

Strategic Action Plan



SLEC

South Louisiana Economic Council
Assumption • Lafourche • St. Mary • Terrebonne

2023-2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SLEC would like to extend its sincere gratitude to the hundreds of Bayou Region stakeholders who participated in this strategic planning effort.

Through months of interviews, surveys, and roundtable discussions, SLEC's Strategic Action Plan was molded by the heartbeat of the Bayou Region - parish presidents, mayors, legislators, industry leaders, small business owners, community representatives, chambers of commerce, industrial associations, and local residents. Their time, input, and support throughout this process were crucial to this plan's development, and their continued involvement in driving the region forward will be one of the primary ways in which this plan achieves progress for the Bayou Region.

Plan Made Possible By



Plan Development



Management & Implementation



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Executive Summary

Louisiana's Bayou Region – representing the parishes of Assumption, Lafourche, St. Mary, and Terrebonne – is home to resilient, devoted residents who have weathered many storms and economic downturns and remained committed to the region and its success. The Bayou Region has a strong collection of economic assets, anchored by the oil and gas industry, an interconnected multimodal transportation system, and related industries such as offshore services, shipbuilding, and advanced manufacturing. The region's close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico supports bustling agriculture and seafood industries, with commercial shrimping, oystering, and fishing serving as major economic drivers. A robust higher education and technical college network supports this industrial activity, with Nicholls State University, Fletcher Community College, and South Louisiana Community College producing skilled graduates prepared to enter the workforce and contribute to the regional economy.

Despite the Bayou Region's economic and workforce strengths, the area was not immune to the impacts of COVID-19 or Hurricane Ida, the seventh-costliest storm in U.S. history that left behind \$95 billion in economic damages. These disruptions highlighted the region's vulnerability and demonstrated the need to diversify the area's economy and make investments in more resilient infrastructure. In response, the South Louisiana Economic Council (SLEC) recognized this opportunity to initiate a plan for revitalizing the region's economy and to chart a new path toward a more prosperous, resilient future.

Input from hundreds of Bayou Region stakeholders guided the development of this strategic action plan, which lays out the immediate steps the region must take to position itself to implement long-term strategies for success over the next five years. Moving forward, SLEC will work with local, regional, state, and federal partners to focus on the following strategic initiatives:

- Positioning SLEC as a world-class regional economic development organization
- Building a more dynamic, diversified regional economy
- Leading business recruitment and expansion activities
- Leveraging workforce development assets to optimize regional talent
- Championing the Bayou Region through marketing, promotion, and advocacy
- Supporting regional community assets to improve quality of place
- Building a stronger, more resilient region

By successfully implementing these initiatives, SLEC and its robust network of partners can establish the Bayou Region as a thriving hub for innovation, growth, and prosperity.



Source: (top) Houma Travel; (bottom) LED



Background

SLEC has been dedicated to serving the parishes of Assumption, Lafourche, St. Mary, and Terrebonne since 1983. As the state-designated regional economic development organization for the four-parish Bayou Region, SLEC has served an integral role in helping the regional economy navigate and respond to major disasters, various economic shifts, and trends affecting regional businesses and industries. The organization has led critical initiatives over the years, including reigniting small businesses struggling to recover from Hurricane Katrina by providing technical assistance and business operational support, working with regional stakeholders to bring in new investment from cutting-edge industries, supporting expansion of existing facilities that house hundreds of jobs for residents, and spearheading collaboration among community leaders around emerging opportunities and economic drivers. For decades, SLEC has proven itself as a resilient economic development organization with the ability to pivot, innovate, and drive progress for the Bayou Region's industries, businesses, residents, and communities.

Arguably, no other region in the U.S. has been confronted with the same breadth and depth of challenges that have faced the Bayou Region over the past two decades. The urgency and complexity of these issues has prompted local, regional, state, and federal leaders to navigate changing conditions again and again and implement initiatives and programs that help businesses not only survive through these changes but adapt and thrive on the other side.

More recently, the Bayou Region is once again at a crossroads. Much like economies and industries across the country, lasting implications from the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to fundamental shifts in everything from talent recruitment to supply chains to revenue streams. This is on top of the impacts from yet another devastating natural disaster, Hurricane Ida, which made landfall in the heart of the Bayou Region in 2021. Other contributing forces include years of shifting federal policy affecting industries that have traditionally dominated regional economic activity, an astronomical rise in the costs of homeownership and flood insurance, a focus on diversifying energy sources, and the need to address the impacts of climate change to the physical footprint of the region and its residents.

As the dust began to settle in the months following Hurricane Ida, SLEC began a process to both assess the damage and changes to the regional economy and contemplate the council's role in driving the region's response. With the long-term impacts of the pandemic and Hurricane Ida still materializing, these challenges have presented SLEC the opportunity to adapt, embrace change, and chart a new path for the

region. By prioritizing data-driven insights, facilitating honest conversations to elicit stakeholder feedback, leveraging existing assets, forging regional collaboration, and identifying innovative partnerships, SLEC is well-positioned to reinvent itself as the type of economic development organization the Bayou Region needs today to usher in a new, more prosperous era for years to come.

SLEC initiated this strategic planning process to clearly identify and prioritize immediate needs and develop a blueprint with initiatives and short-term action steps that reposition the organization around this changed environment. SLEC also defined a longer-term plan that guides how the organization should proactively drive the broad strategy related to economic development in the region over the next three to five years in areas such as mutually beneficial affiliates and partnerships, geographic footprint, programs and services, board structure and governance, funding, staffing, and succession planning. These two efforts proceeded in tandem, with the near-term strategic action plan providing clarity around immediate action steps to further recovery and the organizational plan defining how SLEC orients itself to advance these priorities with more impact in the years to come.



SLEC's process for developing these two plans included the following components:

- In-depth research, review, and analysis of relevant data, including U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics employment data, Emsi labor market and industry-specific data, peer economies, economic development trends, and other relevant state or federal sources for economic growth or workforce development
- Analysis of the economic performance of peer organizations and economies with similar target industries and similar experiences with natural or other disasters to understand how those organizations and geographies may have been impacted by comparable macro-economic conditions that impede economic growth
- Distribution and analysis of a survey to regional employers, economic development partners, residents, business owners, and other stakeholders that focused on understanding the current economic landscape across the four-parish region and identified what stakeholders need the most from SLEC to support recovery, sustainability, and growth
- Utilization of survey feedback and research to inform and facilitate in-depth interviews and focus groups to better understand what business and industry, and specific sectors of each, need from a regional economic development organization both for immediate recovery and long-term planning
- Review of SLEC's organizational structure, programs, services, workforce, funding sources, and governance to identify areas for improvement, additional investment, and to best align with the realized needs of regional stakeholders today and well into the future

In each of these areas of focus, SLEC sought to better understand and answer fundamental questions related to its near-term and long-term role in advancing economic development priorities in the Bayou Region. SLEC's planning process was guided by Emergent Method, a Louisiana-based management consulting firm with an extensive background in economic development and strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and data and analysis, in addition to substantial experience working within the Bayou Region. The firm enabled transparent conversations, captured objective perspectives and insights, and deployed best practices related to data-driven, stakeholder-informed decision making that have bolstered this plan and added clarity to anticipated future opportunities for both SLEC and the Bayou Region's economy.



SLEC'S MISSION, VISION, PROGRAMS, AND SERVICES

Source: LED



Mission

An organization's mission should seek to answer a simple question: Why do we exist? An effective mission statement can serve as an organization's north star, providing guidance and clarity around day-to-day decisions, organizational design and function, and strategic areas of focus. Currently, SLEC's mission is to facilitate regional economic development for Assumption, Lafourche, St. Mary, and Terrebonne parishes. However, under this new strategic plan, SLEC has expanded its mission to reflect a more aggressive approach to progressing the regional economy in the Bayou Region.

To aggressively pursue economic development opportunities, facilitate collaboration, and increase resiliency in the Bayou Region.

Vision

What are we hoping to achieve? Who do we want to be? Where are we going together? Vision statements answer these questions by providing an overarching sense of direction for an organization's mission. Through this strategic planning process, SLEC has found new clarity in its vision, now rooted in the needs and desires of the Bayou Region's stakeholders.

For the Bayou Region to maintain a thriving economy built on innovation, growth, and resiliency.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Since its inception, SLEC has adjusted its service offerings to align with current economic needs of the Bayou Region. SLEC’s programs and services currently include:

- Business recruitment and retention
- Support to startup companies and entrepreneurs
- Provision of key data and comprehensive information about buildings, sites, and development assets
- Support to local and parish economic development
- Coalition building across parishes and organizations
- Special projects leadership, including workforce development, post hurricane recovery, small business support, and homeland security
- Sponsorship of community and industry development training
- Development of a Business Recovery and Resiliency Center

SLEC’s current services resemble the activities of countless economic development organizations across the U.S.; however, with new strategic priorities and direction in place, SLEC has the opportunity to refine and expand its support. A refined scope for the organization will focus on addressing the needs of the Bayou Region today, integrating emerging trends, and bolstering those services that are most critical and impactful.



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION

SLEC currently supports business development and expansion activities by partnering with economic development stakeholders to attract new businesses to the region and facilitating growth at existing Bayou Region firms. SLEC has an opportunity to bolster these efforts by improving its marketing and business development resources, participating in lead generation efforts, coordinating trade missions and corporate site visits, and working closely with Bayou Region businesses to understand their challenges and support their continued growth.

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

While working to attract and grow existing, large-scale businesses, SLEC can also prioritize supporting small businesses, disadvantaged business enterprises, and entrepreneurs by developing a more interconnected business ecosystem. SLEC can serve as a conduit for small businesses and entrepreneurs to gain access to resources and growth opportunities and ensure the region's larger companies are aware of qualified small businesses in the region, so they may support contracting opportunities at the local level.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

SLEC currently has an established partnerships with Fletcher Technical Community College and Nicholls State University, but the logistics and tangible components remain in flux. SLEC can advance this partnership and expand this model by engaging businesses and employers to further understand technical skills or training needed for the current and future job market and serve as the liaison between local educational systems and the private sector.

INCREASED COALITION BUILDING

SLEC has recently formed an Emerging Energy task force whose purpose is to evaluate and discuss emerging energy opportunities and provide guidance to SLEC on how best to represent and advocate on behalf of Louisiana's Bayou Region. This is an ideal form of coalition building focused on addressing current needs in a proactive manner. SLEC can continue to utilize this framework to address other largescale challenges or topics that are impacting the entire region, including homeownership/flood insurance prices, coastal protection and restoration funding priorities, quality of place, and young professional recruitment and retention.

ENHANCED REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

SLEC can improve the effectiveness of its business development and expansion efforts by creating an environment more conducive to business investment and growth. A common theme from stakeholders was that the Bayou Region's quality of life and business environment are not attractive to younger members of the workforce, those exploring relocating, and potential business investors. While the regulatory environment and cost of doing business are important factors, members of the workforce increasingly expect the area in which they work to have quality of life amenities, such as affordable and available housing, recreational activities, and efficient transportation systems. As such, SLEC can lead efforts to improve the Bayou Region's community assets, create local business incentives, and strengthen its inventory of business and industrial sites.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Stakeholders consistently expressed the need for a strong, clear voice speaking on behalf of the Bayou Region to champion important issues at the state and federal levels. SLEC can consider incorporating policy and advocacy as a key service offering that is inclusive of facilitating stakeholder engagement to understand needs, building consensus around topical priorities, developing official priorities under a policy platform for the Bayou Region, engaging leaders, influencers, and stakeholders to raise agreed-upon issues and seek progress, and establishing a comprehensive information database to support these efforts.

SUPPORT OF LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Each parish's economic development office expressed interest in increasing communication and collaboration across the region and their regional offices. SLEC can take lead to facilitate this request by establishing a frequent, consistent meeting schedule between local Economic Development Organizations (EDOs), encouraging alignment between their key initiatives and SLEC's strategic plan, supporting regional priorities and creating regional identity, and understanding better the day-to-day challenges at the parish level in order to enhance support to the local EDOs.

Research and Analysis

KEY INDUSTRIES

The following key industries represent the **historic** economic drivers in the region as identified by SLEC. The most recent Lightcast and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data were analyzed to determine the recent performance and trajectory of each industry. However, SLEC recognizes unprecedented events, including Hurricane Ida and the COVID-19 pandemic, along with modern trends toward emerging technologies and expanded energy portfolios have and will continue to change the region's economic drivers. As such, this information is representative of current-state knowledge but highlights the need to conduct additional studies and acquire updated information.

Source: Fletcher Technical Community College



Food Manufacturing

Located near the Gulf of Mexico, the Bayou Region is known for its abundant seafood resources, including shrimp, oysters, and crawfish, and as such boasts a robust seafood processing business sector. Other manufacturing businesses in the region transform locally grown agricultural supplies into a variety of food products, including sugar and corn syrup, canned fruits and vegetables, and snack foods. The food manufacturing industry in the Bayou Region is supported by a strong transportation infrastructure, including access to major highways and ports, which allow for efficient distribution of products both locally and globally.

2022 JOBS

1,081

The Bayou Region's food manufacturing industry has an average supply of regional talent. The national average for an area this size is 1,135 employees, while there are 1,081 in the region.

EARNINGS PER JOB

\$61,395

The national average salary for the food manufacturing industry in an area this size is \$69,231, while in the Bayou Region it is \$61,395.

JOBS PER PARISH

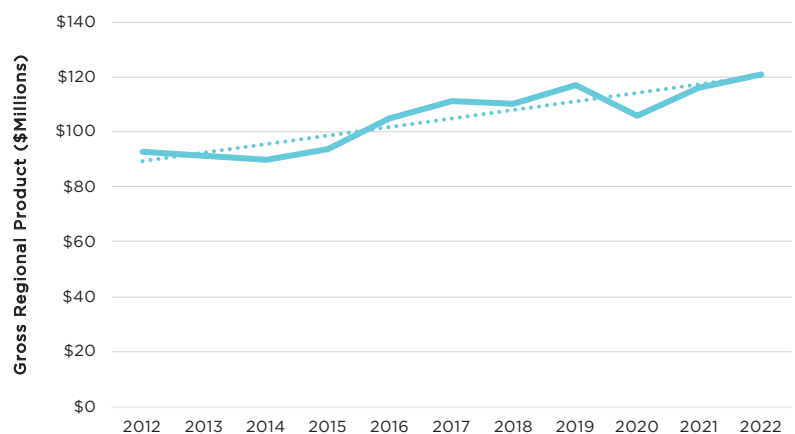
- Assumption: 308
- Lafourche: 249
- Terrebonne: 192
- St. Mary: 331

GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT

Gross regional product (GRP) is a monetary measure of all earnings, profits, and taxes produced in a region over a period of time. GRP of the Bayou Region's food manufacturing industry grew more than 30% over the last decade. In 2022, the industry generated \$69.3 million in earnings, \$51.4 million in property income, and \$492,100 in taxes, bringing the total GRP to \$121.1 million.



Source: LED



RETIREMENT RISK

Retirement risk in the Bayou Region's food manufacturing industry is high. The national average for an area this size is 264 employees aged 55 or older, while there are 398 in the Bayou Region.

Intermodal Industries

2022 JOBS

8,366

The Bayou Region's intermodal industries have a strong supply of regional talent. The national average for an area this size is 1,610 employees, while the Bayou Region has 8,366 people working in intermodal industries.

EARNINGS PER JOB

\$108,062

Earnings per job in the Bayou Region's intermodal industries are well above the national average, which is \$82,258 in areas of this size, while the Bayou Region's intermodal workforce earns \$108,062 on average.

JOBS PER PARISH

Home to Port Fourchon, one of the country's most critical maritime operation and logistics hubs, Lafourche Parish has nearly 5,200 jobs in intermodal industries. Terrebonne Parish has nearly 1,800 intermodal jobs, supported in large part by Port of Terrebonne and Houma-Terrebonne Airport. St. Mary Parish has more than 1,200 intermodal jobs, and Assumption Parish has nearly 200 people working in the industry.

RETIREMENT RISK

Retirement risk in the Bayou Region's intermodal industries is about average. The national average for an area this size is 2,370 employees aged 55 or older, while there are 2,192 in the Bayou Region.

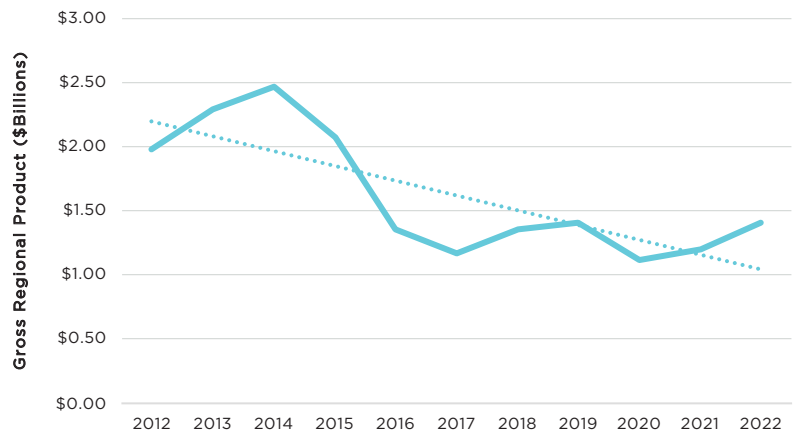
Intermodal industries handle the logistics of the movement of goods using multiple modes of transportation, such as truck, rail, and barge. Due to its strategic location and access to major transportation networks, the Bayou Region is an important hub for intermodal industries, the presence of which helps stimulate economic development by attracting investment and enabling growth in a variety of additional industries, including agriculture, manufacturing, and energy.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not have a North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) sector specifically focused on intermodal industries. For the purpose of this analysis, SLEC focused on NAICS subsectors 482 - Rail Transportation, 483 - Water Transportation, 484 - Truck Transportation, and 488 - Support Activities for Transportation, which encompasses the region's interconnected port system and associated activities.¹

GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT

GRP of the Bayou Region's intermodal industries totaled \$1.4 billion in 2022, supported by \$1.1 billion in earnings, \$295.3 million in property income, and \$32.4 million in taxes generated. GRP for these industries has decreased over the past decade, down 29% from 2010 levels. Nevertheless, intermodal industries generate the second-largest economic output in the Bayou Region, only behind the oil and gas sector.

Intermodal industries in the Bayou Region will benefit from nearly \$600 million in state road projects over the next several years with the elevation of La. 1 and the replacement of Boudreaux Canal Bridge at La. 20. In addition, Port Fourchon is slated to receive more than \$100 million in dredging and infrastructure investment, presenting opportunities for intermodal industries to bolster their economic output in the region.



¹ "Industries at a glance, Transportation and Warehousing: NAICS 48-49." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. bls.gov/iag/tgs/iag_index_naics.htm

Metal Parts Manufacturing

The metal parts manufacturing industry in the Bayou Region produces metal components and parts for a variety of applications, including construction, transportation, and energy. The presence of this industry attracts investment and promotes growth in a variety of other industries. Overall, the metal parts manufacturing industry in the Bayou Region plays a vital role in the local economy and is an important part of the industrial fabric of community.

2022 JOBS

1,699

The Bayou Region's metal parts manufacturing industry has a large supply of regional talent. The national average for an area this size is 962 employees, while there are 1,699 in the Bayou Region.

EARNINGS PER JOB

\$74,535

The national average salary for the metal parts manufacturing industry in an area this size is \$78,977, while it is \$74,535 in the Bayou Region.

JOBS PER PARISH

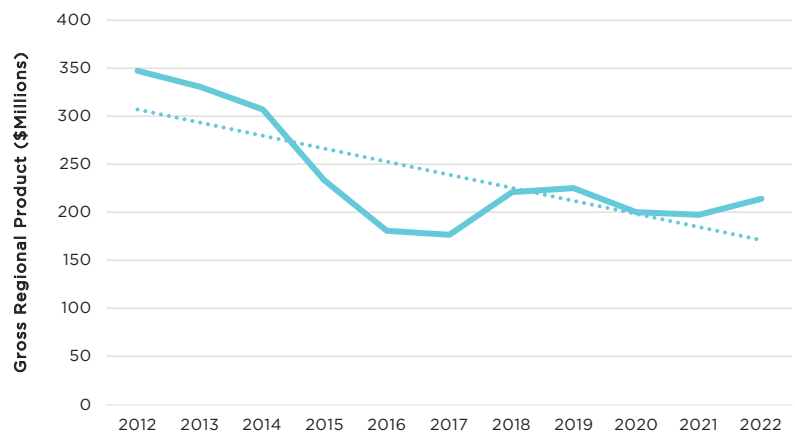
Terrebonne Parish has the highest concentration of metal parts manufacturing jobs in the Bayou Region, with more than 850 professionals employed in the industry. St. Mary Parish has the second-highest concentration of metal parts manufacturing jobs at 643, followed by Lafourche Parish with 121 jobs, and Assumption Parish with 78 jobs in the industry.

RETIREMENT RISK

Retirement risk in the Bayou Region's metal parts manufacturing industry is low. The national average for an area this size is 515 employees aged 55 or older, while there are 448 in the Bayou Region.

GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT

GRP of the Bayou Region's metal parts manufacturing industry peaked in 2012 at \$346 million. Since then, the industry's GRP has decreased by 38%. In 2022, the metal parts manufacturing industry generated \$167.1 million in earnings, \$44.8 million in property income, and \$1.5 million in taxes, bring the industry's total GRP in the Bayou Region to \$213.4 million.



Source: Fletcher Technical Community College

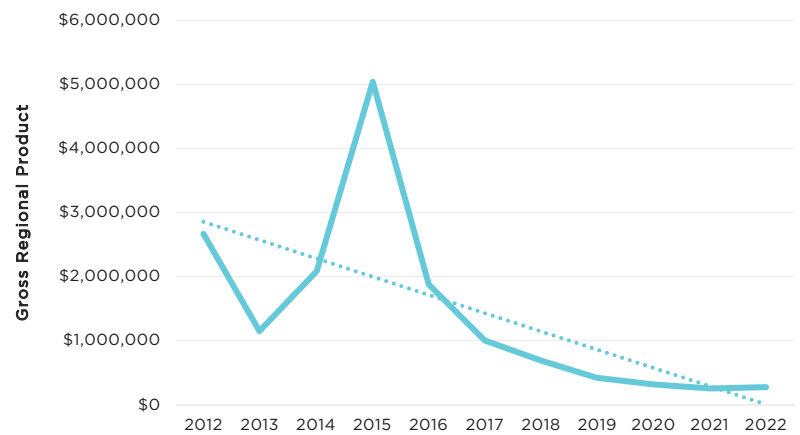
Plastic Product Manufacturing



Source: LED

A wide range of plastic products, including containers, packaging materials, and industrial components, are produced in the Bayou Region. Companies in the area use advanced technology and manufacturing processes to produce high-quality, cost-effective plastic products that meet the demands of a wide range of customers. The industry's focus on innovation, efficiency, and quality makes it well-positioned to continue to grow and support economic development of the region.

GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT



ANALYSIS

The Bayou Region's plastic product manufacturing industry has produced limited economic impacts over the past several years and has not contributed to the region's overall job market. GRP of the Bayou Region's plastic product manufacturing industry peaked in 2015 at just over \$5 million. Most periods over the past decade have seen limited economic output from the industry, with GRP in 2022 totaling less than \$270,000.

STRATEGIC ASSET INVENTORY

Intermodal Infrastructure

ROBUST PORT NETWORK

With its location in close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico's dense networks of offshore oil rigs and pipelines, a wide range of specialized docks and services, and access to class 1 railways, the Bayou Region serves as a strategic maritime operations and logistics hub that is critical to the global economy. The region's coastal parishes of Lafourche, Terrebonne, and St. Mary are home to several ports, including the Port of Morgan City, Port of Terrebonne, and Port of West St. Mary. In addition, Port Fourchon is a multi-use port that offers businesses an unparalleled access point for engaging in global industry and trade, offers secured land, and has other logistical advantages that make it a premier choice for companies seeking new opportunities across several sectors, including traditional and renewable energy, commercial and recreational fishing, seafood processing and distribution, tourism, and recreation. Its expansive portfolio is bolstered by ongoing private and public investments, estimated to surpass \$100 million over the next several years and including a \$28 million dredging and bulkhead project at Slip D and a \$40 million dredging project to deepen the port to 30-33 feet at the port's entrance. Additionally, pending approval by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Fourchon Island development could receive a \$30 million access bridge and \$20 million in additional dredging work in the near future.¹

HOUMA-TERREBONNE AIRPORT AND INDUSTRIAL PARK

Houma-Terrebonne Airport & Industrial Park is located three miles southeast of Houma's central business district. In 2019, the U.S. Economic Development Administration awarded the airport a \$1.35 million airport infrastructure grant to establish a Gulf of Mexico Center of Excellence for Large-Unmanned Aircraft Systems (L-UAS). According to Louisiana Economic Development (LED), the L-UAS Center of Excellence will create 150 new jobs, retain 70 jobs, and generate \$50 million in new private investment once fully developed.²

SOUTH LAFOURCHE LEONARD MILLER JR. AIRPORT

The South Lafourche Leonard Miller Jr. Airport provides air service near Port Fourchon and the Gulf of Mexico with 1,200 acres of available industrial park property. Rotorcraft Leasing Company has begun a \$5 million improvement of the company's site at the airport. A \$3 million airport terminal and a \$35 million road project connecting LA3235 to the airport are expected to begin construction in 2023.³

INTERSTATE AND HIGHWAY CONNECTIVITY

The Bayou Region is served by two major interstates, I-10 and I-49. I-10 runs east-west and connects the area to major cities, such as New Orleans and Baton Rouge, as well as to other states in the southern U.S. I-49 runs north-south and provides access to Shreveport and Lafayette, as well as other cities in Louisiana and neighboring states. The region is served by several state highways, including La. 1, La. 24, La. 308. The Bayou Region is poised to receive \$552.9 million in state funds for road infrastructure over the next two years, with a large portion allocated for elevating La. 1 from Leeville to Golden Meadow. Additionally, \$23.7 million has been earmarked for replacing the Boudreaux Canal Bridge at La. 20. These improvements will further support the movement of goods, people, and services and connect the Bayou Region with strategic markets across the U.S.⁴

¹ Scott, Dr. Loren. 2023-2024 "Louisiana Economic Forecast, State and MSAs: 2023 and 2024." South Louisiana Economic Council. bayouregion.com/23-24-forecast.

² "U.S. Commerce Department Funds Grant For Unmanned Aircraft Center At Houma Airport." Louisiana Economic Development. opportunitylouisiana.gov/led-news/news-releases/news/2019/06/19/u.s.-commerce-department-funds-grant-for-unmanned-aircraft-center-at-houma-airport.

³ Scott, Dr. Loren. 2023-2024 "Louisiana Economic Forecast, State and MSAs: 2023 and 2024." South Louisiana Economic Council. bayouregion.com/23-24-forecast.

⁴ Scott, Dr. Loren. 2023-2024 "Louisiana Economic Forecast, State and MSAs: 2023 and 2024." South Louisiana Economic Council. bayouregion.com/23-24-forecast.

Higher Education and Workforce Assets

NICHOLLS STATE UNIVERSITY

Nicholls State University is a public university in Thibodaux, Louisiana. Founded in 1948, the 287-acre campus is located roughly 50 miles southwest of New Orleans and 60 miles southeast of Baton Rouge, with nearby access to Louisiana wetlands, the Mississippi River and its tributaries, and the Gulf of Mexico.

Nicholls is the primary workforce development and training engine of the Bayou Region. In its 2017-2022 strategic plan, Nicholls established a strategic goal to increase economic development through workforce development and applicable research. Nicholls is working closely with SLEC and local businesses to ensure graduates are fully equipped to enter today's evolving job market. In 2022, Nicholls and SLEC entered into a cooperative endeavor agreement (CEA) aiming to help the region in its recovery from recent hurricanes and the COVID-19 pandemic. The CEA includes provisions for SLEC to provide funding for the improvement of buildings on Nicholls's campus, helping both Nicholls and the regional economy as a whole.

FLETCHER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Fletcher Community College is located in Schriever, Louisiana, and provides vocational training across Terrebonne, Lafourche, Assumption, St. James, and St. Charles parishes. Fletcher's vision is to serve its diverse population by providing pathways for higher education, building a strong workforce, and fostering lifelong learning. Fletcher's technology-driven curriculum serves as the foundation of student success, guided by academic practice to develop applicable, current skills. SLEC and Fletcher currently have an MOU designating Fletcher as the provider of choice for workforce training in the region, through which the two organizations partner to identify workforce needs and associated skills gaps for existing or emerging industries, and upskill, reskill, or teach new skills to meet market needs, retain talent, and enhance the labor pool. SLEC can further formalize this partnership and establish key areas of focus primarily in identifying industry partners to contribute resources, expertise, or capacity in return for a pipeline of well-trained talent.

SOUTH LOUISIANA COMMUNITY COLLEGE - FRANKLIN AND YOUNG MEMORIAL CAMPUSES

South Louisiana Community College (SLCC) was established in 1997 as a public multi-campus two-year institution of higher education and was designated to serve the eight parishes of Acadia, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, and Vermilion. With an annual enrollment of 15,000, SLCC students may choose from more than 50 programs leading to associate degrees, technical diplomas, and certifications. SLCC Franklin Campus, located in Franklin, Louisiana, and SLCC Young Memorial Campus in Morgan City, Louisiana, are both located in the Bayou Region and offer opportunities from business training to welding, with degree programs transferrable to universities across Louisiana. The community college also offers a wide range of non-credit instruction and training.

Louisiana Economic Development Certified Sites

LED Certified Sites are development-ready industrial sites. LED certification is granted after an extensive application process and exhaustive review. The benefits of certification include official acknowledgement of a site's suitability and readiness, in addition to improved success in the site selection process. The program's rigorous review process is conducted by an independent, third-party engineering firm.

The Bayou Region currently has two LED Certified Sites. The 700-acre Rebecca North Development Park and the 234-acre Rebecca South Development Park are adjacent to U.S. 90 at La. 311. The sites are less than 12 miles from the Houma-Terrebonne Airport & Industrial Park, with access to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway via Bayou Lafourche. The sites have available electric, water, sewerage, natural gas, and fiberoptic capacity, and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad is less than four miles away.

It is worth noting that the Bayou Region's relatively small number of LED Certified Sites is not due to a lack of effort or focus. The Bayou Region's coastal proximity presents challenges with certification, as more saturated plots of land often do not pass LED's soil analysis standards. To increase the number of Certified Sites in the region, SLEC can work with landowners of dryer parcels in northern areas of the Bayou Region. Assumption Parish leaders have expressed a strong interest in focusing on this effort to better understand the process and work to certify key sites they believe have strong development potential.

Natural Resources

The Bayou Region is home to significant oil and natural gas supply, accompanied by a dense pipeline network providing extensive opportunities for businesses in drilling and production, transportation, and equipment sales and services.

Louisiana is the largest salt-producing state in the U.S., and the Bayou Region is a major center for salt production. With its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico and access to navigable waterways, the Bayou Region has access to a bountiful portion of the state's world-renowned seafood supply, including shrimp, oysters, and numerous species of inshore and offshore fisheries. The region's fertile farmland creates a prime environment for growing sugarcane, soybeans, and other high-demand crops.

Small Business and Entrepreneurship

COASTAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

The Coastal Technical Assistance Center (CTAC) is based at Nicholls State University and located in the same building as SLEC, which supports the center's management and operations. CTAC in turn supports small business engagement with prime contractors that can offer large coastal project opportunities. Nicholls State University serves as the center's higher education partner, providing technical support, research, and in-kind services. The state will invest hundreds of millions of dollars into coastal protection and restoration projects over the next 50 years, and, through CTAC, small Louisiana businesses have unparalleled access to the public bidding process. Additionally, CTAC develops and maintains an active database of small businesses in a wide range of industries and service sectors and directly connects them to opportunities to secure work, particularly within the public sector. As the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority's (CPRA) annual construction spending increases every year, SLEC will continue to prioritize partnership with CTAC to maintain skilled labor and support small business growth.

BAYOU REGION INCUBATOR

Nicholls State University's Bayou Region Incubator (BRI) is a valuable resource for local entrepreneurs and is vital to the regional economy post-pandemic and amidst ongoing coastal erosion. The purpose of the incubator is to offer consulting, training, technical assistance, mentorships, networking, and other support services to existing and aspiring entrepreneurs and small businesses, largely those that will operate in and contribute to the Bayou Region. The mission of the incubator is to foster growth of a diverse and sustainable economy in the Bayou Region through intentional investments into emerging industries. BRI will connect entrepreneurs addressing Louisiana's coastal challenges with resources and funding opportunities aligned with their growth. Additionally, the incubator provides resources specifically tailored to minority-owned businesses and those based in low- and moderate-income communities - all with the aim of enhancing regional resiliency by diversifying the Bayou Region's economy through job creation initiatives. The beneficial overlap in the missions and purpose of SLEC and BRI should be strategically harnessed in the near future. As BRI establishes its presence and launches operations, SLEC can work with the incubator to identify small businesses that emerge with potential for large-scale impact, share resources when appropriate, and explore avenues for agreements or partnerships that further the mission of both organizations.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS¹

POPULATION (2022)

272,551

Population decreased by 10,666 over the last 5 years and is projected to decrease by 9,260 over the next 5 years.

TOTAL REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT

110,923

Jobs decreased by 6,749 over the last 5 years and are projected to decrease by 1,715 over the next 5 years.

AVERAGE EARNINGS PER JOB (2022)

\$66,600

Regional average earnings per job are \$13,200 below the national average earnings of \$79,800 per job.

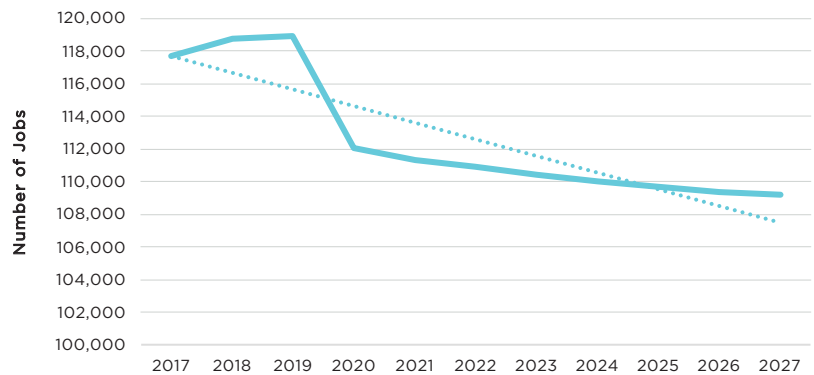
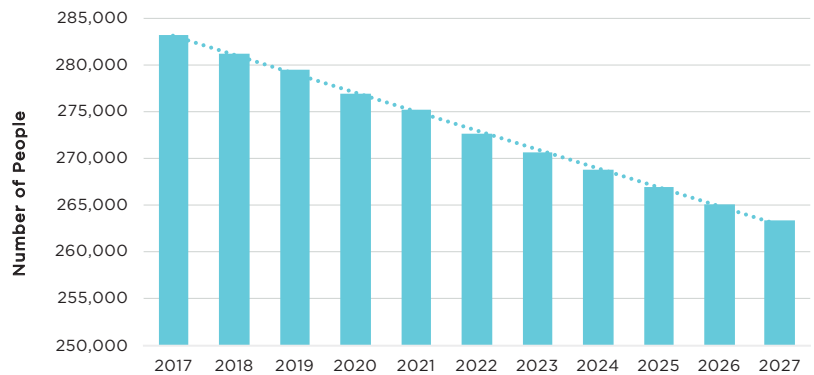
Historic and Projected Trends

POPULATION

From 2017 to 2022, the Bayou Region's population declined by 3.8%, falling by 10,666. Population is expected to decrease by 9,260 (3.4%) between 2022 and 2027.

JOBS

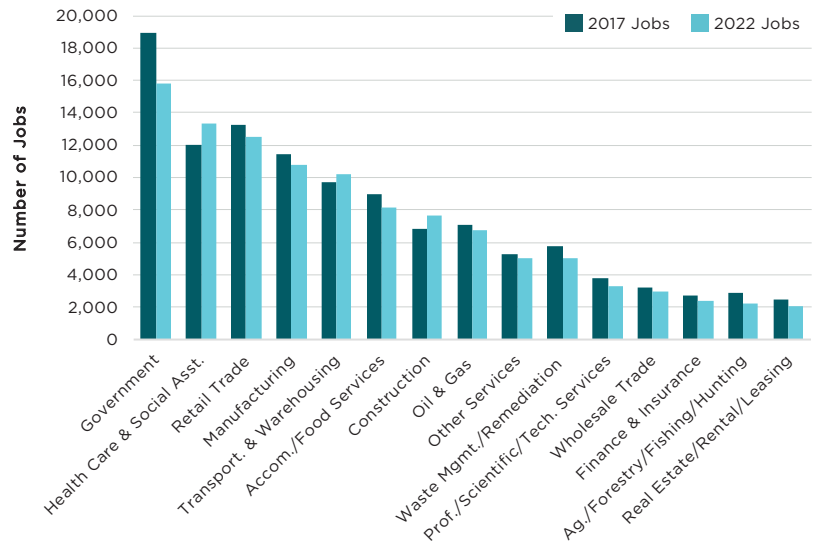
Jobs in the region grew between 2017 and 2019 but sharply declined in 2020, with additional decreases in 2021 and 2022, largely attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of Hurricane Ida. Overall, jobs in the Bayou Region decreased by 5.7% between 2017 and 2022. During the same period, jobs in Louisiana declined by 3.2%, while U.S. jobs grew by 2.4%.



¹ "Economy Overview." Lightcast. analyst.lightcast.io/analyst/?t=45nwq#h=mWPn8&page=edo_economy_overview&vertical=edo&nation=us.

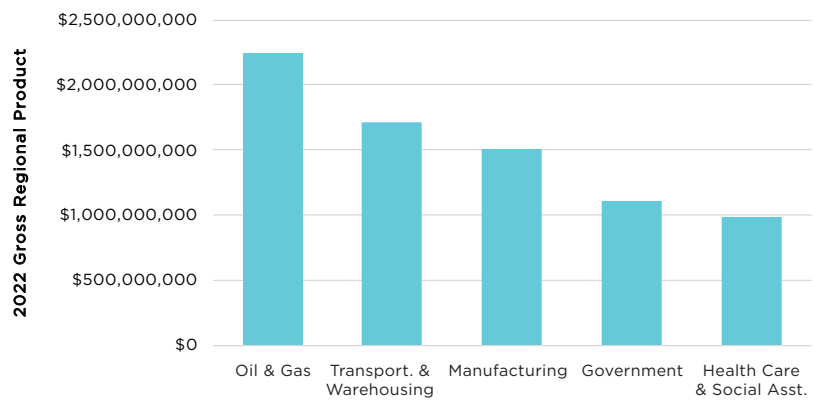
Largest Industries by Number of Jobs

Government jobs remain the most prevalent in the region but did experience decreases over the past five years. Retail trade, manufacturing, and oil and gas jobs were among the sectors that continued to decline over the same period. Conversely, health care and social assistance jobs increased, and the construction and transportation and warehousing industries saw job increases from 2017 to 2022.



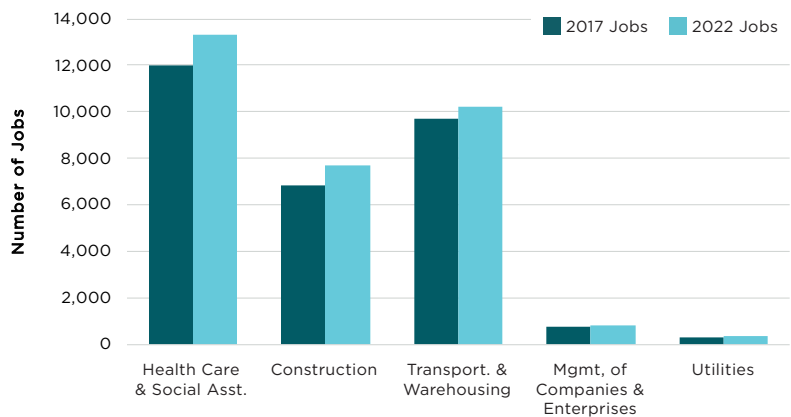
Top Industries by Gross Regional Product

Despite the overall decline in the industry, oil and gas continues to lead the Bayou Region in GRP, producing over \$2.2 billion for the region in 2022. Other leading sectors in the regional economy included transportation and warehousing (\$1.7 billion), manufacturing (\$1.5 billion), government (\$1.1 billion), and healthcare and social assistance (\$1 billion).



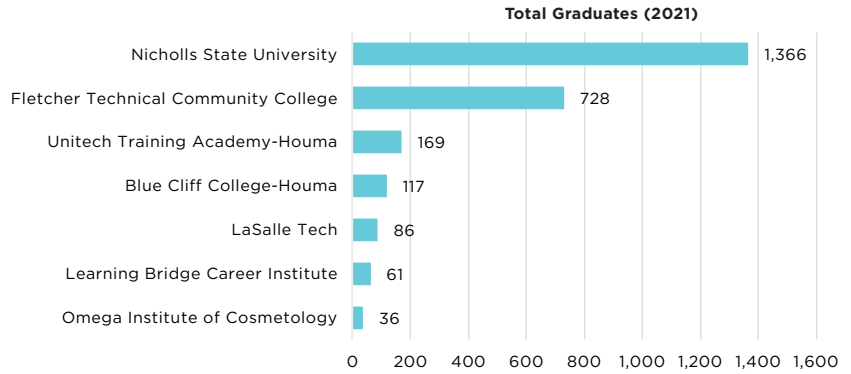
Top Industries by Job Growth

While the Bayou Region's overall job growth has declined since 2017, several sectors in the economy saw job growth, including healthcare and social assistance, construction, transportation and warehousing, management of companies and enterprises, and utilities. Healthcare and social assistance saw the most rapid growth, adding over 1,000 jobs over the five-year period.



Education Pipeline

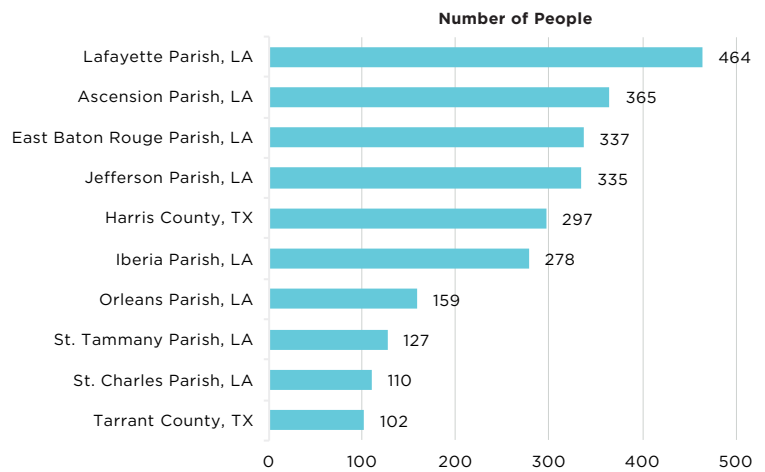
Bayou Region universities and community and technical colleges produced roughly 2,500 graduates in 2021. Nearly 1,400 of these graduates were from Nicholls State University, followed by over 700 from Fletcher Technical Community College. The Bayou Region's education pipeline was supported by a K-12 system graduating high school students with the ability to immediately enter the workforce.



Migration Patterns

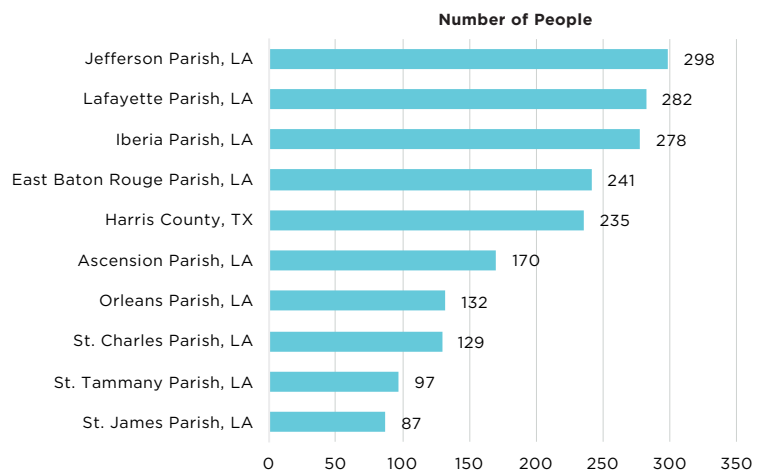
2020 OUT-MIGRATION: TOP DESTINATIONS

Most of the people leaving the Bayou Region are heading to growing population centers in south Louisiana, such as Lafayette, Ascension, East Baton Rouge, and Jefferson parishes. The next-most popular destination for migrants from the region was Harris County, Texas.



2020 IN-MIGRATION: PREVIOUS LOCATIONS

Migrants into the region came from many of the same places to which outward migrants dispersed. Most inward migrants came from Jefferson, Lafayette, and Iberia parishes. The population centers of Lafayette and Jefferson parishes gained more migrants from the Bayou Region than they lost, resulting in net negative population growth between the region and these respective parishes, while Iberia Parish's migration to and from the Bayou Region was neutral.



Cluster Analysis

By providing insight into regional economic concentrations and related industries, cluster mapping helps to inform decisions on where investments can be strategically deployed for maximum impact. This data combines region-specific dynamics with industry data to identify areas of competitive strength across various locations, unlocking potential investments that could yield additional jobs and private capital growth.

SLEC conducted a cluster analysis with support from Harvard Business School's U.S. Cluster Mapping Project. The primary data source for generating these clusters is the U.S. Census Bureau's County Business Patterns dataset on employment, establishments, and wages by six-digit NAICS, collected at the regional level of states, economic areas, metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, and counties. Economic clusters were identified by a novel algorithm allowing for the systematic generation and comparison of clusters based on job earnings, industry growth, regional competitiveness, regional specialization, and industries' potential impact on GRP.

The table below¹ displays the top 10 industries in the Bayou Region with the strongest cluster rankings (1 being the strongest). These clusters represent more concentrated businesses, networks of suppliers, and economic infrastructure within that industry, which signals stronger job creation and growth potential.

BAYOU REGION ECONOMIC CLUSTERS

INDUSTRY	CLUSTER RANKING
Oil and Gas Production and Transportation	1
Water Transportation	2
Upstream Chemical Products	3
Downstream Chemical Products	4
Electric Power Generation and Transmission	5
Local Health Services	6
Transportation and Logistics	7
Food Processing and Manufacturing	8
Production Technology and Heavy Machinery	9
Textile Manufacturing	10

¹ U.S. Cluster Mapping. Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness, Harvard Business School. clustermapping.us/region.

PARISH PROFILES¹



Assumption Parish

POPULATION (2022)

19,987

Population decreased by 2,599 over the last 5 years and is projected to decrease by 2,935 over the next 5 years.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2022)

\$44,700

Median household income is \$20,300 below the national median household income of \$65,000.

TOTAL PARISH EMPLOYMENT

4,452

Jobs decreased by 6 over the last 5 years but are projected to grow by 129 over the next 5 years.



OVERVIEW

Assumption Parish's population declined by 11.5% between 2017 and 2022, decreasing by 2,599 people. Population is expected to decrease by 2,935 people (14.7%) between 2022 and 2027.

Between 2017 and 2022, jobs declined by 0.2% in the parish from 4,459 to 4,452. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 2.4% by 2.6%. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate increased from 49.3% to 53.4% between 2017 and 2022.

Related to educational attainment, 11.2% of Assumption Parish residents possess a bachelor's degree (9.5% below the national average), and 4.7% hold an associate's degree (4.1% below the national average).

2022 TOP INDUSTRIES

- Crop Production
- Education and Hospitals (Local Government)
- Local Government excluding Education and Hospitals

¹ "Economy Overview." Lightcast. analyst.lightcast.io/analyst/?t=45nwq#h=mWpN8&page=edo_economy_overview&vertical=edo&nation=us.

Lafourche Parish



POPULATION (2022)

97,159

Population decreased by 919 over the last 5 years and is projected to decrease by 740 over the next 5 years.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2022)

\$54,500

Median household income is \$10,500 below the national median household income of \$65,000.

TOTAL PARISH EMPLOYMENT

35,162

Jobs decreased by 1,001 over the last 5 years and are projected to decrease by 243 over the next 5 years.



OVERVIEW

Lafourche Parish's population declined by 0.9% between 2017 and 2022, falling by 919 people. Population is expected to decrease by 740 (0.8%) between 2022 and 2027.

Between 2017 and 2022, jobs declined by 2.8% in Lafourche Parish from 36,163 to 35,162. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 2.4% by 5.2%. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate decreased from 54.5% to 52.9% between 2017 and 2022.

11.8% of Lafourche Parish residents possess a bachelor's degree (9.0% below the national average) and 5.6% hold an associate's degree (3.3% below the national average).

2022 TOP INDUSTRIES

- Water Transportation
- Education and Hospitals (Local Government)
- Restaurants/Dining

PARISH PROFILES¹



St. Mary Parish

POPULATION (2022)

48,053

Population decreased by 2,620 over the last 5 years and is projected to decrease by 461 over the next 5 years.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2022)

\$40,200

Median household income is \$24,800 below the national median household income of \$65,000

TOTAL PARISH EMPLOYMENT

21,322

Jobs decreased by 1,258 over the last 5 years and are projected to decrease by 531 over the next 5 years.



OVERVIEW

St. Mary Parish's population declined by 5.2% between 2017 and 2022, falling by 2,620. Population is expected to decrease by 461 (1.0%) between 2022 and 2027.

Between 2017 and 2022, jobs declined by 5.6% in St. Mary Parish from 22,580 to 21,322. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 2.4% by 8.0%. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate increased from 51.7% to 51.9% between 2017 and 2022.

6.3% of St. Mary Parish residents possess a bachelor's degree (14.5% below the national average) and 7.4% hold an associate's degree (1.5% below the national average).

2022 TOP INDUSTRIES

- Education and Hospitals (Local Government)
- Local Government excluding Education and Hospitals
- Energy and energy transport activities

¹ "Economy Overview." Lightcast. analyst.lightcast.io/analyst/?t=45nwq#h=mWPn8&page=edo_economy_overview&vertical=edo&nation=us.

Terrebonne Parish



POPULATION (2022)

107,352

Population decreased by 4,528 over the last 5 years and is projected to decrease by 5,124 over the next 5 years.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2022)

\$52,200

Median household income is \$12,800 below the national median household income of \$65,000.

TOTAL PARISH EMPLOYMENT

49,987

Jobs decreased by 4,484 over the last 5 years and are projected to decrease by 1,071 over the next 5 years.



OVERVIEW

Terrebonne Parish's population declined by 4.0% between 2017 and 2022, falling by 4,528. Population is expected to decrease by 5,124 (4.8%) between 2022 and 2027.

Between 2017 and 2022, jobs declined by 8.2% in Terrebonne Parish from 54,471 to 49,987. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 2.4% by 10.6%. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate decreased from 54.6% to 54.2% between 2017 and 2022.

10.6% of Terrebonne Parish residents possess a bachelor's degree (10.1% below the national average) and 6.2% hold an associate's degree (2.7% below the national average).

2022 TOP INDUSTRIES

- Restaurants/Dining
- Energy and energy transport activities
- Education and Hospitals (Local Government)

IMPACTS OF COVID-19

COVID-19 undoubtedly impacted the global economy. Measures taken to curb the spread of the virus caused many businesses to close their doors or significantly reduce operations. Uncertainty and fear about the future due to the pandemic, coupled with a decline in global trade and travel, added to economic instability.

In Louisiana, the restaurant, hospitality, and entertainment industries were particularly impacted. Oil and gas workers were deemed as essential and could continue operations, but crude oil prices plummeted by more than 270% in April 2020, just weeks after the onslaught of the pandemic.¹ The industry faced another setback in mid-2021 when the U.S. Department of Interior paused the sale of oil and gas leases on federal land, which included rigs in the Gulf of Mexico.

When comparing 2019 and 2020, Louisiana's gross domestic product (GDP) fell 5.5%, compared to 2.9% in Florida, and 3.5% in Texas. In 2020, Louisiana witnessed economic growth of less than 1% in the farming and fishing, utilities, and company management industries.² This minimal growth was not enough to offset considerable economic downturns across the state. Declines in multiple sectors, including oil and gas extraction, construction, manufacturing, retail, and arts and entertainment, contributed to overall economic stagnation throughout 2020.

These impacts affected the Bayou Region as well. The Houma-Thibodaux metropolitan statistical area (MSA) experienced a reduction of approximately 8,900 non-farm jobs between May 2019 and May 2020. During the same period, nearly 5,200 additional people became unemployed. However, according to Dr. Loren Scott, economist and author of the Louisiana Economic Forecast, COVID-19's impact on the Bayou Region's economy was one of the least severe among all regions in Louisiana as it relates to the job market.³ By mid-2021, the area appeared to be on a path to recovery. Then, Hurricane Ida approached Louisiana's coastline.

1 "U.S. Crude Oil First Purchase Price (Dollars per Barrel)", U.S. Energy Information Administration. [eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=p&t=f000000__3&f=m](https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=p&t=f000000__3&f=m).

2 Mossbrucker, Kristen. "The Covid Effect: Here's How Much GDP Louisiana Lost by the End of 2020." *The Advocate*, theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/business/the-covid-effect-heres-how-much-gdp-louisiana-lost-by-the-end-of-2020/article_8e46f6ac-8e43-11eb-b721-238c9ea12170.html.

3 Scott, Dr. Loren. 2023-2024 "Louisiana Economic Forecast, State and MSAs: 2023 and 2024." South Louisiana Economic Council. bayouregion.com/23-24-forecast/.

IMPACTS OF HURRICANE IDA

On August 29, 2021, Hurricane Ida made landfall and devastated southeast Louisiana. At landfall, the Category 4 hurricane became one of the three most intense hurricanes to make landfall on record with sustained winds of 150 miles per hour as it passed over Port Fourchon, Louisiana.¹

AccuWeather estimates Hurricane Ida produced a total of \$95 billion in economic impacts, making it the seventh-costliest storm in U.S. history.²

Hurricane Ida brought unprecedented disruption to the nation's energy production with its impact on oil refineries in Louisiana, where nearly one-fifth of the nation's oil refining capacity is located. The storm ravaged Louisiana's agriculture industry, which supplies a large portion of the nation's rice, sugarcane, and cotton. Hurricane Ida also significantly slowed the state's logistics and transportation system, where a collection of ports, railways, bridges, and roads support the movement of goods to regional and international markets.

Between August and September of 2021, the Houma-Thibodaux MSA lost more than 8,000 non-farm jobs. However, the region's economy is showing signs of recovery. As of October 2022, the Houma-Thibodaux MSA recovered nearly 3,000 jobs since Hurricane Ida. Dr. Loren Scott expects the region's economy to continue to grow despite an anticipated national recession in 2023, estimating the MSA will add 700 jobs in 2023 and an additional 1,700 jobs in 2024.

While the Bayou Region's economy continues to recover, ongoing battles with insurance companies are slowing the reconstruction of both single-family and multi-family units and contributing to an affordable housing shortage across the region. Many insurance companies have gone bankrupt or pulled out of the state completely, which has forced 120,000 households to obtain coverage from the state's property insurer of last resort. The Louisiana Legislature gave final approval in February 2023 for a \$45 million deposit from the state's general fund into an incentive fund meant to lure property insurers to the market.³

Stakeholders across the region and across sectors and industries repeatedly cited unobtainable insurance or dramatic increases in flood insurance premiums as a hindrance to attracting new and retaining residents in the region. Further, as the federal government continues to implement the Risk Rating 2.0 methodology, an updated calculation of flood insurance premiums by the National Flood Insurance Program, the region anticipates substantial challenges in rebuilding damaged homes and attracting residents and business owners to return, due to the rising cost of flood insurance in the region.

1 Beven II, John L, Hagen, Andrew, & Berg, Robbie (2022). "National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone Report (Hurricane Ida)". National Hurricane Center.

2 Stevens, Pippa. "Hurricane Ida's damage tally could top \$95 billion, making it 7th costliest hurricane since 2000." CNBC. [cnbc.com/2021/09/08/hurricane-idas-damage-tally-could-top-95-billion-making-it-7th-costliest-hurricane-since-2000-.html](https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/08/hurricane-idas-damage-tally-could-top-95-billion-making-it-7th-costliest-hurricane-since-2000-.html).

3 "Appropriates funding for the Insure Louisiana Incentive Program." H.B. 1. 2023 Extra. Sess. (LA. 2023). legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1299538

Key Observations

SLEC's research and analysis have shown that the organization and Bayou Region are poised to align their direction with current economic, societal, and policy landscapes. As the lead economic development organization for the Bayou Region, SLEC used this strategic planning exercise as an opportunity to fine tune its mission, vision, and service offerings to capitalize on the synergy between the region's assets, opportunities, and key industries with the most growth potential. In addition, SLEC will continue to refine its organizational structure and revenue model to align with the organization's newly refined strategic priorities.

Source: Explore Houma



The Bayou Region has a strong collection of strategic assets that have produced sizable economic impacts over the past several decades and will continue to bolster the region's economy. Port Fourchon maintains its status as a maritime operations and logistics hub and a regional economic powerhouse. Nicholls State University and Fletcher Community College generate substantial economic impacts and supplement the Bayou Region's workforce pipeline. CTAC and the BRI represent tremendous potential for growing the region's small businesses and next generation of entrepreneurs.

Despite having strong assets in place, COVID-19 and Hurricane Ida illuminated the vulnerabilities of the Bayou Region economy, particularly its reliance on traditional oil and gas activity. SLEC's key industries, focused on food, plastic products, and metal parts manufacturing, as well as intermodal operations, have performed with varying success. The GRP of the food manufacturing industry has shown steady growth. While GRP of intermodal industries has decreased, these activities still represent the second-largest economic driver in the region. Metal parts manufacturing economic output has decreased over the past five years, while still producing more than \$200 million in total GRP. Plastic parts manufacturing has approached an economic standstill, producing less than \$1 million in GRP in 2022 and employing hardly any Bayou Region residents.

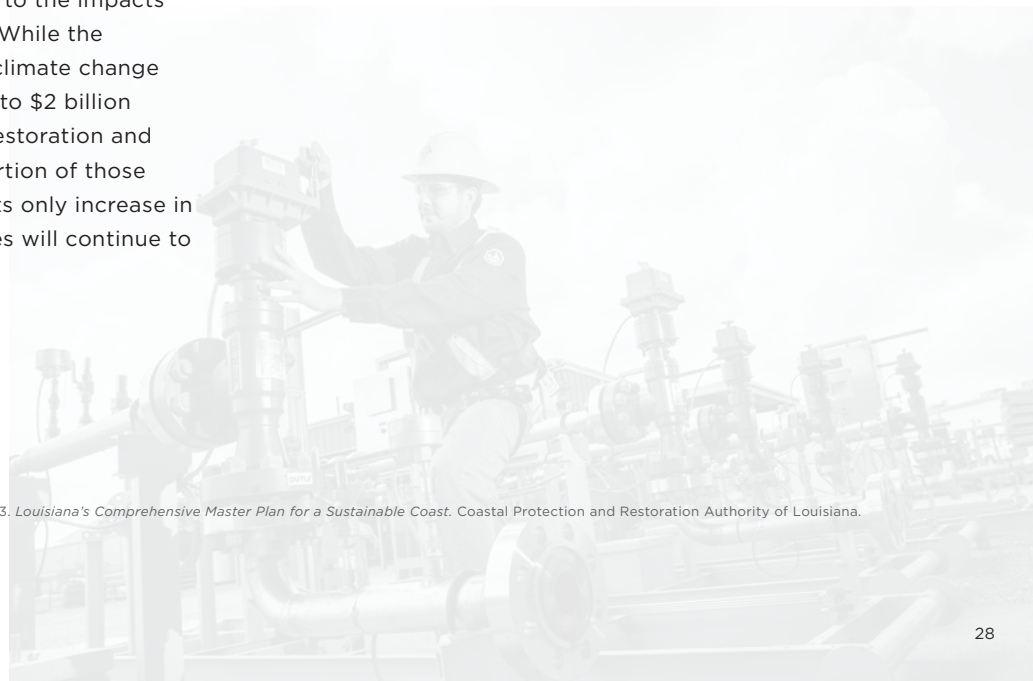
Federal funding from a variety of sources, including the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs, have been or will be allocated for distribution in the region, bringing both recovery resources and economic stimulus associated with construction activities. Further, the area is the center of coastal Louisiana and home to the Nicholls State University Coastal Research Center, making it a hub for global trade, production and recreation, but also incredibly vulnerable to the impacts of a changing climate and major storms. While the state continues to seek ways to combat climate change impacts, it also continues to invest close to \$2 billion each year across coastal Louisiana into restoration and protection projects, with a significant portion of those dollars serving the Bayou Region. Projects only increase in size and scope, meaning job opportunities will continue to rise as well.

SLEC has the opportunity to position itself as facilitator and leader in this space, connecting small businesses to support the state's work and pursuing complementary industries that would boost the economy, increase resilience through the continued development of the SLEC Business Recovery and Resilience Center, and bring new jobs to the area. In the upcoming 2023 Coastal Master Plan,¹ which is still in draft form, there are 31 projects and over \$5 billion in investment slated for the Bayou Region over the next 50 years, including the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection System, a risk reduction system that will include 98 miles of floodwalls, pump stations, and levees to protect population centers in the Bayou Region. While this is a planning tool and not a direct investment today, it is reflective of substantial investment to come to provide greater protection and reduced risk in the region. Additionally, with this investment comes more jobs and industry in which SLEC can and should proactively work with organizations like CPRA and programs such as CTAC to understand what skills and training are needed and proactively prepare today's labor force for the jobs of tomorrow.

Government, healthcare and social assistance, and retail trade represent the largest employers in the Bayou Region. These sectors of the economy are inherently population-based and represent limited economic ripple effects or export capacity. The fourth- and fifth-largest job creators in the region—manufacturing and transportation and warehousing, respectively—have the ability to create value-added economic benefits in the region and new indirect and induced jobs.

Aligning SLEC's focus with current trends and the region's strategic assets can improve the trajectory of the region's economy and mitigate the out-migration trends over the last several years.

¹ Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana. 2023. *Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast*. Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana. Baton Rouge, LA.



Establishing Stable, Reliable Funding To Drive The Regional Economy

BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

In Louisiana, most state and federal economic development funding is managed and allocated by LED, the state department charged with increasing economic opportunity. As a relatively small department of approximately 100 staff, LED partners with regional economic development organizations to carry out its mission across Louisiana's 64 parishes. Regional economic development organizations often serve as a bridge between local communities, businesses, and government entities, working to build partnerships and align resources to drive economic growth. They help ensure that economic development funding and resources allocated through LED are directed toward projects and initiatives that will have the greatest impact and benefit to their communities.

CHALLENGES

Economic development organizations operate in increasingly complex environments. Cyclical economic conditions, rising interest rates and inflation, and political pressures can present challenges in maintaining steady revenue streams. Many Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) face challenges with securing stable funding, as most of their public-sector support must be approved through annual budgeting processes. Calls to reduce or completely defund such organizations or initiatives are not uncommon and can impede the progress of EDOs and their programs. To bolster organizational stability in this environment, economic development organizations can diversify their revenue portfolios to facilitate more predictable, stable funding, while mitigating the severity and duration of financial turbulence.

EDOs have many avenues for pursuing revenue diversification, which can vary depending on the services they offer and the location they serve. These organizations can conduct in-depth prospect research to uncover potential donors, create donor-advised funds, cultivate stronger relationships with existing supporters, and refine their grant proposals to strengthen application efforts. They can leverage assets, such as shared buildings or parking spaces, and develop evergreen funds and reinvest the generated returns. EDOs can create additional revenues by hosting well-attended events, selling advertising space in publications, and providing access to in-house research benefiting local businesses and nonprofit. Through economic and tax analyses, EDOs can make the case that their business development activities are increasing revenues for local governments. EDOs can use this information to secure a portion of the net-new revenues their business development efforts produce. These steps can help unlock a wide range of capital while simultaneously diversifying income streams.



METHODOLOGY

To benchmark its current structure and financial solvency among peer economic development organizations, SLEC analyzed U.S. Census data¹ to identify metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) and combined statistical areas (CSA) in the U.S. Gulf South and Southeast with populations between 200,000 and 500,000 people. Within these areas, SLEC identified peer economic development organizations by screening for factors directly related to SLEC's organizational structure or key attributes of the Bayou Region, which included:

- Regional in nature and serving more than one county, parish, or city
- 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) structure without sole reliance on public-sector funding
- Susceptible to natural disasters and other man made environmental disasters
- Servicing or in close proximity to inland, deepwater, and/or offshore ports
- Target industries related to manufacturing, shipbuilding/maritime, offshore oil and gas, water management, agriculture, and/or commercial fishing

Once peer economic development organizations were identified, SLEC analyzed their most-recent Form 990² from the U.S. Department of Treasury and grouped its findings into the categories of regional characteristics, structure, activities and governance, and notable sources of revenue. SLEC then broke down and calculated sources of revenue in comparison to overall revenues to determine the extent to which these economic development organizations' funding streams were diversified.

Source: Fletcher Technical Community College



1 "Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas Population Totals and Components of Change: 2020-2021." United States Census Bureau. [census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-total-metro-and-micro-statistical-areas.html](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-total-metro-and-micro-statistical-areas.html).

2 "Research Tax-Exempt Organizations." Nonprofit Explorer. projects.propublica.org/nonprofits.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMPARISON¹

Using the aforementioned methodology, SLEC analyzed itself through this same research lens to form a comparison with its peers in similar markets.

	SLEC	GREATER WACO CHAMBER	SAVANNAH AREA CHAMBER	FORT SMITH REGIONAL CHAMBER	BOWLING GREEN AREA CHAMBER	CORPUS CHRISTI REGIONAL
Primary MSA	Houma-Thibodaux, LA	Waco, TX	Savannah, GA	Fort Smith, AR	Bowling Green, KY	Corpus Christi, TX
MSA Population²	207,137	277,547	404,798	244,310	179,639	421,933
Tax Code Designation	501(c)(3)	501(c)(6)	501(c)(6)	501(c)(6)	501(c)(6)	501(c)(6)
Total Revenue	\$631,174	\$2,780,545	\$13,944,735	\$1,137,241	\$2,302,587	\$1,911,645
Voting Members of Governing Body	10	40	47	36	26	28
Number of Employees	5	20	93	9	25	10
Number of Volunteers	N/A	1000	46	N/A	200	N/A

¹ "Research Tax-Exempt Organizations." Nonprofit Explorer. projects.propublica.org/nonprofits.

² "Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas Population Totals and Components of Change: 2020-2021." United States Census Bureau. census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-total-metro-and-micro-statistical-areas.html.

South Louisiana Economic Council¹

NOTABLE SOURCES OF REVENUE

SOURCE	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL REVENUES
Membership Dues	\$0	0%
Government Grants	\$597,612	94.68%
Other Contributions	\$33,537	5.31%
Investment Income	\$25	0.00%
Total Revenue	\$631,174.00	

KEY INDUSTRIES

- Food Manufacturing
- Intermodal Industries
- Metal Parts Manufacturing
- Plastic Product Manufacturing

Bowling Green Area Chamber¹

NOTABLE SOURCES OF REVENUE

SOURCE	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL REVENUES
Membership Dues	\$939,372	40.80%
Government Grants	\$80,750	3.51%
Management Fees	\$912,065	39.61%
Program Services	\$186,028	8.08%
Publication Sales	\$112,928	4.90%
Investment Income	\$7,963	0.35%
Economic Development Revenue	\$25,336	1.10%
Rental Property Income	\$850	0.04%
Other Revenue	\$37,295	1.62%
Total Revenue	\$2,302,587	

KEY INDUSTRIES

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Automotive
- Fabricated Metals
- Food Processing
- Motorsports
- Plastics
- Transportation and Logistics

¹ "Research Tax-Exempt Organizations." Nonprofit Explorer. projects.propublica.org/nonprofits.

Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corporation¹

NOTABLE SOURCES OF REVENUE

SOURCE	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL REVENUES
Membership Dues	\$676,066	35.4%
Government Grants	\$1,145,000	59.9%
Investment Income	\$753	0.0%
Other Revenue	\$89,826	4.7%
Total Revenue	\$1,911,645	

KEY INDUSTRIES

- Aerospace
- Energy and Pipelines
- Entrepreneurship/Small Business
- Steel Production

Fort Smith Regional Chamber¹

NOTABLE SOURCES OF REVENUE

SOURCE	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL REVENUES
Membership Dues	\$514,569	45.25%
Government Grants	\$99,487	8.75%
Event Revenue	\$440,084	38.70%
Economic Development Revenue	\$9,056	0.80%
Investment Revenue	\$32,272	2.84%
Other Revenue	\$41,773	3.67%
Total Revenue	\$1,137,241	

KEY INDUSTRIES

- Healthcare
- Manufacturing
- Retail Trade

¹ "Research Tax-Exempt Organizations." Nonprofit Explorer. projects.propublica.org/nonprofits.

Greater Waco Chamber¹

NOTABLE SOURCES OF REVENUE

SOURCE	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL REVENUES
Membership Dues	\$719,241	25.87%
Government Grants	\$332,500	11.96%
Other Contributions	\$737,050	26.51%
Research and Marketing	\$15,000	0.54%
Sports and Recreation	\$189,188	6.80%
Leadership Development	\$81,210	2.92%
Membership Services	\$236,588	8.51%
Workforce Education	\$77,033	2.77%
Other Service Revenue	\$261,726	9.41%
Investment Income	\$2,995	0.11%
Publications, Lists	\$417	0.01%
Other Revenue	\$127,597	4.59%
Total Revenue	\$2,780,545	

KEY INDUSTRIES

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Aerospace and Defense
- Supply Chain Management
- Health Care
- Professional and Financial Services

¹ "Research Tax-Exempt Organizations." Nonprofit Explorer. projects.propublica.org/nonprofits.

Savannah Area Chamber¹

NOTABLE SOURCES OF REVENUE

SOURCE	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL REVENUES
Membership Dues	\$1,254,403	9.00%
Government Grants	\$9,812,682	70.37%
Other Contributions	\$186,600	1.34%
Program Services	\$1,466,172	10.51%
Advertising Sales	\$959,905	6.88%
Investment Income	\$76,585	0.55%
Sales of Assets	\$32,862	0.24%
Net Income - Sales of Inventory	\$116,943	0.84%
Administrative Fees Collected	\$20,785	0.15%
Certificates of Origin	\$13,735	0.10%
Other Revenue	\$4,063	0.03%
Total Revenue	\$13,944,735	

KEY INDUSTRIES

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Aerospace
- Entertainment Production
- Health Tech
- Creative & Technical Services
- Logistics & Distribution
- Food & Beverage Manufacturing

¹ "Research Tax-Exempt Organizations." Nonprofit Explorer. projects.propublica.org/nonprofits.

KEY FINDINGS

Revenue Sources

SLEC has two primary revenue sources—membership dues and government grants. The selected peer EDOs have a median of nine different sources of revenue. Government grants contribute to 73% of SLEC’s total revenues. Among SLEC’s peers, government grants account for 31% of total revenues on average, with the Bowling Green Area Chamber having the smallest portion (3.5%) and the Savannah Area Chamber having the largest (70.4%).

Tax-Exempt Status

Compared to its peers, SLEC is the only organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. 501(c)(3) organizations are typically charitable organizations exempt from federal income tax and eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions. 501(c)(6) organizations are typically business leagues, chambers of commerce, trade associations, and professional organizations that promote the interests of a particular industry or profession. In addition, 501(c)(6) organizations have the formal ability to engage in lobbying activities. 501(c)(6) organizations are exempt from federal income tax, but contributions to these organizations are not tax-deductible.

SLEC’s regional counterparts in south Louisiana—Southwest Louisiana Economic Development Alliance, One Acadiana, Baton Rouge Area Chamber, and Greater New Orleans, Inc.—all have a 501(c)(6) tax exempt status. As SLEC positions itself to become the lead voice for the Bayou Region, it will consider establishing itself as a 501(c)(6) to align with its strategic priorities, as well as any upcoming policy and advocacy efforts. This recommendation does not exclude retaining 501(c)(3) status, but allows SLEC to explore the benefits and possibilities of doing so for fundraising efforts.



Current and Future Needs

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The geographic layout of the region, though interconnected, does lend to stark differences related to resources, assets, experiences, and viewpoints, which ultimately leads to different priorities and needs across the region. Further, each parish within the region has a unique landscape that dictates the respective dominant industries that, in turn, drive its economy. Therefore, it is critical that this strategic planning effort included broad outreach across the region, soliciting feedback from all who contribute to the regional or local economies.

SLEC held a series of stakeholder interviews and roundtables that were strategically assembled to facilitate candid feedback, identify challenges, extract possible solutions, and, ultimately, understand priorities and opportunities in the Bayou Region. Focus groups were assembled by industry or sector, as well as by parish.

Additionally, one-on-one or small group interviews with key leaders from across the region were conducted to gain insights into the unique perspectives of each. These leaders, who ranged from college presidents to port directors, shared their own perspective on priorities and challenges in the region. Further, they gave insight into how SLEC could better form strategic partnerships with their respective organizations in the future.

Another critical element in engaging SLEC's stakeholders included developing and deploying a survey tool to better understand current needs and challenges of residents and businesses in the region, particularly related to economic implications of COVID-19 and Hurricane Ida. The survey also focused on gathering feedback related to programming and initiatives SLEC should pursue to meet stakeholders' needs.

Notes and summary documents were reviewed to identify common themes or threads between the cross section of geographies and sectors. Emerging themes related to priorities or challenges were noted throughout this process, and themes consistently discussed across some or all touchpoints were translated into strategic focus areas and priorities.

REGIONAL NEEDS SURVEY

A stakeholder survey was developed, deployed, and analyzed by the Emergent Method team, in coordination with SLEC leadership, as an opportunity for stakeholders who live and/or work in the Bayou Region to share feedback anonymously. Questions were focused on better understanding the needs, concerns, and perspectives of stakeholders, as well as potential priority areas, programming, and initiatives SLEC should focus on in the future. The survey was broken down into five main sections: understanding demographics, characterizing effects of COVID-19, assessing impacts of Hurricane Ida, documenting immediate needs, and shaping the future of SLEC. In total, SLEC received 297 responses from stakeholders across the region.

Demographics

At the time of the survey, nearly 60% of respondents lived in Lafourche Parish, followed by 30% of respondents from Terrebonne Parish, 4% from St. Mary Parish, and 3% from Assumption Parish. Some respondents were not residents of the region but either worked in the region or worked for a company with a strong presence in the region. While the parish in which respondents worked closely resembled where they lived, several respondents reported working in multiple parishes within the region or commuting to another parish to work. Overall, St. Mary and Assumption parishes each had a higher number of respondents that worked in the parish than those that lived in the parish.

The region's leading industry, oil and gas, was well represented, with 22% of respondents, followed by education (11%), government workers (10%), and healthcare (8%). Other industries represented included professional services such as accounting and engineering, retail, and manufacturing.

62% of respondents worked in the private, for-profit sector as either employees or business owners. The number of for-profit employees was followed closely by that of government employees, with significantly fewer nonprofit employees and nonprofit leaders responding to the survey, totaling only 14% of responses.

Recent Impacts

COVID-19

Respondents were asked about how the pandemic affected their business, and whether they have seen any long-term impacts. The most common response was a positive one—increased technological capabilities and increased ability to meet and work remotely. The next most frequent answer was that the pandemic had no impact on their business. Workforce shortages and supply chain challenges were noted as negative impacts.

Related to how SLEC, local chambers, and other economic development organizations can help businesses and the regional economy bounce back from the pandemic, most respondents stated they need help recruiting people and attracting skilled labor. They also suggested these organizations focus on training, specifically partnering with regional colleges and universities, to help create a more skilled workforce in the region.

Overall, residents and workers in the Bayou Region noted few residual impacts from the pandemic in the current state of the economy and that businesses have largely bounced back.

HURRICANE IDA

As it relates to Hurricane Ida, respondents noted the most significant impact to their organization was physical damage to their workplace, mostly noted in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes. Another prominent issue noted by survey respondents was that while internal business operations remained the same, individual employees were struggling to rebuild and resettle in their homes, leading to an out-migration from the region that has contributed to a workforce shortage. Several respondents noted that while their place of work was shut down for a period of time, it has since returned to normal. Others expressed revenue losses affecting their businesses. When asked specifically how Hurricane Ida affected their industry, most noted no major changes. Some, however, have seen a reduction in available workers and increased competition for qualified employees.

Respondents were asked what specific ways SLEC, local chambers, and other economic development organizations could assist with hurricane recovery. Respondents noted a need to bring in new businesses and create a business-friendly environment, citing tax incentives, lower insurance costs, and other financial programs as possible enticements. They also noted these organizations could develop a better plan for hurricane response and recovery, including making recovery funds available more quickly, dealing with power outages more quickly, preparing hospitals for evacuation, and creating an incubator for businesses to operate in when the power and internet are down at their offices. Others mentioned creating more resilient coastal communities through stricter building codes and projects aimed at reducing coastal land loss and restoring wetlands. Some respondents noted they did not know of any ways these organizations could help them.

When asked about the roles of SLEC and other local economic development organizations in facilitating hurricane recovery in the region, most notably again suggested these organizations should bring in businesses to support growth of the regional economy and develop a better strategy for hurricane response and recovery. Economic diversification, specifically transitioning from the region's reliance on the oil and gas industry, was another common response, as was a need for greater investment in resilient infrastructure.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS

Respondents were asked about factors outside of the hurricane and pandemic that have affected their organizations and industries, to which they responded about the state of the global economy, particularly the downturn in the oil and gas industry over the past decade. Other factors included inflation, supply chain issues, and workforce shortages. Increasing home and flood insurance costs in the region were also a concern.

By far the most pressing need for respondents was finding and hiring workers, both skilled and unskilled. This gap in the regional labor market was again the most prominent issue highlighted when respondents were asked about the most pressing needs of their customers or constituents. Access to affordable home and flood insurance was also frequently mentioned.

When respondents were asked to rank six regional issues by urgency, quality of life was the top choice, followed closely by access to workforce. These issues were tied to one another, as respondents said attracting people to the region is difficult because of the region's current state in regard to quality of life. Housing was the next most urgent issue, with respondents citing prohibitive costs and lingering physical damage from storms. Industrial infrastructure and supply chain issues were the next most urgent topics, and training was the least urgent issue.

Other needs of the regional economy mentioned were adapting the workforce to meet the needs of the future, attracting young people to the region and retaining young talent, improving infrastructure, expanding mental health services, and enhancing regional waterways like Bayou Lafourche and the Gulf Intercoastal Waterway.

Respondents were asked about the positive and negative changes in the business environment over the past five years. Limited labor availability was again the most common answer in response to negative change. Positive improvements to the region included increased flood protection and de-watering capabilities, broadband access in the region, and effective local elected officials.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

65% of respondents noted they had some involvement with their local economic development organization or some local business/industry group, significantly less (42%) said they were currently involved with SLEC. Some were unsure how to become involved, others were formerly involved, and a few respondents noted they had no familiarity with SLEC.

When asked how SLEC can support organizations in the future, respondents mentioned bringing in more businesses, including working with LED to create incentive programs that could encourage more investment and business activity in the Bayou Region. They suggested working with educational institutions to train members of the workforce and advocating for the region, specifically for lower home and flood insurance costs. Some responses also noted that SLEC needs to become more vocal about their efforts and success through increased communication.

Respondents mentioned that SLEC needs to set a vision for the region and that government and business leaders should come together through SLEC. These responses also mentioned that SLEC should serve as an advocate for the region, spearheading policy priorities and communicating more clearly with stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS AND ROUNDTABLES

In addition to the regional needs survey, SLEC gathered feedback from stakeholders through both one-on-one interviews and small group roundtable discussions. These discussions were conducted by the Emergent Method team, without SLEC staff present, and documented confidentially to ensure the most truthful, unbiased, and useful feedback was gathered. In total, 65 individual stakeholders shared feedback on regional needs, challenges, potential solutions, opportunities, and the role SLEC should play to support each. These stakeholders included representatives from all four parishes in private industries, such as finance, healthcare, oil and gas, manufacturing, metalworks, tourism, food service, agriculture, and energy, as well as leadership from local government, chambers of commerce and economic development offices, and educational institutions.

Key findings from these discussions included:

- Workforce shortages are a major concern in the region. Several business owners noted a need for more skilled and unskilled laborers to meet current demand. Recent impacts like COVID-19 and Hurricane Ida, along with global economic trends, have exacerbated the workforce shortage.
- Rising home and/or flood insurance costs are a real concern across the region. This burden presents significant financial challenges among middle- and lower-class workers, who make up a majority of the region's workforce. With premiums rising to an unsustainable level, residents in the Bayou Region are considering more affordable locations, which is creating additional workforce challenges for local industries.
- A lack of economic diversification, particularly an over-reliance on the cyclical oil and gas industry, has limited the region's growth. As the oil and gas industry has fluctuated over the past several decades, the Bayou Region has seen limited output from other industries. There is an opportunity for the region to invest in and establish new economic assets, to capitalize on the emerging energy sector and lead energy diversification in the state and country, and to attract new, innovative industries.
- Economic development in the Bayou Region currently lacks an integrated, unified leader who is maintaining a log of resources, facilitating collaboration and communication across parishes and leadership, and elevating the region's priorities at the state or federal level. SLEC has an opportunity to fill this role, crossing industries and parishes, to move the region forward. SLEC's role should include economic data analysis, marketing, site selection, policy development, identifying and pursuing funding opportunities, and general strategic advocacy for the Bayou Region.



Regional SWOT Analysis

SLEC analyzed research, stakeholder surveys, and feedback from interviews and roundtables to develop key themes surrounding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) related to the Bayou Region's economy. Strengths and weaknesses refer to the internal activities and inherent attributes, while opportunities and threats signify external factors that could affect the region's strategic efforts moving forward.

Source: LED



STRENGTHS

ASSETS

- Accessible and abundant natural resources, including fisheries and seafood, salt and minerals, oil and gas, and agricultural products
- Houma-Terrebonne Airport's Unmanned Aviation System facility
- Nicholls State University
- Fletcher Community College
- South Louisiana Community College
- Port Fourchon
- Port of Terrebonne
- Port of West St. Mary
- Port of Morgan City
- Strategic location on Louisiana's coast
- Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium
- Access to navigable waterways and the Gulf of Mexico

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Extensive port system that drives facets of the national and global economy
- Class 1 railroad
- Highway connectivity across parishes to population centers (U.S. 90)
- Navigable waterway transportation
- Elevated Gateway to the Gulf Highway (La. 1)
- Significant, continued investments into flood protection infrastructure (Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico Hurricane Protection System)

QUALITY OF PLACE

- Variety of outdoor recreational and tourism activities (ecotourism) such as hunting and fishing
- Loyal residents
- Unique culture
- Community safety

WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- A strong collection of well-established companies
- Multiple organizations and stakeholders focused on the region's economy
- Terrebonne Basin seafood production
- Available employment opportunities



WEAKNESSES

ASSETS

- Lack of hotel accommodations and meeting space for tourists/conferences
- Limited land suitable for industrial development certification standards

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Lack of broadband connectivity
- Increasing traffic on roads and highways

QUALITY OF PLACE

- Rising home and flood insurance costs
- Low quality of K-12 public education
- Limited recreational options
- Increasing vulnerability due to coastal land loss and impacts of climate change

WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Limited revenue and funding sources for SLEC
- No unified voice speaking for the region, defining priorities, or advocating for progress
- Limited diversification in the region's economy, heavy reliance on oil and gas
- International and domestic companies have limited knowledge of the Bayou Region
- Lack of a regional brand/tone and ownership over uniqueness; little sense of regionalism - organizations, cities, and parishes are siloed
- Inability to attract younger residents to the region; lack of enticing opportunities
- Difficulty in retaining current residents in the region
- Lack of capital for small businesses
- Need for development of workforce soft skills
- Lack of clearly defined vision
- Limited collaboration and communication between SLEC and local government
- Duplication of efforts among several organizations

OPPORTUNITIES

ASSETS

- Capitalizing on strategic location of navigable waterways connecting the region to Baton Rouge and New Orleans
- Maintaining and investing more in CTAC and BRI to increase job creation, entrepreneurship, and innovation
- Strengthening the Bayou Region's portfolio of certified sites and businesses parks
- Improving downtown areas and hotel capacity to attract tourists and events that draw visitors (e.g., conferences, tournaments)
- Promoting and preserving the Bayou Region's historical assets
- CTAC and/or the BRI creating a space for businesses to operate during times of disaster

INFRASTRUCTURE

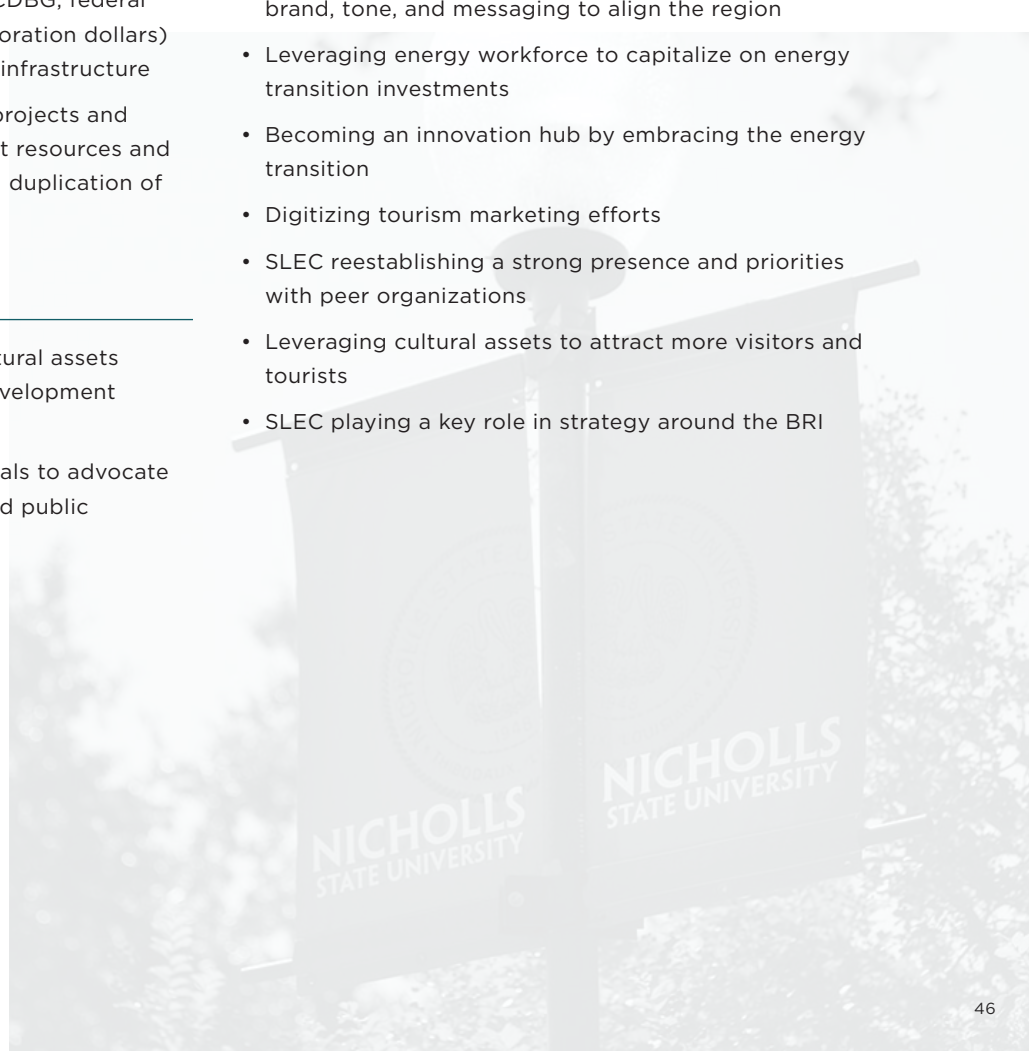
- Leveraging federal funding (e.g., IJJA, CDBG, federal flood protection and other coastal restoration dollars) to support recovery and build resilient infrastructure
- Coordinating on capital improvement projects and community planning to allocate distinct resources and attractions across the region and avoid duplication of efforts

QUALITY OF PLACE

- Capitalizing on the region's unique cultural assets to attract visitors and businesses to development opportunities
- Coordinating with local and state officials to advocate for improvements to roads, bridges, and public transportation systems
- Investing in recreational spaces

WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Leveraging private sector partnerships to amplify business recruitment and retention efforts
- Facilitating collaboration to build alignment between regional education institutions and private sector workforce development priorities
- SLEC serving as the singular voice of the Bayou Region business community as it relates to policy and advocacy at the state and federal level
- Coordinating with regional education institutions to align workforce needs related to anticipated investments
- Positioning the region as a hub of industry and innovation instead of a physical location on a map
- Tapping into LED's Economic Development Assistance Program
- SLEC embracing regionalism and developing regional brand, tone, and messaging to align the region
- Leveraging energy workforce to capitalize on energy transition investments
- Becoming an innovation hub by embracing the energy transition
- Digitizing tourism marketing efforts
- SLEC reestablishing a strong presence and priorities with peer organizations
- Leveraging cultural assets to attract more visitors and tourists
- SLEC playing a key role in strategy around the BRI



THREATS

ASSETS

- Declining population
- Aging population
- Bayou Region businesses having headquarters outside the region
- Aging building structures

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Relying primarily on outside funding to support the infrastructure needs of the region
- Aging roads and bridges
- Cyberattacks disrupting operations and causing significant damage

QUALITY OF PLACE

- Increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters
- Coastal erosion and flooding

WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Lack of industry diversification
- Younger workers not encouraged to move to the region
- Pressure to move away from traditional oil and gas activities that still largely drive regional economy
- Stereotypes about “bayou” making the region look unsophisticated
- Workforce talent pursuing job opportunities outside the region
- Skepticism about clean energy technologies (e.g., Carbon capture, utilization, and storage - CCUS)
- Workers outside the region filling temporary construction jobs
- Maintaining silos within Bayou Region parishes and associated institutions

Regional Themes

Source: LED



LACK OF INDUSTRY DIVERSIFICATION IS AN INCREDIBLY NUANCED TOPIC IN THE REGION

It is no doubt that oil and gas has and continues to be the powerhouse behind the region's economy and creates thousands of direct jobs and even more indirect jobs. However, this is paired with a federal focus on addressing environmental concerns and everchanging regulations that impact the industry's efficiency and production. The different sectors and industries within the Bayou Region recognize and largely support the role the oil and gas industry plays in their community and local economies, but also recognize the volatility and inconsistency in the market and the toll that can take on a community and residents long-term. Helping existing companies outside the oil and gas industry grow and attracting new industries to the region can help mitigate the impacts associated with downturns in oil and gas.

QUALITY OF PLACE IMPROVEMENTS ARE NEEDED

Many stakeholders expressed frustration in a "chicken or the egg" situation related to their communities' quality of place. They believe there is a lack of basic infrastructure and amenities that would make Bayou Region communities attractive, so they lose out on opportunities for investment by industries and companies considering relocation to the area. Simultaneously, people are migrating out of the region due to lack in perceived quality of place, making it hard to justify investment or sell the region as a great place to live and work. The region currently lacks basic features like retail options, affordable and available housing, and broadband access.

SEVERAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE DUPLICATING EFFORTS WITH LIMITED COLLABORATION

Without a regional leader responsible for forcing collaboration, organizations are using their own resources to support programming or initiatives that are already available through other channels, such as marketing, site development, and strategic planning efforts.

LIMITED SENSE OF REGIONALISM

There is a clear, intense sense of pride in the uniqueness, rich history, and cultural identity of the Bayou Region. However, this sentiment is not formalized or communicated externally, nor is it facilitated internally. Without an established leader defining the clear themes and threads that unite the region, parishes and smaller factions within each have begun addressing their own priorities and "fending for themselves." This has led to duplication of efforts and programming, a lack of strategic coordination on funding opportunities or potential investments, and missed opportunities to work together on mutually beneficial projects that ultimately cost less and serve more.

INSURANCE COSTS ARE RISING

In addition to a lack of affordable housing post-Hurricane Ida, dramatically rising home and flood insurance costs are inhibiting homeownership at nearly every level of income and making investments into rebuilding and reconstruction activities difficult. Homeowners are often required to show and maintain proof of flood insurance in order to receive federal disaster relief and recovery assistance. With insurance premiums quadrupling in price due to recent federal policy updates, it is not feasible for individuals and families to afford a home and the required insurance in the region. Additionally, our state is current facing an insurance crisis. Since Hurricane Ida, several insurance companies have filed for bankruptcy, and others have cancelled existing policies or decided not to renew them. This has further inflated the insurance market and caused prices to substantially increase, making adequate insurance unavailable to many of the region's residents.

Strategic Action Plan

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

After identifying the aforementioned key themes, it is evident that SLEC has an opportunity to become the economic development leader for the region to steer collaboration, aggressively seek investment opportunities, serve as a vocal champion, and identify policy priorities that advance progress and economic opportunity.

The information previously detailed throughout this plan, including research and stakeholder feedback, served as the foundation of this strategic action plan. As SLEC implements these near-term strategies for the region, it will also focus on the evolution of the organization to match the caliber, innovation, and energy that the strategic action plan calls for and that is required to meet the needs of stakeholders going forward. As clearly seen in both the physical landscape and economic climate, the Bayou Region is ever changing. This requires SLEC, as the regional economic development organization, to remain adaptable and focus on meeting the current needs of stakeholders while planning future actions that are strategic and sustainable. The following action plan is a direct reflection of just that and includes expanding on some of SLEC's existing efforts, as well as recommendations to pivot focus or add new programs and services into the fold to meet regional needs.

Position SLEC as a World-Class Regional Economic Development Organization

01

A world-class regional economic development organization serves as a central voice to assemble stakeholders and organizations for a common purpose. It is the chief advocate for advancement in its region and drives business growth, recruitment, and retention. SLEC's goals and key initiatives in this Strategic Action Plan demonstrate a commitment to serving the Bayou Region and re-establishing itself as a premier regional economic development organization.

NEAR-TERM

Goal 1.1: Increase Organizational Communication

- **Key Initiative 1:** Rebrand SLEC to align with new mission, vision, and emphasize momentum behind SLEC's strategic priorities.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Evaluate external communication channels and assets, including website, social media presence, email platforms, etc.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Establish a master, multi-pronged communications plan for proactive touchpoints with all stakeholders.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Develop a marketing campaign highlighting target industries and regional assets for companies within key industries to encourage relocation or new facilities.

Goal 1.2: Align Core Programs and Services With Strategy

- **Key Initiative 1:** Establish enhanced programs and services aligning with key areas of focus within this strategic action plan, including:
 - Business Development and Expansion
 - Enhanced Regional Competitiveness
 - Small Business and Entrepreneurship
 - Increased Coalition Building
 - Policy and Advocacy
 - Workforce Development and Training
 - Support of Local Economic Development Organizations

Goal 1.3: Build Out An Effective Business Recruitment/Expansion Strategy

- **Key Initiative 1:** Develop a comprehensive business recruitment and expansion strategy aligning with regional target industries and current economic development goals.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Dedicate resources to enable participation in trade shows, marketing events, and business development activities.

Goal 1.4: Revise Strategic Governance Structure, Board of Directors, and Committee Structure

- **Key Initiative 1:** Establish ideal composition, roles, and responsibilities for SLEC's board of directors, as well as a succession plan for key long-serving board members.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Revamp committee structure to focus on specific areas of organizational responsibility, core priorities, and services.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Establish long-term board and committee member recruitment strategy.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Integrate leaders of economic driver companies on SLEC's board of directors.

- **Key Initiative 5:** Develop board engagement structure, including member expectations, meeting cadence, goals and objectives, timelines, staff liaison, etc.

Goal 1.5: Establish Employee Succession Plans

- **Key Initiative 1:** Develop succession plan(s) for all SLEC staff and key consultants.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Recruit and hire senior staff to serve as the eventual next president and CEO for SLEC.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Recruit and hire for other urgent staff roles based on expected attrition, organizational need, and available resources.

MEDIUM-TERM

Goal 1.6: Optimize Organizational Design and Staffing

- **Key Initiative 1:** Design an organizational structure that aligns with the organization's goals and objectives, with consideration of SLEC's service offerings and the resources required to support the new structure, including personnel, budget, and technology.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Develop a staffing and resourcing plan to support SLEC's newly defined services.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Consider external support to determine key positions to be filled, the skills and expertise required for these positions, and a roadmap for the development and advancement of key staff.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Create a work environment conducive to success and long-term retention of human capital.
- **Key Initiative 5:** Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of SLEC's current 501(c)(3) tax exempt status and consider becoming a 501(c)(6) to better align with new strategic priorities.

Goal 1.7: Enhance and Diversify Funding Model

- **Key Initiative 1:** Aggressively pursue grants via recent federal programs, either directly or in partnership with government agencies and other economic development organizations (e.g., CDBG economic recovery grants, IJJA funds).
- **Key Initiative 2:** Negotiate with local governments to secure a portion of net-new revenues created by SLEC's business development efforts.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Establish a membership model to attract and retain new members and boost organizational revenues.

LONG-TERM

Goal 1.8: Gain Recognition As A Premier Economic Development Organization

- **Key Initiative 1:** Maintain designation through LED as the Bayou Region's primary regional economic development organization.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Become an Accredited Economic Development Organization through the International Economic Development Council (IDEC).
- **Key Initiative 3:** Affirm SLEC's status as a top economic development organization through awards such as International Economic Development Council's Economic Development Organization of the Year.

SLEC is focused on supporting and promoting economic growth and development in the Bayou Region. Diversifying the regional economy is crucial for ensuring stability and resilience against future economic shocks and changes in market conditions. By promoting a diverse range of industries and businesses, SLEC can help the region mitigate risk and reduce dependence on legacy oil and gas operations. This can result in increased job opportunities and improved quality of life for residents.

SLEC can support diversification efforts by attracting new businesses and industries, supporting the growth of existing businesses, and promoting small business development, entrepreneurship, and innovation. SLEC can also work to address barriers or challenges that may prevent businesses from investing in the region. Additionally, SLEC can help to develop the region's workforce and provide training opportunities to equip workers with the skills needed to succeed in a dynamic economy. By taking an active role in promoting economic diversity, SLEC can help to ensure that the Bayou Region remains competitive and continues to grow and thrive.

NEAR-TERM

Goal 2.1: Maintain and Enhance Business Recruitment And Expansion Activities

- **Key Initiative 1:** Participate in site visits with economic driver companies to understand their needs, future goals, and facilitate additional investment in the region.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Attend trade shows, conferences, marketing events, and business recruitment missions.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Leverage partnerships with LED, Entergy, and other stakeholders to identify leads and attract new investments in the region.

Goal 2.2: Pursue Target Industries Aligning With Regional Strategic Assets

- **Key Initiative 1:** Conduct an analysis to identify the Bayou Region's current key industries.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Finalize target industries with consideration of legacy and transitional energy, advanced manufacturing, agribusiness, logistics and multimodal, and value-added health care.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Explore establishing committees/working groups focused on target industries.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Develop a business recruitment plan for attracting new companies to the region within target industries.
- **Key Initiative 5:** Aggressively recruit newly identified target industries with a strong growth potential in the region.

MEDIUM-TERM

Goal 2.3: Foster A Supportive Business Environment Through Policy and Regulation Reform

- **Key Initiative 1:** Identify areas in Louisiana's policy and regulatory environment challenging the growth of target industries in the Bayou Region.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Facilitate partnerships among businesses, universities or research institutions, and other stakeholders to advocate for and create a business environment for growth in the Bayou Region.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and regulations to ensure that they are meeting the needs of regional businesses and industries.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Identify staff and/or resources to handle legislative and governmental affairs on relevant policy matters at the state and/or federal level, including developing SLEC's official policy stance and platform.

Goal 2.4: Develop and Implement Targeted Marketing Campaigns To Attract New Businesses and Investment

- **Key Initiative 1:** Identify priority communication channels for target businesses and investors and develop a marketing and promotional campaign tailored to build interest and awareness of the region.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Host events and trade shows designed to attract businesses and investors in target industries, including business-to-business networking opportunities, workshops, and presentations by local business leaders.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Share success stories of businesses that have located or invested in the Bayou Region to demonstrate the potential for success.

Goal 2.5: Foster Growth For Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs

- **Key Initiative 1:** Advocate for increased funding opportunities and access to capital for small businesses and entrepreneurs to help support their growth.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Connect small and disadvantaged businesses with business development services such as training, mentorship, and technical assistance to help them grow and improve their competitiveness.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Encourage government agencies, large corporations, and other organizations to procure goods and services from small businesses in the region to help increase their visibility and support their growth.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Advocate for continued funding for the BRI, Bayou Region Small Business Development Center, CTAC, and other resource providers focused on local small businesses.
- **Key Initiative 5:** Convene and work with the BRI, Bayou Region Small Business Development Center, and CTAC to identify and align efforts for maximum impact.
- **Key Initiative 6:** Work with the BRI to establish a program or partnership focused on small business startups in key emerging industries.

LONG-TERM

Goal 2.6: Attract and Secure Investments Across Target and Emerging Industries

- **Key Initiative 1:** Work closely with local, regional, and state partners to market Louisiana's incentive programs and the competitive advantages of doing business in the Bayou Region.

- **Key Initiative 2:** Develop targeted marketing and promotional campaigns that highlight the region's strengths and capabilities, and that are specifically designed to attract investment from target and emerging industries.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Maintain strong relationships with Louisiana Economic Development (LED), the Louisiana Workforce Commission, the Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), and other state agencies to leverage state funds for securing investments.

Goal 2.7: Enhance Workforce Pipeline To Meet The Talent Demands of Industry Partners

- **Key Initiative 1:** Facilitate investments in education and training programs to equip the workforce with the skills needed to succeed in a diverse and evolving economy.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Forge connections between industry prospects and Bayou Region education institutions to build workforce pipelines relevant to current talent demand.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Work with key industries and/or employers to develop career pathways or ladders for key jobs and roles.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Integrate in-demand skills training and certifications required for entry-level, available jobs of the regional workforce into high school and/or technical school curriculums.
- **Key Initiative 5:** Establish apprenticeship or internship program for key industries.
- **Key Initiative 6:** Develop a Bayou Region Leadership program that teaches soft skills and provides pathways for technical workers to become more effective managers.

Goal 2.8: Foster Innovation and Entrepreneurship Throughout The Region

- **Key Initiative 1:** Partner with the Bayou Region Incubator, Nicholls Coastal Research Center, and similar organizations to support regional higher education institutions in transferring technology and knowledge developed at their campuses to the commercial sector, where it can be further developed, manufactured, and marketed.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Encourage collaboration between government, universities, research institutions, and the private sector to foster a culture of innovation and to create an ecosystem that supports the development and commercialization of new ideas.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Promote entrepreneurship through marketing and promotional campaigns to raise awareness of the benefits and opportunities in the Bayou Region and to inspire and motivate potential entrepreneurs
- **Key Initiative 4:** Coordinate with educational and business partners to host events such as pitch competitions to promote entrepreneurship in the Bayou Region.

Goal 2.9: Maintain Responsibility For Tracking Industry Trends and Aligning Proactive Strategies

- **Key Initiative 1:** Continue efforts with Emerging Energy Task Force to remain aware of industry trends in target and emerging industries to attract new investments in the energy transition space.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Attend industry conferences and events and join industry associations and professional organizations to network with other professionals and stay current on trends.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Monitor peer economic development organizations and competitors to stay informed about strategies and new trends being leveraged.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Assess alignment of current efforts and industry needs and adjust strategic initiatives, such as task forces, as needed.

Lead Business Recruitment and Expansion Activities for the Four-Parish Region

03

Business recruitment and retention are a critical focus as SLEC helps the region continue responding to the ongoing impacts of Hurricane Ida and other factors impacting the regional economy. Keeping economic drivers in the region, while working to recruit new firms, can help support the Bayou Region's tax base and maintain business activity within the four-parish region. While SLEC is currently engaged in business recruitment and retention activities, the organization can sharpen its focus and accelerate these efforts to sustain the region during this transitional period.

NEAR-TERM

Goal 3.1: Strengthen Business Expansion Activities

- **Key Initiative 1:** Identify economic driver companies in the region poised to make additional investments and create more jobs.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Work closely with LED's Business Expansion and Retention Group and other economic development partners to conduct site visits and corporate headquarter visits with major employers.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Engage in active outreach efforts to build relationships with regional economic drivers and understand their needs.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Provide support services for and connect potential investors with state incentives, local programs, and workforce partners to facilitate continued growth in the region.

Goal 3.2: Bolster Business Recruitment Efforts

- **Key Initiative 1:** Enhance marketing materials to clearly communicate the Bayou Region's strategic assets and value proposition to business prospects.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Leverage partnerships with LED, Entergy, and other stakeholders to increase SLEC's participation in trade shows, marketing events, and business recruitment efforts.

MEDIUM-TERM

Goal 3.3: Enhance Business Services

- **Key Initiative 1:** Work with partners to develop comprehensive informational resources, such as workforce data, GIS mapping, and accessible greenfield and brownfield sites, to support final investment decisions of business prospects.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Operate as a conduit to connect businesses with appropriate state and local resources, LED incentives and support, as well as business incubators and mentorship programs, to support the growth and success of businesses.

Goal 3.4: Promote The Bayou Region's Development Assets and Success Stories

- **Key Initiative 1:** Build partnerships with local businesses, chambers of commerce, industrial associations, and other organizations to enhance the region's economic competitiveness.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Engage in-state trade associations, business groups, and media outlets to broadcast the Bayou Region's success.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Market the region to external investors, businesses, and tourists through various channels such as trade shows, conferences, and social media.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Actively champion the success of regional companies through all SLEC communications.

Goal 3.5: Build Regional Coalitions Among Workforce Partners, The Business Community, and Economic Development Stakeholders

- **Key Initiative 1:** Develop a regional task force with stakeholders to leverage resources and align strategies with overall economic development goals.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Develop partnerships with regional education institutions to promote job opportunities to upcoming graduates and encourage them to stay in the Bayou Region.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Identify community champions and staff to take responsibility and ownership of task forces, workforce groups, etc. to ensure productivity and effectiveness.

LONG-TERM

Goal 3.6: Frequently Secure and Promote Investments In The Bayou Region

- **Key Initiative 1:** Dedicate substantial resources for attending trade shows, hosting familiarization tours, and conducting business development activities.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Leverage workforce assets, such as Nicholls State University and the BRI, to facilitate investments.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Maintain and grow existing relationships with key investors in the Bayou Region.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Align communications strategy and leverage the audience and network of large corporations to expand SLEC's brand presence and awareness.

Goal 3.7: Become The Primary Advocate For The Bayou Region Business Community

- **Key Initiative 1:** Develop a comprehensive communications and advocacy strategy for promoting the region and securing resources for improving the economic competitiveness.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Coordinate with state and federal legislative delegations to advocate for the resources and policies that support regional businesses.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Engage with leading business publications and large media outlets to promote the region's competitive advantages.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Maintain current, accurate information on the Bayou Region's economy, strategic assets, and marketing resources.

Leverage Workforce Development Assets to Optimize Regional Talent

04

A sufficient and well-trained workforce is critical to the success of the Bayou Region's economy. Companies need qualified workers to meet the demands of their operations and grow their businesses. A recurring theme throughout this strategic planning process was the challenges of Bayou Region businesses having an available supply of qualified workers. There are short-term steps SLEC can take to mitigate this issue, while a more comprehensive strategic approach will be necessary to strengthen the overall quality and depth of the Bayou Region's labor market.

NEAR-TERM

Goal 4.1: Raise Awareness and Community Support For Training And Educational Programs That Spur Industry Growth

- **Key Initiative 1:** Engage key stakeholders in the community, such as business leaders, educational institutions, and local organizations, to create a coalition of support for training and educational programs.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Develop a comprehensive public relations campaign, including press releases, media events, and other tactics to generate interest and coverage and to raise awareness of the importance of these programs and the impact they can have on the regional economy.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Utilize social media platforms to reach a wide audience and engage with the community through creative content that showcases the benefits of the programs, highlights success stories, and encourages participation.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Work with educational partners to organize interactive workshops and events that bring together business leaders, educators, and community members to discuss the programs and the impact they can have on the region.

Goal 4.2: Showcase Companies Hiring In The Region and The Benefits Of Working There

- **Key Initiative 1:** Partner with businesses and government agencies to broadcast current job openings and benefits offered by local companies.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Coordinate targeted outreach campaigns and work with workforce partners and businesses to host job fairs to reach a wider audience and promote job opportunities in the region.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Host events and open houses, showcasing local businesses and providing a platform for job seekers to connect with potential employers.

MEDIUM-TERM

Goal 4.3: Build Workforce Development Coalitions To Enhance The Talent Pipeline

- **Key Initiative 1:** Establish ad hoc, diverse, and inclusive workforce development committees to conduct a thorough analysis of the current job market and identify the most in-demand skills and job opportunities.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Engage with community organizations, educational institutions, and businesses to gather input and establish partnerships for workforce development initiatives.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Encourage industry leaders and businesses to become involved in the development and implementation of workforce development programs by serving on committees and offering resources and support.

Goal 4.4: Secure Funding And Resources To Support Workforce Development Programs

- **Key Initiative 1:** Support partners to research and apply for grants from government agencies, foundations, and corporations that further workforce development initiatives.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Partner with local businesses, educational institutions, and other organizations that can provide resources and funding for workforce development programs.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Pursue partnerships with private sector companies to fund and support workforce development initiatives.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Regularly report on the success and impact of workforce development programs to build support and encourage investment.

LONG-TERM

Goal 4.5: Align Education Curricula With Current Industry Demand

- **Key Initiative 1:** Partner with local businesses to identify their current and future workforce needs and communicate this information to higher education institutions.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Bring together higher education institutions, local businesses, and industry experts to co-create curriculum that meets the needs of the regional workforce.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Encourage higher education institutions to create internship and apprenticeship programs that provide students with hands-on experience in the industries they are studying.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Recognize and highlight higher education institutions that have successfully aligned their curriculum with industry demand, thereby encouraging others to follow suit.

Goal 4.6: Promote Career Pathways To Future Members Of The Workforce

- **Key Initiative 1:** Partner with local businesses and educational institutions to provide hands-on job shadowing and internships.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Foster relationships with colleges and universities to encourage them to develop degree programs in high-demand fields and to offer job placement services for graduates.

A sufficient and well-trained workforce is critical to the success of the Bayou Region's economy. Companies need qualified workers to meet the demands of their operations and grow their businesses. A recurring theme throughout this strategic planning process was the challenges of Bayou Region businesses having an available supply of qualified workers. There are short-term steps SLEC can take to mitigate this issue, while a more comprehensive strategic approach will be necessary to strengthen the overall quality and depth of the Bayou Region's labor market.

NEAR-TERM

Goal 5.1: Optimize Existing Marketing Resources

- **Key Initiative 1:** Conduct a thorough analysis to discover the most effective way to position the region as a premier location to start and grow a business.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Create a comprehensive marketing plan that outlines the goals, budget, target markets, messaging, and tactics for promoting the region and its assets.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Develop quality content that showcases the region's assets and highlights the benefits of doing business in the area.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Identify and form strategic partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and other stakeholders to enhance marketing efforts and reach a wider audience.

Goal 5.2: Develop A Compelling Value Proposition

- **Key Initiative 1:** Assess peer competing economies, their strategic positioning, and their strengths and weaknesses.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Determine what sets the Bayou Region apart from competitors and how it can best serve its target audiences.

- **Key Initiative 3:** Create messaging that clearly communicates the region's value proposition and resonates with target audiences and identify appropriate communication channels for distribution.

MEDIUM-TERM

Goal 5.3: Leverage Regional Partnerships To Extend Bayou Region Brand And Messaging

- **Key Initiative 1:** Develop a centralized database to house marketing resources, relevant data, messaging, and other assets for regional partners.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Provide training and support to ensure regional partners are able to use marketing resources effectively.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Collect and share data and stories that demonstrate the impact of SLEC's work on the regional economy and the lives of local residents.

LONG-TERM

Goal 5.4: Secure Earned Media About The Bayou Region's Economic and Community Momentum

- **Key Initiative 1:** Partner with newspapers, television stations, and radio stations to secure earned media and offer opportunities for journalists to write features, conduct interviews, and produce segments on the region.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Leverage relationships with local leaders, elected officials, community organizations, and other key influencers to help spread the word about the region's positive momentum.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Participate in trade shows and conferences to showcase the Bayou Region and its assets and to connect with media representatives, community leaders, and potential investors.

A region's quality of place can help attract residents who are the core of a productive workforce, which in turn helps attract and grow employers in the area. Through research and stakeholder feedback, SLEC found the Bayou Region needs to establish a more sought-after quality of place with tangible action that improves the everyday lives of residents. Part of this process will require the region to think about and market itself in a more desirable way, while also investing in amenities such as broadband connectivity, entertainment options, and activities for families to enjoy.

NEAR-TERM

Goal 6.1: Raise Awareness About The Importance Of Quality Of Place

- **Key Initiative 1:** Partner with local organizations, businesses, and government agencies to build a coalition of supporters who can advocate for quality of place initiatives and increase visibility of the efforts.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Advocate for infrastructure improvements, such as transportation, broadband access, and water and sewerage systems, to create a more livable and sustainable region and improve business development efforts.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Encourage and support cultural and arts initiatives, such as festivals, events, and exhibitions, to create a more vibrant and dynamic region and attract new residents and businesses.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Encourage residents, businesses, and community organizations to participate in shaping the future of their region.
- **Key Initiative 5:** Promote the region's unique cultural heritage and history and use it as a tool to drive tourism and economic development.

MEDIUM-TERM

Goal 6.2: Generate Funding For Community Improvements

- **Key Initiative 1:** Research and apply for grants and funding from foundations and government organizations that support community improvement initiatives.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Encourage community members to donate to community improvement projects through direct appeals, social media campaigns, or other marketing initiative.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Offer local businesses the opportunity to sponsor community improvement projects in exchange for public recognition and branding opportunities.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Coordinate with state and federal legislative delegations to advocate for the resources and policies that support regional businesses.

LONG-TERM

Goal 6.3: Break Ground and Finalize Projects

- **Key Initiative 1:** Establish a clear set of goals and objectives for each community improvement project based on the needs and priorities of the community.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Engage with stakeholders from the community – local residents, businesses, government agencies, and other relevant organizations – to gather input and understand needs and expectations.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Partner with organizations that can provide support and resources to help complete each project, including contractors, suppliers, and other relevant groups.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Upon completion of each project, celebrate the success and the impact it will have on the community through community events, media coverage, and other relevant methods.

A sufficient and well-trained workforce is critical to the success of the Bayou Region's economy. Companies need qualified workers to meet the demands of their operations and grow their businesses. A recurring theme throughout this strategic planning process was the challenges of Bayou Region businesses having an available supply of qualified workers. There are short-term steps SLEC can take to mitigate this issue, while a more comprehensive strategic approach will be necessary to strengthen the overall quality and depth of the Bayou Region's labor market.

NEAR-TERM

Goal 7.1: Leverage Existing Resiliency Assets

- **Key Initiative 1:** Maintain awareness of parish and regional projects to ensure alignment with CPRA's Coastal Master Plan and promote upcoming investments to encourage economic development opportunities and enhance resilience of Louisiana's coastal areas.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Identify and secure funding to expand work of the CTAC aligned with its strategic priorities and broader regional workforce needs.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Lead collaboration between CPRA, Department of Transportation & Development (DOTD), parish leadership, and educational partners to ensure technical skills and training align with upcoming project labor needs.

MEDIUM-TERM

Goal 7.2: Develop A Regional Resiliency Plan

- **Key Initiative 1:** Inventory all existing and planned projects, as well as currently leveraged funding sources and those the region should pursue, including the Louisiana Watershed Initiative, CPRA, CDBG disaster recovery programs, parish programs, and other federal funding opportunities.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Determine short-term and long-term priorities that need to be addressed to help the region recover from previous disruptions, including inventorying recovery efforts and identifying areas of highest risk, historical successes and failures, and what infrastructure remains damaged.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Establish a planning committee/work group/task force with authority comprised of regional leaders and subject matter experts to develop and finalize the plan.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Engage the community in resiliency planning and the decision-making process to build a sense of shared responsibility.
- **Key Initiative 5:** Build partnerships with other organizations, businesses, and government agencies to coordinate resources and efforts for resilience.
- **Key Initiative 6:** Establish a small business training program to teach business resiliency practices, help businesses create resiliency plans, and identify small business funding opportunities for those in need of recovery or relief funding.

LONG-TERM

Goal 7.3: Establish Resilient Infrastructure and Assets

- **Key Initiative 1:** Leverage available funding resources to improve the resilience of critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and utility systems.
- **Key Initiative 2:** Build partnerships with other organizations, businesses, and government agencies to coordinate resources and efforts for resilience, such as offering essential business services during times of disruption.
- **Key Initiative 3:** Continue to prioritize the diversification of the regional economy to reduce its reliance on a single industry or sector and reduce the impact of economic shocks.
- **Key Initiative 4:** Facilitate training and education programs that will equip local workers with the skills they need to adapt to changes in the regional economy, such as those brought about by natural disasters or shifts in the oil and gas industry.
- **Key Initiative 5:** Identify target industries or companies whose work product aligns with the resiliency initiatives and projects of the resiliency plan to expand resources and capacity in the region.

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The South Louisiana Economic Council is a regionally focused economic development agency serving the parishes of Assumption, Lafourche, St. Mary, and Terrebonne. Formed in 1983, SLEC provides industrial assistance and programs designed to create economic growth for the Bayou Region.