

Georgia Workforce Resiliency Guide



Connecting Talent with Opportunity
A proud partner of the American[★]JobCenter[®] network

Powered by  **TCSG**



Carl Vinson
Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



Acknowledgements:

The Georgia Workforce Resiliency Guide was developed by *Bennett Hardee* and *Rebecca Hunt* of the **University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government**. Editing by *Hannah Hussain* and design by *Rosa Zavala*. Thanks to the stakeholders from across the state who shared their stories and insights for this project.

Financial and project support provided by Technical College System of Georgia. This workforce product was funded by a grant awarded by the US Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration. The product was created by the recipient and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the US Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. This product is copyrighted by the institution that created it.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Georgia Relay Services-TTY/TDD Dial 711

This guide is intended as a technical assistance resource for workforce professionals. It is not a substitute for federal or state law, regulation, or official policy. In the event of a conflict between this guide and applicable federal or state requirements, the applicable law, regulation, or official policy controls.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 4

Building a Strong Foundation 8

Recovery after Impact 15

Appendices 19



INTRODUCTION

What is workforce resiliency and why does it matter?

The US Economic Development Administration defines economic resiliency as strategies “to better prepare regions to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stress it may experience.”
(US Economic Development Administration)

While much of the content of this guide falls squarely in the realm of economic resiliency and good community and economic development practices, there have been several specific disruptions to the workforce system that warrant a targeted discussion of workforce resiliency.

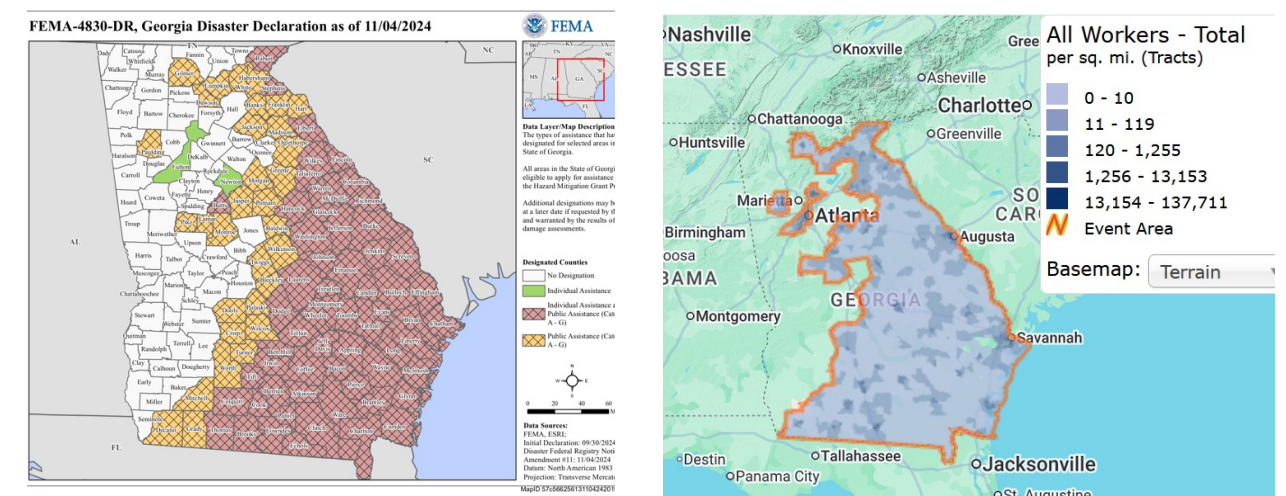
For the purposes of this guide, we will define workforce resilience as “a community’s ability to prepare for, adapt to, and recover from economic or environmental shocks through an agile, skilled, and supported labor pool.”

There are three main portions of this definition to unpack.

First, the definition includes the idea that workforce resiliency helps a community prepare for, adapt to, and recover from shocks. Research for this guide shed light on two distinct types of resilience efforts: steady state and response. Steady-state initiatives are initiatives that communities can undertake regularly before a shock occurs that help communities prepare. Response efforts are efforts designed to focus on the long-term recovery of a community after a shock. Adapting happens when there is a regular cycle of preparation for, recovering from, and then learning from workforce shocks. This guide will share a number of ideas on both steady-state and response efforts.

This definition of workforce resilience also includes both economic and environmental shocks. In recent years, Georgia’s labor force and communities that house workers have been stretched. Georgia has seen rapid economic growth, with companies locating and seeking to hire hundreds or thousands of individuals in nearly every corner of the state. On the other hand, some Georgia communities have faced major industry closures as economies have shifted and industries have rapidly changed. On top of these economic changes, there have been major environmental shocks, such as Hurricane Helene in September of 2024 which impacted over four million Georgians in disaster designated areas. Data from OnTheMap for Emergency Management from the US Census Bureau shows that nearly half of these individuals (1.8 million) held jobs in that area and almost one million were children under the age of 18. These communities have felt firsthand the importance of preparing for and recovering as quickly as possible from disruptions.

Image 1. Hurricane Helene Disaster Designated Areas



Finally, focusing efforts on building an agile, skilled, and supported labor pool is a notable consideration. The average person remains in the labor market for about 40 years and, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the median employee tenure is just shy of four years, which means an individual will hold about ten different jobs in his or her lifetime. In order to move around from job to job or be prepared to take on new opportunities when an employer faces a shock, employees must remain current on their skills and show agility in adapting to changing skill needs. If workers trail in skill acquisition or cannot adjust to new trends, then they may find themselves without a job or struggling to find an opportunity that fits their needs and abilities. These workers may also be less engaged in the local community and more reliant on public assistance.

Proactive workforce resiliency relies on partnerships to ensure local workers have the skills they need to meet local demand, both now and in the future. Additionally, many workers are managing a career as well as family responsibilities, such as caring for children or older individuals in their family. Community initiatives, such as flexible and quality childcare or reliable communication about changes in schedules, can go a long way in supporting workers and allowing them to be their best in the workplace and at home.



About this Guide

This guide was developed by the **Carl Vinson Institute of Government** at the **University of Georgia** with support from the **Technical College System of Georgia**. While many groups have sought to provide planning resources, especially following Hurricane Helene, University researchers and public service faculty saw a broader need beyond traditional emergency management. This guide concentrates on building community resiliency for the longer-term recovery that occurs in the weeks, months, and years following local or regional shocks. All the findings, recommendations, and tools in the guide were inspired by or came directly from community and business partners across Georgia in the aftermath of their own local shocks.

The Georgia Workforce Resiliency Guide seeks to help communities big and small consider how they can support local companies, individuals, and the community at large to be ready for whatever may come their way and ensure their labor pool is skilled and supported. The guide itself is broken into two parts: 1) building a strong foundation and 2) recovery after impact. Each section includes several key themes as well as brief vignettes from Georgia communities or companies. In addition to the guide, there are a number of appendices with resources and worksheets to help communities and local businesses plan for shocks and guide their recovery. Fillable versions of these documents can be found online at cviog.uga.edu/workforceresilience.



BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

This portion of the guide will focus on steady state initiatives. The four key themes of this section include: **(1) strengthening communication and relationships**, **(2) understanding the local landscape**, **(3) building a robust economy**, and **(4) fostering long term resiliency**. More details on each theme can be found below.

Strengthening Communication and Relationships

Research for this guide suggested that the single most impactful thing a community can do to increase its workforce resilience is to build strong relationships and coordinate communication. As several community members mentioned during guide research, ***“you never want the first time you have to call someone to be in the middle of a disaster.”*** Having a good sense of who represents your local workforce ecosystem is important. In most communities, that preparation would include the list of organizations / individuals below, but preparation varies in each community.

- ◆ Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Development Authority(ies)
- ◆ Technical College
- ◆ WorkSource Georgia
- ◆ K-12 schools (Superintendent, CTAE director)
- ◆ Post Secondary institutions (other than TCSG, if applicable; e.g., USG institutions)
- ◆ Business and industry
- ◆ Local utilities/co-ops
- ◆ Local government
- ◆ Community partnerships such as Family Connection
- ◆ Non-profit and faith-based organizations

It is important to not only know the leaders of these institutions individually but also find ways for this whole group or portions of the group to meet regularly to build open lines of communication and trust. Even if this group already exists or meets regularly, building in an annual resiliency meeting is a good way to ensure the topic of workforce resilience is refreshed each year and planning efforts are up to date. Timing of such meetings will depend on the community, but for those in hurricane prone areas, consider meeting in the summer before the season starts; for those with larger snow/ice concerns, conducting a meeting in the fall before temperatures drop may prove useful. For sample agenda topics and other resources for an annual resiliency meeting, see Appendix A (Workforce & Economic Resiliency Pre-Planning Framework).

Beyond community relationships and communication, building strong lines within organizations can also go a long way. Ensuring several key leaders have access to a physical list of all employees with reliable contact and other critical information is helpful. Organizations that can assess and prioritize their company and employee needs can help increase recovery efficiency and potentially reduce burden on local officials.

Below are several brief examples of innovative communication practices that arose from research for this guide:

Innovative Practices in Communication

0 for “Okay”, 1 for “In Distress”

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Helene, after accessing any site damages, a large manufacturer was asked to take stock of their employees. This company had an existing employee notification system that they used to push out news via text, but they were able to turn it around and use it to ask each of their several hundred employees for their status. Employees could text “0” for okay and “1” for in distress. This allowed the company to quickly understand the workforce impacts, prioritize their response, and work with local partners to get help more quickly.

Outside the Bubble

Rarely does a community have the opportunity to learn from a response and quickly apply those lessons like Valdosta did when they were hit by two hurricanes in less than a month’s time: Debby in August 2024 followed by Helene in September 2024. One local organization said they learned that if they had enough lead time, they could send someone “outside the bubble” or beyond the expected impact zone, to ensure they had power and communication. This distance and ability to not focus on personal impacts helped that point of contact connect with resources in the early days following the storms. While it is hard to know where is safe and you never want to put people at risk, where it is possible, this creative, and somewhat counterintuitive idea, can help bypass bottlenecks and increase efficiency of recovery efforts.

Note: For templates on conducting local outreach to business leaders post-disaster, see Appendix B (Business Disaster Contact Tree). For a template to manage internal team communications during a disruption, see Appendix C (Internal Employee Call Log).

Understand the local landscape

Whether you are new to a community or work where you have deep roots, one of the best ways you can help build a strong foundation for workforce resiliency is by understanding the local landscape. Much like knowing who to call and having strong relationships, knowing what is going on in your community is very important. Two ways to get a better understanding of the trends and potential issues impacting your community are through labor market data analysis and vulnerability assessments.

Labor market data analysis can help identify community strengths and weaknesses, particularly when it comes to potential economic trends. Assessing your labor market data for emerging trends can be a daunting task if you don’t regularly look at these data, but many of the partners discussed in the previous section also have knowledge of labor market information and can assist in your efforts.

Data analysis should include looking at data pertinent to major industries, occupations, educational programs, commuting patterns, and demographic trends for both your individual county as well as your region. While having a strong workforce within your county lines is powerful, economies are interconnected, and trends in neighboring communities may have spillover effects, both positive and negative.

Resources for Workforce Data:

Labor Market Explorer from Georgia Department of Labor
www.explorer.gdol.ga.gov

WorkSource Georgia can provide customize and up-to-date LMI through the WorkSource Georgia Portal.
https://www.worksourcegaportal.com/vosnet/MenuLandingPage.aspx?cat=MENU_LABORMARKET

Georgia Workforce and Economic Resiliency Center at CVIOG
<https://cviog.uga.edu/services/georgia-workforce-and-economic-resilience-center/index.html>

After looking at larger community and regional trends in existing labor market data, leaders can focus on specific **local vulnerabilities** using a vulnerability assessment. These tools can be helpful in identifying potential issues your community could face. These assessments can be done at several levels, including at the individual organization level as well as from a greater community lens. Community Emergency Management Agency (EMA) directors are likely already doing community wide assessments on physical assets and areas of concern, but thinking about vulnerabilities in a very broad nature can help identify less typical or critical areas that may need support in the long-term recovery phase.

On the individual organization or company level, vulnerabilities may look like physical concerns such as the location of an office relative to flood plains, financial concerns that may include not having significant reserves to survive unforeseen circumstances/shocks, or personnel related issues like minimal staffing or a lack of cross-training, and so much more. These internal exercises can help identify weaknesses and open doors for new partnerships to shore up these areas.



Note: For an individual business vulnerability assessment, see Appendix D (Simple Hazard and Vulnerability Assessment for Businesses). For a community-wide analysis, see Appendix E (Community At-Large Hazard and Vulnerability Assessment Form) to guide regional workforce planning.

Robust Economy

Another key steady-state theme is working to build a robust local and regional economy. This theme includes efforts such as existing industry programs, supply chain support, and deliberate industrial diversification tactics.

It is important to keep a pulse on the **existing industry** in your area. Know which local employers may have plans for expansion or otherwise have concerns or needs that could be met locally. Some communities choose to have formal Business Retention and Expansion Programs (BREPs) with existing industry surveys or ambassadors; others find regular meetings with large and influential business and industry leaders help to build trust and keep lines of communication open. Regardless of what the program looks like, formalizing this process can help ensure that changes in leadership do not hinder communication and trust. This protection is key to ensure your local workforce is resilient and that local stakeholders can be prepared for any potential shocks.

While many decisions influence where local business and industry procure their supplies, there has been a push to shorten **supply chains** to reduce the risks associated with getting these necessary inputs. Even if a community does not have a major employer of its own, the community can take advantage of this shift. If a county can work regionally to understand current and future needs of regional employers, it may be able to capitalize and attract suppliers or otherwise provide support resources.

The final part of building a robust economy is **diversification**. Not every industry is a good fit in every community, but relying on a single industry or too many companies with similar vulnerabilities can itself be a vulnerability for your community or region. Using localized data, community vision, and asset-based planning to drive target industries and local economic development strategic planning can help all stakeholders embrace a future that relies on a variety of industries. One way to identify potential areas for diversification is to look at the existing skills that your workforce and education/training providers have in your area. Even if industries seem significantly different, they may have overlapping workforce and/or skill needs which can, in turn, help with long-term workforce resiliency.

For assistance with BREP: Georgia Department of Economic Development – Regional Project Managers
<https://georgia.org/about-us/meet-the-department/gc-contacts>

Long-term Resiliency

The final theme in building a strong foundation is building long-term resiliency. While long-term resiliency is closely tied to the local and regional economy, this aspect focuses on the current and future workers in the community. Long-term resiliency informs initiatives such as workforce pipeline planning and upskilling efforts.

Building strong **workforce pipelines** means starting with early learning, such as quality childcare and literacy, and building through K-12 education, including Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) and Adult Education programs, and into post-secondary education where needed, so that all young adults have pathways to good jobs. Depending on opportunities locally, schools and training providers may have to think regionally when it comes to these workforce pipelines as well. Strong workforce pipelines are built **throughout** the earlier themes of this section, particularly through partnerships and communication. Establishing feedback loops from business and industry to educational partners and back is the best way to ensure programs meet local needs and keep up with trends in a particular area or industry.

Top State for Talent

A key driver in state workforce development efforts is the Top State for Talent Initiative. This cross-agency movement helps to guide workforce alignment through the creation of statewide and regional high demand career lists.

More information on High Demand Career lists and Top State for Talent can be found here: topstatefortalent.georgia.gov/

Upskilling is equally important to build long term workforce resilience because, even with robust workforce pipelines, there will always be a need for individuals to retrain or upskill as work changes and technology increases. Employees and employers can access additional training in many ways, but especially through the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG).

TCSG offers a variety of upskilling opportunities through their traditional credit programs, which provide students with a credential after completing a program. These credentials can range from curricula lasting anywhere from several weeks up to two years. Outside of traditional programs, all technical colleges across the state offer economic development programs, which can provide more tailored short-term training for an employer.

Please see Appendix K (TCSG Institutions and Campuses Map) for a full map of TCSG locations.



RECOVERY AFTER IMPACT

This portion of the guide will focus on responsive initiatives for both natural disaster and economic impacts.

Natural Disaster

Many communities across Georgia have recommitted to planning for natural disasters in recent years. This effort comes as large portions of the state have been hit by a historic number of hurricanes, ice storms, floods, and tornados in recent years. These storms are not only becoming more common, but they are causing more damage and disruption to the daily lives of Georgians than in the past. According to NOAA data, the frequency of severe weather events in Georgia has accelerated rapidly over the last forty years. While the state recorded just nine billion-dollars in natural disasters during the entire 1980s, that threshold was vastly exceeded in 2024 alone, which saw thirteen separate billion-dollar disasters impact the state.

Traditional natural disaster planning focuses on immediate response and securing the safety of the community. This planning is typically handled by emergency management, and while workforce and community leaders should be aware of and potentially involved in these efforts, there are many items that others can focus on to ensure long-term recovery can begin and progress smoothly and quickly as soon as possible. Workforce recovery can look like focusing on supporting businesses as they develop reopening plans, communicating with local educational partners about worker/workforce impacts, and generally aiding community and local businesses with efforts to open and be “back to normal” as quickly as possible. The rest of this section references several appendices that contain resources and worksheets for community use following a natural disaster.

Once an EMA has conducted initial assessments of life and property damage and secured any major issues, others in the community may assess human infrastructure, such as childcare and education, transportation, and healthcare. These assets, while less critical in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, are integral to long-term workforce resiliency and getting folks back to work as quickly as possible. Appendix G (Human Infrastructure Status Checklist) provides one potential structure for this assessment to identify areas of largest need. In a similar vein, Appendix H (After-Action Business Resiliency Survey) provides a brief business survey that can be distributed to local employers to capture the status and needs of those impacted. While these employers are also working with the local EMA or others on any major immediate issues, knowing that someone is helping assess and seek remedy for workforce-related issues is a pivotal support for long-term recovery following a disaster.



If issues go beyond local capabilities, then connection to state agency resources may be necessary. Appendix F (Georgia Inter-Agency Coordination and Resource List) lists potential bottlenecks in workforce recovery efforts and pertinent state agencies.

One small research finding that was particularly impactful for local governments was the need to document all help received from local citizens, businesses, or other stakeholders, especially when working with state or federal agencies in declared emergency areas. While on blue sky days this may seem obvious, this task may not be obvious in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Having a simple form that key stakeholders can use to capture important details about volunteer and in-kind donations is key. Appendix I (In-Kind Contribution Documentation Log) serves as a sample of what this could look like.

Innovative Community Practice

In 2024 the Greater Vidalia Chamber and Toombs County Development Authority opened the Greater Vidalia® Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. This space provides access to “coworking, incubation, mentoring, technology, tools, strategic support, and a collaborative downtown environment.” In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, the Chamber and Development Authority got creative and opened the doors of this center to several of their major employers who needed a homebase to continue HR and other critical operations. Once the downtown area was opened and power was secured, this space provided a reliable location for key personnel to come and take care of things that must continue despite the local destruction or activities that were needed to get their main operations back online. Chambers and Development Authorities are known for being places where the business community comes together, but having a physical space and sharing that with members can be a great value add in emergency situations.

More about the Center can be found here:

www.greatervidaliachamber.com/entrepreneurship-center/

Just as regular planning meetings are critical in building a strong foundation, debriefing and learning from events in the months to follow are pivotal for long term community workforce resiliency. Appendix J (Post-Disaster Workforce Resiliency After-Action Worksheet) is a multi-part document that can be used to walk a core team through post-disaster workforce resiliency after-action review. The document includes a scoring rubric, debrief questions, and things to consider in the next round of planning.

Economic Impact

While much of this guide has focused on natural disasters, it is also designed to consider resiliency and recovery from economic impacts, such as the closure of a major local or regional employer. Lead time for a layoff or closure at a local employer may range anywhere from a few months to a few days but knowing what to do and where to go when there is an announcement is key to minimizing the impact on the individuals and community at large.

The **Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act** requires employers to give their workers 60 days’ notice before a plant closing or mass layoff. These “WARNs” also provide data on local closures or major workforce shocks across the state.

WARN Data <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/layoffs/employers>
Georgia: <https://www.tcsg.edu/warn-public-view/>

One of the best first steps a community can take after a closure announcement is to contact their regional Rapid Response Coordinator. These individuals, housed at the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), can work to provide resources to affected individuals. Hopefully, through good partnerships and communication described in the first portion of this guide, local leadership at the impacted business(es) can work with TCSG Rapid Response and local providers to support employees as they look for new opportunities or seek to reskill.

Rapid Response is automatically notified when companies submit WARN notices, but many times employers may be exempt or wait until the last moment to submit these. Notifying TCSG of potential impacts or opportunities to potentially avert a layoff or closure can help communities get the resources and support they need even more quickly.

<https://www.tcsg.edu/worksource/rapid-response/>

APPENDICES

- ◆ **Appendix A.** Workforce and Economic Resiliency Pre-Planning Framework
- ◆ **Appendix B.** Business Disaster Contact Tree
- ◆ **Appendix C.** Internal Employee Call Log
- ◆ **Appendix D.** Simple Hazard and Vulnerability Assessment for Businesses
- ◆ **Appendix E.** Community At-Large Hazard and Vulnerability Assessment
- ◆ **Appendix F.** Georgia Inter-Agency Coordination and Resource List
- ◆ **Appendix G.** Human Infrastructure Status Checklist
- ◆ **Appendix H.** After-Action Business Resiliency Survey
- ◆ **Appendix I.** In-Kind Contribution Documentation Log
- ◆ **Appendix J.** Post-Disaster Workforce Resiliency After-Action Worksheet
- ◆ **Appendix K.** TCSG Institutions and Campuses Map



cviog.uga.edu/workforceresilience



Connecting Talent with Opportunity
A proud partner of the American Job Center network

Powered by  TCSG

This guide was developed and designed by the



Carl Vinson
Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Founded in 1927, the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government informs, innovates, and inspires so that governments, large and small, can be more efficient and responsive, address current and emerging challenges, and serve the public with excellence. As an integral part of the University of Georgia's public service and outreach mission, the Institute of Government's faculty, staff, and students work every day to provide the highest quality educational programming, on-the-ground assistance, and innovative tools that equip government leaders, build stronger communities, inspire economic success, and improve quality of life throughout the state of Georgia.