



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
2024 Annual Performance Progress Report



RESOLUTION NUMBER FY2025-001

RESOLUTION OF THE NORTHEAST OHIO FOUR COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION (NEFCO) GENERAL POLICY BOARD ADOPTING AND AUTHORIZING THE SUBMITTAL OF THE *COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) 2024 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT* TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

WHEREAS, the NEFCO region is undergoing significant changes in the structure of its economy; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA), has designated the NEFCO region as an Economic Development District based on the incidence of unemployment rates and the existence of the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)*; and

WHEREAS, the NEFCO General Policy Board in conjunction with its 124 local units of government has formulated a regional economic development strategy titled the *2023-2028 CEDS*; and

WHEREAS, the EDA requires the submittal of the *CEDS 2024 Annual Performance Progress Report* by October 30, 2024 to maintain NEFCO's Economic Development District designation and the region's eligibility for EDA funding; and

WHEREAS, communities in the Counties of Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne have participated in the formulation of the *CEDS*; and

WHEREAS, the Regional CEDS Committee has provided input on the *CEDS 2024 Annual Performance Progress Report*.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the NEFCO General Policy Board adopts the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2024 Annual Performance Progress Report*, its goals, strategies, and action items, and authorizes the submittal of the report to the Economic Development Administration.

Certified as action taken by the NEFCO
General Policy Board at its regular meeting
of October 16, 2024


Todd Peetz, Secretary
NEFCO General Policy Board



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Acknowledgements

The Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization staff thanks the General Policy Board and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee for their assistance in the completion of this report.

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Introduction

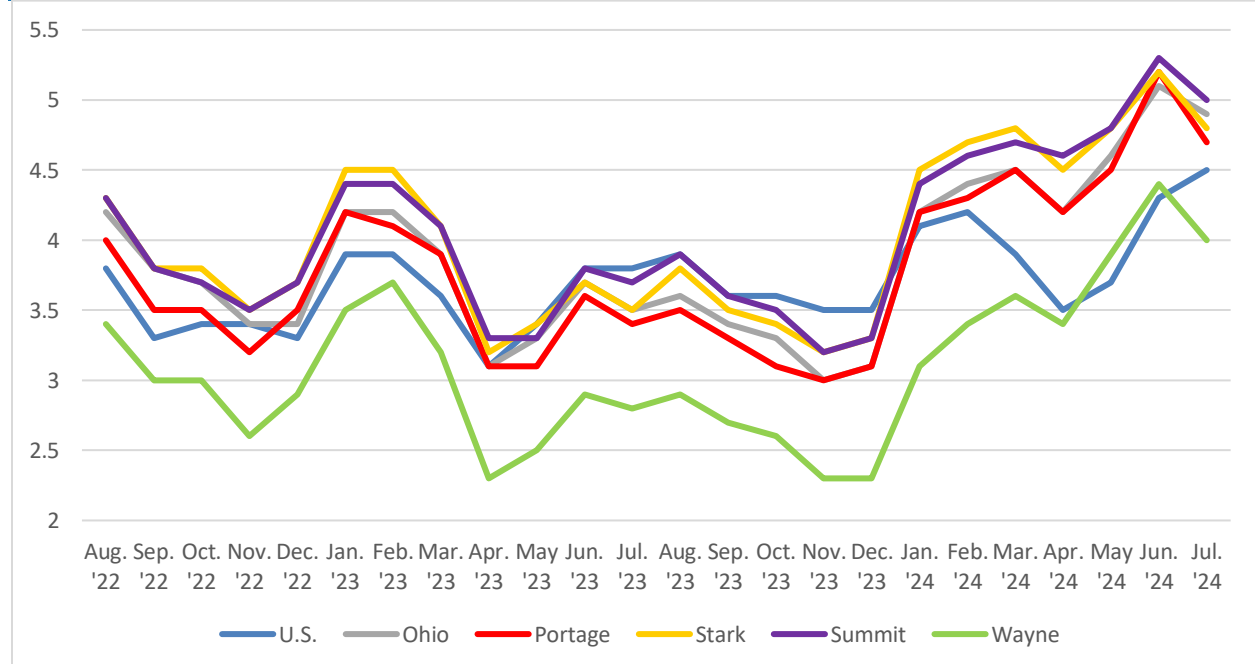
The 2024 Annual Performance Progress Report (APPR) combines elements of the former semi-annual progress reports and the annual performance reports. The period of performance for this APPR spans from January 1, 2024, to September 30, 2024; subsequent APPRs will correspond to the federal fiscal year (October 1 to September 30). This APPR includes a regional overview with current regional economic distress data; an organizational overview including the NEFCO staff and General Policy Board and Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee rosters; a review of the accomplishments in technical assistance for 2024, program outreach and project development highlights; a description of adjustments made to the CEDS and NEFCO strategies; an evaluation of the CEDS goals; and a schedule for goals, program activities, and NEFCO strategies for the upcoming year.

Regional Overview

24-month Unemployment and Per Capita Income in the NEFCO Region

The 24-month unemployment rate pattern for the four NEFCO counties shows the seasonal jumps in unemployment occurring each January and June, as well as a steady rise in the last six months (see Figure 1). The 24-month period spans between August 2022 and July 2024; data are provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The region's unemployment rates match the trend experienced by Ohio and the U.S. Wayne County consistently had the lowest unemployment rates throughout the 24-month period. Summit County generally had the highest unemployment rate among the NEFCO counties.

Figure 1: 24-Month Unemployment Rates for NEFCO Counties

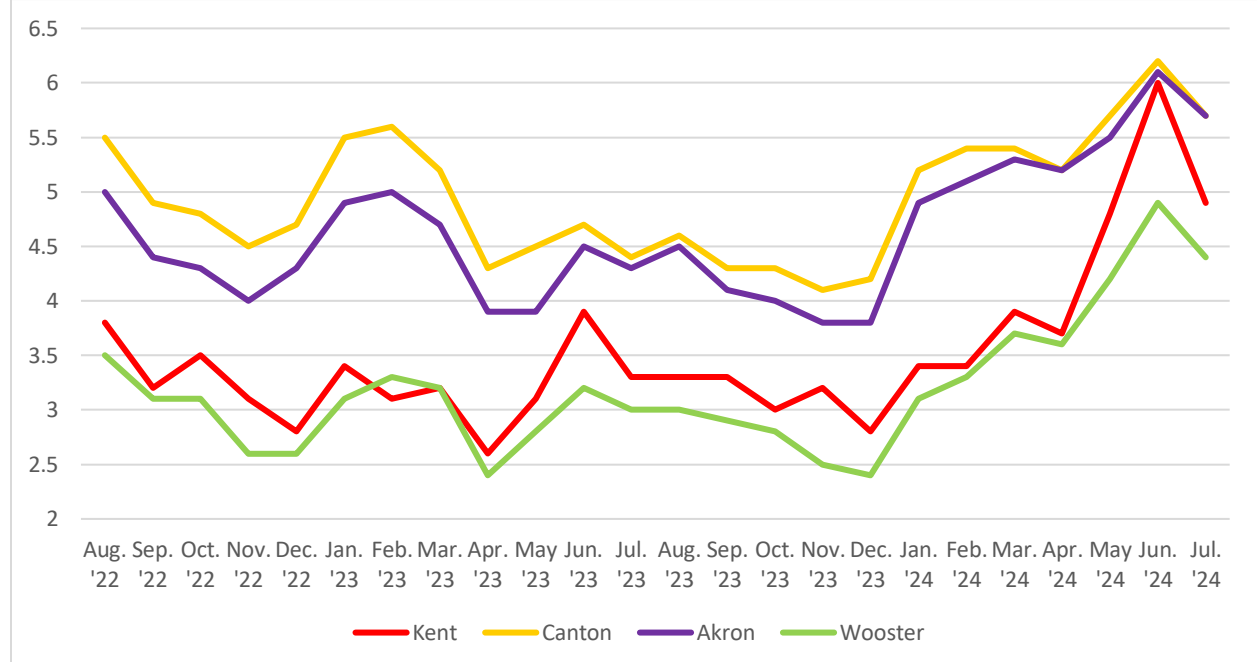


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2024

Figure 2 illustrates the unemployment rates over the last 24 months for the NEFCO member cities. The patterns are generally consistent with Figure 1. The most noticeable pattern is that Wooster and Kent

consistently had lower unemployment rates than Akron and Canton. Additionally, the cities' monthly unemployment rate mirrors that of their respective counties, as seen in Figure 1. Wayne County and Portage County had lower unemployment rates than Stark County and Summit County. This pattern may be reflected in the employment sectors of each county. For instance, Wayne has the lowest percentage of retail and service-related jobs, which continue to experience workforce shortages.

Figure 2: 24-Month Unemployment Rates for NEFCO Member Cities



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2024

Local governments may qualify for EDA assistance based on the economic distress of a census tract or a community's per capita income. A community can qualify as economically distressed either by its per capita income or unemployment rate. A community's per capita income must be 80 percent or less than the U.S. per capita income (\$41,261) or have a 24-month unemployment rate one percent or greater than the national average of 3.71 percent (in period ending July 2024). The per capita income data is derived from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey Five-Year estimate (2018-2022); these data are updated annually. The 24-month unemployment rate is dynamic, updated monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics; the rate accounts for the last 24 months and is constantly changing accordingly. The 24-month period for this report includes unemployment data between August 2022 and July 2024.

Table 1 displays calculations of economic distress for counties and select cities and villages in the NEFCO region. City and county names in bold denote economically distressed communities per EDA metrics. Cells without data indicate that statistics are not provided at this geographic level by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In Portage County, the municipalities of Garrettsville, Hiram, Kent, Ravenna, and Windham have per capita median income levels less than 80 percent of the national average. In Stark County, the municipalities of Alliance, Beach City, Brewster, Canton, East Canton, East Sparta, Magnolia, Massillon, Minerva, Waynesburg, and Wilmot have per capita income levels less than 80 percent of the U.S.; Canton has a 24-month unemployment rate of 4.95 percent, which is also a qualifying metric. In Summit County, the municipalities of Akron, Barberton, Lakemore, and Northfield have per capita



income levels less than 80% of the U.S. In Wayne County, the municipalities of Apple Creek, Congress, Creston, Shreve, West Salem, and Wooster have a per capita median income level below 80 percent of the national average. Also, the per capita median income of Wayne County is \$32,908, which is 79.76 percent of the national average.

Table 1: Economic Distress in the NEFCO Region

| Unit of Government | 24-month Unemployment Rate (BLS)* | PCMI (ACS 5-yr. est.: 2018-2022) | Percentage of U.S. PCMI |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Portage County | 3.78% | \$37,771 | 91.54% |
| Village of Garrettsville | N/A | \$32,746 | 79.36% |
| Village of Hiram | N/A | \$24,178 | 58.60% |
| City of Kent | 3.53% | \$27,506 | 66.66% |
| City of Ravenna | N/A | \$29,996 | 72.70% |
| Village of Windham | N/A | \$19,089 | 46.26% |
| Stark County | 4.02% | \$34,652 | 83.98% |
| City of Alliance | N/A | \$25,606 | 62.06% |
| Village of Beach City | N/A | \$30,193 | 73.18% |
| Village of Brewster | N/A | \$27,728 | 66.96% |
| City of Canton | 4.95% | \$22,649 | 54.89% |
| Village of East Canton | N/A | \$31,465 | 76.26% |
| Village of East Sparta | N/A | \$28,048 | 67.98% |
| Village of Magnolia | N/A | \$32,512 | 78.80% |
| City of Massillon | 4.35% | \$29,859 | 72.37% |
| Village of Minerva | N/A | \$32,797 | 79.49% |
| Village of Waynesburg | N/A | \$24,123 | 58.46% |
| Village of Wilmot | N/A | \$24,437 | 59.23% |
| Summit County | 4.04% | \$40,786 | 98.85% |
| City of Akron | 4.63% | \$28,930 | 70.11% |
| City of Barberton | 4.47% | \$30,995 | 75.12% |
| Village of Lakemore | N/A | \$29,903 | 72.47% |
| Village of Northfield | N/A | \$31,137 | 75.46% |
| Wayne County | 3.10% | \$32,908 | 79.76% |
| Village of Apple Creek | N/A | \$28,699 | 69.55% |
| Village of Congress | N/A | \$28,103 | 68.11% |
| Village of Creston | N/A | \$28,389 | 68.80% |
| Village of Shreve | N/A | \$31,273 | 75.79% |
| Village of West Salem | N/A | \$30,767 | 74.57% |
| City of Wooster | 3.10 | \$32,296 | 78.27% |
| NEFCO region | 3.90% | \$37,680 | 91.32% |
| Ohio | 3.86% | \$37,729 | 91.44% |
| United States | 3.71% | \$41,261 | - |

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 24-month Average (August 2022-July 2024); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023: ACS 2022 5-year Estimates Data Profiles (2018-2022); StatsAmerica

N/A – not available; statistics not provided at this geographic level

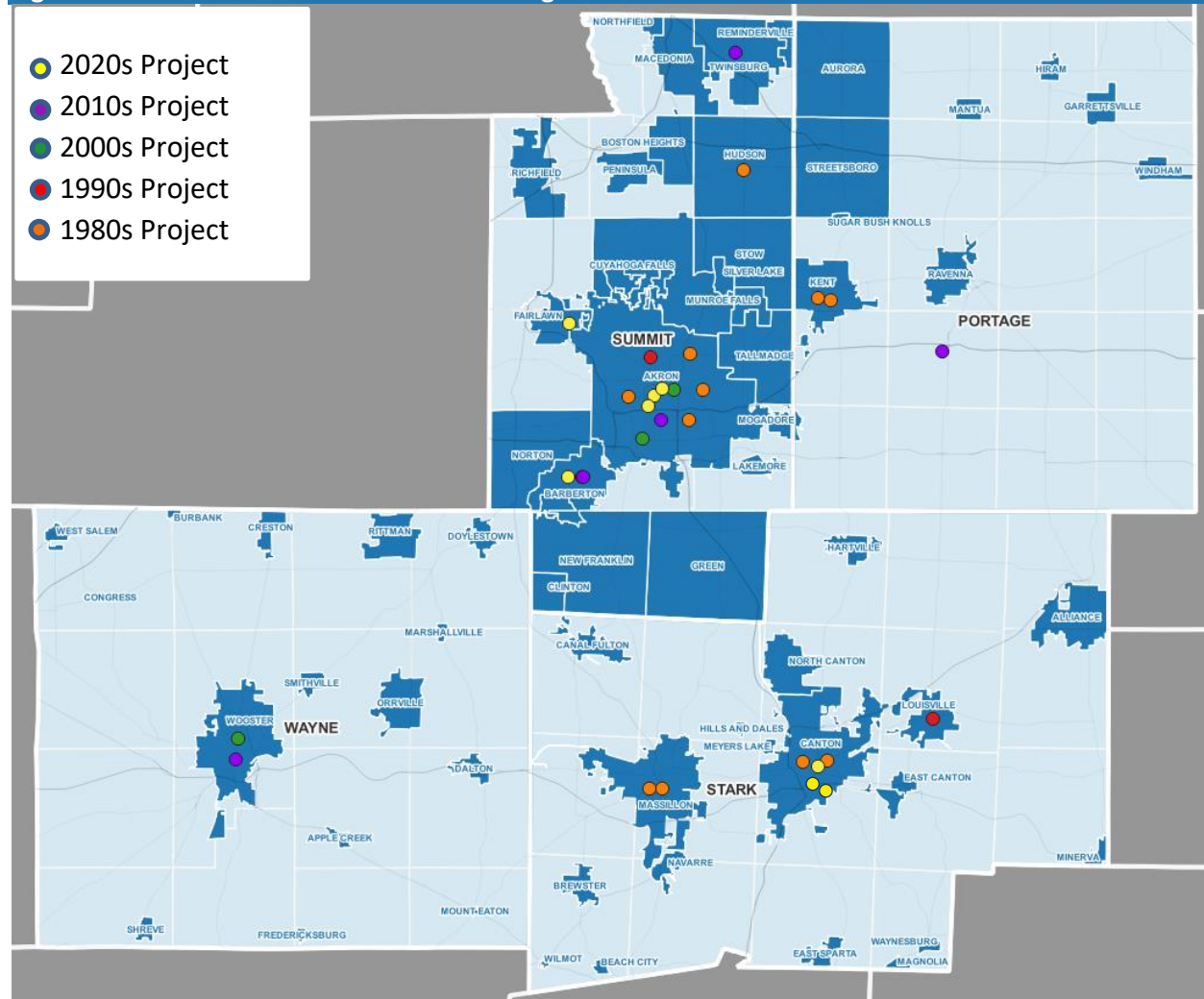
*BLS unemployment rates not seasonally adjusted

Organizational Overview

Staff Capacity

NEFCO's Program Manager for Economic Development Planning manages the agency's economic development planning program and CEDS planning process. As part of the CEDS, staff is also working on the implementation of regional business, workforce development and entrepreneurship, and community development strategies identified in the Economic Recovery and Resiliency (ER&R) Plan, which was completed in 2022. Two other full-time staff members assist with the economic development planning program, including the NEFCO Executive Director and Administrative Assistant. The economic development planning program focuses on the CEDS planning process, working collaboratively with communities in the four-county region on project development, and providing technical assistance and authoritative recommendations to communities and organizations around the region with projects, funding opportunities, and grant applications, particularly EDA grant projects. The map on page 10 illustrates the distribution of EDA grant monies invested in the NEFCO region since 1980 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Past EDA Grant Awards in NEFCO Region



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration



General Policy Board

Table 2 shows the composition and affiliations of the NEFCO General Policy Board. NEFCO's governing board is the decision-making body for the organization. The General Policy Board is broadly representative of the principal environmental and economic interests of the region. There are 40 members from the counties of Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne and the cities of Akron, Canton, Kent, and Wooster. Membership composition is determined by the organization's bylaws. The cities of Canton, Kent, and Wooster each have one member; the City of Akron has seven; Wayne County has three members; Portage County has six; Summit County has nine members; and Stark County has twelve members. Member counties and cities have the appointing authority for all their respective members.

Table 2: NEFCO General Policy Board

| Name | Affiliation | Type |
|---------------------------|--|----------------|
| Portage County | | |
| Amos Sarfo | Stormwater Program Supervisor, Soil and Water Conservation District | Public Sector |
| Joe Diorio | Portage County Health Commissioner | Public Sector |
| Sabrina Christian-Bennett | County Commissioner | Public Sector |
| Todd Peetz | Director, Portage County Regional Planning Commission | Public Sector |
| Daniel Blakely | Director, Portage County Water Resources | Public Sector |
| Rochelle Hartigan | Citizen, Portage County Appointee | |
| City of Kent | | |
| Kailyn Cyrus | Development Planner | Public Sector |
| Stark County | | |
| Keith Bennett | County Engineer | Public Sector |
| David Maley | Planning and Development Director, City of Louisville | Public Sector |
| Kirt Conrad | CEO/Executive Director, Stark Area Regional Transit Authority | Public Sector |
| Pete Wearstler | Planning Director, City of Alliance | Public Sector |
| Richard Regula | County Commissioner | Public Sector |
| Jim Troike | County Sanitary Engineer | Public Sector |
| Bob Nau | Director, Stark County Regional Planning Commission | Public Sector |
| Alfredo Carranza | Building Contractor, Stark County Appointee | Private Sector |
| Dan Moeglin | Executive Director, Stark Parks | Public Sector |
| Stephan Wilder | Mayor, City of North Canton | Public Sector |
| Michael Naso | Economic Development Services Coordinator, Stark Economic Development Board | Private Sector |
| Vacant | | |
| City of Canton | | |
| James Benekos | City Engineer | Public Sector |
| Summit County | | |
| Alan Brubaker | County Engineer | Public Sector |
| James Balogh | Twinsburg Township Trustee | Public Sector |
| Sam Scaffide | Mayor, City of Twinsburg | Public Sector |
| David Kohlmeier | CTI Engineering | Private Sector |
| Caitlin Elrad | Economic Development Coordinator, Department of Community & Economic Development | Public Sector |



| Name | Affiliation | Type |
|-----------------------|---|----------------|
| Ilene Shapiro | County Executive | Public Sector |
| Dianne Sumego | dms water solutions, llc. | Private Sector |
| Michael Vinay | Sanitary Sewer Services Director | Public Sector |
| Vacant | | |
| City of Akron | | |
| Shammas Malik | Mayor | Public Sector |
| Tina Boyes | Council Member | Public Sector |
| Chris Ludle | Deputy Director Public Service | Public Sector |
| Helen Tomic | Comprehensive Planning Manager | Public Sector |
| Margo Sommerville | Council Member | Public Sector |
| Kyle Julien | Director of Planning | Public Sector |
| Vacant | | Public Sector |
| Wayne County | | |
| Jonathan Hofstetter | County Commissioner | Public Sector |
| Jenn Kiper | Planning Director | Public Sector |
| Steve Wheeler | Safety/Service Director, City of Orrville | Public Sector |
| City of Wooster | | |
| Robert Reynolds | Mayor | Public Sector |
| Ohio EPA (Ex Officio) | | |
| David Emerman | Chief, Northeast District Office | Public Sector |

Regional CEDS Committee

The Regional CEDS Committee includes representatives from the NEFCO's four counties and largest city in each of the counties, private sector representatives from the various county economic development boards, a university representative, and a representative from a nonprofit venture development organization (see Table 3). The Regional CEDS Committee is representative of the region's principal economic interests and drives the CEDS planning process.

Table 3: Regional CEDS Committee

| Name | Representing | Title | EDA Category |
|-----------------|---|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Betty Aylsworth | Ohio Agricultural Research & Development Center | Program Coordinator | Higher Education |
| Gregg Cramer | Greater Akron Chamber | Vice President, Economic Development | Private Sector |
| Brad Ehrhart | Portage Development Board | President | Private Sector |
| Matt Riehl | JumpStart, Inc. | Director of Government Relations | Private Sector |
| Ray Hexamer | Stark Economic Development Board | President | Private Sector |
| Jonathan Millea | City of Wooster | Development Coordinator | Public Sector |
| Robert Nau | Stark County Regional Planning Commission | Executive Director | Public Sector |
| Maribeth Burns | Wayne Economic Development Council | President | Private Sector |



| | | | |
|------------------|---|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Dennis Tubbs | Summit County Dept. of Community and Economic Development | Assistant Director | Public Sector |
| Scott Wagner | Barberton Community Development Corp. | Executive Director | Private Sector |
| Jenn Kiper | Wayne County Planning Department | Director | Public Sector |
| David Messner | City of Akron | Development Manager | Public Sector |
| Eric Helmstedter | City of Kent | Economic Development Director | Public Sector |
| Todd Peetz | Portage County Regional Planning Commission | Director | Public Sector |
| Chris Hardesty | City of Canton | Economic Development Director | Public Sector |

The Regional CEDS Committee represents the principal economic interests of the NEFCO region. Note: some updates or changes to this list may occur.

The Regional CEDS Committee is advisory to the NEFCO General Policy Board. The Regional CEDS Committee and General Policy Board participate in the agency's regional economic development planning program, directing the planning strategy, providing economic development updates, and assessing the progress of the region in implementing the CEDS.

Accomplishments – Technical Assistance

Planning and Implementation Assistance

NEFCO provided significant technical assistance on project development in 2024. Staff assisted area officials, community leaders, and professionals with various projects of importance to local communities. In 2024, NEFCO met with and assisted many communities and organizations on funding opportunities and grant applications. NEFCO provided technical assistance, authoritative recommendations on projects and EDA grant applications, and letters of support to communities and organizations around the region for projects that advance the goals and objectives of the NEFCO CEDS. NEFCO staff worked closely with EDA grant applicants to improve the competitiveness of applications and ensure projects meet EDA investment priorities. Staff also acts as liaison between prospective applicants and the EDA, coordinating meetings with EDA staff and providing technical assistance on federal notices of funding opportunity.

NEFCO provided technical assistance and letters of support to the following communities and organizations for projects in 2024:

- Stark Economic Development Board: EDA Recompete Pilot Program (Phase 2) for Reconnecting Canton Project
- Greater Akron Chamber: EDA Tech Hubs Phase 2 for Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub
- Barberton Community Foundation: EDA Local Technical Assistance Grant, Polymer Workforce Center
- Greater Akron Chamber: EDA Good Jobs Challenge for Advanced Polymer and Manufacturing Excellence (APEX) initiative



- County of Summit: U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Charging Facilities Infrastructure Grant
- City of Akron: DOT Charging Facilities Infrastructure Grant for E-Mobility Expansion for Greater Akron (E-MEGA) project
- City of Canton: DOT Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant for Tuscarawas Street West Corridor Safety Project
- City of Wooster, DOT RAISE Grant for Downtown Wooster Streetscape and Roadway Improvements
- Portage Area Regional Transit Authority, Ohio Department of Transportation SFY 2025 Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership Program
- A&J Urban Development, LLC: Ohio Department of Development All Ohio Future Fund loan application for Ford Farm redevelopment

2024 EDA Grant Awards for NEFCO Region

| Applicant | Project | EDA Grant | Award |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Greater Akron Chamber | Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub | Tech Hubs Phase 2 Implementation Grant | \$51,000,000 |

The NEFCO region received one EDA grant award in 2024. The Greater Akron Chamber was awarded a \$51 million Tech Hubs Phase 2 Implementation Grant for the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub. NEFCO was and continues to be an active member of the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub consortium.

Accomplishments – Program Outreach

Updates and Communication

Each month, NEFCO staff communicates funding opportunities and provides updates to its members on issues that affect the region. NEFCO's monthly General Policy Board meetings provide a forum for this communication. Time-sensitive information on new initiatives and other information are emailed to economic development professionals. NEFCO utilizes its website to communicate public events, important meetings, and dates of the General Policy Board, Environmental Resources Technical Advisory Committee and Regional CEDS Committee meetings. NEFCO also maintains an active funding opportunities page on its website, which includes numerous programs in seven different categories: broadband and telecommunications, brownfields and environmental remediation, community development and planning, parks and recreation, public works and economic development, transportation, and water quality and conservation. General Policy Board meetings also occasionally feature speakers on topics selected by staff and/or requested by Board members. The NEFCO *Forum* newsletter provides additional information and key updates on regional environmental and economic development planning activities. NEFCO issued a newsletter in May 2024.

NEFCO staff provides information to the public and private sectors on critical issues affecting the region, including Census data updates, federal and state legislative updates, and funding notices. NEFCO's administration of two U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-funded brownfields assessment grants has made the agency a critical resource for brownfields redevelopment planning. Additionally, staff's close relationship with the U.S. EPA and the Ohio EPA allows NEFCO to assist its members in obtaining quick answers to questions on environmental issues.



Involvement on Regional Committees

During 2024, NEFCO's Executive Director continued to serve as a member of the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).¹ Additionally, the Executive Director serves as a member of the Summit County District 8 Public Works Integrating Committee TAC, which recommends public infrastructure projects for funding through the Ohio Public Works Commission.²

Since 2010, NEFCO has participated in a 12-county study to examine the effects of various future land use development patterns. A vision framework and list of recommendations were adopted in 2014 by the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium Board of Directors. Since that time, a Launch Board was formed and convenes quarterly meetings to advance the plan, Vibrant NEO 2040.³ NEFCO's Executive Director serves as the 2nd Vice Chair. NEFCO staff also serves on the Vibrant NEO Champions awards committee. Champion Awards recognize organizations and individuals demonstrating exceptional leadership in the advancement of the Vibrant NEO Vision. The Executive Director also serves as a non-voting member of the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) and Vibrant NEO Brownfields Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is tasked to make revolving loan fund recommendations to the Vibrant NEO and NOACA Boards of Directors. The Steering Committee reviews applications submitted for RLF loans and subgrants; conducts all standard due diligence normally undertaken by lending entities; drafts loan and subgrant agreements, including determination of loan or subgrant, dollar amount, interest rate, and payback period, subject to Vibrant NEO and NOACA approval; and recommends projects to the Vibrant NEO and NOACA Boards of Directors or their appropriate committees, based on the criteria developed by Vibrant NEO.

Economic Resilience

The NEFCO 2023-2028 CEDS incorporates the ER&R Plan, which was funded by an EDA CARES Act grant. The ER&R Plan is fully integrated into the CEDS and includes Community Development, Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship, and Regional Business strategies. In 2024, staff worked on addressing strategies recommended in the ER&R Plan; staff will continue to work on implementing these strategies in 2025.

NEFCO's Environmental Resources Technical Advisory Committee holds ongoing discussions on various environmental issues. NEFCO is also a member of Summit County's District 8 Technical Advisory Committee, which reviews and recommends projects for funding by the Ohio Public Works Commission. Climate change and its impact on existing and planned infrastructure has been a discussion among the county's city engineers.

NEFCO Region Economic Development Conditions

Staff reviews five area newspapers daily to stay current with economic development news and changes in the region. Significant closures (generally job losses of 100 or greater) are reported to the Ohio Economic Development Representative, and, when appropriate, meetings are requested to discuss projects that will assist a community with efforts to address economic challenges. Major closures in 2024 included Universal Screen Arts in Hudson (215 jobs), Associated Materials LLC in Cuyahoga Falls

¹ Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study, <https://www.amatsplanning.org/>

² County of Summit, District 8 Public Works Integrating Committee, <https://co.summitoh.net/committee-pages/District-8-Public-Works-Integrating-Committee.html>

³ Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium, Vibrant NEO 2040, <http://vibrantneo.org/vibrantneo-2040/vneo-2040-full-report/>

(184 jobs), Anheuser-Busch in Canton (63 jobs), Nursery Supplies in Mogadore (62 jobs). Significant positive economic development stories are also noted.

Adjustments to CEDS and NEFCO strategies

On July 2, 2024, the EDA awarded a consortium led by the Greater Akron Chamber (GAC) a \$51 million Tech Hubs Phase 2 grant for the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub. The project was one of 12 (out of 31 nationally designated Tech Hubs) Phase 2 Tech Hub award recipients. The funding will advance innovation, growth, and investment through the implementation of seven component projects and establish the Greater Akron region as a global leader in sustainable polymers.

The \$51 million award represents the largest EDA grant in the NEFCO region since the organization was designated as an Economic Development District in 1978. In fact, the award is greater than the sum of all the EDA grant awards the region has ever received. The award is truly transformational for the region and the state of Ohio. Per the GAC, the Tech Hub is expected to create or retain over 4,000 jobs, spur over \$1 billion of potential private investment in expanded production capacity, and contribute \$5 billion in total economic impact for Northeast Ohio.

As part of its letter of support/CEDS alignment for the Tech Hubs Phase 2 application, the NEFCO General Policy Board – as a consortium member of the Tech Hub – committed to ensuring the CEDS continues to support and advance the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub, as it will be a principal economic focus of the NEFCO region. As part of the support, NEFCO agreed to make a policy commitment to elevate the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub as a central component of the CEDS and planning initiatives to foster regional prosperity and resiliency. Further, NEFCO staff, the Regional CEDS Committee, and the General Policy Board committed to providing planning resources and technical assistance, as necessary and requested, to support the growth and development of the Tech Hub.

On August 26, 2024, the Regional CEDS Committee made a recommendation to add a new, eighth goal to the CEDS to reinforce NEFCO's commitment to supporting the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub. On September 18, 2024, the NEFCO General Policy Board approved the new CEDS goal: Support the growth and development of the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub. The goal includes six subgoals, each including a listing of partners and resources, implementation timeframe, performance metrics, and NEFCO-specific strategies (see page 21). The updated CEDS was then forwarded to EDA staff.

Evaluation of Progress on CEDS Goals

The following evaluation details the progress made by NEFCO since January 2024 for the eight goals included in the CEDS. As mentioned earlier, the eighth goal – Support the growth and development of the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub – was added to the CEDS in September, so there was limited progress to evaluate. The evaluation includes accomplishments made by staff relative to each goal, challenges the organization has faced in addressing goals, an explanation on how NEFCO anticipates overcoming these challenges, and a status indicator. It should be noted, progress made on the various goals by other organizations in the NEFCO region are not included in this evaluation.

2023-2028 CEDS PLAN GOALS

- 1 Address the supply chain and promote domestic production
- 2 Support programs that build human capital
- 3 Encourage development of industries that support Northeast Ohio's economic clusters
- 4 Promote redevelopment of blighted, underused, vacant, and environmentally challenged sites
- 5 Encourage investment in infrastructure and affordable housing
- 6 Support programs that diversify and build strong, resilient local and regional economies
- 7 Develop benchmarking to evaluate region's progress and competitiveness
- 8 Support the growth and development of the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub⁴

Goal 1: Address the supply chain and promote domestic production

- A. Analyze supply chain issues and opportunities for the region's targeted industrial sectors
- B. Support policies and programs that encourage domestic/regional production
- C. Support programming and partnerships designed to support small businesses engaged in supply chain and production
- D. Support tech and tech-enabled startups that support and/or enhance supply chain and domestic production

NEFCO Highlight:



Provided a letter of support for Bounce Innovation Hub/University of Akron Research Foundation EDA Build to Scale grant application

Addressing the supply chain and promoting domestic production is an overarching goal of all the counties and communities in the NEFCO Region. NEFCO's role in this goal is providing technical assistance to communities and organizations on funding opportunities.

NEFCO should consider how it can incorporate the Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub (ARCH2) project into the CEDS.⁵ The ARCH2 project was awarded funding from the U.S. Department of Energy to develop the region – including parts of Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania – into a clean hydrogen energy hub. The Hub would create many jobs, lower energy costs, and maintain the region's status as a leader in manufacturing and innovation. The award leverages the region's abundant energy resources

⁴ Goal added to Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy on September 18, 2024

⁵ Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub, <https://www.am00atsplanning.org/>

and numerous public and private sector partners. The effort has been led by the Midwest Hydrogen Center of Excellence, Stark Area Regional Transit Authority, Dominion Energy, and Cleveland State University. The Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub is anticipated to create more than 21,000 jobs, including 18,000 construction jobs and more than 3,000 permanent jobs.⁶

CHALLENGES



Challenges with the supply chain are sometimes difficult to address from a regional or local perspective. Addressing supply chain and domestic production is still an overarching goal for the region. One challenge is understanding the supply chain shortages and how they impact local businesses. The regional economic development partners will continue to encourage domestic production and support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and startups. NEFCO needs to work more closely with its partners and communities to understand better how it can respond to these challenges as the regional organization. As a forum of elected officials from communities across the four counties, NEFCO can help communicate challenges to economic development partners and identify partnership opportunities. NEFCO can also communicate the various needs and challenges facing regional industrial sectors with its counties and communities.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

Goal 2: Support programs that build human capital

- A. Support the continued growth and success of programs that train/develop workers and entrepreneurs
- B. Support programs and initiatives to improve upskilling and employee retention
- C. Support efforts and programs aimed at retaining local college and high school graduates with the NEFCO region
- D. Expand technical and vocational training opportunities
- E. Support programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion

NEFCO Highlights:

| | |
|---|--|
|  | Provided technical assistance and a letter of support for Stark Economic Development Board EDA Recompete Pilot Program Phase 2 grant application |
|  | Provided technical assistance and a letter of support for Greater Akron Chamber EDA Good Jobs Challenge grant application |

Workforce development factors remain the top challenges facing the region's economy. Businesses continue to struggle to find workers. Childcare and transportation access have affected labor force participation. The region must find ways to eliminate barriers to employment and address the essential wraparound services to lure additional individuals into the workforce. Companies should consider providing flexible schedules, paid training, and other attractive benefits to be competitive.

⁶ Stark Area Regional Transit Authority, <https://www.sartaonline.com/breaking-brown-secures-appalachian-regional-clean-hydrogen-hub/>

NEFCO provided technical assistance and a letter of support for the Stark Economic Development Board's EDA Recompete Pilot Program Phase 2 grant application. Reconnecting Canton – a collaborative project of SEDB's Strengthening Stark Network and in conjunction with the city of Canton – aims to reduce the prime age employment gap in Canton through planning and targeted investments in workforce development strategies, transportation, childcare, and other critical infrastructure to remove barriers to employment and connect people with good jobs. Reconnecting Canton specifically targets the Madison-Lathrop neighborhoods in Southeast Canton. The project proposes investments in critical resources and supportive services, including expanding transportation options and rebuilding key infrastructure such as day care facilities, grocery stores, laundry facilities, and health care centers for disadvantaged populations, to enhance employment opportunities. Reconnecting Canton will also promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, as it focuses on reaching historically underrepresented communities. In December 2023, the SEDB-led coalition was awarded a Recompete Plan approval and Strategy Development Grant from the EDA. Although the SEDB was unsuccessful in obtaining the Recompete Phase 2 grant, the consortium will continue to look for other funding opportunities, including other EDA grants, to address projects included in the Reconnecting Canton Recompete Plan.

NEFCO also provided technical assistance and a letter of support for the Greater Akron Chamber's EDA Good Jobs Challenge grant application for the Advanced Polymer and Manufacturing Excellence (APEX) initiative. The GAC and its partners – ConxusNEO, Manufacturing Works, MAGNET, Stark State College, University of Akron, community-based organizations, and diverse regional employers – are seeking funding to support sector partnerships throughout the region that bring together businesses, education and training, and partners to design and deliver workforce programs and services that train and place individuals in good jobs. While the project will impact all Northeast Ohio, the focus geography will be Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne Counties. The project is utilizing a two-pronged approach: (1) an entry-level strategy to bring new, underrepresented and un- and underemployed individuals – including women, people of color, and justice-impacted jobseekers – into the advanced manufacturing sector; and (2) an incumbent worker advancement component to upskill manufacturing and polymer employees. The entry-level strategy includes recruitment, job readiness bootcamps, technical training, support services and career coaching. The incumbent worker advancement component includes the development of curriculum to address training gaps in the polymer industry, including degrees and short-term training for industry credentials. The goal of the initiative is to recruit 550 individuals, help 450 complete entry-level or upskilling, and place at least 320 individuals into good jobs in the polymer and advanced manufacturing sectors. The project supports the growth and development of the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub. The project will utilize workforce development and community development organizations to connect un- and under-employed individuals with polymer and advanced manufacturing job opportunities and work with polymer companies to develop training and apprenticeship programs with job placement opportunities upon successful completion.

CHALLENGES

As noted earlier, workforce development is the top challenge facing the NEFCO region. NEFCO will continue to assist communities and workforce development organizations with funding opportunities and work on addressing some of the NEFCO ER&R Plan Workforce Development Strategies. NEFCO should engage communities and organizations in the region and foster partnerships with the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub Governance Team to help address workforce demands of the polymer cluster and identify solutions.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

Goal 3: Encourage development of industries that support Northeast Ohio's economic clusters

- A. Support projects that contribute toward strengthening the region's targeted industries
- B. Support activities that complement targeted and other existing industries in the region
- C. Capitalize on and expand existing regional industrial clusters (e.g., polymers, chemicals, plastics, etc.)
- D. Encourage and support the development of speculative industrial buildings and properties
- E. Provide support and funding to the local universities for development and research for the identified industry clusters
- F. Support programming and partnerships focused on ensuring innovation and inclusion across Northeast Ohio's economic clusters, resulting in diversified, future-proof industries

NEFCO Highlight:



Provided technical assistance to the Barberton Community Foundation in the development of its EDA Local Technical Assistance grant application

NEFCO provided technical assistance and a letter of support to the Barberton Community Foundation (BCF) for its EDA Local Technical Assistance grant application for the Polymer Workforce Center Feasibility Study. The BCF, in partnership with the City of Barberton, has proposed the development of a Polymer Workforce Center (PWC) on BCF's 36-acre property at 401 Newell Street in Barberton. The vacant, industrially zoned property was purchased by the BCF in November 2022 and was formerly the site of B&P Polishing. The PWC would be an advanced educational training and workforce development center to help build a pipeline of skilled workers in polymer-related careers. The BCF is seeking funding to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study, which will include a market study of existing workforce development programs in the polymer sector. The study will identify potential operators capable of managing and administering the PWC. The feasibility study will also identify polymer-related career pathways, provide a gap analysis of existing programs to the employment needs of the polymer sector, develop programming for the physical space, and identify necessary equipment for the PWC.

The polymer industry sector has emerged as a main sector partnership in the region. The region has among the highest concentration of polymer companies in the world. The University of Akron has the top-ranked polymer science and polymer engineering program in the world.⁷ The Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub project illustrates a strong public-private partnership between local governments, nonprofit economic development organizations, universities, industry, philanthropic organizations, and others. The cluster is focused on capitalizing on the region's concentration of resources, polymer companies, and collaborative spirit.⁸ The EDA Tech Hub Designation provides the opportunity for Greater Akron to leverage its regional assets – such as the largest concentration of plastics and rubber manufacturing plants, machines, and materials in North America – as well as regional partnerships in research and development and an inclusive regional workforce, to pursue catalytic funding, which would establish the region as the global epicenter for these advanced materials. The Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub aims to

⁷ The University of Akron, <https://www.uakron.edu/polymer/>

⁸ Polymer Industry Cluster, <https://greaterakronchamber.org/economic-development/polymer-industry-cluster/>

tackle the severe climate and environmental impacts resulting from the use of fossil fuel-derived polymers through accelerating sustainable polymer manufacturing and commercialization in the U.S.

CHALLENGES


There are a number of strong public-private partnerships within the region. All counties work closely with their respective private-sector, nonprofit economic development organization: Portage Development Board, Stark Economic Development Board, Greater Akron Chamber, and Wayne Economic Development Council. Elevate Greater Akron (EGA) is a strategic and inclusive economic development partnership between the City of Akron, Summit County, and the Greater Akron Chamber.⁹ EGA is a regional economic development plan that involves collaboration and support from business, community, non-profit and civic leaders. EGA focuses on supporting small and mid-sized business growth, inclusion and opportunity, workforce talent development, downtown and job hub development, innovation, and high potential startups, and leveraging resources to support business growth. The Wayne Economic Development Council collaborates with Wayne County and the cities of Wooster, Orrville, and Rittman to attract business growth. Strengthening Stark – a collaboration between the Stark Economic Development Board, the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Stark Community Foundation, and communities in Stark County – is a community, economic, and social development plan for Stark County.¹⁰ NEFCO must continue to work to strengthen its collaboration with these organizations. Staff will look to have semi-annual meetings with each of these organizations to share ideas and provide technical assistance or support where desired.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

Goal 4: Promote the redevelopment of blighted, underused, or vacant, and environmentally challenged sites with high market potential

- A. Encourage counties and local governments to identify sites for brownfield assessments and cleanups
- B. Redevelop/reuse vacant industrial sites for economic use
- C. Encourage programs that support and pursue state and federal brownfields grant programs
- D. Work with county land banks to divest of vacant properties that have not been utilized within a certain timeframe
- E. Designate priority areas for development

NEFCO Highlights:

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|---|---|
|  | Participated on the Vibrant NEO Brownfields RLF Steering Committee |
|  | Informed the region about funding opportunities relative to brownfields |

⁹ Elevate Greater Akron, <https://elevategreaterakron.org/>

¹⁰ Stark Community Foundation, Strengthening Stark, <https://www.starkcf.org/files/publications/strengtheningstark2017-lowres.pdf>



As mentioned earlier, NEFCO is an active member of Vibrant NEO, a consortium of governments and organizations, focused on creating a more vibrant, resilient, and sustainable Northeast Ohio.¹¹ The Executive Director serves as a non-voting member of the NOACA-Vibrant NEO Brownfields Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is tasked to make revolving loan fund recommendations to the Vibrant NEO and NOACA Boards of Directors. The Steering Committee reviews applications submitted for RLF loans and subgrants; conducts all standard due diligence normally undertaken by lending entities; drafts loan and subgrant agreements, including determination of loan or subgrant, dollar amount, interest rate, and payback period, subject to Vibrant NEO and NOACA approval; and recommends projects to the Vibrant NEO and NOACA Boards of Directors or their appropriate committees, based on the criteria developed by Vibrant NEO. Staff also serves on the Vibrant NEO Champion Awards committee, which recommends recognition of individuals and projects that demonstrate leadership in the advancement of Vibrant NEO themes.

CHALLENGES

The Portage, Stark, Summit and Wayne County land reutilization corporations (land banks) have been aggressive in demolition, eliminating blight, and preparing properties for redevelopment. Each has capitalized on Ohio Department of Development brownfields funding for demolition, remediation and site revitalization. Cities in the region, particularly Akron and Canton, have also been active in addressing brownfields sites. There remains an abundance of brownfield sites across the NEFCO region. It's often challenging to identify and inventory these sites, though, particularly if they are privately owned. NEFCO will need to determine how best to incorporate these brownfields redevelopment strategies into its CEDS and what role the organization will serve in brownfields planning.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

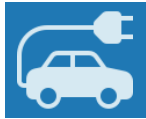
Goal 5: Encourage investment in infrastructure and affordable housing

- A. Support efforts to bring affordable, high-speed, reliable broadband to unserved and underserved areas of the NEFCO region
- B. Expand transportation options that enhance employment and educational opportunities, particularly for economically disadvantaged populations
- C. Support projects that encourage land use policies that improve and promote bike, pedestrian, and transit infrastructure
- D. Support projects that encourage land use policies that promote affordable housing
- E. Invest in sustainable, multimodal transportation infrastructure
- F. Invest in efforts to build new, affordable housing

NEFCO Highlights:

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|---|---|
|  | Provided letters of support for City of Canton and City of Wooster USDOT RAISE grant applications |
|  | Provided letter of support for PARTA grant application for ODOT FY 2025 Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership Program |

¹¹ Vibrant NEO, <https://vibrantneo.org/>



Provided letters of support for City of Akron and County of Summit Charging Facilities Infrastructure Grant applications

NEFCO provided letters of support for the Cities of Canton and Wooster for their respective U.S. Department of Transportation's RAISE grant applications. Canton is seeking \$12 million in funding for its Tuscarawas Street West Corridor Safety Project. The project – a collaborative partnership between the City of Canton, the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA), and Aultman Hospital – will provide safe, efficient, and improved community connectivity, promoting economic development and job creation in an economically-distressed area, and critical section of the historical Lincoln Highway. The project will make significant multi-modal improvements to a congested, high-crash corridor, facilitating safe circulation and access to Canton's largest commercial area and largest employer, Aultman Hospital. Transit amenities will further enhance the area, which is SARTA's highest-use corridor. The multi-purpose bike-ped paths will provide a safe, alternative transportation option for pedestrians and bicyclists. Wooster is seeking \$277,950 in funding for its Downtown Wooster Streetscape and Roadway Improvements project. The funding would enable the City to complete Preliminary Engineering and National Environmental Policy Act activities for the streetscape improvements and roadway alignment in Downtown Wooster. This project will continue the City's progress in implementing improvements to Downtown Wooster and aligns with several RAISE program goals, including promoting projects that improve safety, enhancing community connectivity, promoting pedestrian and bicycling mobility, improving tourism, and fostering a vibrant downtown.

NEFCO also provided a letter of support to the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) for its Ohio Department of Transportation State Fiscal Year 2025 Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership Program funding request. PARTA is seeking funding to support long-term planning projects, including a Transit Feasibility Study and a Transit Development Plan; upgraded Intelligent Transportation Systems equipment; and upgrades to CNG fuel pumps.

CHALLENGES

Affordable housing continues to be a major issue for the region, as it is throughout the nation. Communities must continue to work with organizations and developers to produce more affordable housing options. The recently completed housing studies in the region identify key factors contributing to and provide recommendations for addressing the housing stock shortage. NEFCO will need to determine how best to incorporate these housing strategies into its CEDS and what role the organization will serve in developing solutions. NEFCO should work with its members to determine if there's value in developing a regional, four county housing plan/strategy as part of the CEDS.

Staff will also continue to work with the three transit authorities and two metropolitan planning organizations on implementing transit-oriented development and active transportation strategies, respectively, as recommended in the NEFCO Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

Goal 6: Support programs that diversify and build strong, resilient local and regional economies

- A. Encourage programs and projects that create and retain jobs
- B. Support efforts that will make the region more globally competitive
- C. Support entrepreneurial and technological development
- D. Improve access to capital for regional businesses in equitable manner

Each of the four NEFCO counties and major cities has a business retention and business expansion (BRE) program. The BRE programs include annual visits to major and medium-sized companies to analyze business needs, offer support, and discuss available resources and incentives. The BRE programs are key to retaining existing jobs and ensuring companies remain in the NEFCO region. The four nonprofit economic development organizations – Portage Development Board (PDB), Stark Economic Development Board (SEDB), Greater Akron Chamber (GAC), and Wayne Economic Development Council (WEDC) – work closely with communities in their respective counties to create and retain jobs. The Canton and Akron areas have robust community and economic development planning programs: Strengthening Stark and Elevate Greater Akron.

NEFCO continues to support entrepreneurial development. In 2022, the City of Akron was awarded a \$2 million EDA grant for the Bounce Innovation Hub Expansion and Renovation Project, a \$3.1 million project that will activate over 20,000 square feet of unused space at the Bounce Innovation Hub. The expansion will allow for additional offices for early-stage companies and additional common areas, including conference rooms, workshop space, and classrooms. When complete, the project will greatly expand Bounce’s incubator space and augment its ability to provide entrepreneurial support and development to startups.

CHALLENGES

NEFCO needs to make a more concerted effort of meeting regularly with staff of the GAC, SEDB, PDB, and WEDC to understand challenges, help develop solutions, and provide technical assistance and support with funding opportunities.

STATUS: NEED TO ADDRESS

Goal 7: Develop benchmarking to evaluate region’s progress and competitiveness

- A. Analyze data to establish benchmark
- B. Review and adopt best practices from other regions
- C. Better understand positive and negative factors impacting region’s competitiveness
- D. Assess regional equity
- E. Develop metrics to evaluate regional progress

NEFCO Highlights:



Completed NEFCO Organizational Assessment Survey



Serving on the NADO Research Foundation Advisory Committee

In July, NEFCO staff distributed an organizational assessment survey to General Policy Board members and alternates. The survey solicited feedback on potential new work program areas NEFCO could/should consider exploring, whether NEFCO could/should consider offering contractual services to communities, and any additional general recommendations on ways NEFCO can further assist counties and communities in the region. The goal of the organizational assessment survey was to gather initial input and thoughtful feedback from the Board – both members and alternates. The survey responses will help staff focus efforts on researching and pursuing funding opportunities to support potential new work program areas. Staff is currently processing the responses and will develop list of recommendations for the Board to consider.

Benchmarking is an important evaluation tool for any community or region. Benchmarking helps evaluate regional progress across a broad range of categories. Over the next year, NEFCO will initiate a benchmarking process, evaluating demographic and economic factors, while looking at comparisons with similar regions across the nation. Benchmarking will help establish base data and help determine what factors have impacted development in the NEFCO region, both positively and negatively. Benchmarking will also catalog best practices from other regions and analyze how and why other regions are progressing more or less than the NEFCO region.

NEFCO is a member of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), which offers member organizations a wealth of information and resources on funding, planning and development news, best practices, and updates from other regional development organizations (RDOs). In 2023, NEFCO's Program Manager for Economic Development Planning was selected to serve on the NADO Research Foundation (RF) Advisory Committee, representing the Midwest Region. The Advisory Committee works with RF leadership and staff to identify issues and topics of relevance and concern to NADO members; provides guidance and offers ideas related to research and training programs and opportunities to serve the membership; and shares their individual and collective professional expertise and in-depth knowledge of regional approaches to economic development. Through this committee assignment, staff hopes to collaborate with regional development organizations across the United States and share back best practices, particularly in regions where economic growth outpaces that of the NEFCO region. As an active member of NADO, NEFCO has reached out to NADO RF staff to help pair NEFCO with other RDOs representing regions of similar market size.

CHALLENGES

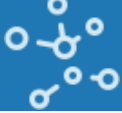

Staff had hoped to begin the benchmarking process in 2024, particularly evaluating the region against other comparable regions. Staff hopes to begin this process in 2025 and work closely with regional partners in developing a benchmarking report. Staff will focus on strengthening its partnership with Team NEO, utilizing resources available through the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), and working with economic development organizations like the Portage Development Board, Stark Economic Development Board, Greater Akron Chamber, and the Wayne Economic Development Council.

STATUS: NEED TO BEGIN WORK

Goal 8: Support the growth and development of the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub

- A. Support growth of existing companies operating in the polymer industry and its supply chain
- B. Attract new business to the region to operate in the polymer industry and its supply chain
- C. Increase R&D funding to tackle priority materials-related technologies
- D. Increase outreach and communications efforts, targeting underserved/underrepresented populations, educating and connecting individuals to polymer industry jobs and supply chain
- E. Improve innovation infrastructure to facilitate R&D, help start-ups and established businesses, and improve global competitiveness
- F. Attract new capital to the region, including new business investment an expansion, and investors funding regional business growth

NEFCO Highlights:

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|---|---|
|  | Provided letter of support/CEDS alignment to Greater Akron Chamber for Good Jobs Challenge grant proposal |
|  | Participate as consortium member on Tech Hub project leads meetings |

On July 2, 2024, the EDA awarded a consortium led by the Greater Akron Chamber (GAC) a \$51 million Tech Hubs Phase 2 grant for the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub. The project was one of 12 (out of 31 nationally designated Tech Hubs) Phase 2 Tech Hub award recipients. The funding will advance innovation, growth, and investment through the implementation of seven component projects and establish the Greater Akron region as a global leader in sustainable polymers. The funding will support implementation of seven projects to advance technology maturation, commercialization, and workforce development.

The funding will support seven projects led by various entities:

- Commercializing the recycling of end-of-life tires (Full Circle Technologies);
- Sustainable Polymer composites via liquid phase mixing (Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company);
- Bio-based butadiene feedstock (BioVerde, Inc.);
- Carbon black and nanotube from methane source (Huntsman);
- Safer anti-degradant for tires and plastics (Flexsys);
- Workforce Initiative for a Sustainable Environment (University of Akron); and
- Regional Office of Innovation Governance (Greater Akron Chamber)

The \$51 million award represents the largest EDA grant in the NEFCO region since the organization was designated as an Economic Development District in 1978. In fact, the award is greater than the sum of all the EDA grant awards the region has ever received. The award is truly transformational for the region and the state of Ohio. Per the GAC, the Tech Hub is expected to create or retain over 4,000 jobs, spur over \$1 billion of potential private investment in expanded production, and contribute \$5 billion in total economic impact for Northeast Ohio.

In early September 2024, the Polymer Industry Cluster (PIC), led by the Greater Akron Chamber, was awarded \$31.25 million in funding through the Ohio Department of Development's Ohio Innovation Hub Program! The funding, which follows the Greater Akron region's designation by the EDA as the



Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub and a \$51 million EDA Phase 2 Tech Hub award, will support the PIC's work to enhance innovation and growth within the polymer industry sector and across Northeast Ohio. Approximately \$25 million of the award will support the development of the Polymer Pilot Plant, a facility that will enable the scaling, testing, and prototyping of new materials. The remainder of the funding will support additional R&D, workforce development, entrepreneur and startup assistance, and staffing for the PIC. Per the state, the Ohio Innovation Hubs Program aims to capitalize on a region's existing industry and research strengths to build a sustainable pipeline of talent and commercialize new products and technologies. The program supports mid-sized cities to create hubs that create jobs, increase STEM talent, and attract research funding and outside capital investment.

Although not a project lead, NEFCO has been an active member of the Tech Hub consortium. On September 18, the General Policy Board approved adding this eighth goal to reinforce NEFCO's commitment to ensuring the CEDS continues to support and advance the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub, as it will be a principal economic focus of the NEFCO region. Further, NEFCO staff, the Regional CEDS Committee, and the General Policy Board are committed to providing planning resources and technical assistance, as necessary and requested, to support the growth and development of the Tech Hub.

CHALLENGES

Though this goal was just added to the CEDS, staff anticipates there will be challenges moving forward. NEFCO will need to actively work with its counties and communities to share project information, foster potential partnership opportunities, and provide technical assistance on future grant applications. NEFCO will need to work actively as a liaison between the Tech Hub Governance Team and the communities and organizations in the NEFCO region.

STATUS: NEED TO BEGIN WORK

Schedule of Goals and Program Activities

The following timeline – between October 1, 2024, and September 30, 2025 – includes CEDS goals and NEFCO strategies that have been reviewed and approved by the NEFCO General Policy Board.

| | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Goal 1: Address the supply chain and promote domestic production | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Support projects that address supply chain issues | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Connect local governments, universities, and other organizations to available resources and funding opportunities | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 2: Support programs that build human capital | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Connect local governments and economic development organizations to available resources and funding opportunities | | | | | | | | | | | | |



| | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Continued implementation of ER&R Plan workforce development strategies | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 3: Encourage development of industries that support Northeast Ohio’s economic clusters | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Connect local governments, universities, and other organizations to available resources | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 4: Promote the redevelopment of blighted, underused, or vacant and environmentally challenged sites | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Participate on Vibrant NEO’s Brownfields Steering Committee | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide information on funding opportunities for brownfields assessment and remediation via website, newsletters, and email communications | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Better engage with county land banks to understand long-term strategies | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Re-assess NEFCO strategy for addressing regional brownfields | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 5: Encourage investment in infrastructure and affordable housing | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Better engage with ISPs in CEDS planning | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Connect local governments, economic development organizations, and other organizations to available resources | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide updates to local governments on BroadbandOhio funding opportunities | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Better engage metropolitan planning organizations and transit authorities in CEDS planning | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ER&R Plan implementation: encourage active transportation planning | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ER&R Plan implementation: encourage transit-oriented development planning | | | | | | | | | | | | |



| | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Better engage metropolitan housing authorities in CEDS planning | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Better engage county and regional planning commissions in CEDS planning | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 6: Support programs that diversify and build strong, resilient local and regional economies | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Connect local governments, economic development organizations, and other organizations to available resources | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Encourage collaboration between community groups, workforce development organizations, and businesses | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Help connect local governments to entrepreneurial resources | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 7: Develop benchmarking to evaluate region's progress and competitiveness | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strengthen partnership with Team NEO | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Collaborate with NADO Research Foundation to find comparable regions; analyze similarities and differences | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Compile demographic and market data | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Compile a list of best practices | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Compile a list of positive and negative factors | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Develop regional evaluation metrics | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Develop summary report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 8: Support the advancement of the Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Keep NEFCO counties and communities informed of the Tech Hub and its component projects | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communicate the needs, questions, and ideas of NEFCO counties and communities with the Tech Hub Governance Team | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Help foster partnerships between communities and the Tech Hub | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Provide technical assistance on grant applications with future projects associated with Tech Hub | | | | | | | | | | | | |