



**GEORGIA**  
COMPETITIVENESS INITIATIVE

# Georgia Competitiveness Initiative Report

JANUARY 2012

[www.georgiacompetitiveness.org](http://www.georgiacompetitiveness.org)

Business  
Climate

Education &  
Workforce

Innovation

Infrastructure

Global  
Commerce

Government  
Efficiency &  
Effectiveness

# STEERING COMMITTEE

Georgia Department of Economic Development Commissioner Chris Cumiskey and Georgia Chamber of Commerce President Chris Clark were asked by Governor Nathan Deal to co-chair the Georgia Competitiveness Initiative, which launched in early 2011.

Twenty-three business leaders representing Georgia's various geographic regions and industry sectors were invited to serve as members of a steering committee charged with receiving input and developing recommendations. In addition, state officials and representatives of both local government and the economic development community served in an ex-officio capacity.

## **Steering Committee members:**

John Addison, *Primerica*  
Dean Alford, *Allied Energy Services*  
Billy Blanchard, *Columbus Bank & Trust*  
Paul Bowers, *Georgia Power Company*  
Doug Carter, *Don Carter Realty*  
Steve Green, *Stephen Green Properties*  
Ernest Greer, *Greenberg Traurig*  
Allen Gudenrath, *Smith Barney*  
Randall Hatcher, *MAU*  
Robbo Hatcher, *H2 Capital*  
Donna Hyland, *Children's Healthcare of Atlanta*  
Raymond King, *Zoo Atlanta*  
Wesley Langdale, *Langdale Forest Products*  
Craig Lesser, *The Pendleton Consulting Group*  
Aaron McWhorter, *North Georgia Turf*  
Allen Rice, *Savannah Luggage Works*  
Bodine Sinyard, *Adams Exterminators*  
Suzanne Sitherwood, *Atlanta Gas Light*  
Charles Tarbutton, *Sandersville Railroad*  
Carol Tomè, *The Home Depot*  
Philip Tomlinson, *TSYS*  
John Watson, *TPA Realty Services*  
Paul Wood, *Georgia EMC*

## **Ex-Officio members:**

Casey Cagle, *Lieutenant Governor*  
David Ralston, *Speaker of the House*  
John Barge, *State School Superintendent*  
Mike Beatty, *Commissioner, Department of Community Affairs*  
Gary Black, *Commissioner, Department of Agriculture*  
Mark Butler, *Commissioner, Department of Labor*  
Curtis Foltz, *Executive Director, Georgia Ports Authority*  
Jim Higdon, *Executive Director, Georgia Municipal Association*  
Hank Huckaby, *Chancellor, University System of Georgia*  
Ron Jackson, *Commissioner, Technical College System of Georgia*  
Brian Kemp, *Secretary of State*  
Ross King, *Executive Director, Association County Commissioners of Georgia*  
Todd Long, *Planning Director, Department of Transportation*  
Mike Pennington, *Executive Director, Georgia Economic Developers Association*

# LETTER FROM THE GOVERNOR

When we created the Georgia Competitiveness Initiative, it was with one goal in mind: becoming the No. 1 state in the nation to do business. We want to strengthen our state's economic development strategy so that we can continue to attract new jobs, encourage investment, and give existing companies the support that they deserve.

We knew that to accomplish this, we needed the involvement of the private sector and real ideas from real Georgians. I am grateful that so many of our citizens were willing to participate in this effort. The input we received is reflected in the recommendations included in this report and will continue to inform our decisions as we work toward economic growth and prosperity.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to this effort throughout 2011. In particular, our co-chairs and steering committee members whose expertise guided us throughout the process and who we will continue to rely upon as we shape our state's future.

Thank you for taking the time to review this report. We will look forward to sharing our progress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Deal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Governor Nathan Deal



# LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

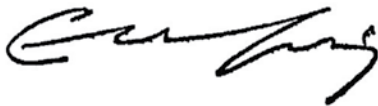
Over the past year, we have had the honor of traveling throughout our state, talking to business and elected leaders, economic developers, and other business-minded Georgians who wanted to contribute to our state's economic future.

As we visited each region, it became very clear that no matter the geography, industry or size of business, there were certain tools to growth and job creation that were universally desired. A quality workforce, access to capital, support for innovation, reduced regulation, and improved connectivity are just a few examples of what Georgians told us they needed to be successful.

We are proud of what has been accomplished through this Initiative and we look forward to continuing to work with Governor Deal, our state's elected leaders, and the thousands of members of Georgia's business community without whose input and participation we could not have been successful.

We believe that this report is another great example of what can be done when the public and private sectors work together. We join Governor Deal in thanking the members of the steering committee and want to add our thanks to the many partners who contributed their time and effort over the past year.

Sincerely,



Chris Cummiskey  
Commissioner  
Georgia Department  
of Economic Development



Chris Clark  
President & CEO  
Georgia Chamber



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# INTRODUCTION

Throughout Georgia's history, state government and the business community have worked together to grow the economy and create a high quality of life for those who call our state home. As a result of that partnership, Georgia has been the economic leader of the South, one with an enviable logistics system, top tier research universities, world class technical education, a robust agricultural sector, abundant natural resources and a positive global reputation—all of which contribute to our ability to attract, retain and grow both jobs and investment.

Despite a state government that is consistently recognized for its efficiency and pro-business environment, Georgia was hit particularly hard by the recent economic recession. Multiple signs point toward recovery. State revenues have trended upward since mid-2010. Traffic to the ports continues to increase. The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) has announced numerous location and expansion projects throughout the past year. However, business still faces challenges.

To ensure that Georgia's future is bright, the state must focus not only on what is needed to successfully emerge from the recent recession but also to remain competitive for decades to come. The Georgia Competitiveness Initiative—a partnership between public and private sectors—was created by Governor Nathan Deal to enhance the state's economic development strategy.

Rather than focusing on specific business sectors, this effort concentrated on the key factors that drive economic development across all industries and throughout the state.

As a result, the Initiative centered on six key areas that, together, have and will continue to form the foundation for long-term economic success. These are also the key areas that site selection consultants use to evaluate locations:

- Business Climate
- Education and Workforce Development
- Innovation
- Infrastructure
- Global Commerce
- Government Efficiency and Effectiveness



# INPUT PROCESS

With the goal of receiving meaningful, broad-based input, an outreach plan was put into place that included the administration of an online survey as well as stakeholder meetings in each of the state's twelve economic development regions. In addition, input was solicited from elected leaders, economists and top economic development and tourism professionals. Any interested party was able to submit comments or ideas via the Initiative's website.

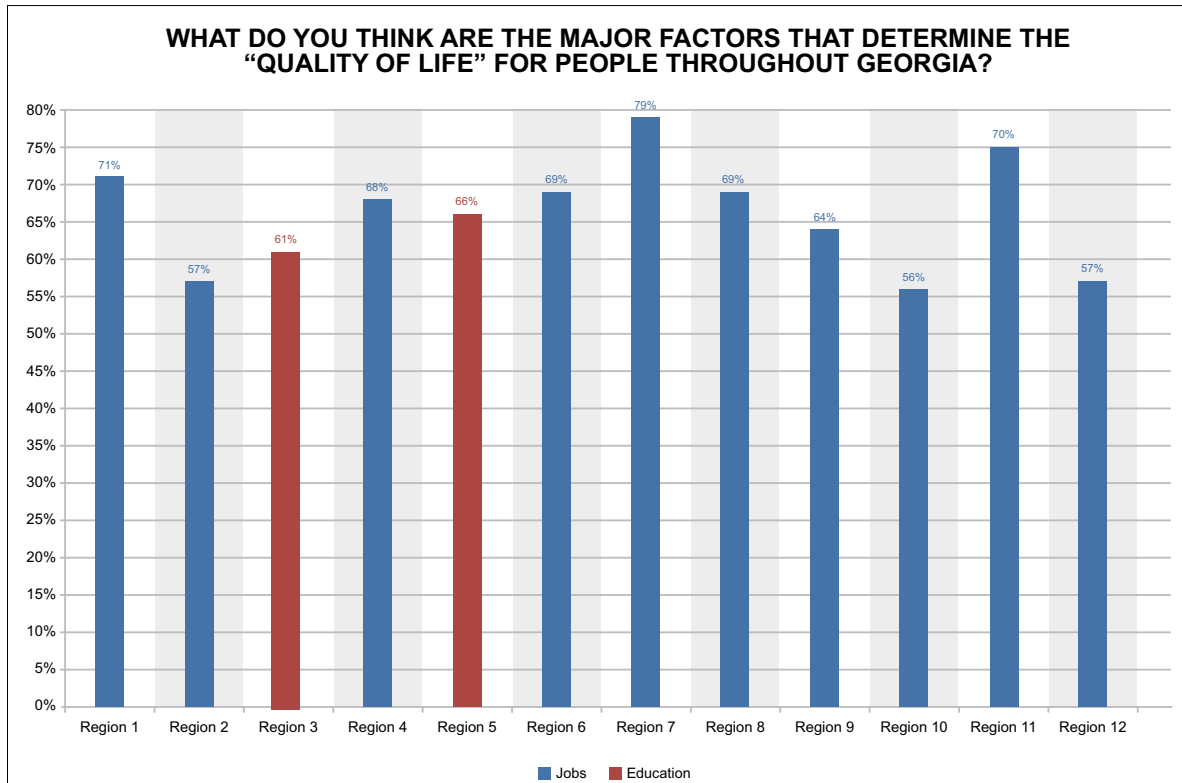
Overall, more than 4,000 Georgians—from all twelve economic development regions and representing large and small businesses, rural and urban communities, and the many industries that call the state home—participated in the input process, providing valuable insight and ideas.

## **Survey**

In order to engage a large cross-section of stakeholders and gather baseline information for discussion at the regional meetings, the Initiative partnered with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG) at the University of Georgia to administer an online survey.

The survey asked participants for both regional and statewide perspectives on major factors impacting Georgia's economic competitiveness—including the six key areas of focus. Additional questions asked respondents about opportunities and challenges as well as the role that “quality of life” plays in economic development. The data collected was shared at the subsequent regional meetings.





### Regional Meetings

Meetings organized by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and held in each of the state’s economic development regions provided the opportunity for discussions with key business, community and government leaders.

Each meeting began with an overview of the goals of the Initiative and explanation of the six key areas of focus. Attendees were then presented with the regional results of the statewide survey and asked for additional input. A significant portion of each meeting was devoted to breakout sessions where small groups of approximately 20 attendees worked together to identify recommendations for each of the key issues in the areas of focus. Several common themes emerged as did issues specific to each region. Discussions were led and recorded by facilitators and highlights were shared with the group as a whole at the end of each session.

Each meeting closed with an electronic vote by attendees determining the single most important issue for their particular region. In all but two regions, Education and Workforce Development received the highest number of votes.



# **AREAS OF FOCUS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Business Climate**

**Education & Workforce Development**

**Innovation**

**Infrastructure**

**Global Commerce**

**Government Efficiency**

# BUSINESS CLIMATE

“Provide incentives that reward growth and support established industry to increase Georgia’s ability to compete with other states in attracting new companies or expanding existing ones.”  
Region 2

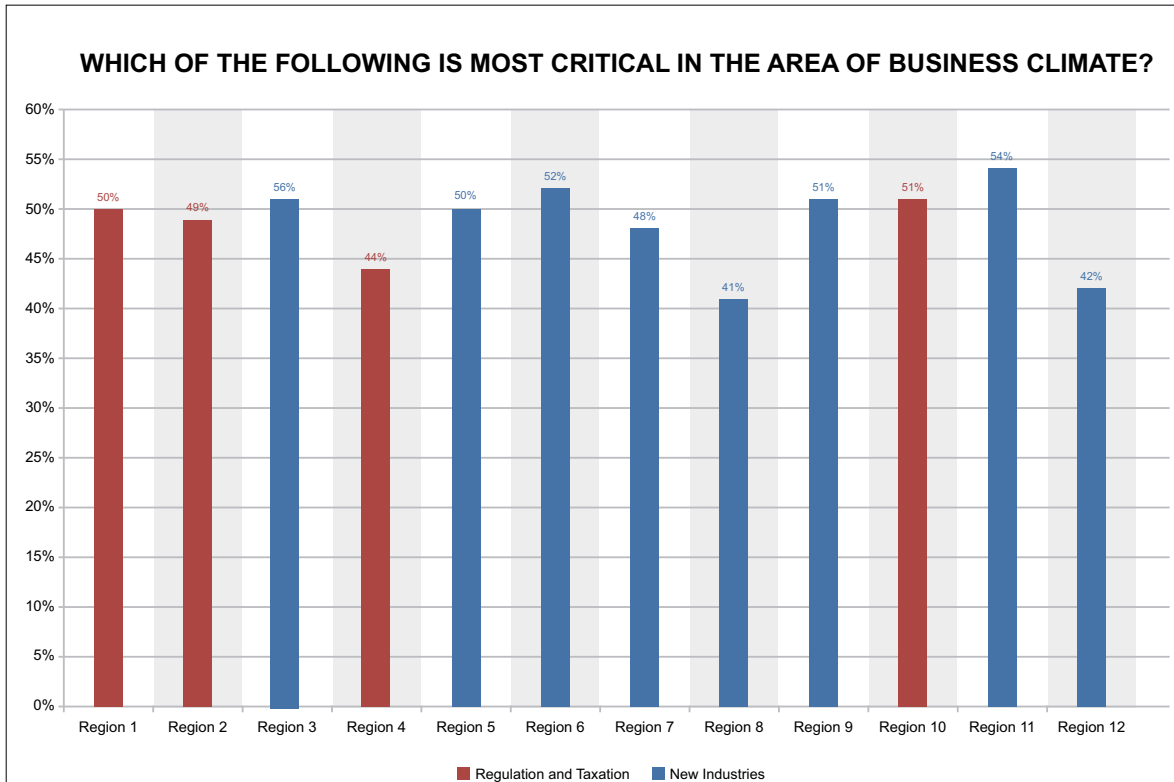
Georgia’s reputation as a business-friendly state has been demonstrated through both past economic success and numerous national rankings and accolades. Maintaining that climate – one that supports existing industry, new corporate locations, small business and entrepreneurs – must remain at the heart of any economic development strategy. By modernizing incentives, revising tax provisions, and leveraging our quality of life, Georgia can ensure continued success in the future.

## Opportunities

- Georgia enjoys a strong foundation of businesses across a wide variety of industry sectors but there is opportunity for growth
- Tax and regulatory policies should be constructed in a way that is transparent, consistent, and promotes job growth and business expansion
- Incentive programs should be modernized and expanded so that a broader spectrum of new and existing businesses can benefit –including identified strategic industries
- Incentive programs could be managed more efficiently to improve timeliness and eliminate unnecessary paperwork
- A fair and balanced judiciary plays an important role in long term economic competitiveness
- The state’s military communities should be considered in both state and local economic development plans
- Businesses understand that quality of life is a key strategy in attracting top talent

## Strategies

- Develop programs that encourage Georgia companies to do business with firms and vendors located within the state
- Seek ways to promote Georgia-produced products
- Ensure that tax and regulatory policies are transparent and not overly burdensome to companies
- Emphasize reducing the tax burden on business inputs. With a low tax burden on business inputs, companies are incentivized to invest more in human capital (jobs), physical capital, and the development of new technology
- Identify and implement opportunities to streamline the economic development incentive process and increase its effectiveness for recruiting business to Georgia
- Continue to position Georgia as the ideal location for any future military base realignment and prepare for the possibility of future base closures
- Continue to implement policies and strategies to protect and enhance quality of life factors in Georgia



**Actions**

- Introduce or support legislation during the 2012 session to:
  - Modify existing incentive and tax credit programs in a way that encourages existing business growth, provides additional incentives for investment in rural communities, and allows flexibility
  - Eliminate the sales tax on energy used in manufacturing, mining, and agriculture
  - Create a discretionary sales and use tax exemption for certain construction projects
  - Increase discretionary economic development funds (FY2013 budget)
- Provide local governments the ability to exempt all inventory taxes
- Adjust the current Opportunity Zone process to expand use of this impactful program in rural Georgia
- Review and modify current state procurement processes to ensure that they are transparent and friendly to Georgia's small businesses
- Through the Department of Community Affairs, study the potential impacts of new incentives targeted for Georgia downtowns as well as potential governance changes for downtown development authorities

# EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

“Focus on adaptability and flexibility within the pre-K through 12 system so that students are prepared to work or be trained to work upon graduation.”  
Region 10

A supportive business climate, sound economic development strategy, and world-class infrastructure are of little value to business without a dependable pipeline of qualified workers. Insisting on excellence, promoting post-secondary options for learning, and ensuring that Georgia’s curriculum is adequately preparing future employees are all critical components to creating a workforce that will attract quality jobs.

## Opportunities

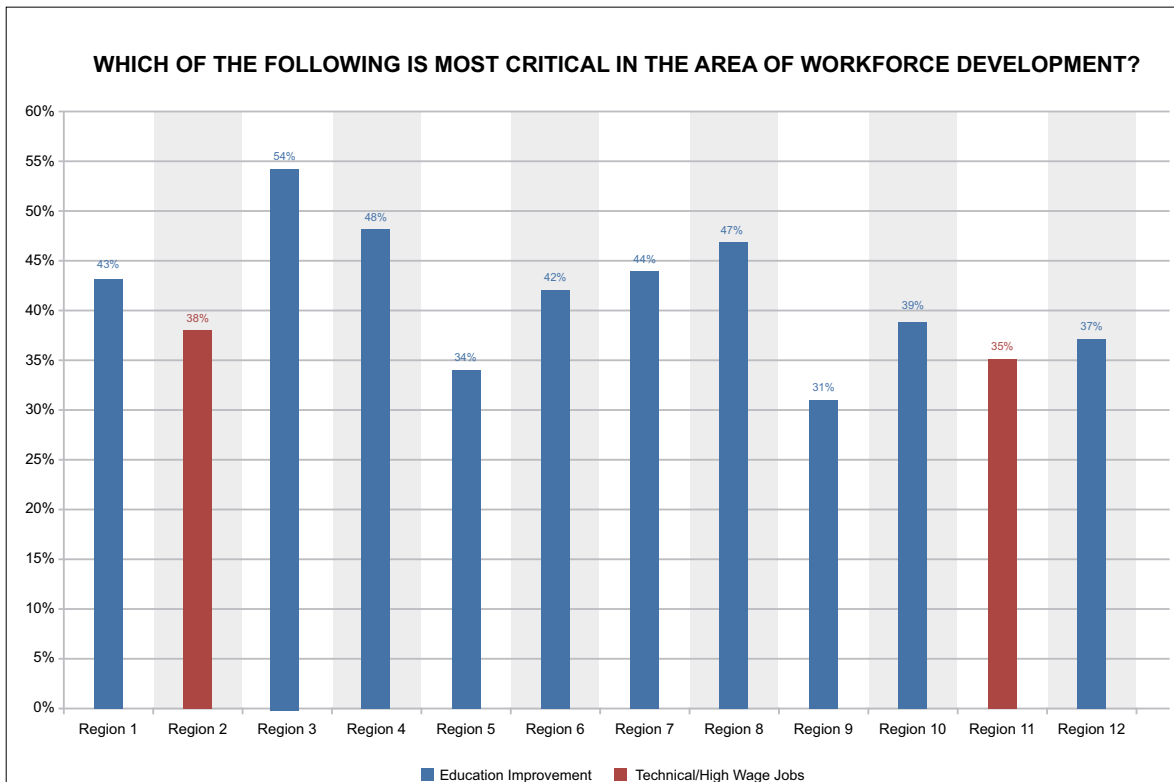
- Many parts of Georgia are experiencing a shortage of technically skilled workers
- Today’s graduates are lacking in “soft skills,” which are important to success in the workplace
- High school students need to be informed about the options of technical careers, including potential pay and availability of training
- High school students and their parents need to understand multiple career pathway options and dual enrollment opportunities that allow students to graduate with high school and two-year postsecondary degrees almost simultaneously
- The state’s education system from pre-K through 12 needs to be improved to ensure that students graduate from high school college- or career-ready
- There are too many students requiring remediation after high school and more emphasis should be placed on improving graduation rates in high school as well as college
- Processes need to be improved to allow for more parental involvement as well as greater teacher and administration effectiveness
- Georgia must create an education system that ensures that students’ transitions from high school to college or careers and their transfers from one postsecondary institution to another are seamless
- Quality technical training programs, such as Georgia’s award-winning Quick Start program, provide Georgia a competitive advantage and should be expanded for existing industry
- Effective agriculture education programs are vitally important to the future of agribusiness and forestry in the state

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## Strategies

- Ensure that students and parents are aware of all options for post-secondary education
- Focus on increasing post-secondary graduation rates and review curriculum to ensure that graduates have the skills needed by today’s employers
- Implement programs to identify and provide remedial assistance as early as possible so that students are better prepared and more likely to achieve success
- Support the creation, implementation and use of proven alternatives such as charter schools, college and career academies, performance learning centers and distance learning
- Continue the development of programs designed to encourage high school students to pursue postsecondary options that lead to quality jobs
- Improve coordination throughout Georgia’s education and workforce development systems





**Actions**

- Introduce or support legislation during the 2012 session to:
  - Provide for the necessary changes to Georgia’s constitution to define the state’s role in the creation of charter schools
  - Implement testing programs that will identify students needing remediation well before high school graduation and provide the necessary assistance to ensure they are prepared for post-secondary options
- Implement new higher education funding models that tie funding to outcomes so that we are providing incentives for graduating students, not just enrolling them
- Launch the “Go Build Georgia” initiative, a public-private partnership promoting technical training programs, to be led by the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development
- Pursue private funding to implement a communications strategy promoting the state’s educational priorities. This effort will encourage broad-based buy-in on issues important to Georgia’s long-term economic competitiveness, such as having all students reading on grade level by third grade, a high school diploma that prepares students to be college- or career-ready, having effective teachers in every classroom, and post-secondary completion

# INNOVATION

“Stop brain drain. Students take Georgia investments out of our state. We need to coordinate programs to keep them in Georgia.”  
Region 12

Innovation plays an important strategic role in both the growth of traditional industries and the continued diversification of the state’s economy. Georgia is fortunate to have multiple incubators for cutting-edge research and start-up companies but lacks the infrastructure needed to fully leverage these opportunities. Georgia can grow into a more attractive and permanent home for entrepreneurs and new industries through an increased focus on providing support, an infusion of available capital, as well as the creation of an environment where entrepreneurs and new industries can thrive.

## Opportunities

- Lack of access to capital is a significant obstacle to keeping entrepreneurs and start-up companies in the state
- Existing assets such as Georgia’s institutions of higher education could be leveraged to better support existing industry, small business and entrepreneurs
- Start-up companies would benefit from additional opportunities to interact and receive support from the existing business community
- While Georgia is home to nationally ranked research institutions, companies in rural Georgia often lack knowledge about ways to access these resources for their benefit

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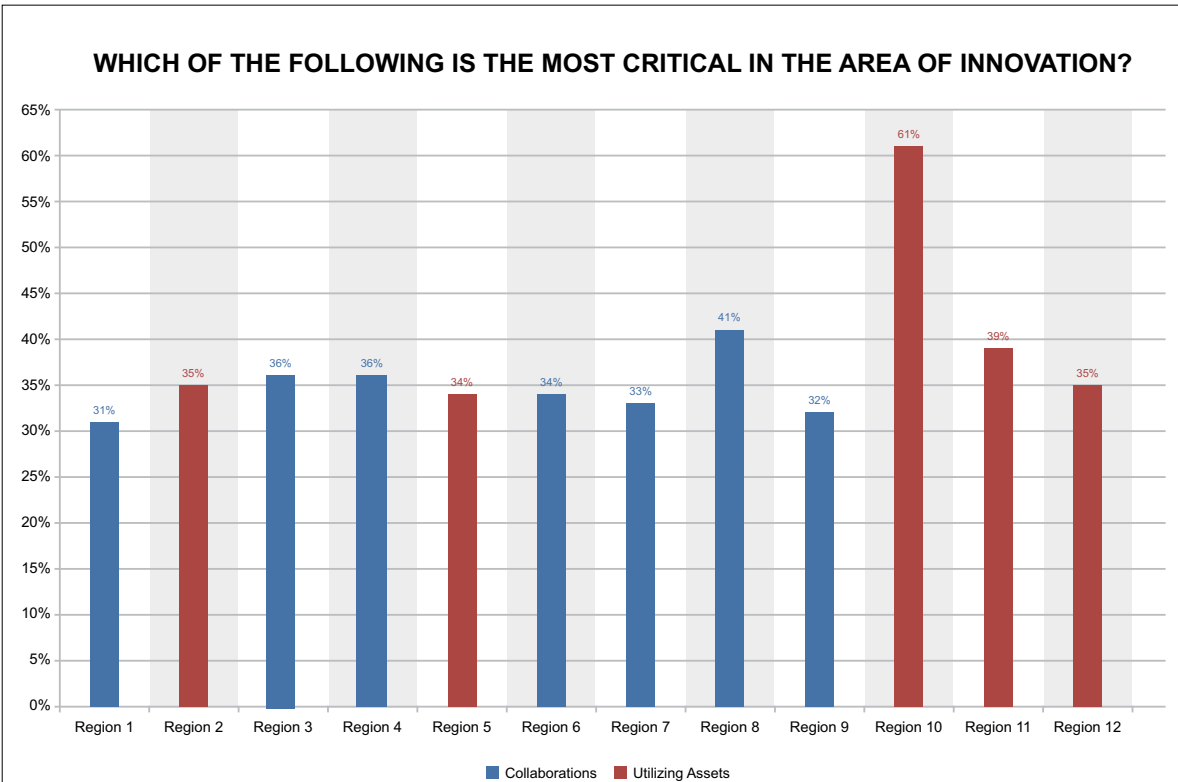
## Strategies

- Continue to identify and create means to improve availability of capital
- Create programs to better support entrepreneurs, such as recruitment of management talent
- Develop and implement a strategy to recruit and retain more corporate research and development operations in the state
- Support the redevelopment of Fort McPherson as a state-of-the-art research center
- Continue to support and expand the Georgia Research Alliance, the state’s Eminent Scholar program, and the Centers of Innovation program
- Streamline university procedures regarding the commercialization of available research opportunities that could be used to stimulate business throughout the state

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## Actions

- Introduce or support legislation during the 2012 session to:
  - Extend the existing Angel Investor Tax Credit by five years to 2018
  - Increase funding for Georgia’s Eminent Scholar program (FY2013 budget)
  - Capitalize on state assets, including intellectual and research capacity, to promote economic development in rural Georgia
- Develop and implement a marketing campaign, to be led by the Department of Economic Development, to promote the state’s research and innovation assets in order to attract more entrepreneurial, corporate research, and new technology investments



# INFRASTRUCTURE

“Sustainable infrastructure development is key to the future of communities.”  
Region 6

For half a century, Georgia’s transportation assets, affordable energy, expansive telecommunications networks, and abundant natural resources were highlights of successful economic recruitment efforts. As other states and nations made investments in their own infrastructure in order to compete, Georgia maintained the status quo and that advantage is diminishing. Reinvestment in and expansion of these assets, including long-term planning, is critical to the state’s economic future.

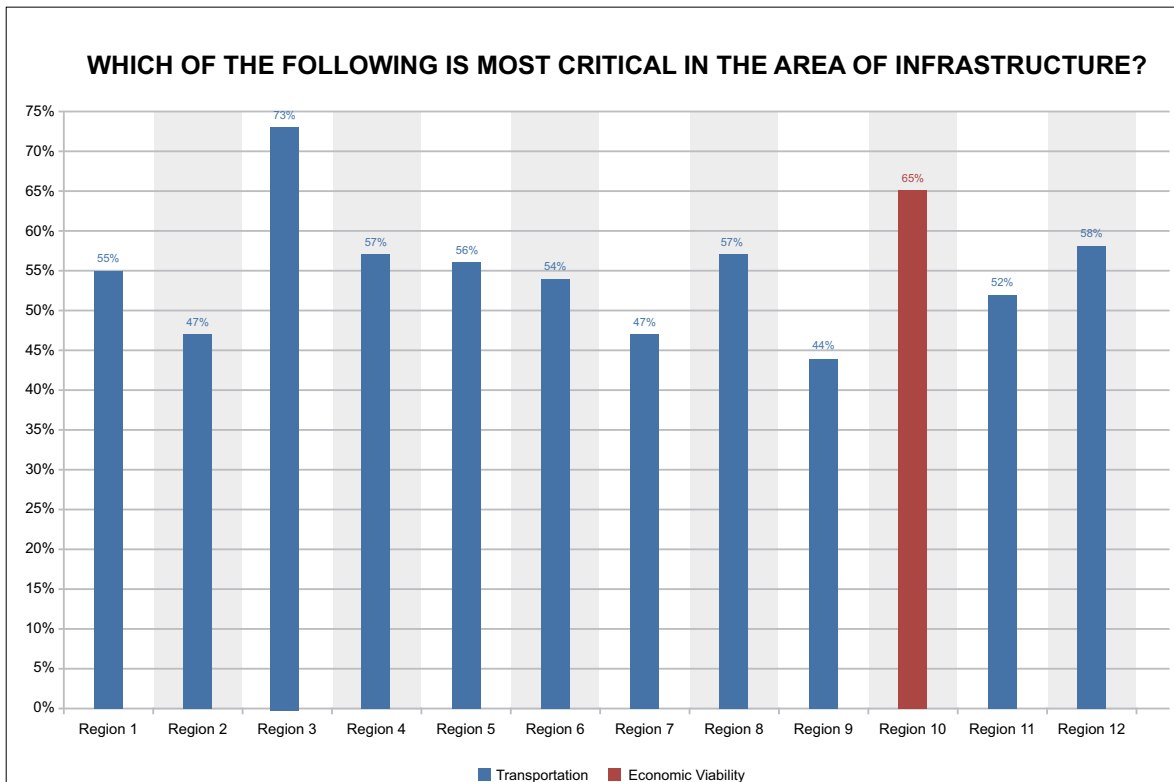
## Opportunities

- In every part of the state, transportation improvements that enhance local, regional and statewide connectivity are needed
- Communities throughout the state understand the role Georgia’s ports play in the economy, support the Savannah harbor deepening, and want to ensure effective connectivity to the ports for business growth
- Rural and regional airports are important components to a competitive multi-modal transportation and logistics system
- Affordable, accessible, and reliable energy is critical for economic growth
- The state must maintain its focus on water quality and quantity for business, residential, and recreational use
- Parts of rural Georgia are at a competitive disadvantage because of lack of access to broadband networks
- Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport provides a competitive advantage for Georgia that needs to be better leveraged

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## Strategies

- Ensure that state transportation funding decisions are based on connectivity needs, economic demand and safety
- Create a coordinated, multi-modal transportation and transit strategy and management structure with input from the private sector
- Continue to work with the Georgia Ports Authority, US Congress and General Assembly to secure funding and ensure the deepening of the Savannah Harbor
- Support market-based private investments
- Promote the expansion of the state’s water supply capacity in order to capture more water and protect the state in times of drought
- Continue to promote conservation and water control improvements and innovations
- Continue the operation of the Regional Water Councils created through the Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan



**Actions**

- Introduce or support legislation in the 2012 session to:
  - Implement the recommendations of the Transit Governance Study Committee
  - Fund water conservation and supply projects (FY2013 budget)
- Create by Executive Order:
  - Extension of the work of the Regional Water Councils, defining their role going forward in the water planning process
- Promote and pass statewide regional referenda in 2012 as provided for by the Transportation Investment Act of 2010
- Study private infrastructure incentive programs to identify those feasible for implementation
- Work with Georgia’s Congressional delegation to ensure that state receives its fair share of federal transportation dollars
- Maintain and update the State Energy Plan as administered by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority on a regular basis to ensure affordable, long term and reliable energy resources

# GLOBAL COMMERCE

“Enhance collaboration with the state economic development office and foreign offices to work with local businesses.”  
Region 5

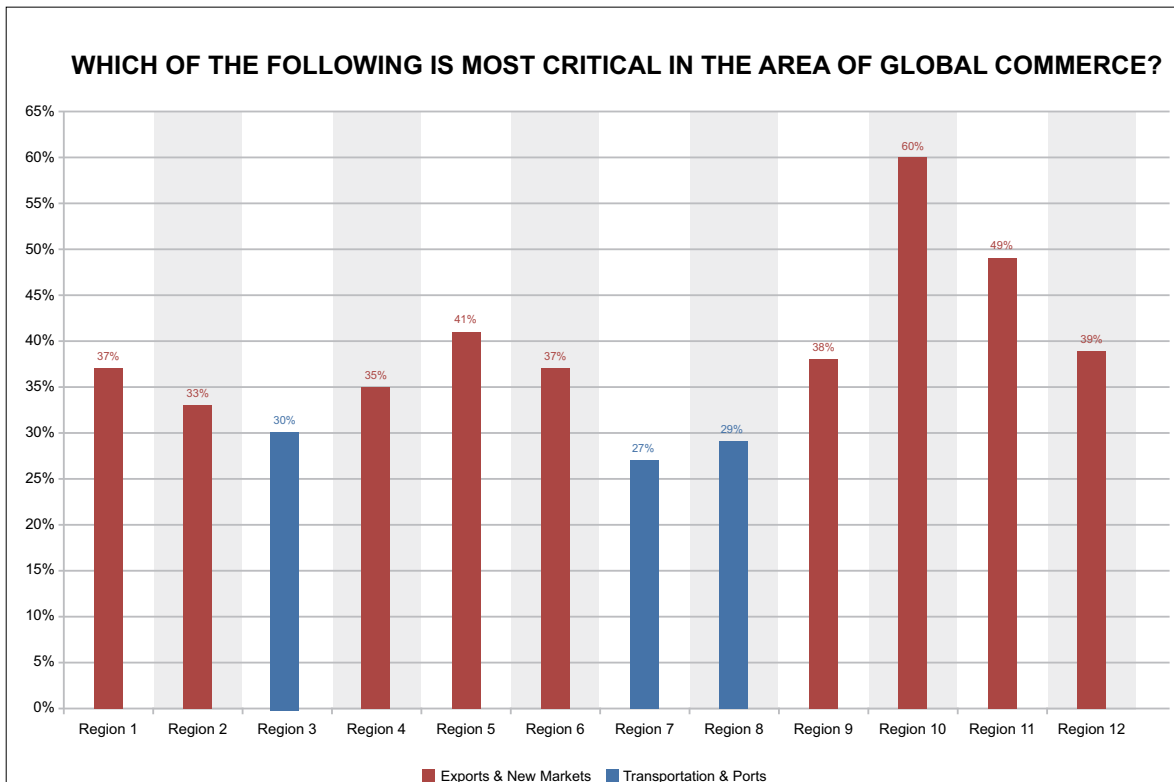
The 1996 Olympics placed Georgia on a global stage that, combined with world-class logistics assets such as the ports and international airport, has resulted in increased exports, foreign direct investment, and companies doing business globally. Ensuring that Georgia companies are ready to maximize international opportunities for growth, identifying emerging markets, and promoting the state as a great place for tourism are all key to continued growth.

## Opportunities

- Georgia has all the necessary ingredients for greater international success but needs to better market services and opportunities
- Businesses need more information and assistance identifying and leveraging international opportunities
- Georgia businesses understand the connection between long-term international relationships and economic development
- The agriculture industry, in particular, could benefit from assistance with global expansion and closer collaboration with the Georgia Department of Economic Development
- Stronger marketing programs for the state’s tourism industry would increase awareness for this important economic engine
- The state’s entertainment industry has potential for growth, both domestically and internationally
- Closer collaboration is needed between state economic development agencies and the university system’s economic development programs
- Georgia film and television industries continue to grow exponentially, experiencing 1000% growth in economic impact over a four-year period

## Strategies

- Increase awareness of existing state programs that are available to help businesses grow globally
- Grow Georgia’s brand globally and strategically target international markets for growth
- Focus on recruiting more foreign direct investment to the state
- Identify opportunities to create partnerships for exporting and to match new exporters with experienced ones willing to share their knowledge and experience
- Continue to support the Savannah harbor deepening project, improvements at the Brunswick Port, enhancements to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and the expansion of inland ports, and Foreign Trade Zones
- Continue to update the state’s strategic industry efforts to ensure that we are focused on existing industry strengths as well as emerging opportunities
- Work with Georgia’s agriculture and forestry industry to identify opportunities for growth from value-added processing and additional exporting
- Enhance current tourism and travel marketing programs to targeted audiences by identifying and integrating successful best practices and investing more in tourism marketing
- Continue commitment to the Georgia film industry by identifying opportunities to strengthen the workforce and assist in the relocation and expansion of production services providers



### Actions

- Introduce or support legislation during the 2012 session to:
  - Allow for the use of federal grant funds to directly assist small businesses seeking to export goods
  - Improve the existing tourism development incentive to encourage increased travel, retail, and hospitality investment in Georgia
- Encourage the Economic Development Committees of the General Assembly and the Tourism Division of the Department of Economic Development, in partnership with the private sector, to conduct a review of best practices in tourism marketing throughout the world and develop recommendations for implementation in 2013
- Through the Department of Economic Development, design and host an annual Global Commerce Economic Development Summit beginning in 2013
- Use STEP (State Trade and Export Promotion) grant funds received in 2011 to increase awareness of and encourage business participation in programs designed to grow the value of exports
- In partnership with the private sector, design and implement a marketing campaign to promote Georgia-based companies and products
- For each of Georgia's strategic industries, adopt a global marketing position that promotes Georgia's leadership status

# GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

“Reduce red tape or bureaucratic issues that impede progress of economic development.”  
Region 11

Businesses depend on state government to operate in an efficient manner, providing services and support in a way that does not impede growth. Georgia has been fortunate to have been recognized for such efficiency in the past, consistently receiving AAA bond ratings and accolades from national business and government experts. Retaining and enhancing that reputation is key to attracting new investment and job creation.

## Opportunities

- State and local laws, regulations, permitting processes, and other requirements are often time-consuming, cumbersome and obstructive to business development
- Many government processes at the state and local level could be handled more efficiently
- The consolidation or privatization of certain government services should be considered

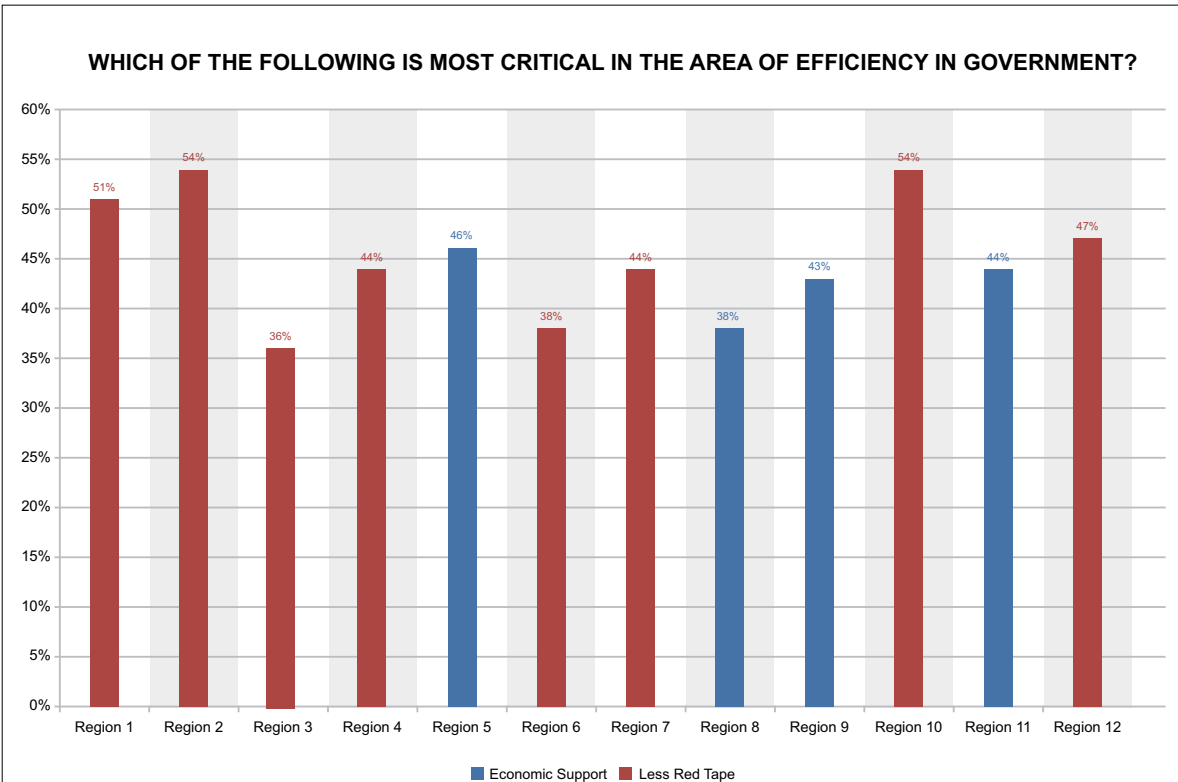
## Strategies

- Review and improve state and local procurement process to reduce barriers to small business
- Create a process to evaluate and recommend opportunities for government services privatization, public-private partnerships, and shared services
- Create options for expediting permitting processes throughout state and local government
- Create a “one-stop shop” for business support and incorporation
- Ensure that Georgia maintains its AAA bond rating with all major rating agencies

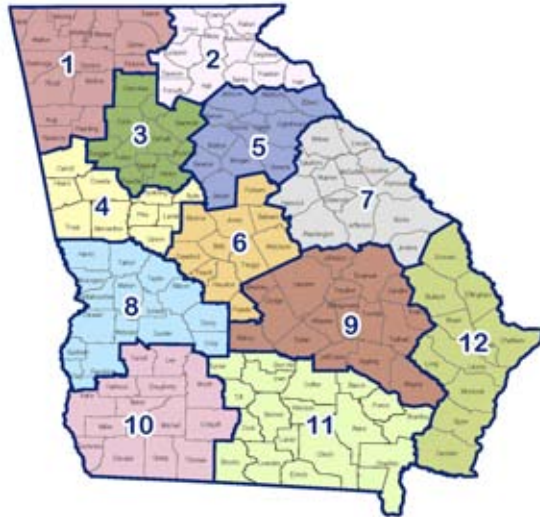
## Actions

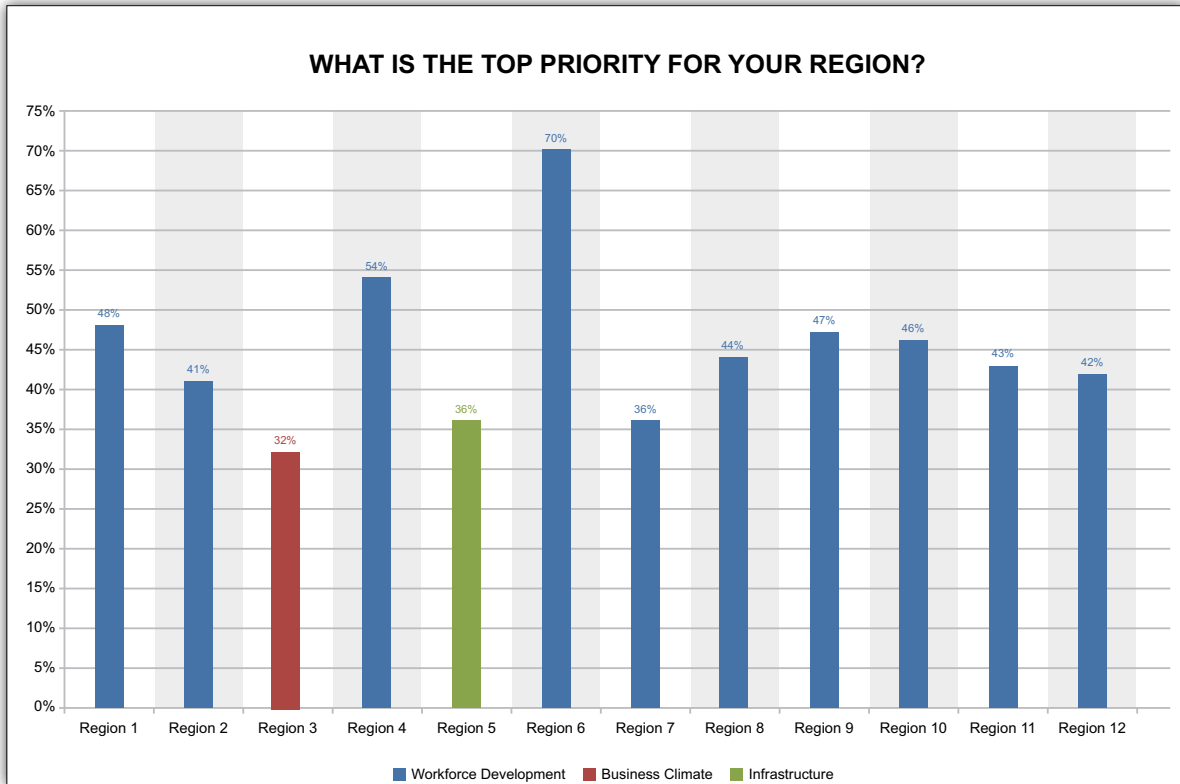
- Introduce legislation during the 2012 legislative session to:
  - Realign appropriate state agencies to yield operational efficiencies and enhanced customer service
- By Executive Order:
  - Require appropriate state agencies to conduct a thorough review of current rules and regulations to ensure that they support economic development in the state





# REGIONAL REPORTS

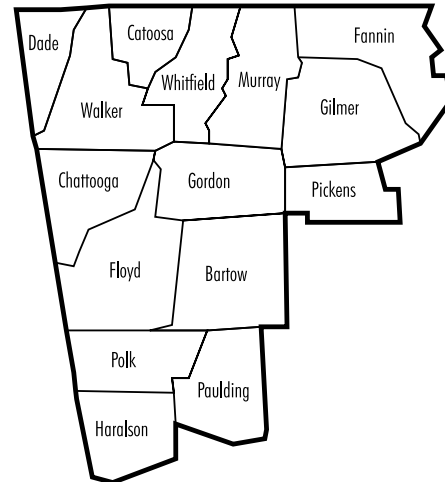




Successful regional meetings hosted thousands of Georgians—each of whom shared thoughts and ideas about what our state should focus on to ensure economic recovery. While each area has its own unique opportunities and challenges—there were also many themes that remained constant and that can and will be addressed from a statewide perspective.

The following pages share some of what was heard specifically in each region. Now that statewide goals have been established, it will be up to leaders in each of Georgia’s economic development regions to use this information to develop their own economic development plans.

# REGION 1



## Highest ranking issues:

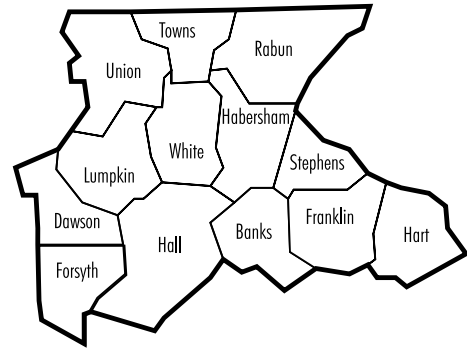
1. Education and Workforce Development: Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access
2. Business Climate: Reduce regulations, modify incentives, and lower business taxes

## Highlights from regional input:

- Ensure that Georgia's tax policies are competitive with other states
- Make the permitting application process more transparent and accountable and adopt a regional approach
- Provide training and technical assistance for value-added agribusiness
- Create a state guide to starting a business
- Start career pathways in elementary school and expand dual enrollment offerings
- Help local school districts partner with local businesses in forming business-led advisory boards to guide and support school systems
- Align high school business classes with Georgia Work Ready and engage employers in classrooms
- Give guidance to students on "non-traditional" career paths based on innovation and markets growing in this region
- Encourage and reward partnering between companies exporting to similar countries or markets
- Coach local businesses about exporting, develop a comprehensive guide, and sponsor collaborative workshops by region to help businesses learn how and where global markets can be tapped
- Reach out to entrepreneurs through university alumni and encourage them to come back to Georgia



# REGION 2



## Highest ranking issues:

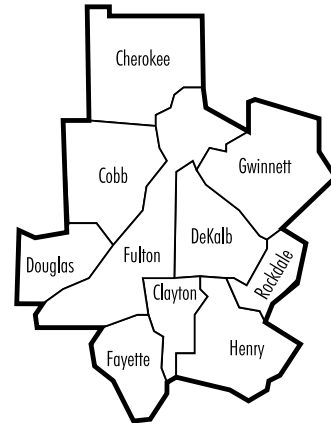
1. Education and Workforce Development:  
Attract and create better jobs (technical and high wage)
2. Infrastructure: Multi-modal transportation

## Highlights from regional input:

- Increase communication and engagement with local chambers of commerce to keep them informed about policy and legislative issues
- Dedicate a single point of contact in every state department or division of an agency for businesses and economic developers
- Promote regional, collaborative, and public-private partnership approaches to redevelopment
- Conduct cluster analyses for each county in the region
- Allow businesses and industries to use schools for training, and bring experts and retirees into schools to share their knowledge
- Expand virtual learning options and other alternatives for learning
- Develop and expand training for targeted economic clusters, such as hospitality and entertainment
- Work with existing successful export companies to learn how Georgia can fill needs in other countries
- Promote cultural competence including a clearer understanding of why we export, understanding of key cultural differences in other countries, valuing diversity to reduce cultural bias, and helping other countries navigate our culture
- Link regional transportation options to increase access, speed commerce, and reduce costs and increase connectivity between northeast and northwest Georgia
- Complete the Northeast Georgia Fiber Optics Project
- Look further ahead to water sources and supply



# REGION 3



## Highest ranking issues:

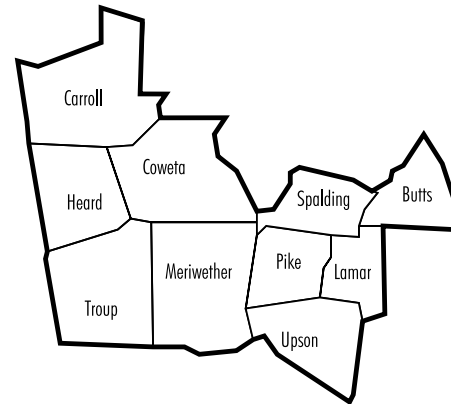
1. Business Climate: Developing and nurturing new industries, emerging technologies and start-ups
2. Education and Workforce Development: Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access

## Highlights from regional input:

- Connect and leverage business and intellectual capital
- Facilitate regional and cross-sector meetings and forums to foster innovation and the exchange of ideas
- Ensure that business leaders have a seat at the education table
- Market and play to our strengths of being entrepreneurial, vibrant, and culturally sophisticated, having a high quality of life, and being young and educated
- Strengthen partnerships, internships, and in-service learning
- Adopt private, consolidated, and regional approaches to business permitting and regulation
- Require greater interdepartmental coordination, zero-based budgeting, teamwork, one-stop shopping, customer service, efficiency, and performance measurement
- Invest in regional bus, port, rail, a second metro-area airport and alternative transportation to support commerce
- Invest in pedestrian-friendly and senior-friendly communities and better connect housing and jobs
- Help smaller businesses become global through international exchange
- Fix the perception that we aren't "immigrant friendly" by distinguishing between legal and illegal immigration and embracing diversity
- Develop strategies for keeping graduates and attracting new talent
- Market Georgia to the world
- Identify a single point of contact in each county's economic development efforts



# REGION 4



## Highest ranking issues:

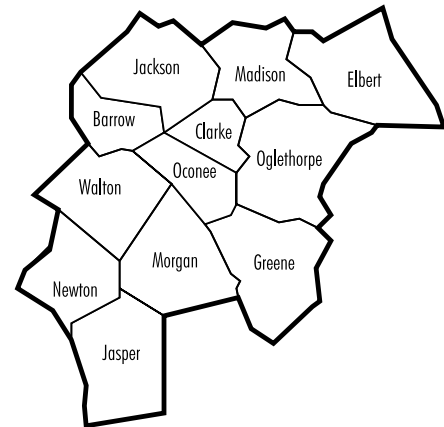
1. Education and Workforce Development: Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access
2. Business Climate: Reduce regulations, modify incentives, and lower business taxes

## Highlights from regional input:

- Shift regulation to focus more on outcomes than process
- Create opportunities for government and business to interact in order to improve awareness and understanding
- Create a broad-based business and industry group to identify potential regulatory reforms
- Ensure every county has parenting/mentorship programs that focus on at-risk students
- Create a fast-track leadership program for school administrators who may or may not have the required “education-related” degrees but who are proven leaders
- Partner government and business with students for real-world learning applications and require internships, apprenticeships and co-ops as part of education
- Create regional groups of educational institutions to address specific business needs
- Market local products and brands at trade shows and expand opportunities for interaction between small business and the state’s trade offices abroad
- Develop a state infrastructure bank for broadband, rail, highway, and other transportation and connection modalities
- Plan for our water future



# REGION 5



## Highest ranking issues:

1. Infrastructure: Multi-modal transportation
2. Education and Workforce Development:  
Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access

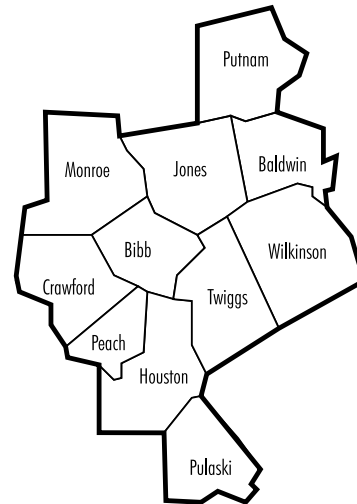
## Highlights from regional input:

- Capitalize on incubators at the University of Georgia - teach entrepreneurship skills from idea to viable business
- Replicate Georgia College Digital Bridges concept across the state to help integrate new technologies into communities
- Match innovators with investors and technical assistance
- Make use of eminent entrepreneurs-in-residence to teach, mentor, and consult new start-ups
- Align technical colleges with high school, teach skills at the high school level, and ensure that students have the foundation needed to go on to earn a bachelor's degree
- Teach economic awareness at all levels from elementary to high school
- Involve local officials more in economic development education and training through programs such as the Georgia Academy for Economic Development
- Sponsor local forums on international trade opportunities
- Use local international businesses to educate communities on best practices for global business opportunities
- Use university service-learning projects to provide services to businesses
- Emphasize cargo-rail enhancements in smaller communities
- Capitalize on our creative economy and examine best practices for marketing and promotion strategies





# REGION 6



## Highest ranking issues:

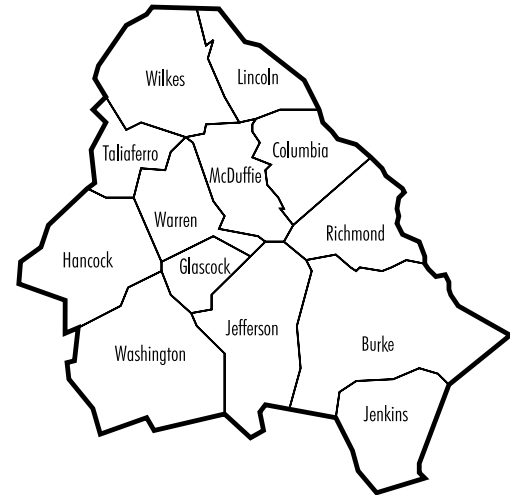
1. Education and Workforce Development:  
Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access
2. Innovation: Building partnerships between public sector and higher education

## Highlights from regional input:

- Create a regional “easy button” solution to integrate and coordinate resources
- Support and expand business and entrepreneurial training within traditional and technical colleges
- Encourage the federal government to streamline applications for free trade zone status
- Sponsor regional international executive forums for existing and emerging industries to connect potential buyers with local suppliers
- Address encroachment issues at Robins Air Force Base
- Promote the lifestyles, quality of life, cultural attractions, and diversity of Georgia
- Reinvent regional advisory council programs so they are composed of educational institutions, economic development agencies, private industry, regional commissions, and chambers of commerce
- Discuss and prioritize regional issues



# REGION 7



## Highest ranking issues:

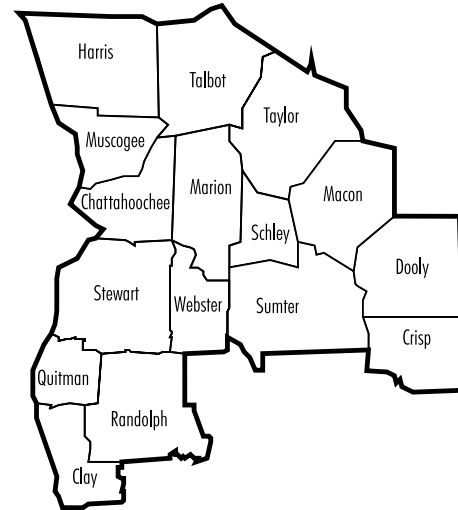
1. Education and Workforce Development: Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access
2. Business Climate: Developing and nurturing new industries, emerging technologies and start-ups

## Highlights from regional input:

- Improve communication and collaboration between elected officials, government agencies, businesses, and the public at large
- Tailor education to students, expose them to role models, provide more choices, offset the “college-only” track and mindset with options for technical skilled jobs, and increase partnerships and teaching with businesses
- Create better connectivity to the ports, identify more inland ports, and invest in more rail to strengthen smaller towns and communities
- Create a second international airport in Georgia
- Market competitive advantages, such as right-to-work status and lower energy costs
- Increase communication between the state and local communities
- Identify opportunities to promote tourism
- Utilize Fort Gordon as an economic engine
- Engage colleges and universities in assisting businesses and start-up companies with new products, technologies, manufacturing processes, and research and development
- Create mentoring programs for entrepreneurs
- Engage university students to help provide technology education for older adults
- Continue to study the development of a regional industrial park or mega-site



# REGION 8



## Highest ranking issues:

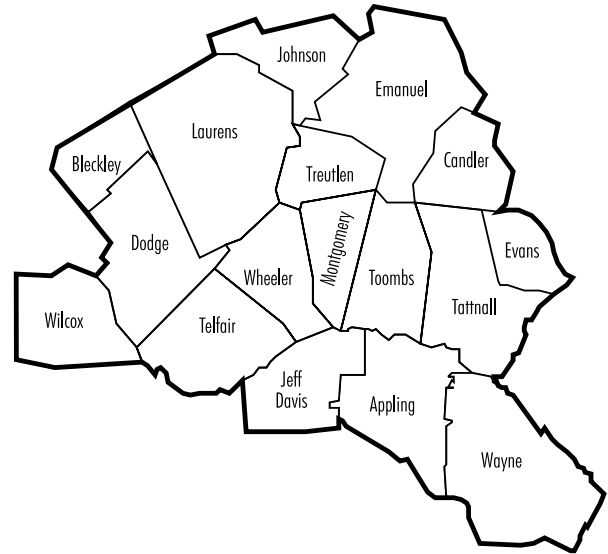
1. Education and Workforce Development:  
Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access
2. Innovation, Infrastructure, Business Climate and Government Efficiency all received equal votes

## Highlights from regional input:

- Identify non-financial resources to develop new industry in small rural communities
- Develop group offices for small businesses that need an office location but cannot afford their own space
- Consider new models for pre-K through 12 education that do not focus on sending all students through traditional college prep
- Increase the number of magnet schools across the region
- Make more resources available to develop multi-language and cultural skills
- Make better use of inland ports
- Emphasize location and transportation strengths—this region is central to ports throughout the Southeast
- Make Columbus Airport a multi-modal facility and link with other state and regional resources
- Strengthen information technology connections within the region and with the rest of the state
- Develop a supply chain network for agriculture and support innovations within the industry
- Ensure that the region has internet and high speed connectivity



# REGION 9



## Highest ranking issues:

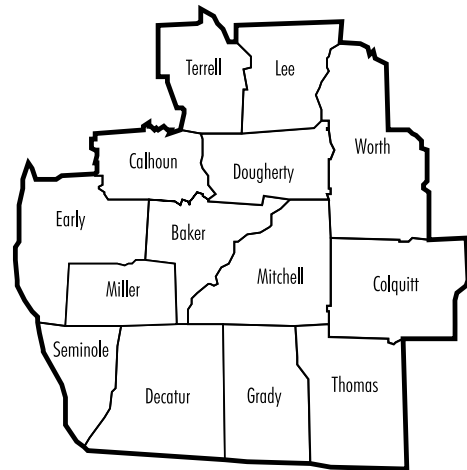
1. Education and Workforce Development: Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access
2. Innovation: Collaboration and leveraging assists

## Highlights from regional input:

- Focus on smaller businesses, entrepreneurs, existing industries, and local and regional strengths
- Develop small business incubators and provide support such as space, incentives, and resource sharing
- Leverage existing but underused assets such as Warner Robins aerospace training and Chicken of the Sea's freezer capacity to add value to our economy
- Explore new markets for existing products, such as agricultural products, timber, pet food, pecans, and honey
- Help local businesses address shipping costs by grouping products to sell to foreign markets
- Address structural barriers to education, such as availability of courses, transportation, and access to technical education, college fairs, and career academies
- Develop infrastructure and a plan to strengthen recreational travel and tourism
- Provide state assistance with broadband and information highways



# REGION 10



## Highest ranking issues:

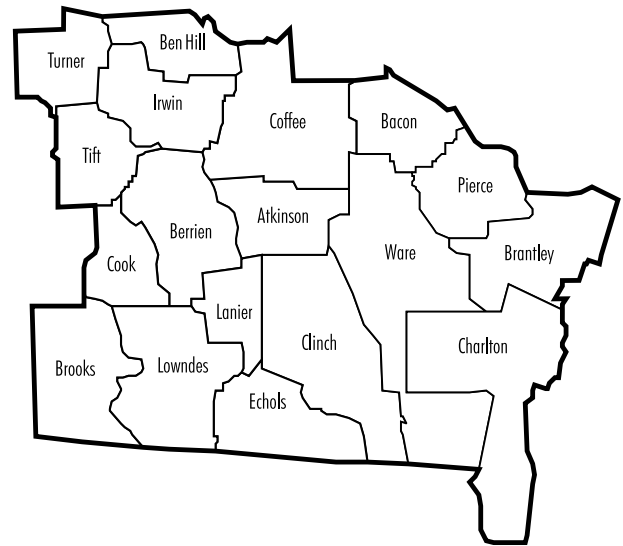
1. Education and Workforce Development: Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access
2. Business Climate: Developing and nurturing new industries, emerging technologies and start-ups

## Highlights from regional input:

- Capitalize on existing infrastructure assets to recruit and develop specific new industries
- Look at existing enterprises for value-added innovations and provide more support and assistance to small businesses, incubators, and entrepreneurs
- Expand information and transportation connections across and throughout the state
- Educate smaller businesses and local public officials about global commerce and economic opportunities
- Learn from and develop best practices modeling businesses and industries already accessing global markets
- Use local and regional organizations and commissions to identify and implement specific efficiency and productivity recommendations
- Improve and reward good teaching
- Work with the local community to set up supply chain solutions for agriculture, including recruiting more food companies who can purchase locally grown agricultural products



# REGION 11



## Highest ranking issues:

1. Education and Workforce Development:  
Attract and create better jobs (technical and high wage)
2. Innovation, Infrastructure, Business Climate and Government Efficiency all received equal votes

## Highlights from regional input:

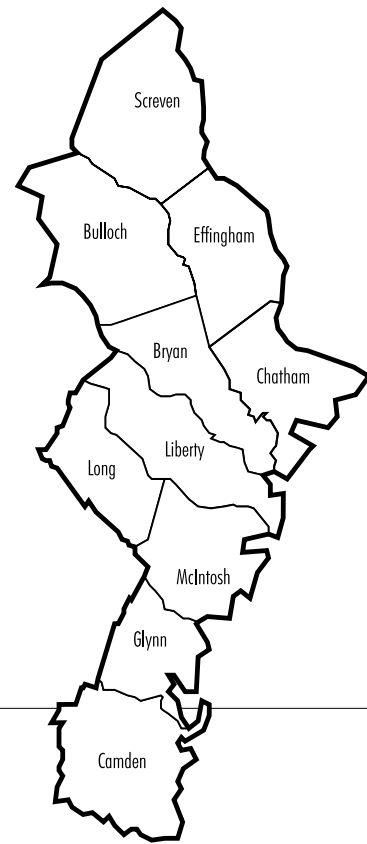
- Compete with other states, not other counties within Georgia
- Build a strong bridge between education and business
- Engage universities and technical colleges in creating more meaningful outreach to rural Georgia
- Make sure there's no "wrong door" for businesses to go through
- Increase competitiveness and promote products by creating an issue-specific one-stop business clearinghouse - for example, a single location for permitting help
- Continue regional initiative currently underway to identify new marketing opportunities for existing exporters and identify current manufacturers not yet exporting
- Develop technology infrastructure
- Establish an incubator to assist emerging industries
- Take greater advantage of Georgia's agriculture industry
- Undertake comprehensive assessments of community needs and assets - use these to formulate local and regional plans
- Take advantage of specialized assets, such as nuclear capabilities, military retirees, logistics management, solar technology, and forestry and agriculture



# REGION 12

## Highest ranking issues:

1. Education and Workforce Development: Enhance quality of K-12 through post-secondary, increase access
2. Business Climate: Reduce regulations, modify incentives, and lower business taxes



## Highlights from regional input:

- Nurture our relationships with military bases
- Identify and implement viable “best practices” for local permitting offices and timelines for response
- Tailor education to jobs with targeted, successful companies and industry sectors
- Foster partnerships between higher education institutions within the region
- Create regional strategic plans for international recruitment and exports
- Gather information from local governments, businesses, and industry as trade missions are designed in order to ensure a positive impact on Georgia’s economy
- Partner with environmental institutions in order to learn about new innovations.
- Consider infrastructure enhancements to maximize productivity and economic opportunity, such as raising truck weight requirements and port expansion
- Improve fiber infrastructure to support a knowledge-based economy/business environment
- Maintain intercoastal waterways and support secondary airports
- Continue to support the Georgia Ports Authority Savannah harbor deepening and expansion project
- Develop strategies to attract retirees to the region





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