



TWIN COUNTIES VISIONING  
FOR A BETTER LIFE

# A Discussion Guide for the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process

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Created by Skeo Solutions for the Twin Counties  
Visioning and Strategic Plan Process

# Project Information

**The City of Rocky Mount, Edgecombe County and Nash County** are partnering through the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process to develop a broad-based vision and strategic plan for the future of the Twin Counties Region.

For more information, please visit the project website:  
<http://twincountiesvisioning.skeo.com>



## Key administrative contacts

Eric Evans  
Edgecombe County  
252-641-5775

Rosemary Dorsey  
Nash County  
252-459-9809

Peter Varney  
City of Rocky Mount  
252-972-1325

For additional project contacts and contributors, see the Acknowledgements.



# TWIN COUNTIES VISIONING FOR A BETTER LIFE

## Community Partners Coalition

### Edgecombe County Representatives

Donald Boswell,  
Co-Chair  
Bobbie Martin  
Jerry Spruell  
Deborah Lamm  
Randi Dikeman  
Ernest Taylor  
Gwendolyn Pitt

### Nash County Representatives

Robert Beaman,  
Co-Chair  
Mike Hancock  
Johnny Bass  
James Alston  
Joseph Powell  
Lu Harvey Lewis  
Patsy McGhee  
John Hazel

### City of Rocky Mount Representatives

Susan Perry-Cole,  
Co-Chair  
Chet Mottershead  
Joyce Dickens  
Tripp Evans  
James Galliard  
Jeffrey Batts  
Quinsella Bunn

### Administration

Eric Evans  
Edgecombe County  
252-641-5775

Rosemary Dorsey  
Nash County  
252-459-9809

Peter Varney  
City of Rocky Mount  
252-972-1325

## *Help Us Shape the Future of Our Community*

Welcome, and thank you for joining Edgecombe County, Nash County and the City of Rocky Mount as we embark together on a journey designed to create a shared vision for our community and to develop a strategic plan that will position the Twin Counties Region to succeed in a globally competitive economy.

We all share a stake in the future of our region, but as individuals we each envision it through our own unique values, goals and ideas. With that in mind, dozens of small study circle groups are being formed across the Twin Counties Region to participate in this discussion.

Most study circle groups will meet once a week for four weeks between April 23<sup>rd</sup> and May 27<sup>th</sup>. Each meeting is expected to last only about 90 minutes, and study circle groups will be scheduled at a variety of times and locations around the Twin Counties Region. Each study circle group will be facilitated by two local co-facilitators who will attend a one-day session (either Friday, April 13<sup>th</sup> or Saturday, April 14<sup>th</sup>) designed to equip them with the training and materials needed to lead the discussion.

Please visit the **Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process** website at <http://twincountiesvisioning.skeo.com/> for more information on the study circles or for an overview of the entire Visioning Process.

Residents of the Twin Counties Region can only build a solid economic future by looking forward and planning for the long term. Your participation is vital to the success of this project and your unique perspective will help us ensure that our region remains a great place to live, work and grow in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Again, thank you for the time you have committed to your study circle group over the next four weeks. We look forward to hearing the vision ideas and recommended actions your group will generate for the Twin Counties Region!

*Creating Prosperous Communities Tomorrow Requires Responsible Planning Today.*

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# Why conduct a regional visioning process?

*“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”*

*~ Peter Drucker*

The Twin Counties Region has a rich, shared history as well as present-day economic and political ties that weave together residents of cities, towns and rural areas in a shared destiny. Our region is a special place to live, work and play, and we have many wonderful community assets upon which a vibrant and sustainable future can be built. Some of these assets are highlighted in the box at right for reference; these assets were identified based on conversations with project leadership and in the TCCA study described on the following page.

However, the past 10 years have been difficult for our area. We suffered enormous devastation from flooding during Hurricane Floyd in September 1999. We have lost our textile manufacturing industries and tobacco production has declined significantly. Our inner-city neighborhoods show evidence of decline with many homes boarded up. In October 2010, *Forbes* magazine listed the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Statistical Area as one of the 10 most impoverished cities in America.

In response to the *Forbes* magazine report, city staff convened a small group to plan a community visioning process. Over a period of several months, this group discussed efforts by other cities faced with a changing economy and diminishing resources. Of particular interest was a report that summarizes the following set of elements common among successful revitalization efforts of smaller cities:

*While each city approaches the revitalization puzzle quite differently, the pivotal pieces are the same from one context to the next. They are (1) leadership, (2) civic infrastructure, (3) vision and plan, (4) social inclusion, (5) quality of life, (6) access to opportunities, (7) resource acquisition, and (8) image and perception ... In an environment of many challenges and limited resources, priorities must be set and investment targeted. A vision built with broad community input and consensus provides a framework for that difficult decision.<sup>1</sup>*

## Regional Assets

### Location

- Proximity to multiple population centers and trade opportunities.
- Proximity to major transportation infrastructure, including the intersection of I-64 and I-95

### Sense of Place

- Small-town atmosphere and sense of community
- Cultural history and character
- Community resilience in the face of disaster (e.g., flooding)
- Valuable parks and rivers that enhance quality of life and tourism
- Existing historic preservation and green initiatives

### Strong Local Institutions and Businesses

- Strong local governments and economic development organizations
- Carolina Gateway Partnership and existing business incentives
- Existing base of industries and farms

### Built Environment

- Walkable neighborhoods and downtowns
- Historic architecture
- Pre-developed industrial properties

### Natural Resources

- Productive farmland
- Undeveloped, available land
- Tar River and natural open space

In the spring of 2010, the City of Rocky Mount joined with Nash and Edgecombe Counties to fund a study to evaluate the Twin Counties Region's ability to grow and prosper in the 21st Century.<sup>2</sup> The resulting Twin Counties Competitive Assessment (TCCA) study provides community leaders and residents with a set of recommendations to attract businesses, create jobs and raise the quality of life in communities across the region. A summary of the findings of this study can be found in the Key Issues chapter.

The study notes:

*"A unique opportunity [...] exists for local officials to simultaneously foster employment enhancing business development and improve the overall quality of life in the region by embracing an approach and strategies that fall under the broader rubric of sustainable community economic development."*

Building on the findings of the TCCA study, the City of Rocky Mount again joined with Nash and Edgecombe Counties to fund the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process. This process will involve many citizens in developing a shared vision and set of priorities for the future of our regional community.

### The Goal of the Visioning Process for the Twin Counties Region



The Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process is an opportunity for residents and community leaders to develop a road map for transforming the Twin Counties Region into a sustainable and prosperous community.

The goal of the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process is to:

- Create a shared vision and strategic plan based on the collective quality of life goals that community members have for their region.
- Position the Twin Counties Region to succeed in a globally competitive economy.

<sup>1</sup> "Voices from Forgotten Cities: Innovative Revitalization Coalitions in America's Older Small Cities" published in 2007 by MIT's School of Architecture and Planning.

<sup>2</sup> "Twin Counties Competitiveness Assessment" published in 2010 by Dr. James Johnson with the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

# What will the visioning process look like?

## Overview

### *Community-based Process*

The project is rooted in the belief that it is people who define the places in which they live, work and raise their families. All residents have a stake in envisioning the future for the region.

### *Moving from Vision ...*

The community visioning process will rely on public dialogue through the study circles as well as a variety of events and workgroups to first develop a shared, regional vision based on analysis and benchmarking of current conditions, and then explore a range of strategies and solutions for implementing and achieving the vision.

### *To Action!*

Project participants will work to develop targeted implementation strategies for the vision, recognizing that solutions must fit the needs of the multiple communities represented in the region while enabling everyone to reach the same quality of life standards.

## Who is guiding the process?

Each jurisdiction has appointed representatives to the Community Partners Coalition, the committee that will guide the community visioning process. Each jurisdiction has also appointed staff members to serve on the Core Team. For a complete list of Coalition and Core Team members, please see the Acknowledgements.

## Who should get involved?

Everyone! In order to develop a shared vision, the process will rely on the contributions from community members from every part of the Twin Counties Region.

There are many ways you can get involved, including:

-  **WEBSITE**  
For the latest information, visit the project website at: <http://twincountiesvisioning.skeo.com>
-  **FACILITATORS**  
Community members can sign up to receive facilitator training in order to serve as a Study Circle facilitator.
-  **STUDY CIRCLES**  
Participants meet in study circles of 8-12 people over several weeks to begin collaborative visioning for the Twin Counties Region.
-  **TOWN HALL FORUM**  
A public forum will be held to share the vision developed by Study Circle participants and receive feedback and input from community members not engaged in the Study Circle process.
-  **ACTION GROUPS**  
Action Groups, organized around specific topic areas, will explore best practices and strategies and develop a framework for achieving the vision developed by Study Circle and Town Hall Forum participants.

### What are the project’s phases?

The Community Partners Coalitions, composed of members appointed from each of the jurisdictions, will guide the Visioning Process to foster broad-based input and community involvement as participants move from vision-casting and recommendations to action and implementation.

The Project Diagram below illustrates each phase of the project, including involvement opportunities and technical support, which will be provided by Skeo Solutions. The following text describes each of the phases in more detail.

#### Phase I: Goals and Vision

Discussion-based study circle groups, led by local facilitators, will explore existing conditions, such as the area economy, health, education and housing, and develop a vision for what the Twin Counties Region could look like as a thriving community for all residents and businesses. For more information on the study circle process, see the chapter titled “How Do Study Circles Work?”.

#### Phase II: Solutions Development

The results of the Visioning Process will be shared with the community at large at a Town Hall Forum, and Action Groups, organized around specific topic areas, will move forward with exploring best practices and strategies for improving prosperity, sustainability and quality of life for area residents.

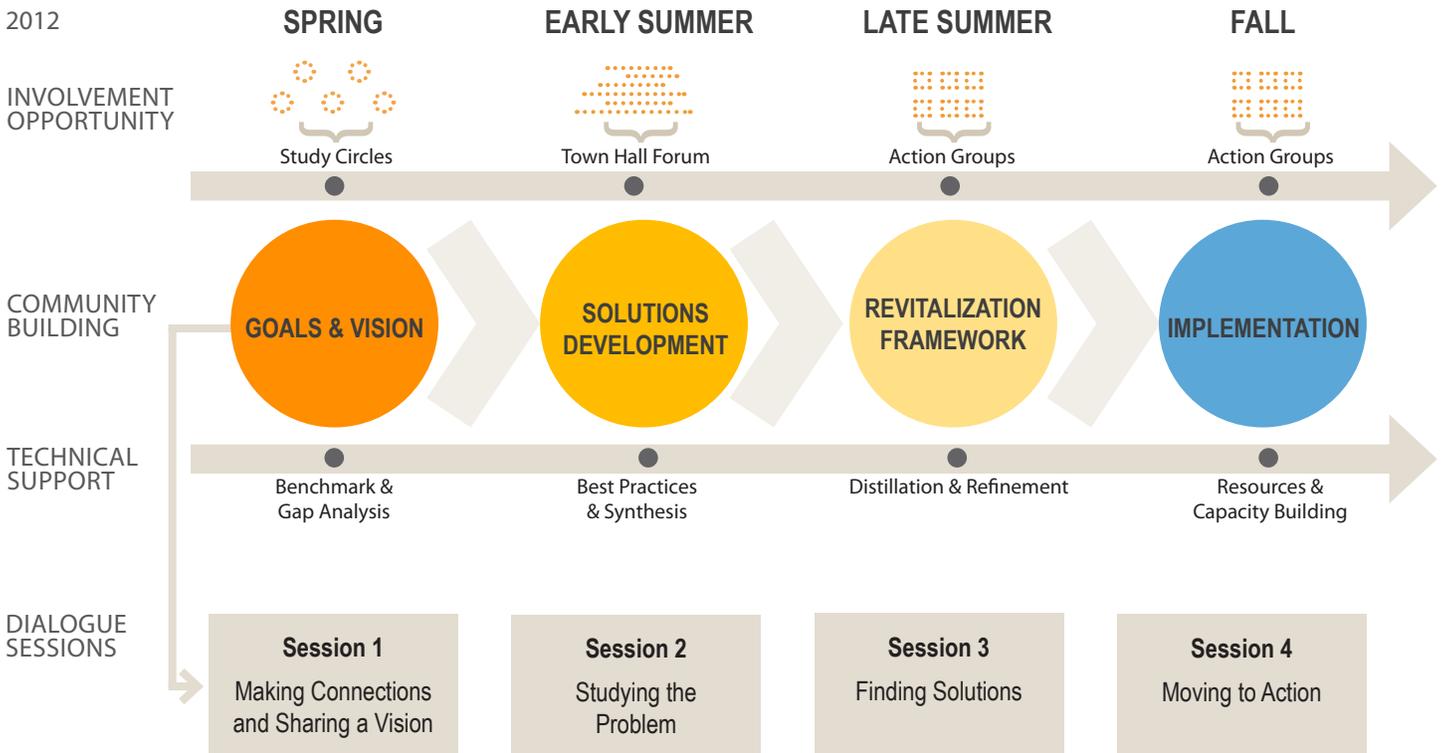
#### Phase III: Revitalization Framework

The Action Groups will work to refine a Revitalization Framework that prioritizes a set of objectives and actions. The framework may span a range of alternatives from ideas that can be implemented by individuals or community groups to ideas requiring implementation by the Twin Counties jurisdictions or a coalition of community partners.

#### Phase IV: Implementation

After the Revitalization Framework is finalized, the Action Groups will focus on developing implementation plans to address phasing, funding, partners and next steps.

### PROJECT DIAGRAM



# How do study circles work?

## Using dialogue to create change

If we are going to make progress in our communities and our region, people from all backgrounds and views must work together to develop a vision of the future and bring it to fruition. We need democratic dialogue, organized on a large scale, so that people of all backgrounds can:

- **Listen respectfully to one another.**  
Through dialogue, people can share experiences and concerns, and work together to develop a vision for the future. They can understand one another better, and build relationships that help them work together.
- **Look at different sides of an issue and explore common concerns.**  
When people learn more about public problems and explore disagreements, they begin to find common concerns. They find out that they can work together, and they begin to solve problems.
- **Come up with practical ways to address economic challenges and inequities.**  
Through dialogue, people develop new community networks and new ideas for action and change. Strong, community-based organizing helps them work with others to connect their talk to action.
- **Take action on their ideas, and test their solutions over the long run.**  
Dialogue can lead to democratic problem solving on many issues in the community — education, community-police relations, poverty and others. Over years, communities can begin to take stock of their progress. Some may join other communities — in their state and around the country — to come up with regional and even national solutions.

A growing number of communities are creating ongoing democratic dialogue and action. They are finding ways to involve people from all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, all political beliefs, all faiths, all education levels, all income levels, and all walks of life. They are finding ways to move from dialogue to individual change and collective action.

As more of us move ahead with this challenging work, we will find ways to honor our regional vision and local identities. Together, we can build strong communities where everyone has a voice.

### A Dialogue-to-Change Program ...

- Is organized by a diverse group of people from the whole community.
- Includes a large number of people from all walks of life.
- Has easy-to-use, fair-minded discussion materials.
- Uses trained facilitators who reflect the community's diversity.
- Moves a community to action when the dialogues conclude.

## What is a study circle?

Study circles bring people together to talk about an issue. By talking about existing conditions in the Twin Counties Region, participants can gain a clearer understanding of regional interdependence and their own community's unique position in the regional economy. Participants also get new ideas about what they can do to help their community grow into the kind of place they are happy to call home.

The study circle is a simple process for small-group deliberation. Study circles create a setting for personal learning, building community and problem solving. Each small-group dialogue ...

- Is a small group of 8 to 12 people.
- Meets together for four sessions which may range from an hour to ninety minutes in length.
- Sets its own ground rules. This helps the group share responsibility for the quality of the discussion.
- Is led by a pair of impartial facilitators who help manage the discussion. The facilitators are not there to teach the group about the issue.
- Starts with personal stories, which help the group look at a problem from many points of view. Next, the group explores possible solutions. Finally, they make plans for action and change.

## Making the most of your study circle

In a study circle, how you talk with each other is as important as what you talk about. These tips will help make your study circle enjoyable, thought-provoking and productive.

- **Attend every study circle session.**

If everyone in your group makes a good effort to be at each meeting, you will build trust and familiarity. This is essential for a conversation that explores the depths of how you feel and think about the issue. And you won't feel the need to review the details of each session for those who did not attend.

- **Be prepared.**

Read the discussion materials before you come to each session. Each part of the study circle guide offers questions, viewpoints and ideas to help you examine the issue. By reading the materials ahead of time, you will be ready to jump right into the discussion. The guide also suggests simple things you can do to keep your own learning and reflection going between study circle meetings.

- **Take responsibility for the quality of the discussion.**

The study circle facilitators' job is to keep the discussion moving and on track. In the dictionary, the word "facilitate" means "to make easier." But participants are also responsible for making things easier! At the first session of your study circle, your group will set ground rules about what kind of discussion you want to have and how you want to treat each other. Stick with these ground rules and help others do the same.

- **Remember that you are not alone.**

Your study circle is part of a larger, community-wide program, and many other study circles are going on at the same time across the Twin Counties Region. Join with them for the Town Hall Forum to discuss taking action on implementing a regional vision for change. This meeting will help build momentum for addressing the issue across the community. And consider joining an action team following the Forum to work on an issue of significance to you. (See "Where will this lead?" for more details.)

## Where will this lead?

In your dialogue, you will be creating a vision for change in the Twin Counties Region as well as your local community. During the last session of your dialogue, you will focus on action ideas. These ideas will be presented at a large community Town Hall Forum. This takes place after all the dialogues finish. Then, those who want to stay involved will work together in Action Teams with other community members to carry out these ideas.

The results of dialogue-to-change programs differ from one community to the next. Below you will find examples of outcomes that can occur at a variety of scales:

- Changes in individual behaviors and attitudes.
- New relationships and networks within local communities and across the Twin Counties Region.
- Institutional changes.
- Changes in public policy.
- Changes in community dynamics.

## Key Issues

The goal of the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process is to design and implement actions that will build a better regional economy and future for all residents of the Twin Counties. This study circle process will capture a shared vision of our desired future. This vision will serve as the basis of a strategic plan to create that future.

As a starting point for this discussion, Edgecombe County, Nash County and the City of Rocky Mount commissioned the Twin Counties Competitive Assessment (TCCA) study by Dr. James Johnson with the Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise of UNC-Chapel Hill. The study articulates some of the challenges and opportunities faced by the community as it tries to build a better future; it also identifies a number of regional assets that can provide the groundwork for moving forward. Additionally, members of the Community Partners Coalition met for a number of facilitated discussions to identify key issues and priorities for the region. Some of the recommendations identified in these discussions and in the TCCA study are presented at right.

Over the course of the four-week dialogue, study circle participants will have the opportunity to provide input on the relevance and importance of these issues to the future of the community and to offer their own insights into additional challenges and assets that should be considered in developing a vision for the Twin Counties Region.

During this study circle dialogue, we invite you to share what you value most about this community, what you would like to see improve, and what our highest aspirations are for our future and our children's future.

During our first session, we will reflect on the issues outlined at right, determine if there are other important issues to discuss, and prioritize which areas to focus on for our dialogue.

### Key Issues Summary

#### **Align the leadership of the region.**

The economic future of the residents of Edgecombe County, Nash County, and the City of Rocky Mount are irrevocably intertwined. Successfully working together across political, geographic, economic, cultural and racial lines is critical to the community's future vitality.

#### **Improve conditions of poverty.**

Some members of our community live in conditions of persistent poverty. Every individual should have an equal opportunity to share in the growth and prosperity of the region's economy, so that even the most vulnerable people have the potential to improve their own lives. In order to strengthen the region's economic competitiveness and attract quality employers, we must invest in skills, opportunities and other fundamentals to ensure that the region's working residents are productive enough to support higher wage jobs and living standards.

#### **Improve race relations.**

Building a stronger economy and good jobs for all workers for the long term means we must strive to change our thinking to overcome old barriers, divisions and disparities based upon race. With a proactive approach focused on the common good of the region, we can lay the foundation for a stronger, more resilient economy that includes everyone and supports families and strengthens communities.

#### **Re-engineer K-20 education to equip youth to thrive and prosper.**

For our children to be competitive in a global economy and for our community to attract and retain people who care about their children's future, we must build a world-class education system. Further, we must make sure that the education we are providing our residents prepares them for specific employment opportunities in today's economy and the economy of the future.

### **Retain young adults.**

According to 2010 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, over a 10-year period, the region's population aged 25-44 declined by 19 percent. This loss of young adults has a large impact on our community's health, presently and in the future. We must understand why we have lost so many young adults and develop a strategy to retain and recapture this age group.

### **Improve health outcomes.**

Health disparities and unhealthy lifestyles are also a deterrent to economic growth and development in the Twin Counties Region. Smoking, obesity, alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and teen births occur at higher rates in our region than in the state as a whole. Currently, 29 percent of children in Edgecombe and Nash counties are obese or overweight before entering kindergarten. Healthier and more sustainable alternatives are increasingly available. Research also shows that effective policies and tools to guide healthy eating and active living are within our grasp to improve the region's health outcomes.

### **Address electricity costs in Rocky Mount.**

Many residents and businesses in the Rocky Mount community struggle with high electric costs. These high costs are the combined result of high electric rates and energy inefficient structures. These high costs impact the competitiveness of businesses, have a huge impact on the quality of life of some community residents, and reduce disposable income that can be spent at local businesses.

### **Job creation and talent recruitment.**

The TCCA Study recommends augmenting traditional efforts at economic development, such as industry recruitment, with new efforts aimed specifically at job creation through talent recruitment. Most job growth in North Carolina in recent decades has been the result of local entrepreneurship rather than industrial recruitment. The report recommends emphasizing recruitment of homegrown talent that has moved away, particularly individuals who may be seeking to return to the community to care for aging parents.

### **Nurture and grow the local elder care economy.**

The aging population of the Twin Counties Region presents an opportunity to strengthen the economy through development of goods, services and amenities targeted to the preferences and purchasing behaviors of the elderly. Local government could help grow this economic sector by offering incentives or collaborating with business startups to attract investors.

### **Leverage the internet to promote the region.**

Governments and institutions across the region could develop a coordinated marketing strategy to promote the region and attract new residents, development, businesses and tourism consistent with the regional vision.

### **Rebrand as a sustainable community.**

Improving the community's image is vital to retaining and attracting people and businesses. The TCCA Study discusses external perceptions that the community is racially divided and how this makes it difficult to attract businesses and retain residents. The report also highlights the need for a broader economic development approach that embraces local business and entrepreneurship, particularly those businesses that emphasize green jobs and environmental responsibility. Each of these elements can help create a new internal and external identity for the Twin Counties Region as being the model of a progressive community ready to compete in a diverse and competitive 21st century.

# Making Connections and Sharing a Vision

In this session, we will get to know one another, talk about what is important to us, and see how we want to work together.

## Part One: Getting Started (15 minutes)

As a group, review the following introductory chapters together. These chapters tell us what the goal of the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process is, what a dialogue is, how it might help, and what key issues have been identified to date.

- Why conduct a regional visioning process? (p. 4)
- What will the visioning process look like? (p. 6)
- How do study circles work? (p. 8)
- Key Issues (p. 10)

Explain the role of the co-facilitators to the group. Facilitators are not teachers. A dialogue is not a class. It's a place for the group to talk and work together. The facilitators help make sure the talking goes well and is useful. They do not take sides.

Most sessions usually take about ninety minutes. If the group agrees, we can choose to talk longer or add a fifth meeting. There are many questions in each session. We do not have to cover every question.

We need to create some ground rules to help our dialogue work better. Some ideas are listed on the following page. Are there rules you would like to add?

### FACILITATOR TIPS

#### Help the group work well together

- Help everyone feel welcome. Be sure each person has a chance to speak and to hear the other group members.
- Some people find it easier than others to talk about this subject. Give everyone room and time to get comfortable with the issue.
- Ask for volunteers to read out loud rather than going "around the circle." Be prepared to do this yourself, if no one volunteers.

#### Collect ideas for action

- From the start, participants may come up with action ideas for the Twin Counties Region or their own community. Ask the recorder to keep a list of **Action Ideas**, and add to it from one session to the next. (Please see note-taking tips in Appendix 4.)
- Group members may also mention things that the community is already doing. List these under **Things We are Already Doing**.
- Post the lists where everyone can see them.
- Assure the group that they will talk more about action ideas in sessions three and four.

### Sample Ground Rules

1. Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
2. Each person gets a chance to talk.
3. One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
4. Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."
5. It's OK to disagree. If you feel hurt, say so and say why.
6. Stick to the issue. No name-calling.
7. If you talk about people who are not here, don't say their names.
8. Some of the things we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.
9. Help the facilitator keep things on track.

### Part Two: About Ourselves (10 minutes)

Each person in the dialogue can introduce themselves to the group by answering these questions:

- Who are you? Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
- Where do you live?
- Why did you come today? What concerns you?
- What are your hopes for this effort?

### Part Three: Ties to Our Community and the Twin Counties Region (25 minutes)

Our group will talk about these questions:

- **What is the story of our community and our region?** What was it like in the past?
- **Who are we now?** What kinds of events have shaped the community and the region?
- **What do you like about living in the Twin Counties Region?** What's going well? What are the strengths (assets) of our region?
- **What's not going so well?** What economic and quality of life challenges does our region face?

## Part Four: Our Vision for the Twin Counties Region (30 minutes)

Imagine a place in the community where almost everyone goes. Maybe it's a main road or a park. Think of a public place. It's a place that visitors are likely to see. It's also a place that school buses pass each day.

Imagine that we will build something (like an archway or a statue) that stands for the things we like about our community. We want to carve some words into it — words of hope.

We need to find words to describe our vision of our community when it is thriving. There is only room for four or five words. Our group has to come up with these words.

1. Look at the box, **Things You Might Find in a Thriving Region**. It has some ideas for words that might go on a statue. The facilitator may ask someone to read the ideas out loud.
2. What words would you like to carve into our statue? As a group, we will brainstorm some words to add to this list. Once our list seems long enough, we will stop and think for a moment:
  - Which three matter most to you?
  - How would others feel about them?
  - Which ideas are alike? Which ideas are different?
3. As a group, try to agree on three to five words for your statue. The facilitator or recorder will list them on a piece of paper labeled **Our Regional Vision**.

### Things You Might Find in a Thriving Region

**Opportunity** — Everyone has an equal chance to succeed. There are local resources and opportunities for all.

**Respect** — People treat each other fairly. They allow others to live the way they want to.

**Order** — Things run smoothly. People do what they are supposed to do.

**Safety** — People feel secure. They aren't too worried about crime or drugs. They don't think their things will be stolen or damaged.

**Prosperity** — The community is growing and the economy is strong. Businesses are successful, and there are plenty of jobs that pay enough.

**Health** — People are healthy. It is easy to get to good health care.

**Diversity** — There are all kinds of people in the community. They come into contact with each other often. They can all work together and help each other.

**Spirituality and Culture** — People feel connected to something larger than themselves. They understand their culture and keep it alive in their day-to-day activities. People take pride in who they are.

## Part Five: Wrap Up (10 minutes)

Choose one of the following questions to respond to:

- What did you learn in this session?
- What stories touched you or surprised you?
- How do you think our vision can contribute to creating a region and local community where everyone has a chance to thrive?

## For the Next Session

Before the next session, please do the following:

- 1) Think about the words we chose for our statue.
  - See if you can find some examples of these ideas in our local community and throughout the region.
  - In our community and/or our region, who might think that this vision seems out of reach? Why?
  - What economic and quality of life challenges make it hard to have the kind of kind of community we described in our vision?
- 2) Review the **Twin Counties Region Information Sheet**, which shares some information on how our region is doing. Consider the following:
  - What do you think of these facts? What stands out? Which facts align with what you see in our local community? Do any of the facts surprise you?
  - What does this information tell us?
- 3) Spend some time completing the Regional Report Card on page 17 of this discussion guide.

## FACILITATOR TIPS

### For Part Four

- Post a flipchart sheet labeled **Our Regional Vision**. Use it to record the group's thoughts, including the top three to five words identified for the Regional Vision. You will submit these online after the session.
- Encourage everyone to come up with their own words in addition to the ones listed in the box.
- Remind everyone that these words are about how we would like the Twin Counties Region to be. But it's OK if some of the words describe things as they are now.
- Ask participants to talk about what the ideas and words mean to them.
- Let participants know they do not have to cover every question.
- Don't worry if the group cannot reach complete agreement on what words to include.

### In Closing

- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week.

# Studying the Problem

## Introduction (5 minutes)

In Session One, we talked about our vision for the community. We also shared the Twin Counties Region Information Sheet for your review prior to this session.

In this session, we will talk about what current economic conditions and quality of life look like in our region and why. We will also discuss a range of views to help us explore the roots of the problem. This will help us develop action ideas in later sessions.

Review the ground rules.

- Does everyone still agree with the list?
- Do we need to add anything?

## Part One: Getting Started (15 minutes)

As a group, review the main ideas from the discussion during Session One, including the group's shared vision for the future of the Twin Counties Region.

- What examples of our community vision did you find since our last meeting? What gave you hope? What made you sad or upset? Why?
- In our community and/or our region, who might think that this vision seems out of reach? Why?
- What economic and quality of life challenges make it hard to have the kind of kind of community we described in our vision?

In Session Three, we will talk about solutions. But before we can figure out what to do, we need to know what challenges are a problem in our region and why. After the last session, we were asked to review the Twin Counties Region Information Sheet, which shares some information on how our region is doing.

- Which facts align with what you see in our local community? Do any of the facts surprise you?
- What new insights do you have?

## Part Two: Creating a Community Report Card (20 minutes)

Let's think about how our community is doing. Do all people get a fair chance to succeed? Do people from all backgrounds and communities across the Twin Counties Region have equal quality of life? Is every community in the Twin Counties Region equally prosperous?

### FACILITATOR TIPS

#### Session Tips

- This session has three parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide. You don't have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.
- Post key notes from Session One where everyone can see them.

#### For Part Two

- Prepare two flipchart sheets ahead of time. On the first, draw the **Twin Counties Region Report Card**, omitting the "Statement" column (see facing page).
- On the second, make two columns. Label one column "Successes." Label the other column "Challenges."
- Review the grading system. Invite participants to share their grades with the group. Record all responses on the flipchart version of the Report Card.
- Ask everyone to choose several categories to discuss as a whole group. You probably won't have time to discuss every category. That's OK.
- When you get to questions 6 and 7 under the Report Card, write the key successes and challenges on the second flipchart. You will submit these online following the session.

## TWIN COUNTIES REGION REPORT CARD

Category	Statement	A	B	C	D	F	Q
<b>Competitiveness</b>	Our region supports high wage jobs and living standards by being productive—creating a high value of goods and services using our human assets, financial capital and natural resources.						
<b>Leadership</b>	Our community leaders (in government, financial institutions, education, business, etc.) are partnering effectively to improve economic prosperity and quality of life across our region.						
<b>Quality of Life Conditions</b>	All members of our community experience a quality of life standard that supports their ability to compete successfully in the workforce.						
<b>Race Relations</b>	Communities of color in the Twin Counties Region experience a quality of life equal to that of predominantly white communities. Additionally, communities with different racial and/or ethnic backgrounds have strong relationships with one another.						
<b>Education</b>	In our region every child receives a quality education, and the courses offered prepare children for locally relevant trades or for higher education.						
<b>Health and Health Care</b>	Our region promotes healthy lifestyles and offers a health care system that serves the needs of all our residents.						
<b>Retaining Youth</b>	Our young people are able to find fulfilling employment and stay in the Twin Counties Region if they desire.						
<b>Rocky Mount Electric Costs</b>	Electric expenses in City of Rocky Mount are comparable to other regions across the state.						
<b>Job Creation and Talent Recruitment</b>	Local talent and entrepreneurship are appreciated and fostered in the Twin Counties Region.						
<b>Elder Care</b>	There are appropriate services and recreational activities to ensure a comfortable lifestyle for the seniors in our community.						
<b>Positive Mindsets and Community Image</b>	People who live in our region generally speak positively about our community. Local radio, TV stations and newspapers offer fair and full coverage, and they highlight both the challenges and success of our region. Additionally, Twin Counties leadership uses the internet and other tools to successfully promote our region.						
<b>Sustainability</b>	Our region emphasizes sustainable housing, business and recreation practices. We use our sustainable successes to promote the region.						

### Instructions

1. Read each statement on the Report Card. Think about what is happening in the community. Then, give a grade for each statement.
2. What additional statement(s) might you add?
3. Are there statements where the grade you gave for the region as whole differs from the grade you might give for your local community?
4. Look at the grades. Where do we agree? Where do we differ?
5. How did you decide what grade to give?
6. Look at the report card. What successes do you see?
7. When you look at the report card, what are one or two challenges we need to address?

### Explanation of Grading System

- A – We are all doing great!
- B – We are doing well.
- C – We are doing okay.
- D – We’ve had no success.
- F – We have taken steps backwards.
- Q – Not sure.

### Part Three: Exploring Changing Economic Conditions and Quality of Life Challenges (40 minutes)

Why have economic conditions and quality of life conditions changed in the Twin Counties Region?

People have different ideas about how current economic conditions and quality of life conditions got this way. One view cannot tell the whole story. We may agree with each other on some points, and disagree on others. That is OK.

Each view stated here is in the voice of a person who thinks the view is a very important idea. We will use the questions in the Discussing these Views box to help us talk about them.

**Discussing these Views**

These questions will help you talk about the views.

1. Which views are closest to your own (you may agree with more than one)? Why?
2. What view would you like to add?
3. Think about a view you don't agree with. Why would someone agree with that view? Try to come up with reasons to support that view.
4. Do some of these views surprise you? Why?
5. Which views conflict with each other?
6. If we want to achieve our vision, which views are most important to work on?

#### VIEWPOINT 1 Regional Development Patterns are Uneven

As compared with other adjacent regions in our state, the Twin Counties region has produced less robust job growth and prosperity. Within our region, the benefits of economic expansion must be spread more evenly area-wide. Our region has experienced more economic growth and development in Nash County than in Edgecombe County. Additionally, there are economic disparities between rural and urban areas. Our economy cannot perform at its peak unless all areas and residents of our region are able to benefit from local public and private investment in the Region.

#### VIEWPOINT 2 Global and National Economic Shifts are Impacting the Local Economy

Shifts in the global economy have significant impacts locally. Outsourcing of jobs to other countries or urban centers, pressures on family farms, changes in demand for farm crops, loss of local industry and other changes have all negatively impacted the health of our regional economy.

#### VIEWPOINT 3 Electric Costs are Too High

High electric rates in the City of Rocky Mount drive up cost of living, leaving less disposable income for food and clothing, paying rent or a mortgage, or spending money in the local economy. High electric rates present a challenge for recruiting and retaining industrial businesses that rely on low energy costs to stay in business. Additionally, aging homes and buildings may be less energy efficient, creating a further financial burden on top of high utility rates.

#### VIEWPOINT 4 Lacking Amenities

A lack of local amenities such as an active downtown in Rocky Mount, quality and affordable housing stock, social events for young people, or recreational spaces makes it difficult to attract and retain entrepreneurs and young people who could strengthen our workforce.

#### VIEWPOINT 5 Race-Based Disparities Hurt Our Economy

Race-based disparities may impact educational attainment, longevity, health outcomes, income and many other quality of life factors in communities of color. Communities of color are more likely to have fewer quality of life amenities, higher concentrations of low-income residents, and higher rates of environmental contamination. It is also more difficult to attract new capital and investment to these communities. These disparities hurt our regional economy as well as the individuals and families who are directly affected.

## **VIEWPOINT 6**

### **Poor Education**

Some schools don't teach students the skills they need to get and retain a job. Sometimes, school curriculum may not be aligned with the jobs available in the community. Students drop out or fail. Having a reputation for low-achieving schools can also impact the willingness of newcomers to move to the region if they believe a neighboring school district will provide better education.

## **VIEWPOINT 7**

### **Not Being Responsible**

Every individual is responsible for his/her own success or failure. Some people don't work hard enough, don't look hard enough for jobs, expect things to be given to them, or refuse to work. And they don't make the most of resources, like job training. They drop out of school. They turn to drugs, gambling, alcohol or crime and do not contribute to the local economy.

## **VIEWPOINT 8**

### **Economic Inequality**

We don't like to admit it, but our country is divided into classes. Not everyone has the same amount of money, land or resources. Some people live in poverty. Others are rich and have success just because they were born into wealth. And then there are those in the middle. Rigid class structures make us think that some parts of the community will always underperform economically.

## **VIEWPOINT 9**

### **Lack of Active Lifestyle**

Lack of an active lifestyle and health issues such as diabetes, obesity, smoking, alcohol abuse and teen births create cost burdens on the local health care economy and make consistent employment challenging for some members of our community.

## **VIEWPOINT 10**

### **Local Governments are Competing Against Each Other**

Many local governments see each other as their primary competition for economic growth. It is hard to promote regional growth in an environment where towns, cities and rural areas are not cooperating. The local governments in the Twin Counties Region need to cooperate around a shared vision as well as leverage the success of nearby thriving communities.

## **VIEWPOINT 11**

### **Bad Things Can Happen**

Natural disasters, such as a tornado or hurricane, can cause flooding or high winds that damage homes, businesses and even whole communities. This damage can have a significant impact on the local economy and on quality of life. When things like this happen, it takes time and resources to rebuild.

## **VIEWPOINT 12**

### **Aging Population**

The imbalance between seniors and young adults in our community is growing as our population ages and as young people move away from our region. This makes it difficult to maintain a strong workforce base and presents challenges for elder care.

## **VIEWPOINT 13**

### **Poor Image and Negative Mindset**

With the loss of jobs and industries, a chronically negative mindset pervades the way many residents think about and talk about the Twin Counties Region. Negativity in national and local news outlets reinforces a poor image of our region, particularly on issues of education, race and poverty. This makes it difficult to market our region as a wonderful place to live, work and visit.

## **VIEWPOINT 14**

### **Lack of community engagement**

People are less involved in their communities than they used to be. People used to try to get to know their neighbors and volunteer to serve at their local place of worship, school or on community boards. This doesn't happen as much anymore. It is hard to work together in the absence of strong community ties.



# Finding Solutions

## Introduction

In Session Two, we talked about why current economic conditions and quality of life issues are a problem in our region. Today we will talk about how we can start to solve the problem and develop a preliminary, prioritized list of action ideas. The next time we meet, we will narrow the list down to our best action ideas.

### FACILITATOR TIPS

#### Session Tips

- This session has three parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide. You don't have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.
- Post key notes from other sessions where everyone can see them.

#### Collect ideas for action

- As people come up with ideas about how to reduce poverty, ask the recorder to add them to the list of **Action Ideas**.
- Group members may also mention things that the community is already doing to reduce poverty. List these under **Things We Are Already Doing**.
- Remind the group that they will prioritize action ideas today and narrow the list down to their best action ideas during Session Four.

#### For Part Two

- Label a blank flipchart sheet **Promising Approaches**.
- Ask the recorder to note the top Approaches identified by participants during the discussion. You will submit these online following the session.

## Part One: Getting Started (10 minutes)

Review the ground rules.

- Does everyone still agree with the list?
- Do we need to add anything?

Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?

Review notes from Session Two and sum up the main ideas from that discussion.

## Part Two: Approaches to Change (45 minutes)

We've talked about how our community is doing. Now, we will explore some ways to improve things. What approaches will work well? What will help us improve economic conditions and quality of life across our region?

Use the questions below to think about the different approaches listed on pages 22-24.

### Discussing these Approaches

These questions will help you talk about the approaches.

1. Which approaches appeal to you? Why?
2. What doubts do you have? Concerns?
3. What other approaches can you think of?
4. What is already going on in our community that reflects these approaches?
5. What approaches might help us get closer to our vision?
6. How would this approach help us improve economic prosperity and quality of life conditions in our community? Our region?
7. Which approaches address economic conditions or quality of life issues in different types of institutions (e.g., government, business, schools, nonprofits)?

## APPROACH 1

### Align and develop the leadership of the region

#### A person who supports this approach might say:

In order for our region to prosper, political, business and community leaders will need to collaborate on a shared set of priorities. These leaders need to collaborate around a common vision in order align their development efforts and investments.

#### Here are some potential strategies:

- Establish regional networking meetings to keep leadership apprised of new development initiatives and changing economic conditions.
- Create a regional board to coordinate economic development and investment.
- Build political will and support for an effective regional vision by facilitating meetings for residents to get together to write letters and make phone calls to elected officials.
- Invest in priorities that build a prosperous future for all communities in our region.
- Identify and develop new community leaders by cultivating and nurturing the involvement and leadership skills of today's youth (under age 25).
- Leverage the success of nearby thriving communities by building alliances between chambers and economic development organizations.

## APPROACH 2

### Improve conditions of poverty

#### A person who supports this approach might say:

Persistent poverty holds our regional economy back. Everyone can benefit from investments and asset creation in poverty-stricken areas. Assets can be people or skills; they can also be money or things we own. We can use assets to help ourselves and each other. For example, you can use your car to drive someone who needs a ride or to visit a sick person. Other assets can be handed down in families, or from group to group.

#### Here are some potential strategies:

- Focus investments in the built environment and government services in "target areas" currently experiencing higher poverty levels, dropout rates and unemployment.
- Offer incentives to business for job creation and local hiring.
- Develop a long-term approach to community-based economic development that builds assets throughout a person's life by focusing on savings, homeownership, financial services and education, business development and increasing community assets.
- Promote affordable housing and concentration of neighborhood-oriented services and businesses in walkable neighborhoods near downtowns across the region.
- Focus on equitable development initiatives that improve lives of existing residents rather than development initiatives that provide a facelift on the built environment but result in displacement of poor communities.

## APPROACH 3

### Improve race relations and address race-based disparities

#### A person who supports this approach might say:

Disparities in areas such as educational attainment, longevity, health outcomes, and income that affect communities of color need to be addressed proactively. A regional economy that includes everyone will be stronger and more resilient over the long-term. Additionally, we need to create opportunities for strengthening relationships between all communities in our region.

#### Here are some potential strategies:

- Develop a minority business council that encourages minority entrepreneurship.
- Focus on programs to assist people who just came to this country. Help people who have skills (like doctors or plumbers) get certified so they can do their work here in the United States.
- Work with local religious organizations to hold community meals where individuals and families from different racial and ethnic backgrounds can get know each other.
- Promote cultural events that honor the achievements and history of communities of color in the region.

## APPROACH 4

### Re-engineer K-20 education to equip youth to thrive and prosper

#### A person who supports this approach might say:

A world-class education system not only benefits children in our region but also helps attract and retain new families looking for a quality education for their children. Our education system should offer high-quality vocational and technical classes as well as classes for college-bound students. By graduation, students from all communities should be equipped with the skills to enter the workforce or pursue higher education.

#### Here are some potential strategies:

- Increase access to quality early childhood education opportunities for all students.
- Ensure that school systems offer vocational and technical classes that align with specific employment opportunities in the local and future economy.
- Develop an internship program that connects local youth to summer employment opportunities that can increase their job-readiness and help them develop local connections that encourage them to stay in the region after graduation.
- Invite youth to help make the decisions that affect them by starting a youth council or asking youth to serve on the school board.
- Develop financial literacy programs that prepare youth for managing their finances after graduation.

## APPROACH 5

### Encourage healthy lifestyles

#### A person who supports this approach might say:

Health disparities and unhealthy lifestyles are a deterrent to economic growth and development in the Twin Counties Region. We should implement programs to combat health problems such as smoking, elevated blood lead levels, asthma, obesity, alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and teen births. Proactive lifestyle programs should be combined with investments in opportunities for outdoor recreation.

#### Here are some potential strategies:

- Invest in parks and outdoor recreation amenities, community events and programs in communities that currently do not have access to them.
- Provide healthy lifestyles education opportunities (e.g., develop a community garden program that encourages youth to learn agriculture skills and healthy eating habits).
- Provide education through schools, churches and community organizations to reduce smoking, asthma, sexually transmitted diseases and teen births.
- Invest in alcohol abuse assistance programs that have had success in other communities.
- Address health risks to children, such as mold and lead, in older housing stock.

## APPROACH 6

### Retain young adults

#### A person who supports this approach might say:

Residents between the ages of 25 and 44 constitute a significant portion of the workforce. In addition, these young adults raise families, contribute to community life, and often care for aging parents. We need to find a way to keep our young people in order to maintain a healthy balance between young adults, middle-age adults and the elderly in our community.

#### Here are some potential strategies:

- Convene a focus group of high school students, college students and young professionals to discuss what opportunities and amenities would encourage or allow them to stay in the community as young adults.
- Support entrepreneurs catering to this age group through amenities such as coffee shops, music venues, entertainment events and outdoor recreation.
- Invest in young adults as civic leaders by seeking them out to serve on local boards or creating a mentoring program that matches them with an older civic leader in the community.

## APPROACH 7

### Address high electric costs in Rocky Mount

#### A person who supports this approach might say:

High electric costs impact everyone in the Rocky Mount community, from low-income families to residents of energy inefficient homes to corporations and industrial users whose businesses use large amounts of electricity. Money saved on utility costs could ultimately be reinvested in our local economy.

#### Here are some potential strategies:

- Work with decision makers to find innovative ways to lower electricity costs.
- Develop an energy efficiency home retrofit program to renovate older housing stock and lower energy usage.
- Offer incentives for landlords to improve energy efficiency in rental housing units so that lower income families will have more disposable income to spend locally.
- Implement an Energy Star program for businesses who are able to find innovative ways to substantially reduce energy use.

## APPROACH 8

### Job Creation and Talent Recruitment

#### A person who supports this approach might say:

In an economy where most jobs come from local entrepreneurs rather than industrial recruitment, we need to focus on recruiting individuals from both outside and within our region whose interests align with our local niche markets. Homegrown individuals interested in moving back to the area could be a primary focus of initial rounds of recruitment. Ultimately, we should look for individuals committed to creating jobs for local residents and meeting existing needs in the community.

#### Here are some potential strategies:

- Hold an "entrepreneurship showcase" — a special event to create interest in business and help local people start new businesses.
- Devise incentive packages to retain and attract homegrown talent to develop viable businesses and sustainable jobs.
- Strengthen the creative economy by supporting regional arts and cultural events, live-work spaces, and guest innovators in residence.
- Develop a regional business incubator focused on development of a promising new industry cluster, such as "clean energy," to provide start-up support such as reduced rent, equipment, resource networks and peer-to-peer entrepreneurial counseling and training.
- Identify markets for local businesses to thrive by meeting community needs and services (called economic gardening).

**APPROACH 9  
Grow the elder care economy**

**A person who supports this approach might say:**  
Pre-boomers and baby boomers are getting older and require age-appropriate products and services. From products and building renovations that help individuals “age in place” to retirement communities, nursing homes and end-of-life care, there are numerous opportunities to develop an economic sector that serves our aging population.

- Here are some potential strategies:**
- Develop exercise and recreation opportunities promoting healthy lifestyles for seniors.
  - Recruit or start a health telemonitoring business.
  - Assess the need for a regional transit service or privately-operated shuttles that could assist in providing door-to-door service for elderly individuals needing transportation to the grocery store, doctor’s office or social events.
  - Hire someone to coordinate mentorship opportunities that match local students and seniors in the community.

**APPROACH 10  
Leverage the internet to promote the region**

**A person who supports this approach might say:**  
The internet is a powerful tool for changing outside perceptions of our region. Our economic development and tourism agencies, local governments, institutions and businesses should use their websites to communicate a unified vision of the region.

- Here are some potential strategies:**
- Develop a web-based marketing strategy that promotes a regional vision.
  - Coordinate weblinks and marketing materials across multiple regional websites.
  - Develop a coordinated marketing strategy across the Twin Counties Region that leverages the success of nearby thriving communities.
  - Use social media such as Twitter and YouTube to engage young people in promoting the region.

**APPROACH 11  
Rebrand as a sustainable community**

**A person who supports this approach might say:**  
Sustainability means ensuring our region has a prosperous economy, thriving communities and a healthy environment both today and well into the future. Rebranding as a sustainable community could include developing initiatives in the areas of:

- economic prosperity and revitalization,
- social equity, inclusion and access to opportunity,
- energy use and climate change, and
- public health and a clean environment.

These initiatives should consider how to increase the sustainability of our region while remaining rooted in our local values and unique identity as a small-town region of Eastern North Carolina. They should also consider how to celebrate the collective strength of the diverse communities in our region.

- Here are some potential strategies:**
- Encourage local food in stores, restaurants and schools.
  - Support homegrown entrepreneurial ventures that create high tech and green jobs.
  - Build individual and community assets in disenfranchised neighborhoods or underserved populations.
  - Develop a plan to conserve and promote regional environmental resources as a local quality of life asset.
  - Provide incentives and promotion for water, energy and waste reduction in both public and private sectors.

**ADDITIONAL APPROACHES**  
Use this space to note additional approaches identified by your group.

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## Part Three: What are some action ideas? (30 minutes)

Let's think about some of our ideas for action.

### Review and add to the list of action ideas:

We have made lists of action ideas as we talked about many ways of improving quality of life and strengthening our economic prosperity.

1. *Take a look at the list of action ideas.* Think quietly for a moment. What else do you think could help our community and our region make progress? What ideas would we like to add?
2. *Brainstorm a list of action ideas with the group.* Try to come up with different kinds of ideas. Some actions might involve community groups. Some could focus on things we can do with institutions (e.g., governments, schools, businesses, nonprofits). And some could focus on things small groups of people or individuals could do.

Remember, action ideas are things we can do. Be specific. For example:

*Instead of suggesting:* "Public services need to be improved."

*Try this:* "Meet with public works department to arrange weekly trash pickup along Elm Street."

### Narrow down the list of action ideas:

Let's begin to narrow down the list. We will do this again in the next session. First, we will combine ideas that are nearly the same. Then, we will think about our community vision and how to make it happen. Talk about the **Questions for Setting Priorities**.

### Questions for Setting Priorities

These questions will help our group set priorities:

1. What five or six ideas seem most real and useful for our local community?
2. What five or six ideas seem most real and useful for the region?
3. Who would work with us on these ideas? Are there things we can really get done?
4. Have these ideas worked before? What other communities are using them?

### FACILITATOR TIPS

#### Note for Part Three

- Help the group brainstorm action ideas. Share the brainstorm guidelines below with the group.
- Record all action ideas on the **Action Ideas** flipchart. Use the speakers' words when recording action ideas.

#### Brainstorm Guidelines

*Brainstorming* is a way for our group to come up with lots of ideas.

*Purpose:* To help us be creative. To come up with many ideas in a short period of time.

*Guidelines:* All ideas are OK. Don't stop to talk about ideas. Don't judge ideas. Build on others' ideas.

*How to do it:* Anyone can offer an idea. You don't need to wait for your "turn." The facilitator will write down every idea.



# Moving to Action

## Introduction

In this session, we will move to action. First, we will review our action ideas from the last session and narrow them down to our top priorities. Next we will look at the assets we have. We will then connect our action ideas with our assets. Finally, we will set priorities for action.

The next step will be to share our action ideas with other study circle participants at the Town Hall Forum.

Review the ground rules.

- Does everyone still agree with the list?
- Do we need to add anything?

## Part One: Reviewing Our Action Ideas (10 minutes)

Post the notes from the Action Ideas brainstorm from Session Three and sum up the ideas for action in the local community and in the region from that discussion.

- Are there additional actions that you would like to offer to the group?

### FACILITATOR TIPS

#### Session Tips

- This session has five parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Post your sheets labeled **Action Ideas** and **Things We are Already Doing**.
- Also post sheets summarizing the outcomes of the previous three sessions: **Our Regional Vision, Successes and Challenges**, and **Promising Approaches**.
- Label three new flipchart sheets and post them: **Regional Assets, Priority Action Ideas for Our Community**, and **Priority Action Ideas for the Twin Counties Region**. The Regional Assets flipchart can be modeled on the chart found on page 29.
- Following the session, you will upload the information from the three new flipcharts, along with a copy of the group's **Pledge Sheet** (see page 31).
- Today, your group will narrow down a list of action ideas to present at the Town Hall Forum. Some ideas may not end up on that list. Tell people that they will have a chance to add their own ideas at the Town Hall Forum.

## Part Two: Narrow Down the Action Ideas (35 minutes)

Look at our list of ideas for action. Now we are going to narrow it down to a few ideas we can work with in our local community and across the Twin Counties Region. Then, we will record these action ideas to take to the Town Hall Forum where people from all the discussion groups will meet to share their ideas.

Consider the following:

1. Which ideas are easiest to get done?
2. Which ideas might help improve quality of life or economic prosperity in the Twin Counties Region? Which ideas are specific to our community?
3. Pick two or three ideas that seem useful and ask the following questions:
  - a. What would it take to make this happen?
  - b. What community assets could we use to move this idea forward?
  - c. What would our next steps be?
  - d. What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?

Choose two or three action ideas for our community and two or three ideas for the Twin Counties Region to take to the Town Hall Forum. They should be things we can do on our own, in groups or in collaboration with local government. People from other groups will also be bringing their ideas to that meeting.

### FACILITATOR TIPS

#### Tips for Part Two

Some groups might get bogged down here. They might get stuck wondering whether to prioritize major projects or things that can be done by community members.

Remind people that both types of ideas are appropriate. They will be prioritizing action ideas for both their local community and the Twin Counties Region.

Steps for prioritizing action ideas:

- Use questions 1 and 2 to help the group talk about the action ideas.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check next to their top three choices on the list of action ideas.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Then, ask people to suggest other ideas to take off the list.
- Repeat this process until you have only two or three ideas left for your local community and two or three ideas for the region. These ideas will be recorded on the **Pledge Statement** on page 31.

**Part Three: Community Assets  
Brainstorm  
(15 minutes)**

Every town or city has strengths or assets. Assets can be people, places or organizations. Whatever makes our community a better place is an asset.

“Brainstorming” is a creative way for a group to come up with lots of ideas in a short amount of time. Build on one another’s ideas. All ideas are OK. Don’t stop to discuss or judge them. The facilitator will write down every idea. Use these headings as a guide:

**FACILITATOR TIPS**

**Tips for Part Three**  
Use these questions to help people start the brainstorm:

- Who has talents and skills that they might offer?
- What groups in the community can help us out?
- What sources of funding do we have in our community?
- What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
- Can you think of anything else?

**COMMUNITY ASSETS**

People	Places	Institutions or Organizations	Funding Sources	Other



**Our Action Ideas to Improve Quality of Life Issues and Economic Prosperity**

**TOGETHER WE HOLD THE KEY TO CHANGE**

**Moving from Challenge ...**

As a group of concerned residents of the following jurisdictions, we've identified these key challenges facing our community and the Twin Counties Region as a whole:

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**To Vision ...**

We have also identified the following three to five words or phrases as representative of the vision we have for the Twin County Region:

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**To Action!**

We suggest the following actions for our local community:

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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We suggest the following actions for the Twin County Region:

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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**Signed:**

Our signatures show our commitment to take these ideas to the Town Hall Forum and to work with others in our community and across the Twin Counties Region on implementation.

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## Part Six: Wrapping Up (10 minutes)

Thank you for taking part in this dialogue. You are making a difference in the community. Use the individual **Pledge Statement** at right to record your responses to participation in our dialogue group.

Please share any thoughts you have on these questions with the group:

- What have you learned in this dialogue?
- What was hard for you during this dialogue? What was helpful?
- Did the dialogue help you identify ways that your community is connected to the Twin Counties Region?
- Has your thinking changed about these issues? If so, how?
- What actions, if any, might you take on your own? Is there something you can do in the next few weeks or months? In the next year? If you wish, you can fill out the personal action card on the next page.

### FACILITATOR TIPS

#### In Closing

- Thank people for coming to the dialogue and for working to make a difference in their community and the Twin County Region.
- Ask if anyone has questions about the Town Hall Forum.
- Tell your group where and when the Town Hall Forum will take place. Let them know how important it is for them to come!

#### Following the Session

- Use the project website to submit a summary of your group's Pledge Statement, including key challenges, vision words and action ideas.
- Return extra materials or supplies along with a copy of the **Pledge Statement** signed by your group members to your local project contact.

**My Pledge to Work to Improve Quality of Life and Economic Prosperity in Our Region**

**I AM THE KEY TO CHANGE**

**I will talk about what I learned during this dialogue with the following people:**

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**I will ask** \_\_\_\_\_ number of people to attend the Town Hall Forum.

**I will ...**

- \_\_\_ join an Action Group at the Town Hall Forum.
- \_\_\_ join or volunteer with an organization work on local quality of life or economic prosperity issues.
- \_\_\_ encourage my elected officials to build working relationships with other localities to partner on these issues.

**In addition, I will take the following actions:**

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**Signed:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# A1. Facilitation Tips

## Overview

A study circle facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. But the facilitator should be the person best prepared for the discussion. This means:

- Understand the goals of the study circle.
- Be familiar with the subject.
- Think ahead of time about how the discussion might go.
- Prepare questions to help the group consider the subject.

If you are well prepared, it will make it easier for you to give your full attention to how the group is acting and interacting, and to what individuals in the group are saying.

Here are a few more tips:

## Stay neutral!

The most important thing to remember is that, as a facilitator, you should not share your personal views or try to push your own agenda on the issue. You are there to serve the discussion, not to join it.

- Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.
- Well-placed humor is usually appreciated. But, make sure you do not offend anyone or make hurtful jokes.

## Explain the purpose of the study circle and help the group set ground rules.

At the beginning of the study circle, remind everyone that the purpose of the study circle is to work with one another to look at the issue in a democratic way. Also remind them that your role is to remain neutral, keep the discussion focused, and guide the conversation according to the ground rules.

Start with the basic ground rules listed in Session One, then ask participants to add their own ideas.

## Stay aware of and assist the group process.

- Remember, your main role is to help the group stay focused on the subject.
- Help the discussion flow by keeping track of how the participants are communicating with each other —

who has spoken, who hasn't spoken and who needs more time to make a point. Make sure everyone gets a fair hearing.

- Consider splitting up into smaller groups. This will help put people at ease.
- Only interfere with the discussion if you have to. Don't allow the group to turn to you for answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let participants respond directly to each other. Always be thinking about how to move the discussion forward.
- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up the most important points that have come out in the discussion.
- Remember that some people are uncomfortable reading out loud. Don't go "around the circle" reading passages; instead, ask for volunteers.
- Don't be afraid of silence! People sometimes need time to think before they respond. Try counting silently to 10 before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Don't let anyone take over the conversation; try to involve everyone.
- Remember that a study circle is not a debate. It's a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the ground rules.
- Keep track of time!

## Help the group look at various points of view.

- Make it clear to participants that you will never take sides on the issue; your role as a facilitator is to be a fair and neutral resource.
- Use the discussion guide to help participants consider a wide range of views. You might ask participants to consider a point of view that hasn't come up in the discussion. Ask the group to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem.
- Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs.
- Help participants identify common ground, but don't try to force agreement.

## Ask open-ended questions that don't lead to easy answers.

Open-ended questions are questions that can't be answered with a quick "yes" or "no." They push people to think about why they believe what they do. Open-ended questions also encourage people to look for connections between different ideas.

Get familiar with the following questions. They are a great resource during any study circle.

### General questions:

- What seems to be the key point here?
- Do you agree with that? Why?
- What do other people think of this idea?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What experiences with this can you share with the group?
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- How might others see this issue?
- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why?
- How does this make you feel?

## Questions to use when there is disagreement:

- What do you think s/he is saying?
- What bothers you most about this?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What is blocking the discussion?
- What might you be willing to give up in order to come to some agreement?
- What don't you agree with?
- What do you find compelling about that perspective?
- What is it about that position that you cannot live with?
- Could you say more about what you think?
- What makes this so hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

## Questions to use when people are feeling hopeless:

- Say a little about how that makes you feel.
- Is there any hope?
- Can the problems that you are talking about be solved in any way? How?

## Close with a summary of the discussion and set the stage for the next meeting. When the circle is over, be sure to provide time for evaluation.

Give people a chance to talk about the most important things they got out of the discussion. You might ask them to share new ideas or thoughts they've had as a result of the discussion.

- What are the key points of agreement and disagreement about today's session?
- What have you heard today that has made you think, or has touched you in some way?

If you will be meeting again, remind the group of the readings and subject for the next session.

If the groups are meeting because they hope to have an impact on community decision-making, be sure to document what happens in the discussions. In many study circles, participants record common concerns and points of agreement and disagreement, as well as ideas for action steps.

After the last session, provide some time for the group to fill out a written evaluation. This allows participants to comment on the process and give feedback to the facilitator.

## Thank everyone for their contributions!

## A2. Working with Cultural Differences<sup>1</sup>

### **Be aware of the ways that cultural differences show up when people from different cultures interact:**

#### **Communication styles**

- Verbal communication — shades of meaning differ (even in the same language) from one culture to another. Volume: shouting may mean a person is excited, not angry.
- Non-verbal communication: facial expressions and body language; personal space (seating arrangements matter!); sense of time; touching.

#### **Attitudes toward conflict**

- In some cultures, people deal with conflict directly.
- In other cultures, face-to-face conflict is embarrassing, and people prefer to work things out quietly, perhaps in writing.

#### **Approaches to completing tasks**

- People have different notions about time and relationship building. In some cultures, more value is placed on getting down to work first, and building relationships along the way.
- Other cultures start by building relationships; then, people are ready to work together to complete the task.

#### **Decision-making styles**

- In some cultures, managers delegate responsibility for decision making to an assistant.
- In some cultures, people value being able to make decisions themselves.
- Sometimes, group decisions are made by majority rule.
- Sometimes, groups make decisions by consensus.

#### **Approaches to “knowing”**

- People in some cultures learn by measuring, and counting — quantifying things.
- In other cultures, “knowing” comes from experience and intuitive reasoning.

### **Helping multicultural groups function well:**

Make people feel welcome. At the beginning, give participants time to share information about their culture.

- Ask them to bring something to the dialogue that helps people learn about their culture.
- Ask people to tell the story of their name/their whole name/all of their names.

Give each person an equal amount of time.

Think about how your own culture and communication style is affecting the conversation. You may need to ask the questions in a different way.

Set a tone of unity. Help people see their similarities as well as their differences.

Help people understand that there is no one “right way” to communicate.

Help group members appreciate different communication styles. Talk together about things like body language and personal space, about traditions of listening, and speaking out.

Avoid stereotyping. Cultural norms don’t apply to all the individuals within a culture.

Help the group understand that no one can represent his or her entire culture.

Try to build empathy and understanding among group members, but remind them that no one can know exactly how it feels to be in someone else’s shoes.

After a couple of sessions, ask participants how culture affects the way they view the exercises and ideas that come up in the discussion.

After the group develops a list of options for action, ask about the role of culture and race in developing and carrying out the options.

### **Working with interpreters:**

Remind interpreters that their job is to translate accurately, not to add their own opinions.

Give interpreters written materials ahead of time, and go over the process with them.

Make sure the interpreter feels comfortable letting the facilitator know if s/he needs more time.

Speak in short sentences and keep ideas simple. (This gives the interpreter time to catch up.)

Pay attention to the interpreter. Even if you don’t speak the language, you can tell if s/he is translating everything or not.

After every session, ask interpreters to translate ground rules and notes that were posted on newsprint.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from an essay, “Working on Common Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges,” by Marcelle E. DuPraw and Marya Axner in *Toward a More Perfect Union in An Age of Diversity*.

## A3. Literacy Tips

### Working with groups where literacy is a concern:

- At the start, give a simple explanation of how the dialogue will work, and tell participants the goal of each session. (Each time you meet, restate the goal of the session.)
- If the people in your group can't read, or have trouble reading, limit your use of the flip chart.
- If participants are required to fill out forms, assign someone to ask the questions and fill out the forms with/for them.
- Be prepared to read aloud to the group, if participants are uncomfortable doing that.
- Ask people to rephrase or summarize to make sure everyone understands.
- Avoid using jargon or acronyms. When these terms come up and people look puzzled, ask: "What does that mean?"
- In between sessions, check with participants to make sure they know that what they have shared is very important to the group.
- Give people extra time to collect their thoughts before they talk. Remember, this may be the first time they have spoken in public, and/or in a different language.
- Consider putting people in small groups, but don't separate people by language groups. (You may need more than one interpreter per dialogue.)

## A4. Note-Taking Tips

### The role of a recorder:

Every dialogue needs a recorder — someone to take notes. This person's job is to listen carefully, keep track of the big ideas that come up, and list them, in categories, on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them.

- If there are two facilitators for your group, they can take turns recording.
- If a volunteer takes notes, make sure it is not the same person each session. (The recorder is too busy to take part in the discussion.)

### Note taking serves many purposes:

- It helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along.
- It provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion.
- Notes from all the dialogues in your program can be turned into a report that summarizes what you have done.
- *Caution:* People should talk to each other, not to the recorder.

### How to do it:

Capture big ideas and themes, not every word. Use the words of the speaker as closely as possible. Check with the group to make sure your notes are correct.

Some groups organize their records this way:

- Areas where we agree
- Areas where we disagree
- Areas that are mixed
- Action ideas
- Things we are already doing

Write neatly so everyone can read the notes. Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions. After each session, share the notes with the program organizers so they can follow your progress.

# Twin Counties Region Information Sheet

## Population Change (2000-2009)

	Percent Change
North Carolina	16.1%
Edgecombe County	-6.3%
Nash County	8.0%
Twin Counties Region	2.5%

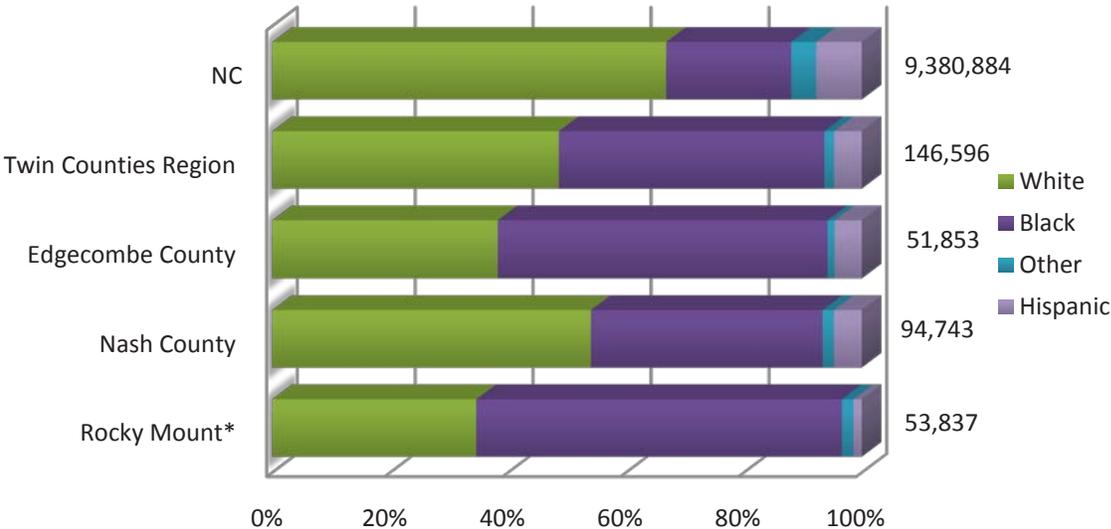
The table at left summarizes population change between 2000 and 2009. While North Carolina’s population grew 16.1%, the Twin Counties Region grew by only 2.5%. Within the region, Edgecombe County’s population actually declined.

During the same time period, in spite of its overall population gain, the Twin Counties Region as a whole lost 16.1% of its prime working age individuals who were between the ages of 25 and 44.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, December 2009.

## Race and Ethnic Population Distribution (2009)

The chart at right summarizes population distribution by race and ethnicity in the State of North Carolina and in the Twin Counties Region.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, December 2009.

## Employment and Job Creation

The Twin Counties Region experienced a net job loss between 1990 and 2007. The primary driver for the losses was the fact that far more jobs were lost through firms going out of business than were created through firm startups.

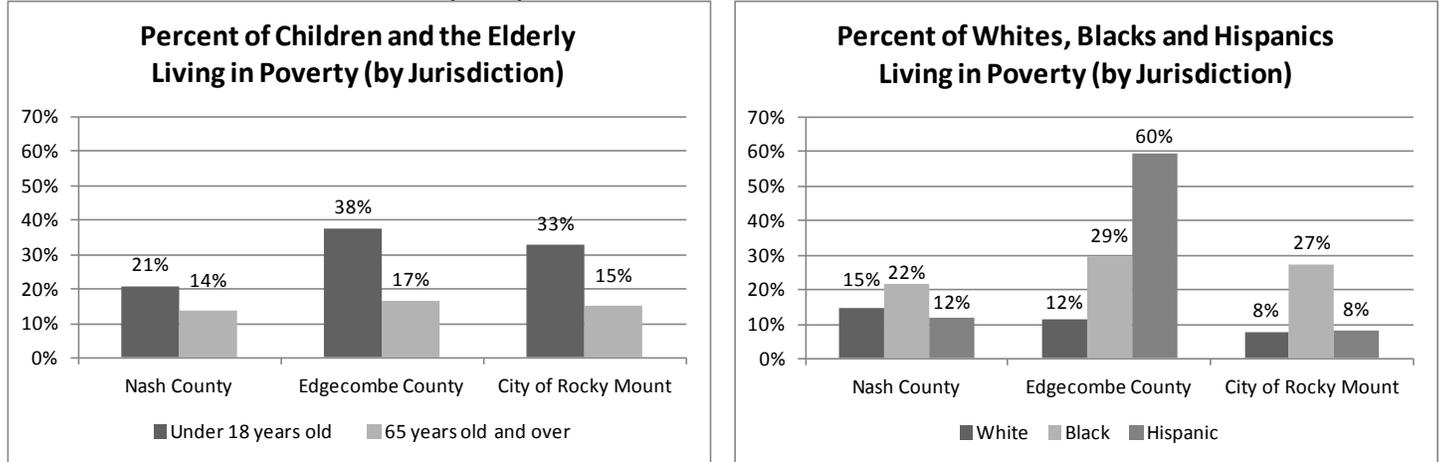
During the same time period, over half of the jobs created (56 percent) were the result of employment generated by newly created firms and most of the remaining jobs were created through existing firms expanding their workforces (43 percent).

Source: Information on this page has been adapted or summarized from the "Twin Counties Competitiveness Assessment" published in 2010 and conducted by Dr. James Johnson with the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## Poverty (2010)

Experiences of poverty vary across the Twin Counties Region by geography, age, race and ethnicity. In 2010, 14.8% of Nash County residents, and 23.1% of Edgecombe County residents were living in poverty. In the City of Rocky Mount, which includes residents of both counties, 20.0% of residents were living in poverty. The following two charts provide additional information about poverty by age and race or ethnicity.

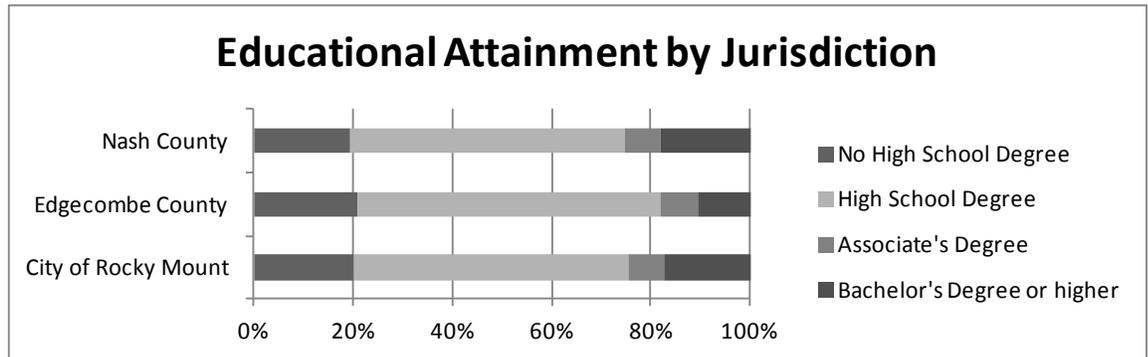
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Three Year Estimates (2008-2010).



## Educational Attainment (2010)

The chart at right identifies educational attainment for the population of adults 25 years and over by locality.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Three Year Estimates (2008-2010).



## Infant Health (2010)

The table at right summarizes data on low birth weight babies and infant mortality.

Low birth weight is a leading cause of death before 28 days of age. Low birth weight infants are also more likely to experience long-term disability or die during the first year of life than are infants of normal weight.

In the United States, the leading causes of infant mortality are congenital malformations and disorders related to short gestation or low birth weight. Economic well-being, nutrition, sanitation, and knowledge about infant care can also be contributing factors.

Sources: (1) North Carolina Vital Statistics 2010, Vol. 1. (2) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Child Health USA 2010. Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010.

		Low Birth Weight Rate (per 100 births)	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 births)
<b>Nash County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>6</b>
	White	8.8	0
	Black	12.8	3.4
	Hispanic	3.2	0
<b>Edgecombe County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>5.4</b>
	White	9.2	0
	Black	15.8	8.2
	Hispanic	3.6	0
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>7</b>
	White	7.8	5.3
	Black	14.1	12.7
	Hispanic	6.3	5



# Acknowledgements

## Materials Development

The **Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process Discussion Guide** and the **Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Participant's Discussion Guide** are an adaptation of materials produced by Everyday Democracy. These guides were developed by Skeo Solutions, with support from Everyday Democracy, for the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process. Session 4 includes materials adapted with permission from "Creating a Vibrant Hartford: Adult Learning as a Pathway to Change," developed by the Hartford (Conn.) Public Library and Everyday Democracy.

The City of Rocky Mount, Edgecombe County and Nash County have engaged **Skeo Solutions** to facilitate the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process. For more information: [www.skeo.com](http://www.skeo.com)



**Everyday Democracy** is an organization that helps local communities explore ways for all kinds of people to think, talk and work together to solve problems. Building on the real-life challenges and successes of communities, Everyday Democracy creates flexible tools and processes that are widely used and adapted in the United States and beyond. For more information: [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)



## Additional Information

For additional information on the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process, please visit the project website:

<http://twincountiesvisioning.skeo.com>

## Special Thanks

Special thanks go to the many reviewers for their assistance in the development of this guide:

**Everyday Democracy Advisor:** Malana Rogers Bursen  
**Facilitation Trainer:** Gwendolyn P. Whiting

### TCV Core Team

Ann Wall, Assistant City Manager, Rocky Mount  
Eric Evans, Assistant County Manager, Edgecombe County  
John Gessaman, President, Carolina Gateways Partnership  
Ken Graves, Planning and Development Interim Director, Rocky Mount  
Lea Henry, Program Officer, North Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations  
Nancy Nixon, Senior Planner, Nash County  
Ola Pittman, Planning Director, Edgecombe County  
Peter Varney, Assistant City Manager, Rocky Mount  
Rosemary Dorsey, Planning and Development Director, Nash County  
Shearin Johnson, Interim Chief Operating Officer, Rocky Mount Area Chamber of Commerce  
Sue Perry-Cole, President, North Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations

### TCV Community Partners Coalition Co-Chairs

Donald Boswell, Edgecombe County  
Robert Beaman, Nash County  
Sue Perry-Cole, City of Rocky Mount

### TCV Community Partners Coalition Members

Bobbie Martin, Edgecombe County  
Chet Mottershead, Rocky Mount  
Deborah Lamm, Edgecombe County  
Ernest Taylor, Edgecombe County  
Gwendolyn Pitt, Edgecombe County  
James Alston, Nash County  
James Gailliard, Rocky Mount  
Jeffrey Batts, Rocky Mount  
Jerry Spruell, Edgecombe County  
John Hazel, Nash County  
Johnny Bass, Nash County  
Joseph Powell, Nash County  
Joyce Dickens, Rocky Mount  
Lu Harvey Lewis, Nash County  
Mike Hancock, Nash County  
Patsy McGhee, Nash County  
Quinsella Bunn, Rocky Mount  
Randi Dikeman, Edgecombe County  
Tripp Evans, Rocky Mount



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