Convening potential partners in 'innovation forums' could help connect new ideas with opportunities.



Build a More Co-operative, Responsive and Flexible Organization

6.6 | BUILD A MORE CO-OPERATIVE AND FLEXIBLE ORGANIZATION

6.6.1 | IMPORTANCE OF THIS PILLAR

The planning process has identified that LSCOG wants to become a more flexible and co-operative organization. This is an approach for both internal operations and external focus.

One of the core shifts identified in the planning work, is for the organization and the leadership to move from 'serving needs' to a 'seizing opportunities' approach. This shift does not mean a reduction in programs that provide important support, but it positions the organization as a more dynamic solution provider that is focused on innovation and adaptation.

Taking a more co-operative and flexible approach will require more internal collaboration. In this approach, teams may rapidly form around specific new issues and challenges to work on solutions.

"From my perspective, the LSCOG teams are like a well-oiled machine. Good communication, fast and responsive actions and informed decision-making are the hallmarks of these teams"
- Stakeholder Survey Respondent





Build a More Co-operative, Responsive and Flexible Organization

6.6.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

For this strategic pillar, two key action areas have been identified. These aim to build the Board’s depth and foresight and empower the organization’s leadership team.

The specific actions recommended to support this strategic pillar include:



ELEVATE THE BOARD FOCUS AND RENEW MEMBERSHIP

- It is proposed to have a focus on helping the Board embrace and mobilize around generational change.
- Board mobilization and capacity building will include:
 - Board retreat - Triggering bold thinking with a high-performing Board.
 - Elevating the ambassador role - LSCOG Board to act as ambassadors to the region and make presentations in their own counties, helping to build profile and heft.
 - Seek additional resources and support - Encourage board members and partners to assist with looking for additional resources (education, funding and workforce).



EMPOWER EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM TO SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES

- Empowering the executive team to move from a ‘meeting needs’ to ‘seizing and creating opportunities’.
- This will help focus on generating alternative and additional funding opportunities for LSCOG, which will allow it to have an expanded role in the communities/region.



BOLD IDEA

- The LSCOG acts as an important level of Government. One idea proposed during the planning was for the organization to embrace a ‘high-performing’ mindset that looks to elevate its function and role in the region.



7.0 | COMBINED STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK

The framework for action developed through the strategic action planning process has identified a set of key actions that will help LSCOG pivot its trajectory towards the ‘Innovation and Bold Action’ future.

This framework is the culmination of engagement and input via surveys, in person Think-Tank and deliberation by the focus groups. The resulting overall framework creates the basis of the roadmap to the future and the guiding vision that will inform future planning efforts by LSCOG.

Promote and Advocate the Larger Regional Value Proposition

- Build the regional narrative and develop communication strategy
- Elevate convening role of LSCOG in region

Unleash Staff and Organizational Capability

- Create a strong innovation focus
- Redefine and expand employment packages

Activate the Economic Development in High Potential Emerging Areas

- Convene partners to assist getting the higher potential communities ‘investment ready’
- Prioritize action on critical infrastructure and service needs

Build Larger Consortium of Partners and Funders

- Create broad consortiums with partner organization that are future-focused
- Prioritize convening work on transit and housing solutions

Support Transition and Adaptation in Distressed and Disadvantaged Areas

- Focus on building local capacity
- Build a stronger internal alliance between Allendale and Bamberg

Build a More Co-operative, Responsive and Flexible Organization

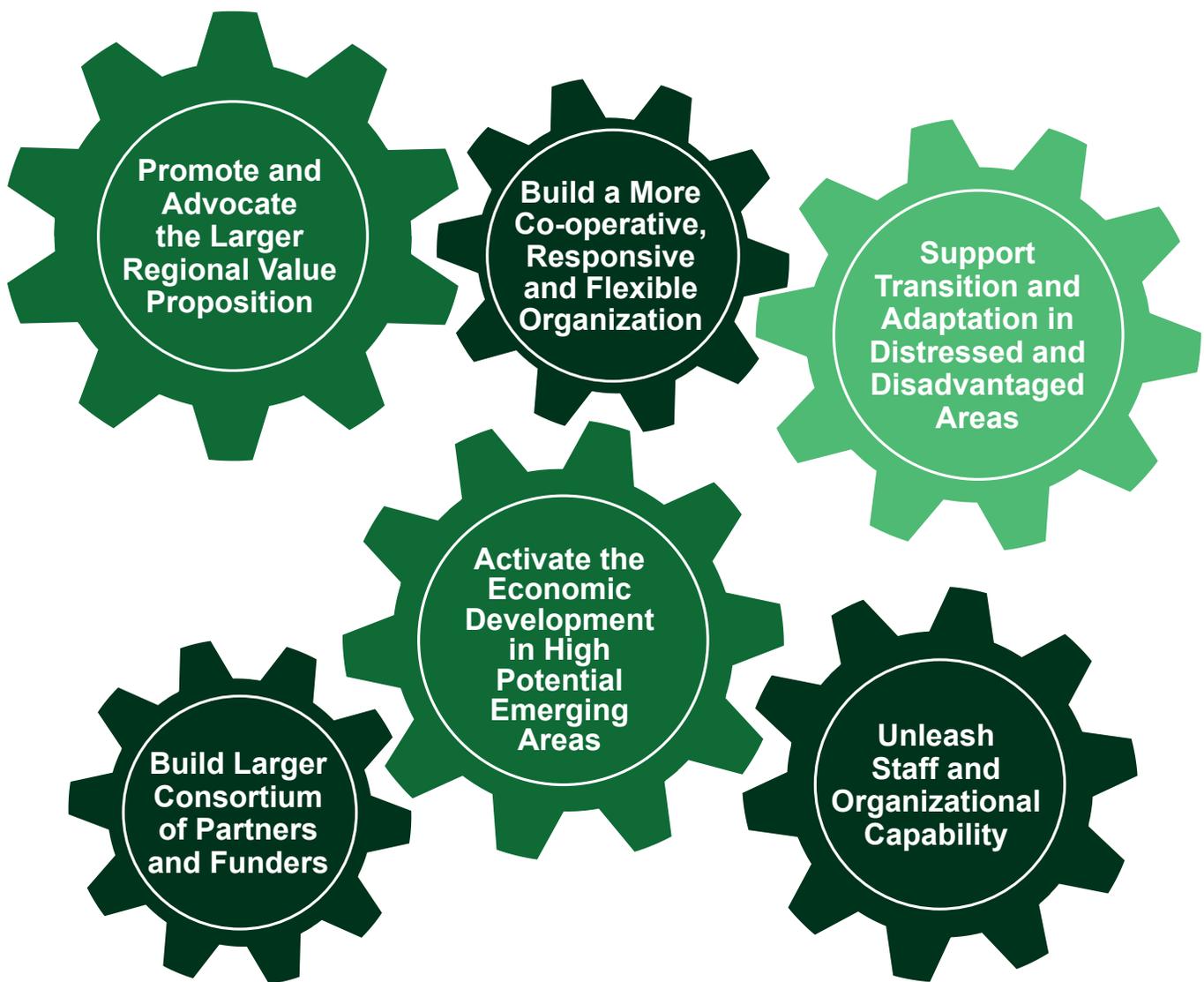
- Elevate the Board focus and renew membership
- Empower executive leadership team to seize opportunities





8.0 | DYNAMIC SYSTEMS-THINKING APPROACH

The framework for action developed through the strategic planning process has identified a set of 12 key actions that will help LSCOG pivot its trajectory towards the 'Innovation and Bold Action' scenario.





9.0 | COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

For the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan to be accessible to all stakeholders, it will be necessary to focus on a communications strategy going forward.

As highlighted in Strategic Pillar 1 - Promote and Advocate the Larger Regional Value Proposition, there is a need to build this regional narrative and develop an energetic and consistent communication strategy. This would include:

- **Hiring a full time LSCOG Communications staff member** to focus on telling the ‘Regional Story’ in a consistent and energetic manner via coordinated marketing efforts which would include:
 - Promoting the LSCOG Strategic Action Plan with Social Media tile linking to the plan after it is launched.
 - Regional Website
 - Social Media
 - Monthly Newsletter
- **Building the regional narrative** and advocating / championing success in the region
 - Consistent press releases and outreach to all areas to inform and update the residents across the region of regional news stories, LSCOG updates and engaging with stakeholders to be part of the communication process.
 - Identify the regional value proposition and build an outward facing communication plan to reach potential partners, funders, legislators and investors.



9.1 | LSCOG SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEWSLETTER

LSCOG has an opportunity to boost its profile and impact by building the frequency and impact of its communications. Regular outreach via social media platforms or organizational e-newsletters would assist this process.

- **Utilize the existing LSCOG social media** creatively and actively to create a dialogue and shared platform with stakeholders and partners. Currently LSCOG has a Facebook page, this could expand to other social media platforms such as a Linked In page and possibly Instagram.
 - Produce three posts a week incorporating information from regional partners and tagging all stakeholder organizations/partners in order to also share these posts.
 - Create posts that incorporate news from LSCOG but share regional information and success stories which will be appealing to social media followers.
- **Produce a monthly (or quarterly) LSCOG Newsletter** to send electronically to an enhanced and comprehensive mailing list across the region. The monthly newsletter would also be available in hard copy to post out to those without internet access. The newsletter would include:
 - Updates from LSCOG
 - Regional updates from stakeholders/partners
 - Good news stories regarding success stories from the region
 - Spotlight section on LSCOG Team Member each month – featuring photo and information on the LSCOG staff member, which will encourage transparency and enable people to feel connected and provide a personal connection with the LSCOG staff. This could include a short interview with the LSCOG staff member about the work that he/she does and their thoughts on the future of the region. This would also encourage staff connection to LSCOG and to the region.
 - Spotlight section on an individual from the region each month. This could be a person from a stakeholder organization/partner but would bring the stakeholder organizations/partners and LSCOG closer together and create an interesting new angle.
 - Newsletter space could be offered to local businesses and new developments information, which would deepen business connections across the region and inform people of relevant activity within businesses across the region.





10.0 | NEXT STEPS – ROADMAP TO THE FUTURE

LSCOG has undertaken a strategic planning process that has produced the following outcomes:

- **Documented** a detailed understanding of stakeholder views across a range of important topics and future shaping factors.
- **Allowed detailed examination** of plausible future scenarios, explored expected, least desired, and preferred futures, and built an understanding of the implications of these future options.
- **Identified a preferred vision** for the future, acknowledging that there are a variety of viewpoints.
- **Identified key strategic pillars**, objectives, action areas, and community ideas.

Stakeholders and LSCOG staff have shown a healthy appetite for change going forward. This is the first step towards the preferred future 'Innovation and Bold Action', that will guide the organization's future planning efforts.

Now, the next phase of work needs to begin. The following immediate next step is recommended:

- **Incorporation of the key elements** of the Strategic Action Plan into LSCOG's future planning efforts





»»»» 10.1 | ROADMAP TIMELINE & SCHEMATIC

Pillar	SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (2025)	MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (2026)	LONG-TERM ACTIONS (2027-2030)
Pillar 1: Promote and advocate the larger regional value proposition	Build the regional narrative and develop communication strategy	Elevate convening role of LSCOG in the region	Convene regular thought-leadership roundtables
	Hire a full-time Communications staff member	Convene LSCOG's first leadership roundtable (link to pillar 2)	
Pillar 2: Activate the economic development in high potential emerging areas	Prioritize action on critical infrastructure and service needs; identify funding support	Convene partners to assist getting the higher potential communities 'investment ready'	Take action on the identified critical infrastructure and service needs
Pillar 3: Support transition and adaptation in distressed and disadvantaged areas	Focus on building local capacity – identify grant writers and funding sources	Build a stronger internal alliance between Allendale and Bamberg	Identify potential for shared service and infrastructure projects between Allendale and Bamberg
		Host series of town hall meetings to gather input and foster collaboration mindset around capacity building	Connect with/build relationships with other 'case study' communities to learn about successful strategies
Pillar 4: Unleash staff and organizational capability	Create a strong innovation focus; encourage staff input	Set up an Innovation Committee; meet quarterly	
	Redefine and expand employment packages		
Pillar 5: Build larger consortium of partners and funders	Prioritize work on transit and housing solutions	Identify technology companies to partner with on future developments (link to pillar 1)	Create broad consortiums with partner organizations that are future-focused
Pillar 6: Build a more cooperative, responsive and flexible organization	Elevate the board focus and renew membership	Organize a Board retreat to trigger bold thinking	
	Empower executive leadership team to seize opportunities		



11.0 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The LSCOG Strategic Action Steering Committee was formed to assist with this project. We would like to acknowledge the members of the Steering Committee for their guidance and advice during the monthly Steering Committee Meetings.

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Stakeholders and LSCOG staff have engaged in this strategic action planning process with great enthusiasm and commitment. Their passion and interest have ensured discussions are open, thoughtful, and reflective of the myriads of perspectives that exist within LSCOG. This dedication is also reflective of the deep commitment participants have to the future of LSCOG.

Additionally, extra appreciation is extended to Dr. William Molnar (Executive Director, LSCOG) and Nora Sanders (Assistant Executive Director, LSCOG). Weekly project calls held with Dr. Molnar and Ms. Sanders has provided extraordinary support, direction and guidance.





»»»» 12.0 | FOR MORE INFORMATION

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These reports and the associated data analysis are available on the project portal:

www.LSCOG.org





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LOWER SAVANNAH
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VISION & STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2024

LOWER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (LSCOG)
STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

SOUTH CAROLINA, USA

JANUARY 2025