



TWIN COUNTIES VISIONING
FOR A BETTER LIFE

A Participant's Discussion Guide
for the
Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process

April 2012

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 23rd and May 27th. 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 13th or Saturday, April 14th) 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 21st 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.

This page intentionally left blank.

Table of Contents

Welcome	1
Introduction	
What will the visioning process look like?	4
How do study circles work?	6
Local Assets and Issues	8
Session Materials	
Session 1: Making Connections and Sharing a Vision	10
Twin Counties Region Information Sheet	11
Session 2: Studying the Problem	13
Session 3: Finding Solutions	16
Session 4: Moving to Action	20

What will the visioning process look like?

Overview

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. 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.



What will the process look like?

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 to first develop a shared, regional vision and then explore a range of strategies 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.

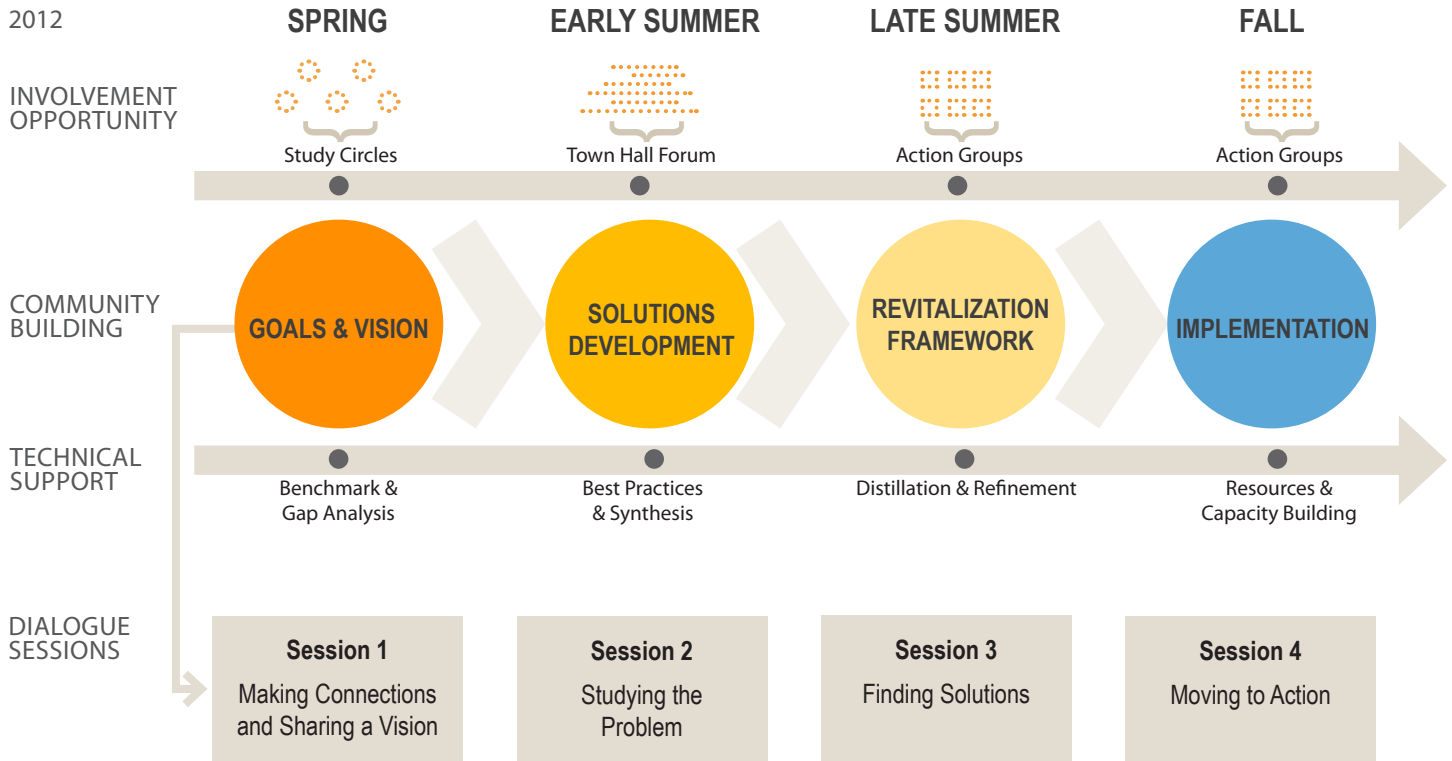
Who should get involved?

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: 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.

PROJECT DIAGRAM



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 above 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.

Study Circles Fact Sheet

Using dialogue to create change

The leaders of the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process needed an effective process design for fostering social, political and economic changes in people, organizations, communities and the region.

With these goals in mind, the leadership of the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process selected a consultant that recommended using the study circle model of dialogue.

- The study circle process recognizes that community residents should be the agents of their own change.
- Study circles focus dialogue, debate and negotiation on issues that are meaningful to members of the community, not just to outside technical experts.
- The study circles are small dialogue groups where neighbors and friends, and even people with different backgrounds and views, can come together to exchange views about who they are, what they want and how they can get it.

The study circles will help us:

- Involve everyone. Demonstrate that the whole community is welcome and needed.
- Promote diversity with participation. Make sure we reach out to all kinds of people.
- Share knowledge, resources, power and decision-making.
- Combine dialogue and deliberation. Create public talk that builds understanding and explores a range of solutions.
- Connect deliberative dialogue to social, political and policy change.

Where will this lead?

In your dialogue, you will be creating a vision for change in the Twin Counties Region. During the last session, 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 to carry out these ideas.

This page intentionally left blank.

Local Assets & Issues

As a starting point for the visioning 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 assets, issues and priorities for the region.

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

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

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.

For the Next Session

Before the next session, please do the following:

Think about the visioning words we chose.

- 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 community we described in our vision?

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?

Spend some time completing the Regional Report Card on page 13 of this discussion guide.

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.

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.

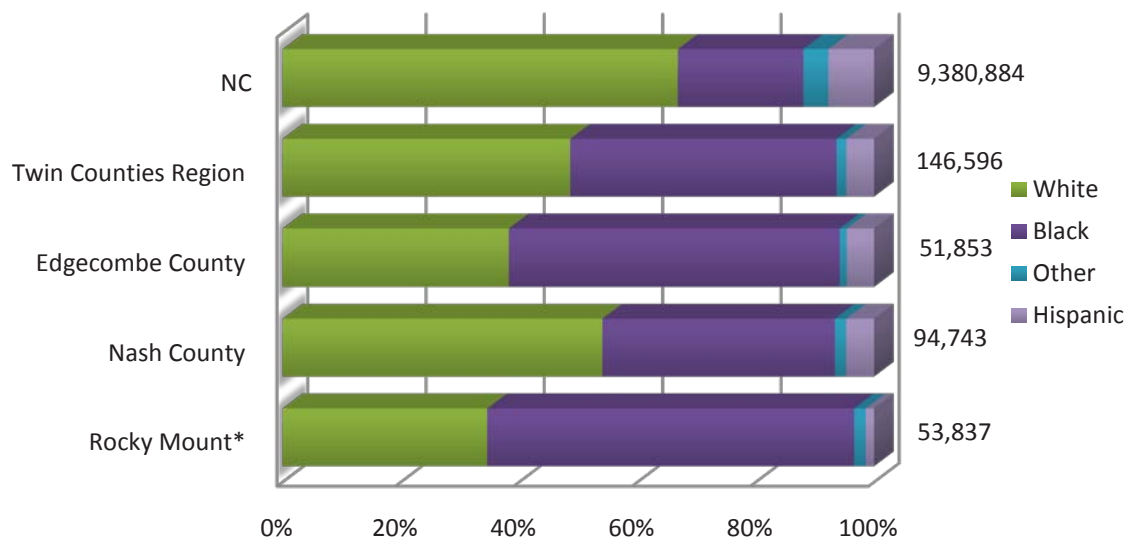
During the same time period, in spite of its overall population gain, the Twin Counties Region as a whole lost 16.1% of its prime working age individuals who were between the ages of 25 and 44.

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.

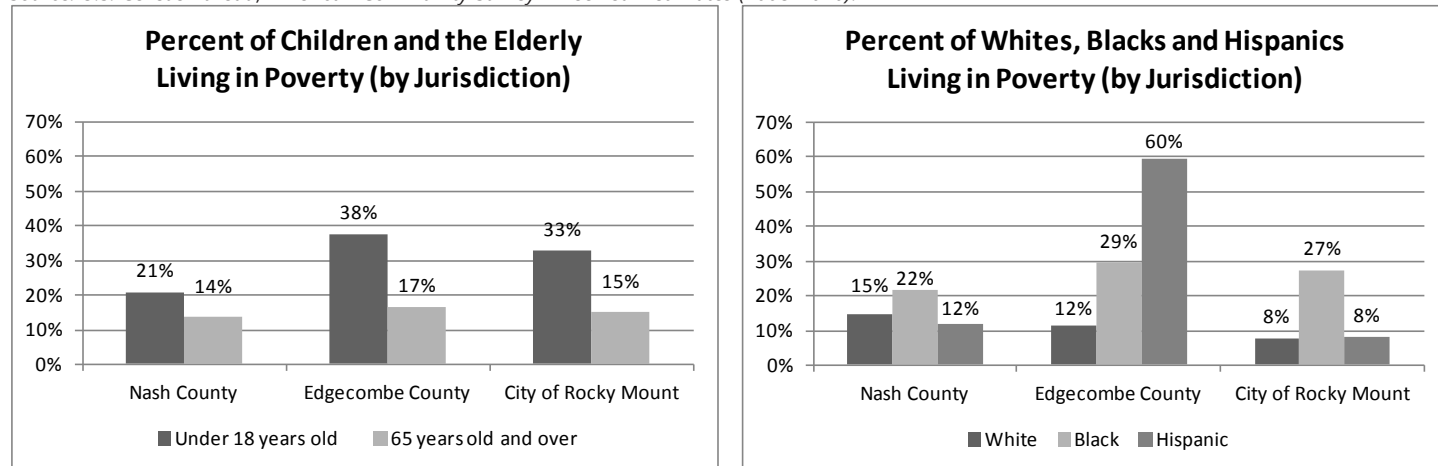
During the same time period, over half of the jobs created (56 percent) were the result of employment generated by newly created firms and most of the remaining jobs were created through existing firms expanding their workforces (43 percent).

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.

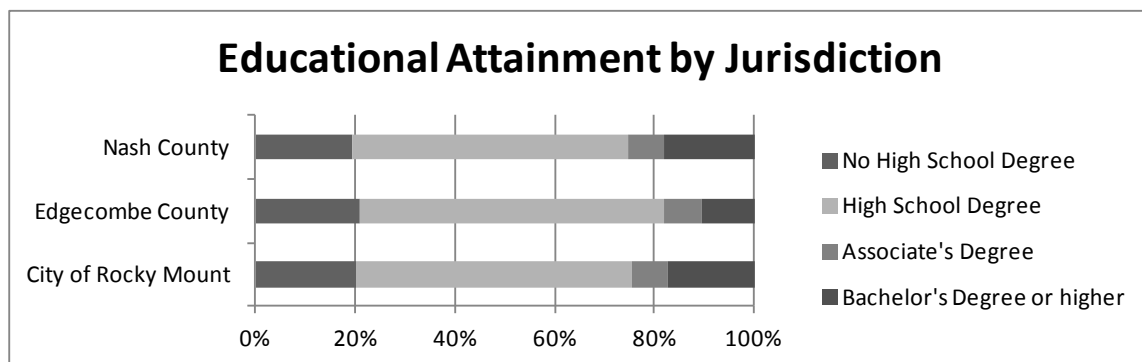
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Three Year Estimates (2008-2010).



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)
Nash County	Total	9.8	6
	White	8.8	0
	Black	12.8	3.4
	Hispanic	3.2	0
Edgecombe County	Total	13.1	5.4
	White	9.2	0
	Black	15.8	8.2
	Hispanic	3.6	0
Statewide	Total	9.1	7
	White	7.8	5.3
	Black	14.1	12.7
	Hispanic	6.3	5

Studying the Problem

TWIN COUNTIES REGION REPORT CARD

Category	Statement	A	B	C	D	F	Q
Competitiveness	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.						
Leadership	Our community leaders (in government, financial institutions, education, business, etc.) are partnering effectively to improve economic prosperity and quality of life across our region.						
Quality of Life Conditions	All members of our community experience a quality of life standard that supports their ability to compete successfully in the workforce.						
Race Relations	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.						
Education	In our region every child receives a quality education, and the courses offered prepare children for locally relevant trades or for higher education.						
Health and Health Care	Our region promotes healthy lifestyles and offers a health care system that serves the needs of all our residents.						
Retaining Youth	Our young people are able to find fulfilling employment and stay in the Twin Counties Region if they desire.						
Rocky Mount Electric Costs	Electric expenses in City of Rocky Mount are comparable to other regions across the state.						
Job Creation and Talent Recruitment	Local talent and entrepreneurship are appreciated and fostered in the Twin Counties Region.						
Elder Care	There are appropriate services and recreational activities to ensure a comfortable lifestyle for the seniors in our community.						
Positive Mindsets and Community Image	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.						
Sustainability	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 it 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

Approaches Exercise Instructions

In the last session, we 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 at right to think about the different approaches listed on pages 17-19.

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).

Grow the elder care economy

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.

- 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.

Leverage the internet to promote the region

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.

- 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.

Rebrand as a sustainable community

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:

- 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.

- 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.

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

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. On the left side, there is a vertical margin line, creating a narrow left margin. The paper appears to be from a notebook or a standard ruled document.

Moving to Action

Community Assets Exercise

Instructions

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:

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:

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:

To Action!

We suggest the following actions for our local community:

1.

2.

3.

We suggest the following actions for the Twin County Region:

1.

2.

3.

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.

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:

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:

Signed:

Name: _____

Date: _____

DISCUSSION NOTES

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

DISCUSSION NOTES

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook or legal stationery. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

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



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



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

