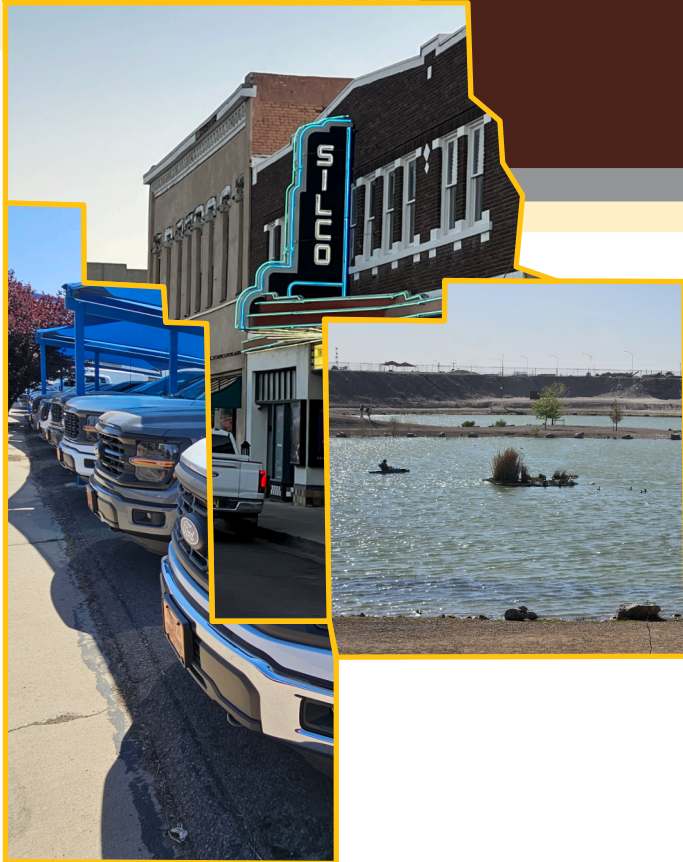


Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments

2026-2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



STRENGTHENING THOSE WE SERVE
Hidalgo Catron Luna Grant

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Executive Summary

The SWNMCOG Region (the “Region”) is a large (17,300 square mile) area located in the southwestern corner of the state of New Mexico. It contains a variety of geography, demographics, and industry, from the mountainous terrain of Catron County to the urban downtown of Silver City in Grant County, to the desert plains of Luna and Hidalgo counties. The Region faces persistent headwinds, including population decline, aging infrastructure, workforce shortages, and limited access to critical services. However, there are critical opportunities for the Region to grow and strengthen—such as in outdoor recreation, energy, military, and transportation and warehousing—that can increase the quality of life for the Region’s residents.

The 2026–2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Southwest New Mexico outlines a regional roadmap for economic resilience, inclusive growth, and strategic investment across Catron, Grant, Hidalgo, and Luna counties. Developed through extensive process with more than 20 individual stakeholder interviews, 4 focus group roundtables, a review of 42 plans, and extensive data analysis, the CEDS identifies core challenges and opportunities affecting the Region’s economic success and proposes targeted strategies to strengthen infrastructure, workforce capacity, housing, governance, disaster preparedness, and catalytic industries.



As part of the community outreach efforts, a regional vision was developed that guides the strategies described in this document (see box on right). To achieve this vision, the Region has developed six key objectives that it will pursue over the next five years:

Objective #1: Improve the Region's infrastructure to be competitive for economic development.

Objective #2: Improve Workforce Training and Business Support Services.

Objective #3: Support the growth of the regional housing industry.

Objective #4: Increase the capacity of local governments to operate more effectively.

Objective #5: Increase the Region's ability to prevent and respond to natural disasters and other emergencies.

Objective #6: Improve the Region's resilience by investing in catalytic projects and industries.

SWNMCOG will lead implementation in partnership with local governments, educational institutions, and private stakeholders. Progress will be tracked via an interactive online dashboard (see QR code on right) that will be updated annually to reflect evolving priorities and performance metrics. The dashboard will monitor adoption rates, funding secured, and measurable impacts across the key objectives.

Southwest New Mexico's Regional Vision

“Southwest New Mexico will be an economically vibrant and culturally rich region where family, community, and progress guide our growth.”

We will harness our natural assets to develop sustainable industries in renewable energy, outdoor tourism, and high-value manufacturing while maintaining our strong mining and agricultural roots. Investments in education, workforce training, leadership development, and critical infrastructure will create a foundation for lasting growth and regional prosperity.

CEDS Progress Dashboard



Summary Background



Demographics

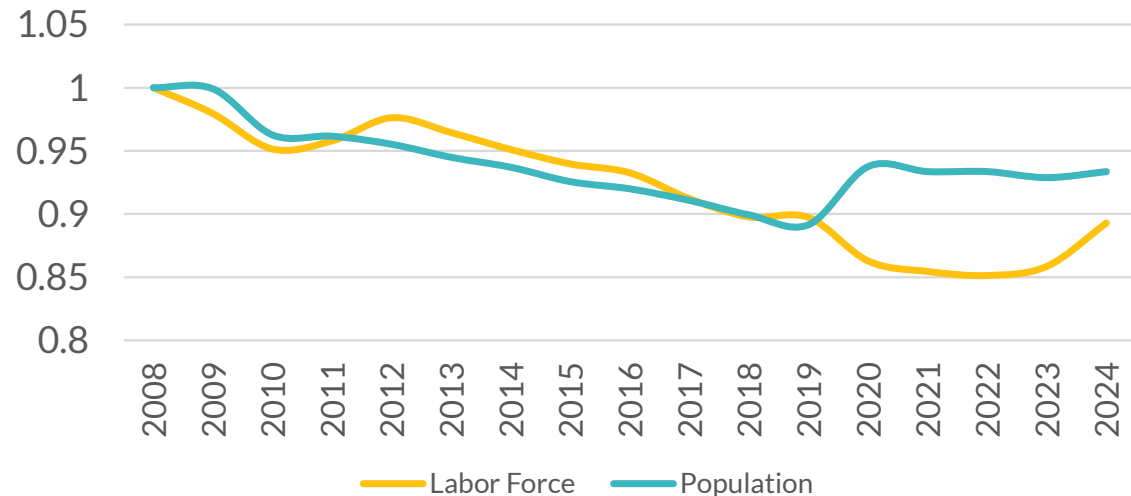
The Region is populated by an estimated 61 thousand people, which is down 3% since 2010 and 6% since the most recent maximum of 65.5 thousand in 2000.

County	1990	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 % Change
Catron County	2,563	3,543	3,725	3,579	3,795	1.9%
Grant County	27,676	31,002	29,514	28,185	27,541	-6.7%
Hidalgo County	5,958	5,932	4,894	4,178	3,966	-19.0%
Luna County	18,110	25,016	25,095	25,427	25,878	3.1%
Region	54,307	65,493	63,228	61,369	61,180	-3.2%

Source: SWNMCOG Statistical Abstract (2025 release)

The loss of population has been particularly acute for those in the labor force (employed/unemployed persons 16 years or older). While the labor force loss was commensurate with population loss from 2008 to 2019, in the period directly after the Covid-19 Pandemic the labor force shrank significantly compared to the population. While there was growth in 2024, the labor force size remains well below the population, meaning that there are fewer workers per resident. This has led to workforce shortages and reduced human capital stock needed for strong business competitiveness.

Chart 1 – Labor Force and Population over Time (2008 Index)



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

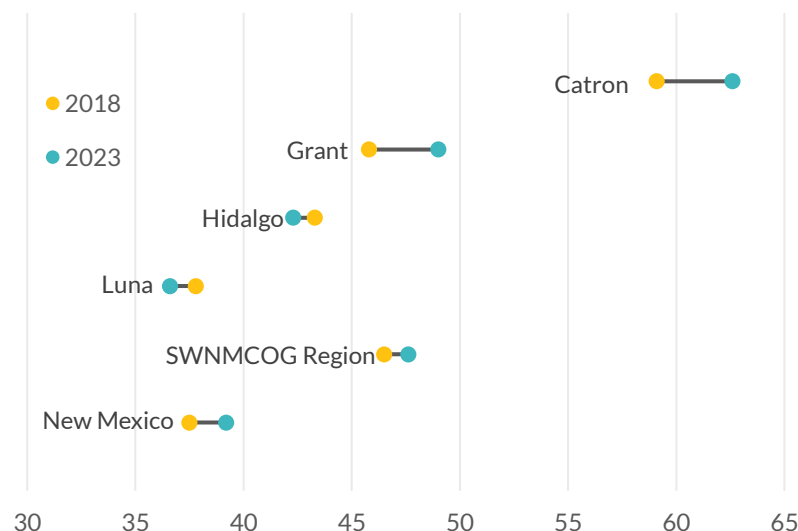
The Region continues to age, with the median age increasing from 46.5 in 2018 to 47.6 in 2023. The Region’s median age is estimated to be 8½ years higher than the state. However, significant disparities in median age exist across the Region, with Catron (62.6) at the high end and Luna (36.6) at the low end. Having a high share of older residents can lead to economic strain if there are only a few workers to support that population (as is the case in Catron, where there are 96 seniors for every 100 workers).

The Region is quite diverse, with 54% of the population identifying as Hispanic/Latino and 65% identifying with at least one minority group.

Workforce and Income

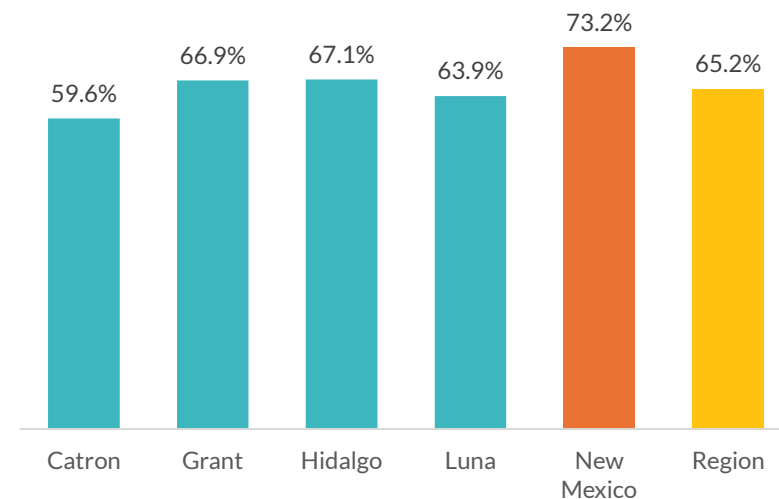
The Region’s prime-age labor force participation rate (65.2%) is 8 percentage points lower than the state. There is slack in the regional labor force among those who are not yet of retirement age. Getting these individuals re-engaged in the workforce is important to the long-term success of the economy because these are the workers who provide the greatest economic benefits to the economy because they often play a role as a producer (via labor) and as a consumer.

Chart 2 – Median Age over Time by Geography



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimates, Table S0101

Chart 3 – Prime Age Labor Force Participation Rate



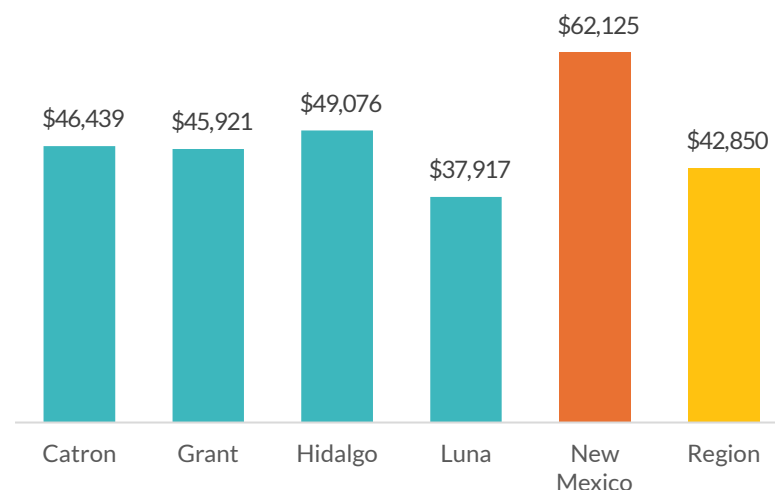
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimates, Table S2301

Post-secondary educational attainment rates across the Region are low, with the regional average 8.5 percentage points below the state’s bachelor’s attainment rate. As with median ages, disparities exist between counties, with Luna having the lowest attainment (14.7%) and Grant having the highest (28.8%).

Counties in the Region have low incomes, with a regional median household income of \$42,850 which is more than \$19 thousand below the state’s median of \$62 thousand.

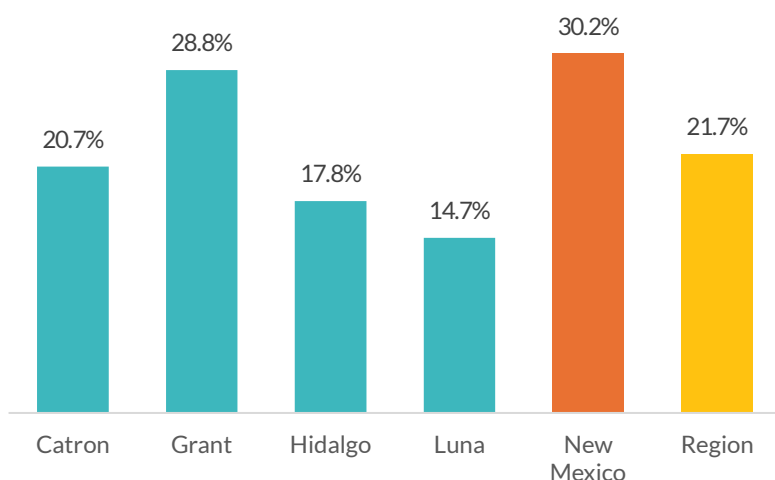
Due to these low incomes, poverty is quite high throughout the Region, with a regional average of 22%. With the lowest incomes, Luna County has the highest percent of its population living under the poverty level, at 26%.

Chart 5 – Median Household Income (2023 Inflation-Adj. Dollars)



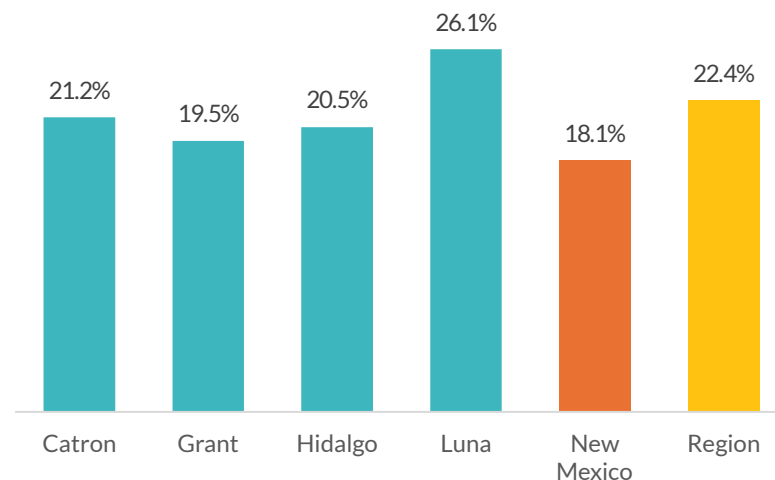
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimates, Table S2503

Chart 6 – Percent Pop. 25+ with Bachelor’s Degree or Higher



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimates, Table S2301

Chart 4 – Percent of Population Living Under the Poverty Level



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimates, Table S1701

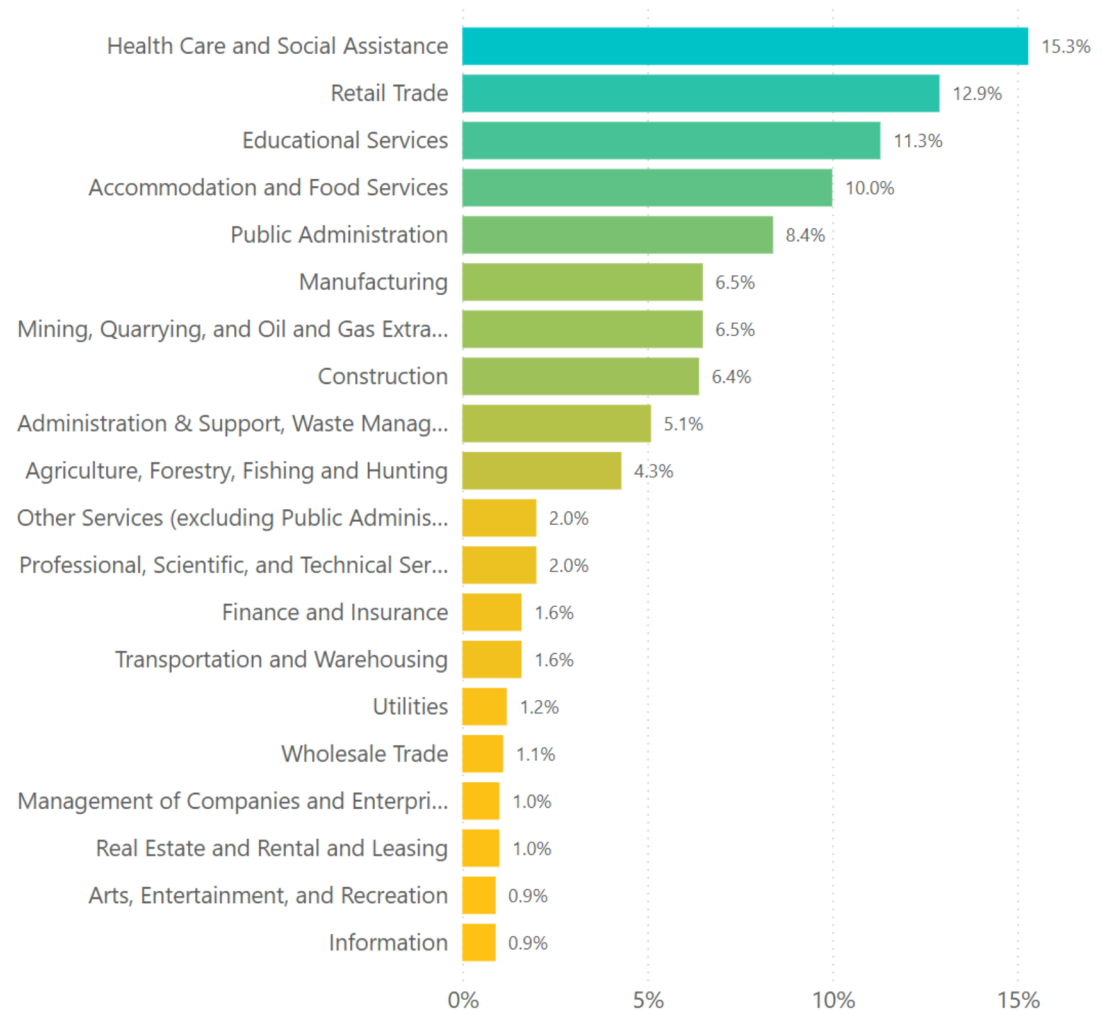
Business and Industry

The Region as a whole has a diverse mix of employment clusters, with Health Care, Retail, Education, and Accommodation and Food Services each accounting for 10% or more of total jobs. However, many of these jobs are in lower-level positions, with 58% of jobs earning less than \$40K per year.¹

When looking at the counties as a more local level, major disparities exist. While all of them has a very large government sector (29% of GDP or higher), private industry uses are more disparate: Catron County is driven by agriculture and recreation, Grant County is driven by mining, Hidalgo is driven by agriculture and retail, and Luna has a mix of private industry.

For detailed information about the counties, refer to the County-level data analyses provided in the appendix of this report and which will be available and updated annually on the SWNMCOG website.

Chart 7 – Primary Jobs by Industry



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2022).

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application

Housing

Despite having lower incomes when compared with the state, the Region's households are enjoying lower housing costs (the expenses for mortgage/rent as well as utilities and other housing-related payments). The regional average is 4 percentage points lower than the state for the share of cost-burdened households, or those that spend 30% or more of monthly household income. Luna County is the only county that is on-par with the state's share of burdened households.

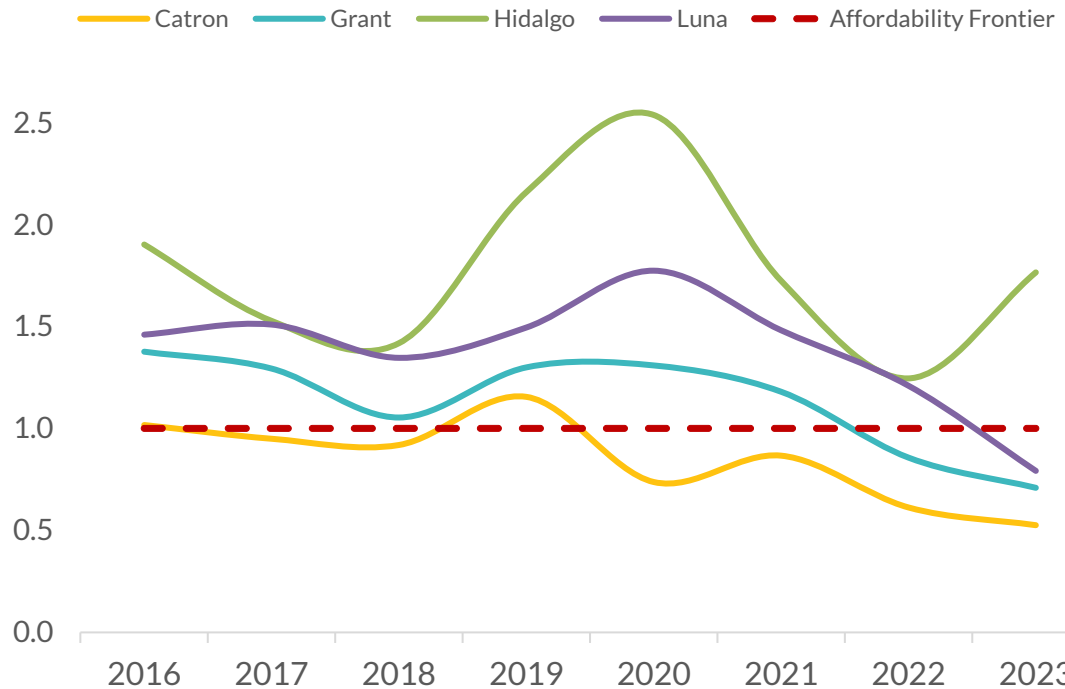
The share of cost-burdened households is expected to rise over time. Housing prices and loan costs are rising faster than incomes, as shown by the decrease in the Home Affordability Index for most counties in the Region over time. As of 2023, all counties except Hidalgo have dropped below the Affordability Frontier, the point at which the median household is no longer able to afford the median home. Breaking this frontier means that housing is becoming increasingly unattainable and is pricing out lower-earning households, including those in public services, education, recreation, and accommodation and food services, key industries for the sustainability of the Region's economy.

Chart 8 – Percent of Cost-Burdened Households (30% or more of monthly household income on housing expenses)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimates, Table S2503

Chart 9 – Housing Index by Year



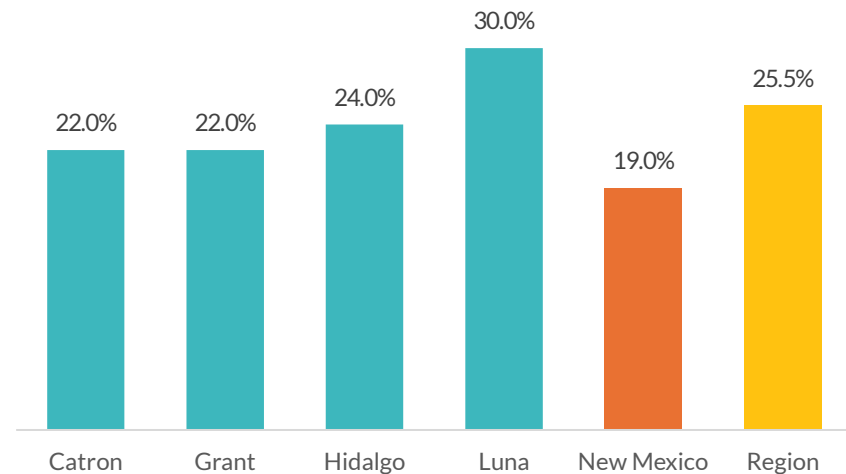
Source: Realtor.com; Freddie Mac; U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates. Created using Texas A&M Home Affordability Index Methodology with 20% down payment and 28% qualifying ratio.

Health

A healthy workforce is the basis of a strong economy. The Region's health outcomes are lower than the State, with one out of every four adults reporting fair or poor health (compared to one out of five for the state). Similarly, the Region reports an average of 5.3 physically unhealthy days (compared to 4.2 for the State).

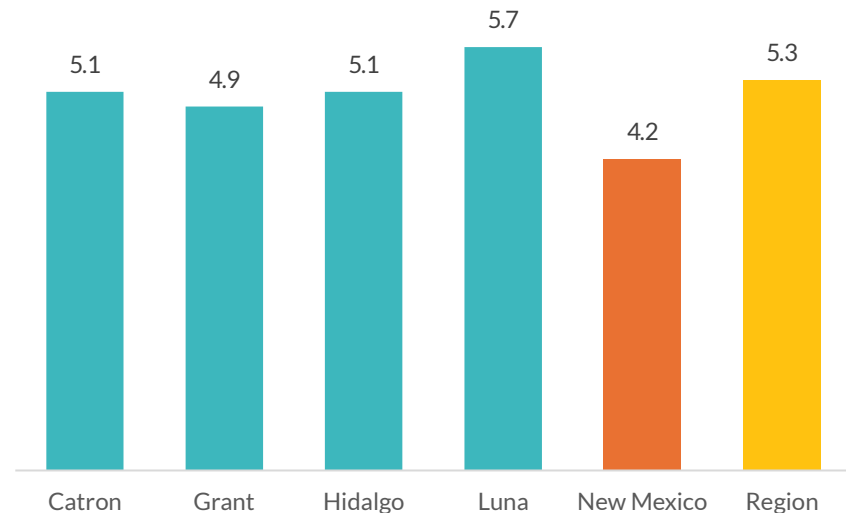
There is some variability throughout the Region, with Luna County having between 11 and 20 percent worse outcomes compared to the regional averages.

Chart 10 – Percent of Adults Reporting Fair or Poor Health



Source: 2025 County Health Rankings

Chart 11 – Average Number of Physically Unhealthy Days in the last 30 days



Source: 2025 County Health Rankings

SWOT Analysis



A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis considers the internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) that influence the efficacy of economic development activities within the Region. This table summarizes all of the SWOT items. Detailed descriptions of each are found on the following pages.

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Economic Diversification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airports/Aerospace • Agricultural Assets • Border Commerce and Trade • Weather/Climate • Port of Entry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce skills • Low wages • High Poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NM Tech • Energy, Military, and Research Industries • Port of Entry • Chinese Tariffs • Proximity to Routes • Agriculture, Food Processing, Cold Storage, and Exporting • Energy production • Stage 2 Business Support • Childcare Businesses Expansion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain Drain • Population Loss • Finite Resources for Mining • Change in Federal Border Laws / Migration Policy Changes
Outdoor Rec & Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry Growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blight • Insufficient Lodging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vast and Diverse Outdoor Recreation Areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple Use Conflicts

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Labor Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple Higher Educational Institutions (WNMU, NM Tech) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational Attainment and Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative CTE/ Trades Workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult labor market conditions
Leadership Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly effective, Well-respected COG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small Staff/Pool of Successors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grow Youth Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliance on Limited and “Close to Retirement” Leadership
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water/wastewater Collaboration projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to get Funding for Infrastructure Projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-private partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aging Infrastructure Reduction in Federal Grant Opportunities

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable Housing plans in each county, and that opens up opportunities to develop AH and other types of housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aging Housing Stock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible Housing projects in Bayard, Deming, Columbus, Silver City, Lordsburg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tariffs and Trades Labor Shortages
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mix of for-profit and non-profit hospital models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthcare Services Lack of Senior and Childcare Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Models of Healthcare to Improve Service in Region and Strengthen Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Mexico Malpractice Laws

Strengths

Economic Diversification: The SWNMCOG Region benefits from a foundation of core industries, including agriculture, mining, education, healthcare, and a growing aviation/aerospace presence. Notable assets, such as the world’s largest chile processing plant and New Mexico’s largest winery, bolster the Region’s reputation for specialty agriculture and value-added production. The Region’s proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border further enhances its economic positioning for trade, logistics, and binational supply chain opportunities.

In addition, the Region’s diverse geography and favorable climate support niche agriculture, renewable energy development, and year-round outdoor recreation and tourism. The abundance of public lands and scenic natural areas continues to draw visitors and supports a growing recreation economy that complements traditional industries.

Infrastructure Prioritization and Collaboration
While aging infrastructure presents challenges, it also highlights the critical importance and shared commitment to investment across the Region. Communities have proactively identified and prioritized major water and wastewater needs in their ICIP submissions. In Grant County, collaboration with Freeport-McMoRan on water projects showcases a model for public-private partnerships. Luna County is strategically preparing for future industry by addressing gaps in gas infrastructure to support cold

storage and value-added food production.

Broadband expansion efforts are underway across all counties, supported by federal and state funding. While significant gaps remain—particularly in rural parts of Catron and Hidalgo Counties and the outskirts of Silver City and Deming—the Region’s growing engagement in digital equity initiatives represents a strong foundation for improving access and connectivity.

Labor Force: The Region has active partnerships between public schools and higher education institutions that are expanding workforce readiness. Dual credit and career and technical education (CTE) programs provide young people with early access to post-secondary education and in-demand skills training. These partnerships form a pipeline into sectors such as healthcare, skilled trades, digital media, and energy.

The Region’s rural setting also offers a unique quality of life that appeals to remote workers and mobile professionals. A lower cost of living, combined with access to the Gila Wilderness, state parks, and a vibrant arts and culture scene, positions the Region as an ideal destination for talent seeking lifestyle, affordability, and meaningful work.

Leadership Capacity: Communities across the four counties benefit from a strong sense of cultural identity and civic engagement. Local leaders—though few—are highly dedicated and deeply involved in advancing community priorities. This concentrated leadership has driven meaningful change in areas such as education, economic development, and environmental stewardship.

SWNMCOG provides critical regional capacity, convening stakeholders, securing funding, and offering technical assistance. Its effectiveness and reputation as a trusted regional convener are key assets in advancing multi-county collaboration and federal funding readiness.

Housing: Each of the four counties—Grant, Luna, Hidalgo, and Catron—has developed or is in the process of updating affordable housing plans, creating a strong foundation for coordinated regional efforts to address housing needs. These plans position the region to pursue state and federal housing resources more effectively and demonstrate a proactive approach to long-term community development.

Additionally, the region’s lower land costs and available property in rural and semi-rural areas present opportunities for new housing development, including multi-family units, workforce housing, and single-family homes. With proper planning and infrastructure investment, these assets can support the attraction and retention of residents, especially essential workers, retirees, and young families looking for affordable living options in communities with access to natural beauty, cultural heritage, and a lower cost of living.

Healthcare: The SWNMCOG region benefits from two anchor hospitals operating under distinct models, offering residents both access and resilience in healthcare delivery. Mimbres Memorial Hospital in Deming (Luna County) is a privately managed facility that has implemented innovative pricing structures such as “Simple + Price” to better serve uninsured patients. Gila Regional Medical Center in Silver City (Grant County), a county-owned nonprofit, provides a comprehensive array of affordable services including a cancer center and the Surgical Center of the Southwest.

These models offer valuable case studies in rural healthcare innovation and sustainability.

Additional regional assets include Tu Casa in Silver City, a leading behavioral health center currently planning to expand to 24-hour operations and add a 30-unit supportive housing facility—an initiative that could become a cornerstone for regional mental health services. The region also has Hidalgo Medical Services, Presbyterian Medical Services, and Ben Archer Health Clinic, and the Recovery Management Organization. These facilities stand to benefit from the newly approved SB3 funding through the New Mexico Legislature in 2025. Moreover, County Health Rankings show that the region performs at or slightly above state and national averages in several key metrics, including preventable hospital stays, uninsured rates, and low birthweight rates. These indicators, paired with emerging infrastructure like telehealth and workforce training initiatives, provide a strong foundation for improving health outcomes across rural communities.

Weaknesses

Economic Diversification: While the region exhibits moderate industrial diversity overall, each county remains heavily dependent on one or two dominant sectors—most commonly mining, agriculture, or government. This over-reliance increases vulnerability to industry downturns, regulatory changes, or market closures and limits the Region’s ability to adapt quickly to economic shifts.

The region also faces critical gaps in workforce readiness. Many residents lack the skills needed by employers in existing and emerging industries, which is compounded by consistently low wages, high poverty rates, and limited access to career-aligned training. These conditions create a mismatch between available talent and employer needs, constraining economic expansion and business retention.

Infrastructure: Aging infrastructure—particularly water, wastewater, and transportation systems—continues to hinder growth and development. Many rural communities in the Region struggle to secure adequate funding to repair or modernize critical infrastructure, which creates barriers to both residential and commercial development.

Insufficient infrastructure investment also makes it difficult to attract new businesses or expand housing stock, especially in remote areas where costs are higher and capacity for project management is limited.

Labor Force: The region’s labor force is shrinking and aging. A declining number of prime working-age adults has

created persistent challenges for employers attempting to fill vacancies or scale up operations.

Additionally, geographic isolation and limited transportation options reduce access to larger labor pools. While post-secondary institutions and CTE/Dual Credit programs exist, the training pathways currently available do not fully align with the needs of regional employers—especially in the trades, technology, and healthcare sectors.

Educational attainment remains low in several parts of the Region, particularly in areas outside of Grant County. Access to higher education is limited by distance, affordability, and program alignment. The Region lacks a central hub for adult education, technical credentialing, and career navigation. This gap impedes economic mobility and weakens the long-term workforce.

Leadership Capacity: Many local governments and organizations operate with small, overstretched staff, which reduces their capacity to engage in cross-sector or regional collaboration. This often leads to siloed planning and missed opportunities for shared resources, joint grant applications, and unified advocacy.

Succession planning is a growing concern across public, private, and nonprofit sectors. As long-serving leaders near retirement, there is a limited pool of trained individuals prepared to take on key leadership roles in government, education, healthcare, and community development.

Housing: The Region faces a shortage of quality affordable housing. Much of the existing housing stock is aging or deteriorating, and in smaller communities residential and

commercial blight is widespread. Inadequate lodging options also hamper tourism and short-term workforce attraction.

Efforts to renovate or expand housing are often delayed by the high cost of materials, limited availability of skilled construction labor, and slow permitting and inspection processes. These barriers prevent the Region from keeping pace with housing demand and deter potential residents or investors.

Healthcare Services: Access to healthcare is significantly limited by geography. The region's two main hospitals are separated by vast distances, and specialized medical services are only available in distant metro areas.

According to County Health Rankings, there is a shortage of primary care physicians, mental health professionals, and specialists—particularly in Luna and Hidalgo Counties, where ratios are three to four times worse than the state average. Preventive care metrics such as flu vaccinations, mammography screenings, and mental health access are consistently below state and national averages. The lack of senior care and childcare services also places strain on families and limits workforce participation.

Opportunities

Economic Diversification: Southwest New Mexico is strategically positioned to capitalize on its proximity to Mexico, Arizona, and Texas—making it a natural hub for binational trade, logistics, and manufacturing. The Columbus Port of Entry—the only 24-hour port in the state—presents a major opportunity to increase international commerce, particularly as global supply chains shift and tariffs on Chinese goods create openings for nearshoring and onshoring. The Region's access to major highways and rail lines strengthens its potential for expanding value-added agriculture, food processing, cold storage, and logistics operations.

Ongoing investments by New Mexico Tech at the Playas training and research facility also present a high-impact opportunity. Statewide support for innovation in energy, aerospace, and military technologies positions the Region as a potential testing and workforce development site. The Playas facility's aviation, unmanned systems, and defense-related training programs could serve as anchors for high-tech economic growth in Hidalgo County and the broader region.

Southwest New Mexico's arid, sunny climate supports the growth of solar and renewable energy projects. Projects such as the proposed Terawatt electric vehicle (EV) truck charging station offer the potential to attract infrastructure investment and create skilled jobs. Additionally, the Region's vast public lands, scenic beauty, and rich culture

provide a strong foundation for growing the outdoor recreation, heritage tourism economy, and film production through strategic branding, infrastructure development, and stewardship initiatives. Entrepreneurial programs like Co.Starters have been successful, showing that with proper funding the Region can support new businesses growth and greater economic diversity.

Infrastructure: There are significant opportunities to modernize aging infrastructure by leveraging state and federal funding programs, including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, USDA Rural Development programs, and New Mexico’s Colonias Infrastructure Fund. These resources can support critical upgrades to water, wastewater, transportation, and broadband systems—many of which are at or beyond their serviceable life. The recent passage of New Mexico SB1 enhances the potential for shared regional infrastructure assets, allowing counties and municipalities to pool equipment, expertise, and tools to reduce costs and increase efficiency in public works operations.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) offer another avenue for accelerating infrastructure investment, especially in broadband deployment and renewable energy projects. Furthermore, there is growing interest in place-based entrepreneurship, creative industries, and artisan economies that could be supported through innovation hubs, local marketplaces, and cooperative development models.

Labor Force: The Region has the potential to grow and strengthen its labor force by expanding workforce development programs that are tailored to the unique

needs of rural communities. Focus areas include skilled trades, healthcare, digital technologies, and renewable energy sectors. By increasing collaboration among counties, school districts, community colleges, and employers, the Region can develop a more cohesive education-to-employment pipeline.

Existing Dual Credit and Career Technical Education (CTE) programs provide a strong foundation for deeper collaboration and alignment with local industries. Scaling these programs and integrating adult upskilling and retraining opportunities will help address the shortage of prime-age workers and provide meaningful pathways for residents.

Leadership Capacity: The Region has an opportunity to cultivate the next generation of civic and economic leaders through youth leadership initiatives, mentorship programs, and professional development targeted at rural government and nonprofit professionals. Building regional leadership capacity is critical to ensuring long-term resilience and effective succession planning in both public and private sectors.

Cross-sector collaboration between governments, schools, economic development entities, and tribal and cultural organizations can strengthen strategic planning and increase access to competitive funding opportunities.

Housing: Opportunities exist to expand workforce and affordable housing through targeted development projects in communities such as Bayard, Deming, Columbus, Silver City, and Lordsburg. By leveraging tools such as public-private partnerships, housing trust funds, and Low-Income

Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), the region can address its housing shortages and blight.

These housing investments will not only help attract and retain workers but also support the growth of the tourism economy by improving short-term lodging options and revitalizing town centers.

Healthcare: The region has a significant opportunity to expand healthcare access and coordination by building on existing models in Deming and Silver City. Mimbres Memorial Hospital’s innovative pricing for uninsured patients and Gila Regional Medical Center’s integrated, county-owned nonprofit model serve as scalable templates. Replicating these models—particularly through simplified pricing, telehealth expansion, and integrated behavioral and physical health services—can directly address service gaps in more remote and underserved areas such as Hidalgo and Catron Counties.

Additionally, the passage of New Mexico Senate Bill 3 creates a timely opening to improve behavioral health infrastructure across the region. The legislation provides funding and structural support for communities to expand behavioral health services and establish new models of care. These collaborative efforts offer the region a strategic opportunity to strengthen mental health services, increase the behavioral health workforce, and better coordinate care—while also supporting healthcare as a key regional employment sector. Strengthening ties between healthcare providers, educational institutions, and workforce training programs will be vital to addressing persistent shortages in primary care, elder care, and behavioral health, and ensuring long-term regional resilience.

Threats

Economic Diversification: The Region’s reliance on a small number of traditional industries—particularly mining and agriculture—leaves it vulnerable to market fluctuations, regulatory changes, and resource depletion. Commodity price volatility, drought impacts on agriculture, and finite mineral reserves all threaten the long-term sustainability of these sectors.

Rural “brain drain” remains a critical issue, with continued outmigration of youth and working-age adults seeking higher education or better job prospects elsewhere. This ongoing population loss weakens the local talent pool and reduces economic dynamism. In addition, changing federal border and immigration policies may disrupt cross-border commerce, labor availability, and investment around the Columbus Port of Entry.

Emerging opportunities in broadband and digital infrastructure also carry risks, including cybersecurity threats to public systems and limited local capacity to manage or protect new technologies. Growing tensions around land use for ranching and outdoor recreation pose potential threats as the Region finds balance between these industries.

Infrastructure: Aging infrastructure remains a persistent threat to public health, safety, and economic development. Many systems across the Region—particularly water, wastewater, and roads—are outdated, undersized, or

deteriorating. Deferred maintenance and rising costs make it difficult for small communities to meet basic infrastructure needs or plan for future growth.

Climate change is compounding these risks. The increasing frequency and severity of wildfires, droughts, and flash floods threaten not only physical infrastructure but also the reliability of water sources and the overall safety and resilience of rural communities.

There is growing concern that future federal infrastructure funding may become more competitive or reduced, making it harder for under-resourced counties to access the dollars needed for critical upgrades.

Labor Force: Out-migration of young and prime-age workers continues to erode the labor pool, while the remaining population skews older and more dependent on fixed incomes and public services. This demographic imbalance makes it difficult to support existing industries or attract new employers.

Healthcare workforce shortages—especially in primary care, behavioral health, and elder care—further strain the Region’s ability to retain residents and support a healthy, working-age population.

Leadership Capacity: Many local governments and institutions continue to operate with minimal staff and resources, limiting their ability to pursue complex grants, conduct long-range planning, or navigate regulatory compliance. The lack of regional coordination and collaborative planning capacity reduces the effectiveness of economic development initiatives.

In many communities, institutional knowledge and leadership capacity are concentrated in a few long-serving individuals nearing retirement. Without clear succession plans or leadership development strategies in place, the loss of even one or two key leaders could cause major disruptions in local governance and economic planning efforts.

Housing: Trade tariffs, rising material costs, and persistent skilled labor shortages in the construction trades have significantly increased the cost of building or renovating housing in rural areas. These pressures make it difficult to maintain or expand housing stock—especially workforce and affordable units.

Healthcare: A major threat to healthcare access in the Region—as well as across rural New Mexico generally—is the state’s current malpractice laws, which significantly deter physicians and medical providers from establishing or maintaining practices in underserved areas. These legal and insurance barriers have made it increasingly difficult to attract and retain qualified healthcare professionals in communities that are already struggling with provider shortages. Exacerbating these threats are the looming cuts to federally funded clinics and rural healthcare facilities, which rely on Medicare and Medicaid funding, which would significantly impact the rural, aging, and low-income region.

Additionally, the region’s vast geography and long travel times to access care pose serious risks, especially for elderly individuals with limited mobility and those lacking reliable transportation. The aging population in the Region, combined with a shrinking younger workforce, creates compounding challenges in meeting the healthcare needs of

seniors and ensuring adequate caregiving support. This growing care gap threatens long-term community health outcomes and further limits population retention and sustainability.





Strategic Direction and Action Plan

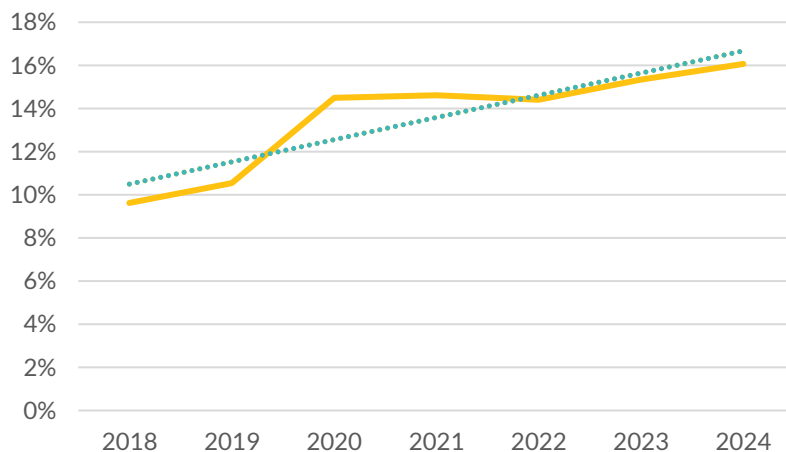


Objective #1: Improve the Region's infrastructure to be competitive for economic development.

Economic Resilience: Maintaining infrastructure is critical to the dependable flow of goods and services into the Region.

All economic activity occurs at a place, either in a real-world space, such as visiting a restaurant or store, or in a virtual space, such as buying goods or services online. Infrastructure is what allows buyers and sellers to transact products and services, regardless of the medium. Digital infrastructure is also critical: the advent of online transactions in particular has become more favorable for local governments in recent years with the updated destination sourcing rules made it 2021 (see NM § 7-1-14 and § 3.1.4.13). These changes allow local jurisdictions to collect local-option Gross Receipts Taxes (GRT) from goods and services purchased online, a continually growing sector of the economy. Maintaining and improving infrastructure is critical to the economic health and sustainability of the communities within the Region.

Chart 12 – E-Commerce Sales as a Percent of Total Sales



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales

Strategy 1.1: Create an infrastructure prioritization logic model for governments to adopt and use to prioritize infrastructure projects

Local governments face tradeoffs when deciding how to use their limited budgets and balancing the needs of different community members is the main political question leaders face. However, investment in quality infrastructure can maintain or grow local government revenues, and investing in infrastructure gives the local government more resources to invest in other critical services.

An infrastructure prioritization logic model is a simple tool that staff members can use to evaluate the costs and

benefits of different infrastructure projects, giving decision-makers and residents a better evaluation of the projects that their community invests in. Matrices evaluate the performance of infrastructure projects based on the priorities of the board/council (examples provided on the right). SWNMCOG will assist with the development of a general framework that local governments will adapt to meet their own needs and priorities. Because of the cost of infrastructure relative to other projects, the financial and economic returns should hold a heavy weight for these models.

Action Steps

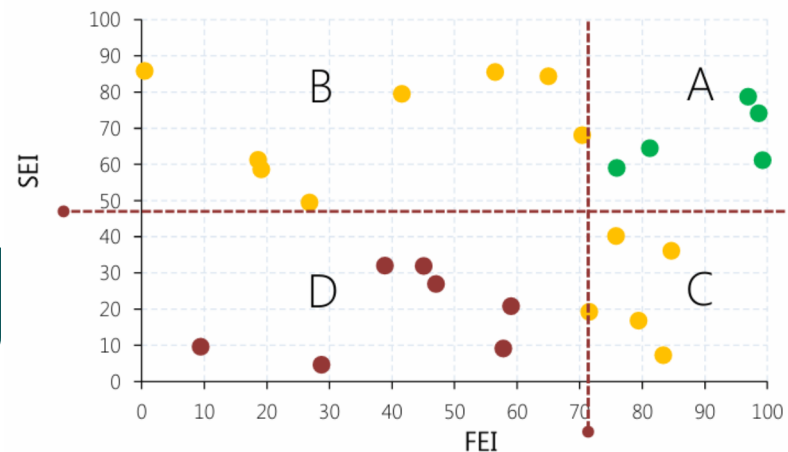
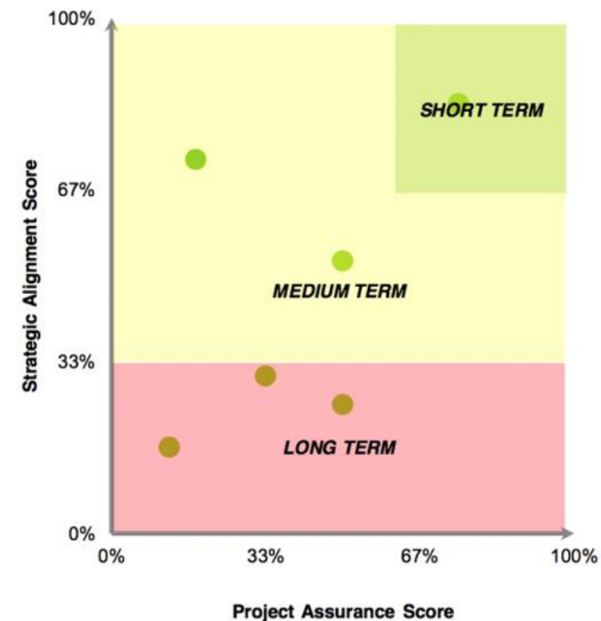
- **SWNMCOG**—create a infrastructure prioritization logic model for regional use, supporting its adoption by combining it with ICIP-supporting activities.
- **Local governments**—Adopt the models based on local priorities and use it to discuss and evaluate infrastructure projects.

Key Metrics

- Percent of regional model template completed
- Percent of governments that have adopted the model

Strategy 1.2: Partner with private capital to accelerate infrastructure investment

Local governments rely on federal money to fund infrastructure projects, with the federal share reaching as high as 100%. However, not all projects are eligible for federal funding nor is federal funding guaranteed, as evidenced by the pullback of funding on many grant awards in 2025. For infrastructure



Source: Marcelo, D., Mandri-Perrott, C., House, S., & Schwartz, J. (2015). *Prioritization of infrastructure projects: A decision support framework*. World Bank PPP Group.

projects that require additional capital and for which there is a good return, there are private companies that provide Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) models whereby the infrastructure is privately owned and maintained and the City pays a use fee for the infrastructure. The largest firm in this space is Sustainability Partners.

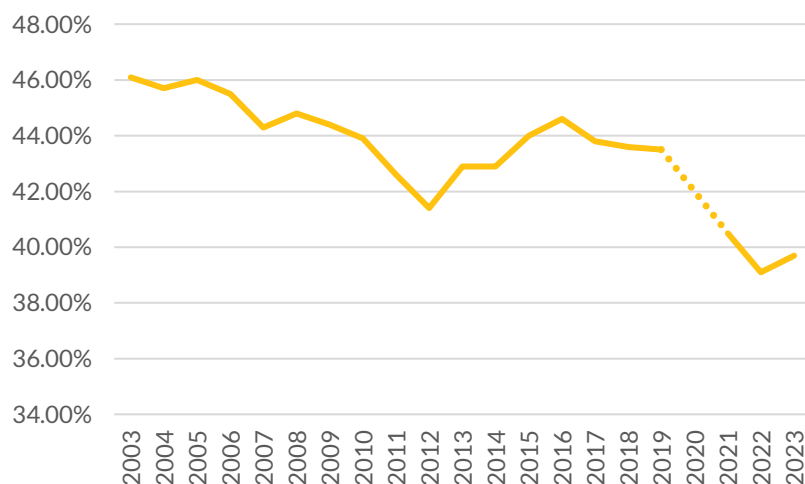
Action Steps

- **Local Governments**–Identify projects that have a demonstrable cash flow, are not eligible for bonding, grants, or other loan programs.
- **SWNMCOG**–Reach out to capital investment firms to begin the process of establishing the IaaS model within the Region.

Key Metrics

- Value (in USD) of infrastructure expenditures made through IaaS.

Chart 13 – Percent of Population who spent time purchasing goods and services on a typical day (2003-2023)



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey

Note: Data for 2020 unavailable from source; shown as dotted line

Strategy 1.3: Expand and enhance broadband infrastructure throughout the Region

The prevalence of online shopping after the pandemic has led to a dramatic change in behaviors. The share of consumers who spend their time shopping has gone down from 46% in 2003 to less than 40% in 2023. However, retail sales are up 470% over the same period after inflation adjustments, meaning that people are spending more money despite the less time spent shopping. Online services, straight-to-door delivery, and subscriptions for goods are driving much of this change. The Region must respond by ensuring that its broadband infrastructure is capable of servicing these requests and keeping the Region’s businesses competitive and relevant.

Action Step / Key Metric

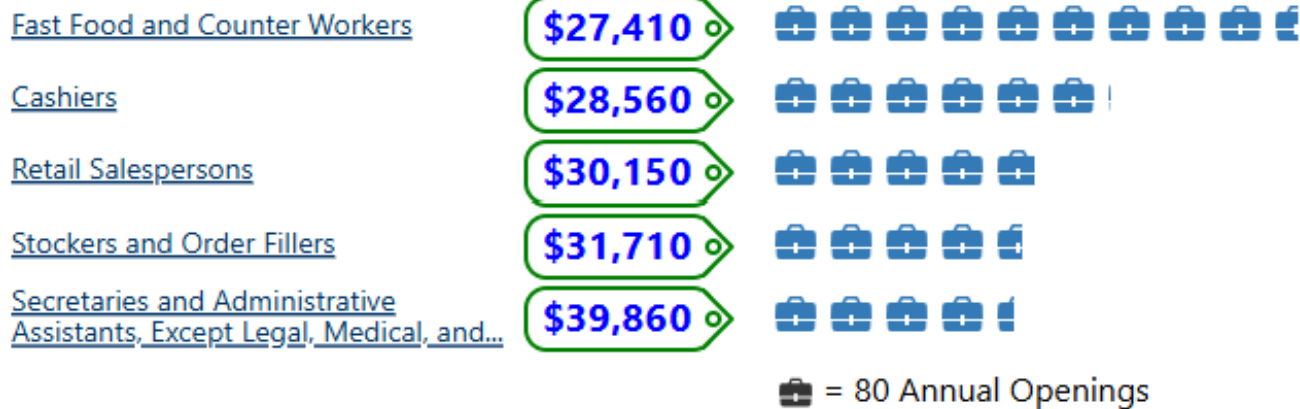
- **Local Governments**–Leverage local, state, and federal funds to ensure that 100% of businesses and households have access to high-speed internet services.



Objective #2: Improve Workforce Training and Business Support Services.

Economic Resilience: The labor force must adapt to industry changes, become capable in emerging technologies, and have the skills and capacity to take on leadership roles.

The Region’s labor force declined from 28,000 to 24,500 workers between 2012 and 2022, a 12.5% decrease over the period. Educational outcomes and wages for the Region are low, leading to poor wages when compared to the state and nation. The best way to address this is to support the upskilling of workers into higher-paying jobs. The Region needs to support the growth and development of new businesses that can create new jobs, especially to counteract job disruptions that are likely as a result of the adoption of automation and AI agents. According to the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, the top-growing occupations for the Southwest Area are Fast Food and Counter Workers, Cashiers, Retail Salespersons, Stockers and Order Filers, and Secretaries and Administrative Assistants. All of these have relatively low wages and will accentuate poverty and the cycle of low income mobility many households are facing. The Region has many documented starts and stops addressing workforce development but most of these initiatives have happened at a local level (county or municipal). As the labor force and population shrinks, the viability of such programs decreases because there isn’t a sufficient number of students participating in the programs to be successful.



Strategy 2.1: Coordinate workforce development projects at the regional level to ensure coordination and critical mass

To increase the likelihood of success for workforce development programs, they must be coordinated at the regional level, including of a wide variety of employers, governments, and educational institutions participating. The Council of Governments is best positioned to facilitate these conversations and secure funding for a Regional workforce development initiative. EDA and the NM EDD are also agencies which have resources and programs that can be leveraged to improve workforce outcomes.

Action Steps

- **SWNMCOG**–Leverage the structure and local participation of the Local Area Workforce Board to begin planning and collaborating on Regional workforce development projects.
- **Workforce Board**
 - Draft an MOU with all partners to outline roles and responsibilities for employers, schools, and other partners.
 - Secure funding to develop programming and materials to train and/or retrain workers.

Key Metrics

- Number of regional workforce training programs developed
- Number of program participants

Strategy 2.2: Implement leadership trainings and support services to increase employer competencies and improve career pathways

Many business owners and leaders do not have the support and training they need to have a successful rural business. Of a survey conducted in 2019, one of the top issues faced by rural small businesses is limited access to capital and business support services. Many small businesses need help understanding how to manage their business, secure funding, hire and manage employees, and complete many of the other operational duties required of them as a business owner. Providing training and support services for these businesses will help them be more sustainable and resilient and can also improve worker outcomes by providing training and support for mid- and high-level management. This will be passed on as workers leave their roles to work at other businesses or to start their own business.

Action Steps

- **Chambers of Commerce and Main Street Organizations**–Provide a list to SWNMCOG of all of the businesses that could best utilize business support services.
- **SWNMCOG**–Identify and secure funding to administer a business support program.
- **NewMARC, contractor or consultant**–Run the business support program.
 - Businesses that provide this type of support include the [Community Leadership Accelerator](#), [Dreambuilder](#), and the [Small Business Administration](#)

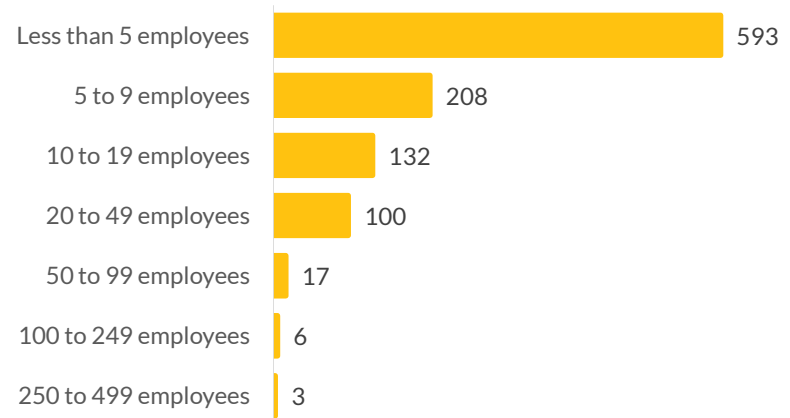
Key Metrics

- Number of businesses listed
- Percent of identified businesses supported

Strategy 2.3: Implement a stage-two business support program, with a focus on stable and scalable businesses

Second-stage companies provide the majority of local job creation and tend to sell to external markets, bringing in outside dollars into the community. Second-stage companies are businesses that have advanced beyond the startup phase but haven't reached maturity. They typically have 10 to 99 employees and generate between \$1 million and \$50 million in annual revenue. The Region likely has between 200 and 250 of these companies. Supporting these businesses is important for the economic success of the Region. These businesses need additional capital, workers, and land to scale and drive additional investment; failure to address these needs often results in the company relocating to another area where their needs can be better served.

Chart 14 – Number of Businesses by Employment Size



Source: US Census Bureau, County Business Patterns (2023)

Action Steps

- **Chambers of Commerce and Main Street Organizations**–Provide a list to SWNMCOG of all of the businesses that are second-stage
- **SWNMCOG**–Work with local governments to schedule short meetings and/or site visits to these companies to understand their needs, then create policies and programs that can better support these businesses.

Key Metrics

- Number of businesses listed
- Number of businesses supported

Strategy 2.4: Invest in the Co.Starters program to establish new businesses

Grant County launched a CO.STARTERS® program in 2019 funded by a USDA REDI grant. Since then, the program has expanded to the entire Region and more than 70 businesses have been started or invigorated by the CO.STARTERS® program. 57 were started in Grant County, 10 in Luna County, and 3 in Catron County. Out of these Alumni businesses, 36 were still active in 2025 (an average survival rate of 51%).

Action Steps

- **SWNMCOG**–Identify funding sources to maintain and grow the program.
- **Chambers of Commerce, Main Street Organizations, Counties and Municipalities**–Invite business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs to participate in the program.



Objective #3: Support the growth of the regional housing industry.

Economic Resilience: A region's success is driven by its ability to provide homes for workers and their families. Insufficient housing choice stifles a region's ability to adapt to demographic changes and inhibits workforce supply.

Housing is unique in that it is simultaneously a consumption and an investment good. Because of this, home prices have risen across New Mexico and have outpaced wage growth, even with a slower housing market. Providing good-quality homes that are affordable for working families will be critical to ensuring the Region's governments and employers have the workforce they need.

Strategy 3.1: Develop CTE pathways and technical programs for the construction industries

Home construction and maintenance requires a variety of specializations including plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and landscaping. Many of the jobs available in this sector are local and remain relevant across the business cycle. The Region must provide a steady pipeline of workers to fulfill these jobs and maintain the availability and quality of the housing stock.

Action Steps

- **SWNMCOG**–Coordinate with secondary and post-secondary institutions to have certificate and diploma options available for students.
- **Local Developers**–Partner with educational institutions to support summer internships where students can help with construction sites and new graduates are more likely to be hired by existing firms.

Key Metrics

- Number of employees in the construction industry by county
- Growth of the construction industry as a share of total jobs

Strategy 3.2: Pass vacant building ordinances in each municipality to address vacancies and blight

Approximately 8,500 units (or 27% of the Region’s housing stock) are vacant. While some vacancies are due to seasonal use (e.g. second homes, seasonal worker accommodations, cabins for the hunting season) or planned transitions (sold or rented but waiting for the new occupants), an estimated 16% of the housing stock (or 5,000 units) is abandoned and/or persistently vacant. These units often need renovations and repairs to become habitable and put back into the housing market, typically for much less than it would cost to construct from scratch. These units are especially important if they exist in developed neighborhoods because they have good access to jobs, schools, and shopping. They also depress the values of the surrounding homes.

Action Steps

- **Local Governments**—Pass abandoned property ordinances that authorize code enforcement to track vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated (VAD) properties. Work with property owners (if identified and willing to comply) to bring properties up to code or transact the property. If the owner is unidentifiable or unwilling to comply, the local government can use municipal lien enforcement to force the property to be transferred to responsible public or private ownership.

Key Metrics

- Percent of vacant housing units
- Number of VAD properties addressed through passed property ordinances



Strategy 3.3: Improve rental housing by leveraging the State's landlord incentive programs

There are 6,300 renter-occupied units in the Region, many of which are older homes that are experiencing degraded quality. The State has several incentive programs available to increase the number of safe, voucher-supported rental units. The programs available to landlords include the following:

Landlord Collaboration Program (LCP)-Supports landlords in renting to young adults at risk of homelessness, in partnership with youth service providers. Offers remedies to eligible landlords to encourage successful tenancies.

Landlord Engagement Program (LEP)-Encourages landlords to rent to City of Albuquerque and Continuum of Care housing voucher holders. Provides support and incentives to promote stable housing.

Rehab-2-Rental Program-Provides funding to upgrade substandard rental properties to meet housing quality standards. Aims to increase housing stability for tenant-based voucher households in New Mexico.

Statewide Landlord Incentive Program (SLIP)-Offers financial incentives to landlords who rent to eligible housing voucher holders. Designed to expand the availability of safe, adequate rental units across New Mexico.

Action Steps

- **SWNMCOG**–Work with the Housing NM to identify voucher-supported units and assess their condition, then work with municipalities and landlords to complete the work and get reimbursed for qualifying work completed.

Key Metrics

- Number of units included and breakdown of condition
- Amount of funding secured under Housing New Mexico landlord programs



Objective #4: Increase the capacity of local governments to operate more effectively.

Economic Resilience: Federal funding has decreased for local governments and is unlikely to return to early 2020 levels. Governments must operate effectively to maintain their budgets and level of services.

One of the key roles of the Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments is to provide technical assistance and support to municipalities within the Region. Many of the incorporated communities within the region have limited staff, resulting in those who must perform many roles and who have limited experience. One of the consistent outcomes of the interviews conducted for this report was that the COG provides critical information about upcoming legislation, state statutes and compliance, available grants, and other best practices so these governments can perform more effectively. A key focus for the COG in the next five years will be to enhance and expand this role to provide better support to these local governments.

Strategy 4.1: Provide monthly technical assistance trainings to city and county leaders on a rotating list of topics

The SWNMCOG will provide monthly virtual trainings on a rotating list of topics that will be decided upon annually by the board committee. SWNMCOG staff will lead the meeting and provide time for government staff to ask questions, seek clarification, and practice key skills.

Action Steps

- **SWNMCOG Board**—Have a standing agenda item at the last meeting of each year to pick 10-12 topics for the COG to train on each month.
- **SWNMCOG Staff**—Plan, prepare for, and host the monthly trainings using a virtual meeting tool so the meeting can be recorded, saved for later, and distributed to relevant staff members.

Key Metrics

- Number of training meetings held each quarter
- Number of attendees at each meeting

Strategy 4.2: Track the financial sustainability of local municipalities

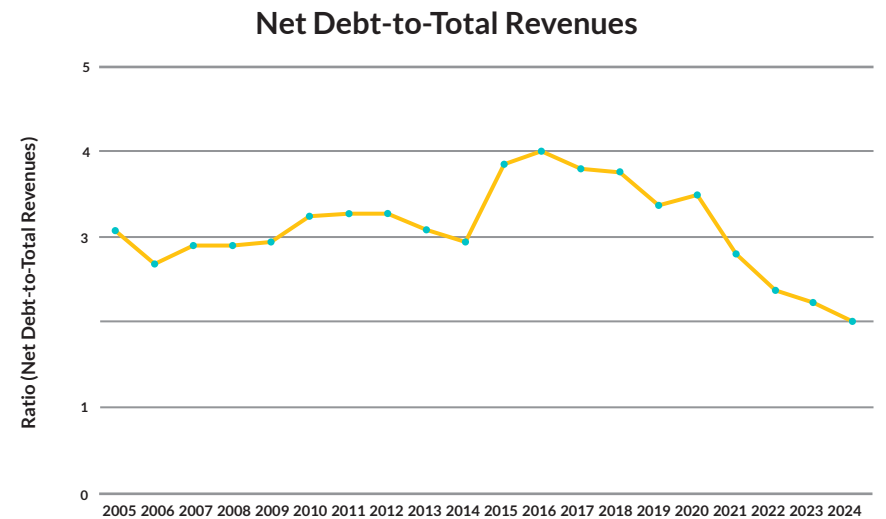
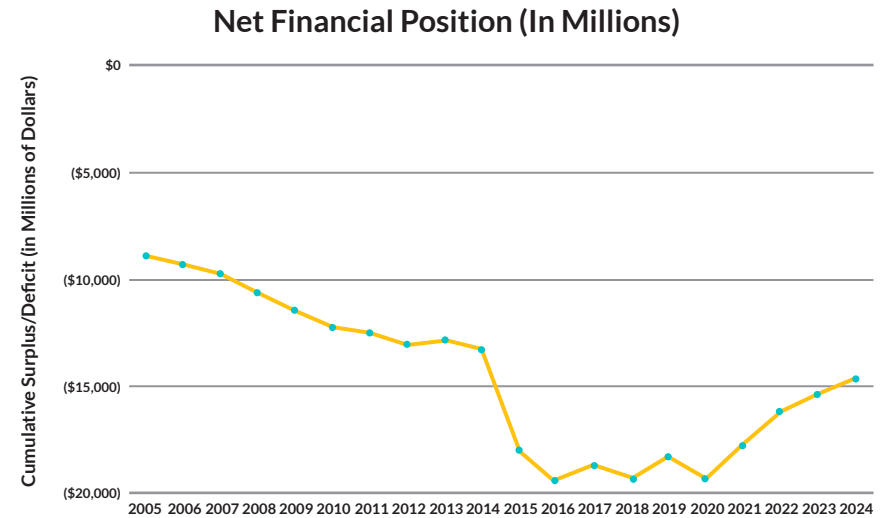
Government budgets can be difficult to understand, especially for elected officials who do not have the know-how and experience to interpret the annual financial reports. The Strong Towns advocacy organization has developed a [Finance Decoder](#) that makes it easy to interpret a city’s financial sustainability. Providing access to this tool will help local governments better understand how their finances are being used and the financial risks they are facing.

Action Steps

- **SWNMCOG**–Fill out the tool for member municipalities and train them on how to update the tool. Attend municipal board meetings to go over the findings and how to address identified risks. Update the tool on an annual basis, as part of the CEDS annual update.

Key Metrics

- Percent of municipalities with finance decoder reports
- Percent of finance decoder reports updated (annually)



Source: StrongTowns.org



Objective #5: Increase the Region’s ability to prevent and respond to natural disasters and other emergencies.

Economic Resilience: Natural disasters halt economic activities, destroy residential and business property, and increase the costs of living and working in an area. Preventing and responding to these events will reduce the harm to the community and maintain the sustainability of the Region’s businesses, workers, and residents.

The Region experienced an average of 12 wildfires per year (82K acres per fire) between 2014 and 2024. While the average number of fires has trended downward for the period 2004-2024, the number of acres burned climbed significantly in 2023 due to the Black Fire (the largest fire in the Region within the last decade). The Region has several populations that are susceptible to wildfire impacts. All of the counties have at least 23% or more of their population who have 3 or more

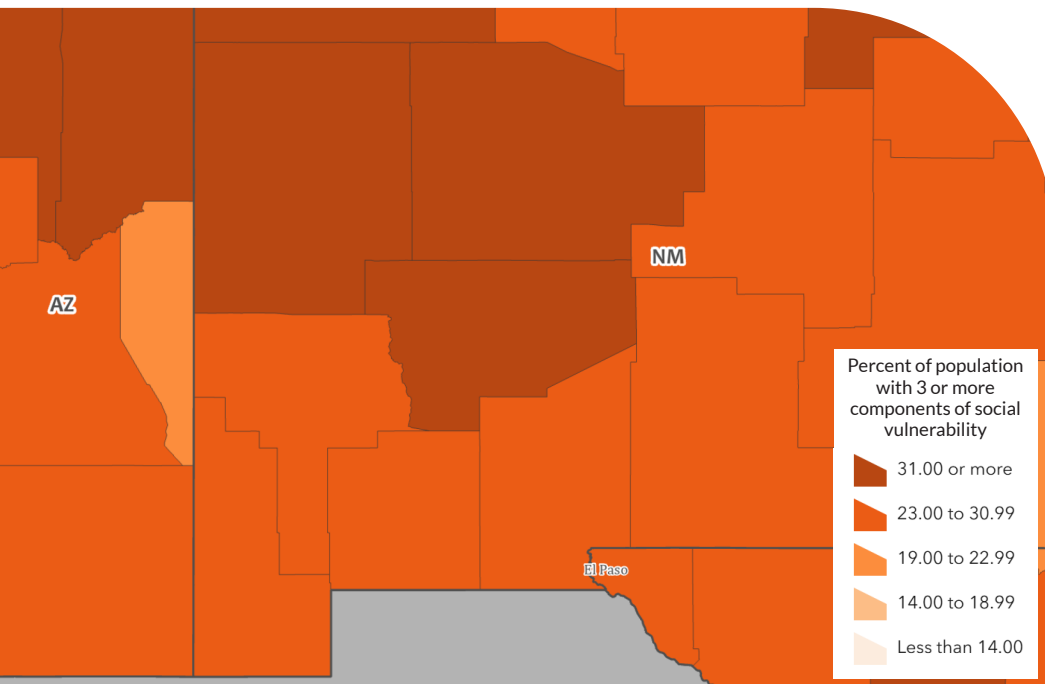
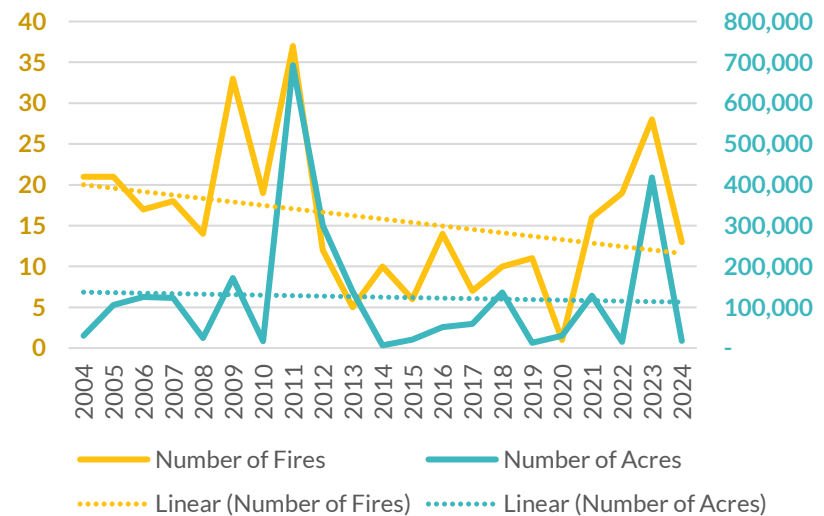


Chart 15 – Number of fires and number of acres burned by year (2004-2024)



Source: National Interagency Fire Center

components of social vulnerability (poverty, overcrowding, lack of health insurance, etc.). Wildfire, flooding, and other natural disasters increase business risks and can significantly harm the Region’s economy.

Strategy 5.1: Ensure all local governments have hazard mitigation and emergency and natural disaster response plans

All of the Region’s local governments are required to have hazard mitigation plans to qualify for FEMA funding support. On top of that requirement, each government should have emergency and disaster response plans so they can effectively coordinate and distribute resources in the case of an emergency or natural disaster occurring. These plans should not be long or complicated—a simple set of protocols for who should be contacted and how local resources should be distributed based on the type of emergency should be created to minimize damages and protect residents.

Action Steps

- **Local Governments**—Perform public outreach to inform residents about its emergency plans as well as resources that are available in case of an emergency.
- **SWNMCOG**—Ensure that each county has an approved hazard mitigation plan and support the local governments in getting funding for the creation of emergency and natural disaster plans. Ensure that links to those plans are stored and maintained and can be easily access by community leaders and residents.

Key Metrics

- Percent of local governments with an updated emergency and/or natural disaster plan



Objective #6: Improve the Region's resilience by investing in catalytic projects and industries.

Economic Resilience: The Region has several catalytic projects that are planned or under development. These projects will increase the Region's economy by improving critical infrastructure, creating new markets, and creating new capacity for economic development activities.

Strategy 6.1: Support development of the Playas Research and Training Center and other Department of Defense initiatives

The Playas Research and Training Center is owned and operated by the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology. It is a historic mining town that was converted into a 640-acre site for advanced research and training activities. The site hosts first responders, national guard, and army reserves for training events, often lasting several days to a week. The site is also becoming better integrated with cybersecurity research and related projects that are continuing to push the site's relevance for the national defense industry and toward high-skilled jobs in information technology and security.

Additionally, this project provides opportunities for support services to the site, including food, laundering, and cleaning services that can be provided by local businesses.



Strategy 6.2: Support development of the Deming, Columbus, Lordsburg, Playas, and Grant County airports and industrial parks

Airports and industrial parks are fundamental infrastructure for economic base industries. These locations provide the land, water, power, and other essential services necessary for medium- and large-sized businesses. Base industries are supported by non-base industries that rely on the expenditures of the base industry to survive. For example, mining is an economic base industry for Grant County and the restaurants, hotels, and downtown stores in the area are all reliant on the goods and services demanded by that industry and its workers as a major source of income.

Each of the Region's counties have dedicated airport and industrial park space. Ensuring that the infrastructure and services to these sites is maintained and ready is critical to the long-term success of each county's economy. The State passed two bills in 2025 (SB 169 and SB 170) to help with site readiness and utility pre-deployment.

Strategy 6.3: Support outdoor recreation projects including the Continental Divide Trail, 5-points plan, Fort Bayard, Trees Lakes Recreation Site, dark skies and cosmic campgrounds and outfitting services

Outdoor recreation represents an estimated 2.4% of value added (\$3.1 Billion) and 3.2% of total wage and salary employment (29,000 jobs) for the State of New Mexico. This industry is a major of economic driver for the Region and has made the tourism and hospitality industry the 4th-largest employment sector for the Region. The State continues to invest significant funds into outdoor recreation, spending more than \$30 Million on the Trails+ grant program between 2020 and 2025.

The Region's communities will invest in high-return infrastructure and programming that will lead to overnight stays and additional spending at local restaurants and shops.



Strategy 6.4: Support the development of the energy corridor, natural gas, geothermal, grid modernization, transportation, renewable energy, and electric vehicle charging projects.

As the energy economy continues transitioning from crude oil to natural gas, nuclear, wind, and solar there are good opportunities for the Region to take advantage of this transition. One such project is the upcoming Southline Transmission Project, which will allow the Region to access more power and make the Region more competitive. Additionally, the Region can invest in power production and can then sell that power to the Tucson and El Paso regions. Another project is the TeraWatt I-10 electric corridor, which will have 9 pull-through stalls for heavy-duty trucks in Lordsburg. This will enable critical transportation infrastructure for large EV trucks and semis.

Strategy 6.5: Enhance agriculture innovation and cold storage/ transportation industries.



*Several Deming manufacturing plants near the intersection of J Street and McCan Road
Source: Google Earth Imagery Data (Images sourced between 1/1/2020 and 4/14/2023)*

The southern part of the Region has economic potential tied to border commerce and agriculture. The Region has the only 24 hour port of entry in the State (Columbus) and is well positioned along the I-10 corridor to support the manufacturing, storage, and distribution of agricultural and food products. There is already a strong AG/manufacturing/ transportation cluster (representing 19.5% and 20% of Luna and Hidalgo County's GDP, respectively). When combined with the energy and transportation investments discussed in Strategy 5.4, the Region has unique competitive advantages in this economic cluster.

Strategy 6.6: Expand capacity through the adoption of local option gross receipts tax increments (2019 HB 479) at the County and Municipal levels

House Bill 479 allows for the de-earmarking of Gross Receipts Tax collections that can be used for economic development purposes. Counties can impose up to one-eighth of a percent and municipalities can impose up to one-fourth percent. These funds can be used to further or implement economic development plans and projects, including the purchase of lands and for construction activities, as well as payments for professional services contracts and the provision of direct loans and grants. The funds can even be bonded to pay for larger projects that the community otherwise wouldn't have been able to support.

Strategy 6.7: Support improved healthcare and childcare services

New Mexico has made significant changes to public healthcare and childcare services, including the recent passing and/or fund major new initiatives:

- **2025 SB #3**–This act reformed New Mexico's behavioral health system by creating regionally coordinated planning and service delivery structures. It also creates regional plans, funding, and performance metrics, while mandating collaboration with local stakeholders and higher education institutions to address workforce shortages.
- **Rural Healthcare Delivery Fund**–\$46 Million in 2024 and \$20 Million in 2025 was made available to rural providers to provide financial support by offsetting operational costs and expanding essential health care services.
- **NMFA Childcare Facility Revolving Loan Fund**–This fund can be used for capital projects, such as expansions, renovations, repairs, and new construction of childcare facilities. Loan amounts are available for amounts between \$100 thousand and \$2.5 million and have a fixed 2% interest rate.
- **Universal Childcare**–The state now offers no-cost universal childcare (starting November 1, 2025). This initiative makes childcare available to all



Source: Google Earth Streetview (Imagery date: 04/2023)

New Mexicans. It also provides funding to construct, expand, and renovate childcare facilities, will recruit and license home providers, and will increase the reimbursement rates providers receive to reflect the true cost of care.

Many of these programs and initiatives are in their early stages and will need community and stakeholder buy-in and support to see benefits at the regional level. SWNMCOG will support these efforts and make sure that the Region's communities will have access to these jobs and that healthcare and childcare partners are working to take advantage of these programs and funds.

Strategy 6.8: Support changes to healthcare malpractice litigation

New Mexico has one of the highest rates of medical malpractice payouts per capita in the U.S. (#2 in 2024 per [Consumer Shield](#)). Between 2019 and 2024, New Mexico was the only state in the U.S. to lose doctors, with a net loss of 248 practicing physicians, according to a study from the Physicians Advocacy Institute. The costs of these payouts and loss of practitioners is especially harmful for rural healthcare centers that are too small to be able to afford the insurance and liability costs.

The NM legislature is trying to find ways to address these issues, such as the with SB 161 (2024) that provided \$50 million in grants to hospitals for two years to offset these costs. However, it does not resolve the underlying issue of litigation and the state's large population of people who use Medicaid, which provides smaller reimbursements than private insurance providers.

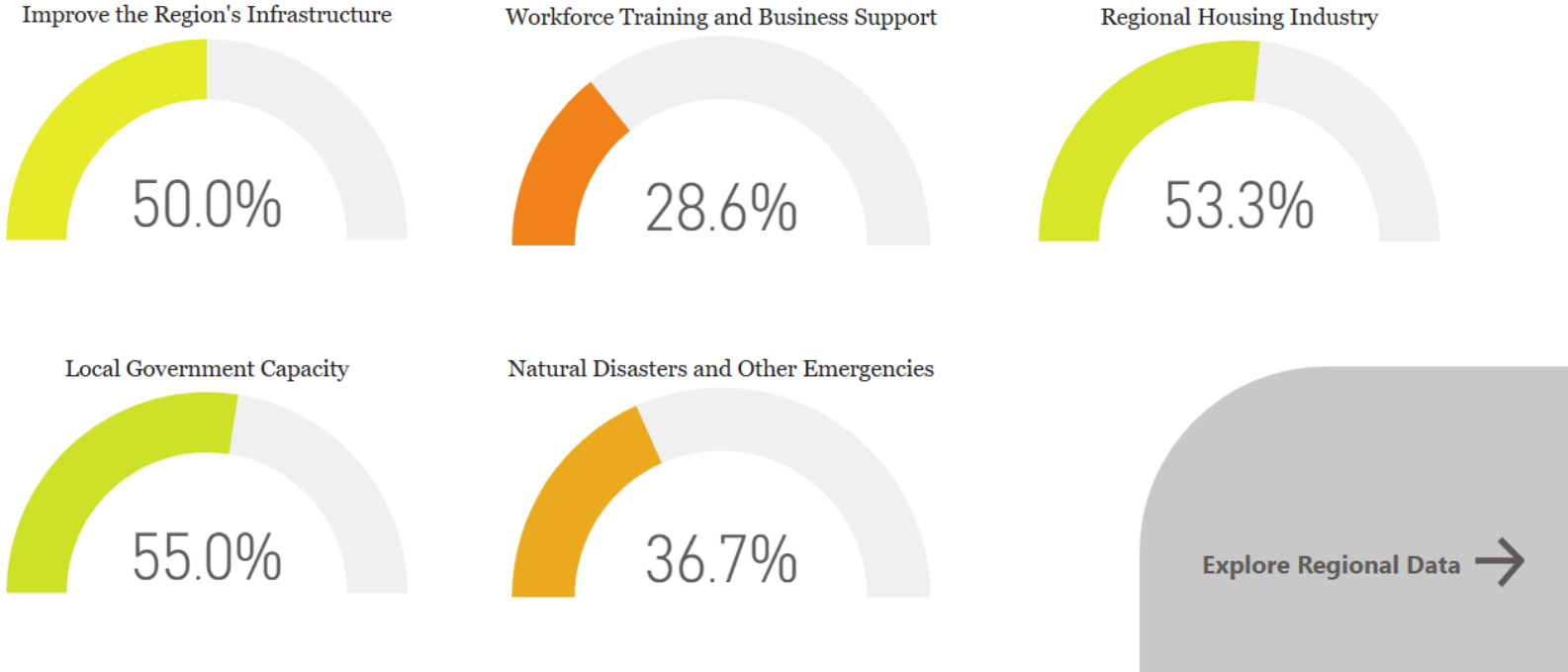
These issues need to be addressed at the state level. The Region's communities and the COG will support local healthcare providers and support the long-term sustainability of facilities and services throughout the Region.

Evaluation Framework



SWNMCOG intends to work on all of the strategies described in this report. Tracking progress is an important way to ensure that the strategies are being worked on and that progress is being made. The table on the following pages summarizes the objectives and strategies described within this CEDS Report. However, some strategies lose relevance or need to be adjusted as they are implemented. For those reasons, SWNMCOG had created an online dashboard tool that will be updated regularly (at least once every year as part of the annual update) to track progress on the strategies as well as to add or remove strategies to best fulfill the objectives described in this report. Readers of this section are invited to follow the link to the dashboard for the most up-to-date data about the Region’s progress on the CEDS.

CEDS Progress Dashboard



Example view of the SWNMCOG CEDS Dashboard. To view the interactive dashboard, [click here](#) or scan the QR code.

Objective #1: Improve the Region's infrastructure to be competitive for economic development.

Strategy	Participating Organizations	Metric(s)
1.1 Create an infrastructure prioritization logic model for governments to adopt and use to prioritize infrastructure projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SWNMCOG ● Local Governments (Municipalities and Counties) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creation of the regional model template (% complete) ● Adoption of model by local governments (% of governments)
1.2: Partner with private capital to accelerate infrastructure investment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SWNMCOG ● Local Governments (Municipalities and Counties) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Value (in USD) of infrastructure expenditures saved through investment in infrastructure system upgrades
1.3: Expand and enhance broadband infrastructure throughout the Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local Governments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that 100% of businesses and households have access to high-speed internet services

Objective #2: Improve Workforce Training and Business Support Services.

Strategy	Participating Organizations	Metric(s)
2.1: Coordinate workforce development projects at the regional level to ensure coordination and critical mass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SWNMCOG ● Local Area Workforce Development Board ● NM Economic Development Department ● Economic Development Administration ● NM Mortgage Finance Authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of regional workforce training programs developed ● Number of program participants
2.2: Implement leadership trainings and support services to increase employer competencies and improve career pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chambers of Commerce and Main Street Organizations ● SWNMCOG ● NewMARC ● Contractor or consultant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of businesses listed ● % of identified businesses supported
2.3: Implement a stage-two business support program, with a focus on stable and scalable businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chambers of Commerce and Main Street Organizations ● SWNMCOG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of businesses listed ● % of businesses supported
2.4: Invest in the Co.Starters program to establish new businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chambers of Commerce ● Main Street Organizations ● Local Governments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●

Objective #3: Support the growth of the regional housing industry.

Strategy	Participating Organizations	Metric(s)
3.1 Develop CTE pathways and technical programs for the construction industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SWNMCOG ● Local Developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of employees in the construction industry by county ● Growth of the construction industry as a share of total jobs
3.2 Pass vacant building ordinances in each municipality to address vacancies and blight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local Governments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Percent of vacant housing units ● Number of VAD properties addressed through passed property ordinances
3.3 Improve rental housing by leveraging the State's landlord incentive programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SWNMCOG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of units included and breakdown of condition ● Amount of funding secured under Housing New Mexico landlord programs

Objective #4: Increase the capacity of local governments to operate more effectively.

Strategy	Participating Organizations	Metric(s)
4.1 Provide monthly technical assistance trainings to city and county leaders on a rotating list of topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SWNMCOG Board ● SWNMCOG Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of training meetings held each quarter ● Number of attendees at each meeting
4.2: Track the financial sustainability of local municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SWNMCOG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● % of finance decoder reports generated ● % of finance decoder reports updated (annually)

Objective #5: Increase the Region's ability to prevent and respond to natural disasters and other emergencies.

Strategy	Participating Organizations	Metric(s)
5.1: Ensure all local governments have emergency and natural disaster response plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWNMCOG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of local governments with an updated emergency and/or natural disaster plan

Objective #6: Improve the Region's resilience by investing in catalytic projects and industries.

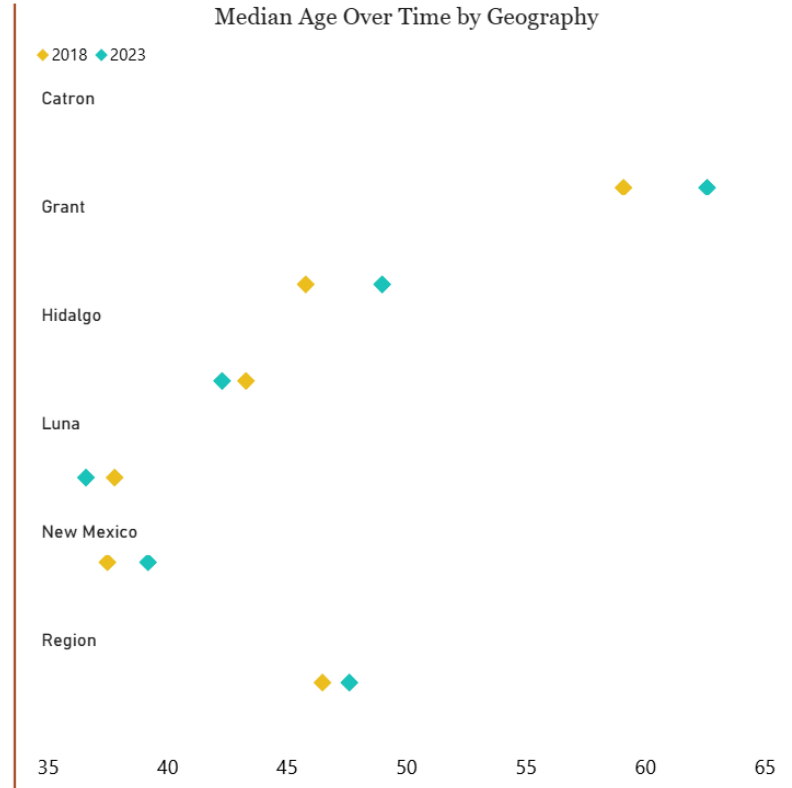
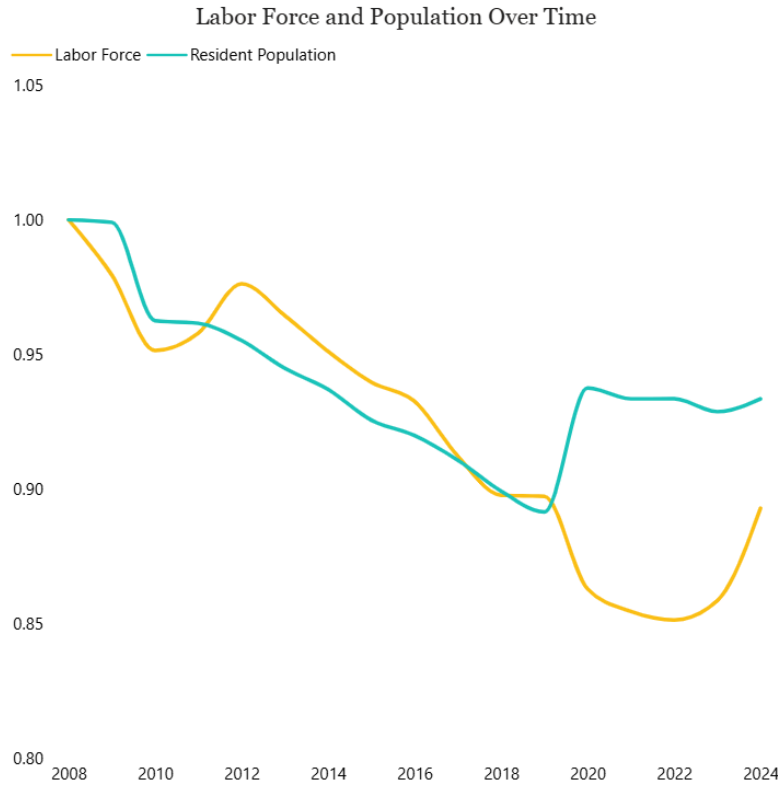
6.1: Support development of the Playas Research and Training Center and other Department of Defense initiatives
6.2: Support development of the Deming, Columbus, Lordsburg, and Grant County airports and industrial parks
6.3: Support outdoor recreation projects including the Continental Divide Trail, 5-points plan, Fort Bayard, Trees Lakes Recreation Site, dark skies and cosmic campgrounds and outfitting services
6.4: Support the development of the energy corridor, natural gas, renewable energy, transportation, and electric vehicle charging projects
6.5: Enhance AG innovation and cold storage/transportation
6.6: Expand capacity through the adoption of local option gross receipts tax increments (2019 HB 479) at the County and Municipal levels
6.7: Support improved healthcare and childcare services
6.8: Support changes to healthcare malpractice litigation

Note: Strategies in Objective 6 are regional projects the SWNMCOG is generally supporting but for which it will not be actively leading implementation. Therefore, these strategies do not have participating organizations and metrics and will not be actively tracked in the CEDS progress dashboard.

Appendices



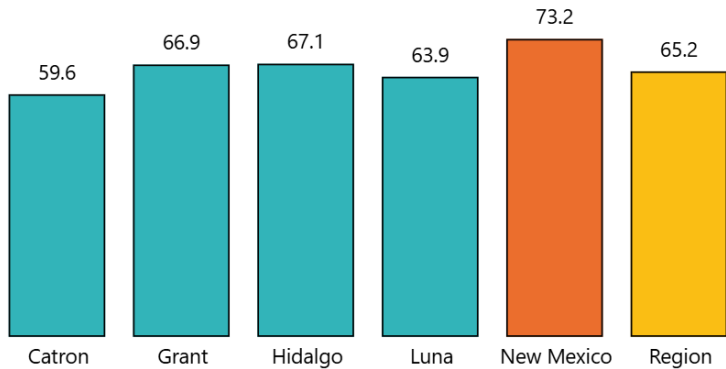
Demographics



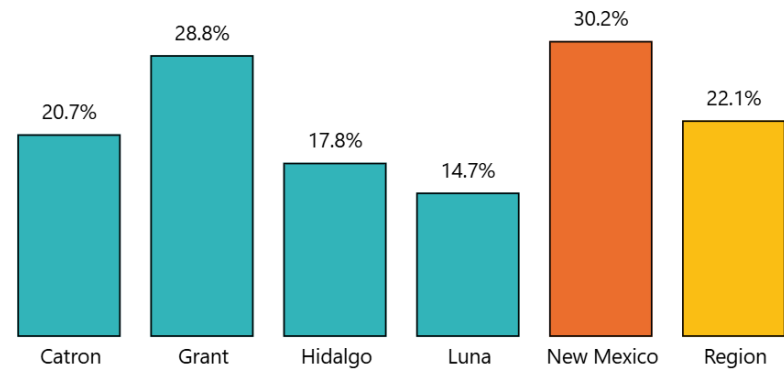
County	1990	2000	2010	2020	2024	2010-2024 % Change
Catron	2563	3543	3725	3579	3795	1.9%
Grant	27676	31002	29514	28185	27541	-6.7%
Hidalgo	5958	5932	4894	4178	3966	-19.0%
Luna	18110	25016	25095	25427	25878	3.1%
Region	54307	65493	63228	61369	61180	-3.2%

Workforce & Income

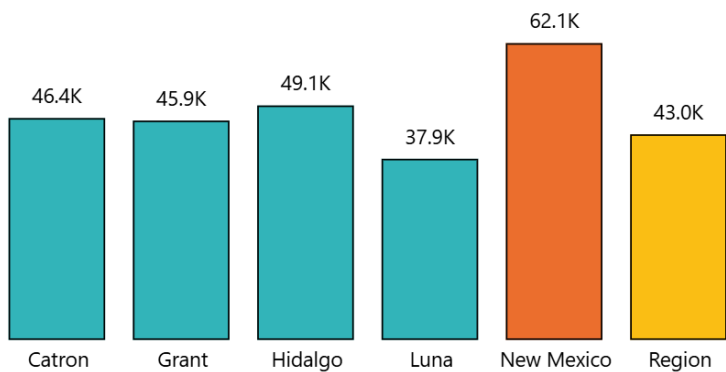
Prime Age Labor Force Participation Rate



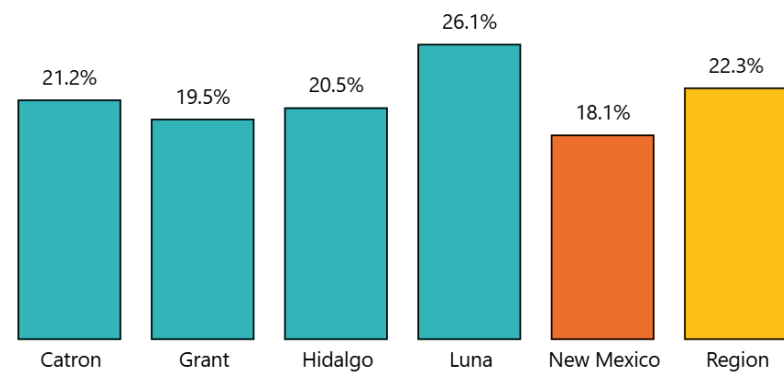
Educational Attainment (% Bachelor's or Higher)



Median Household Income

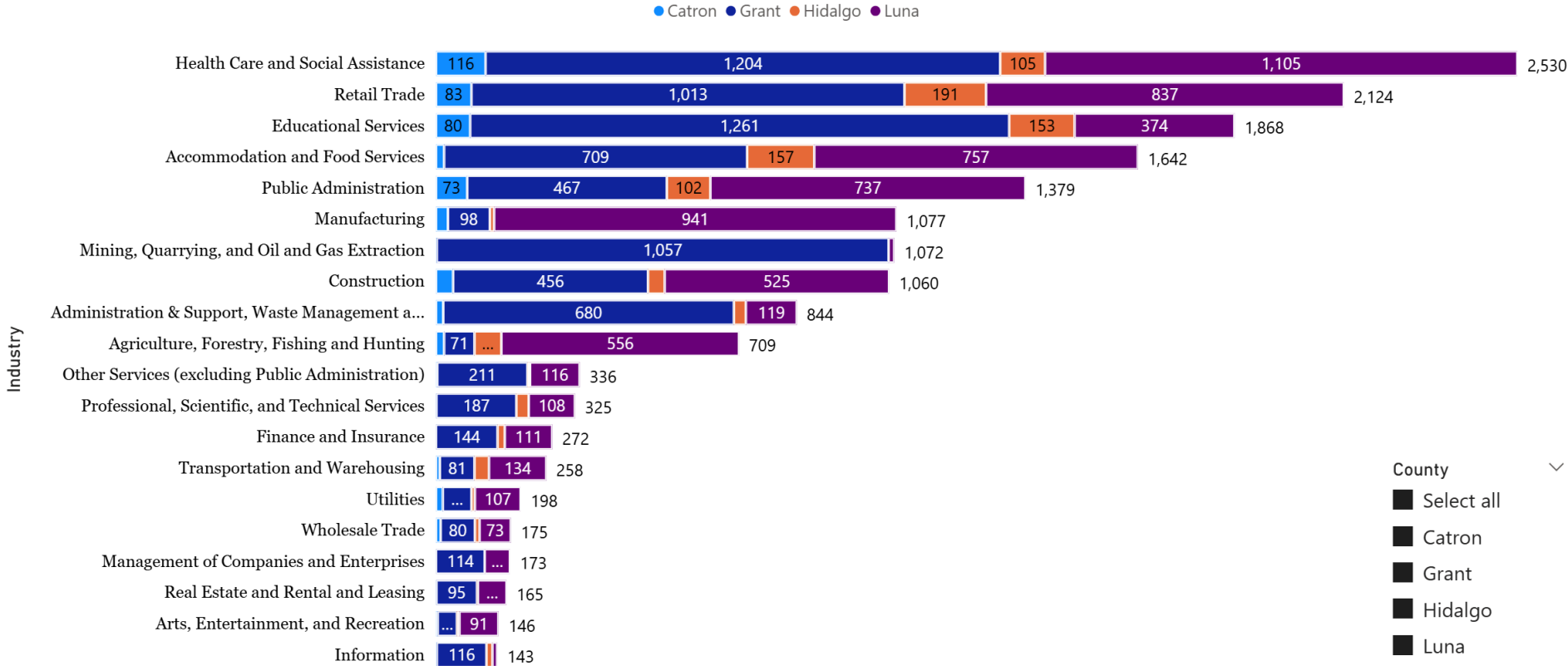


Percent of Population Living Under the Poverty Level



Jobs & Industry

Primary Jobs by Industry

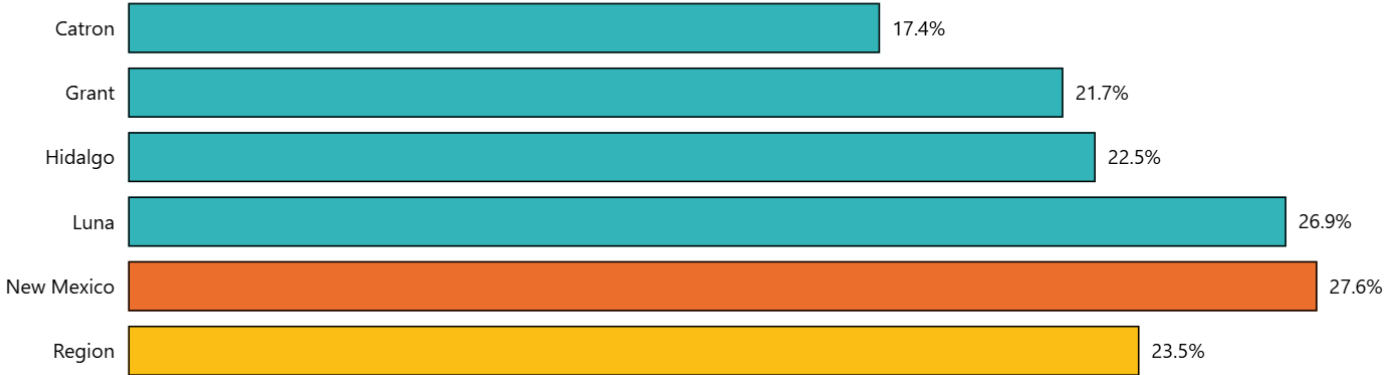


County

- Select all
- Catron
- Grant
- Hidalgo
- Luna

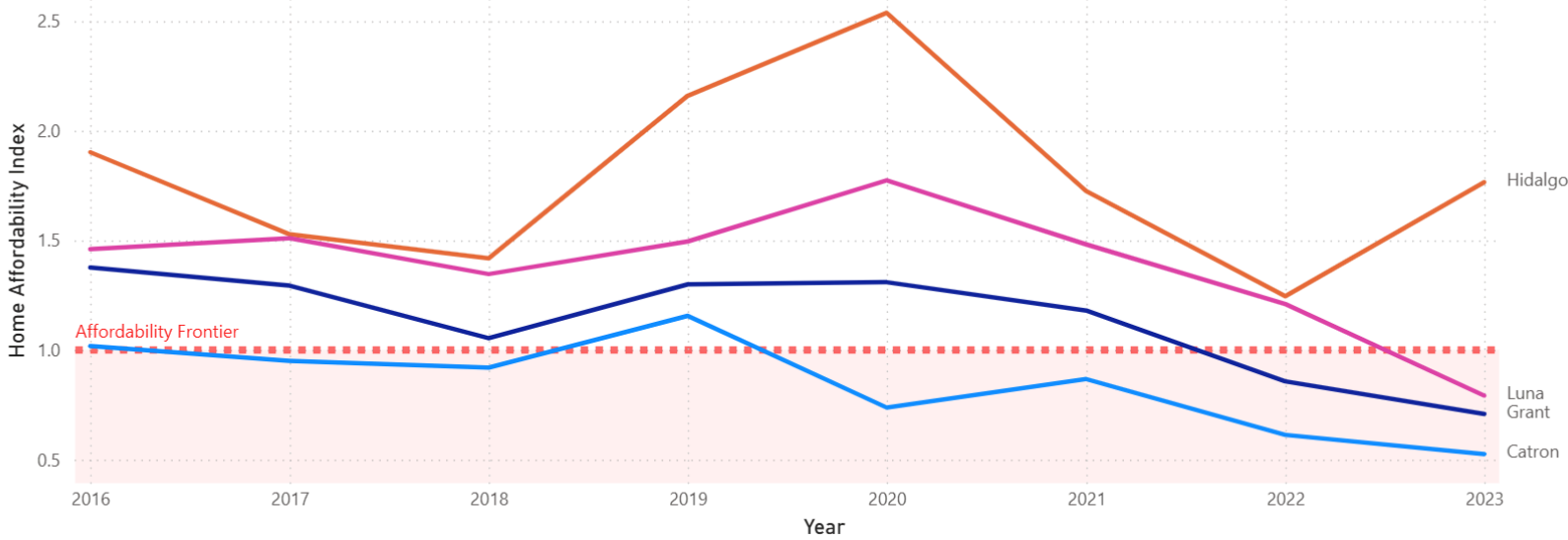
Housing

Percent of Cost-Burdened Households (30% or more of monthly household income on housing expenses)



Home Affordability Index

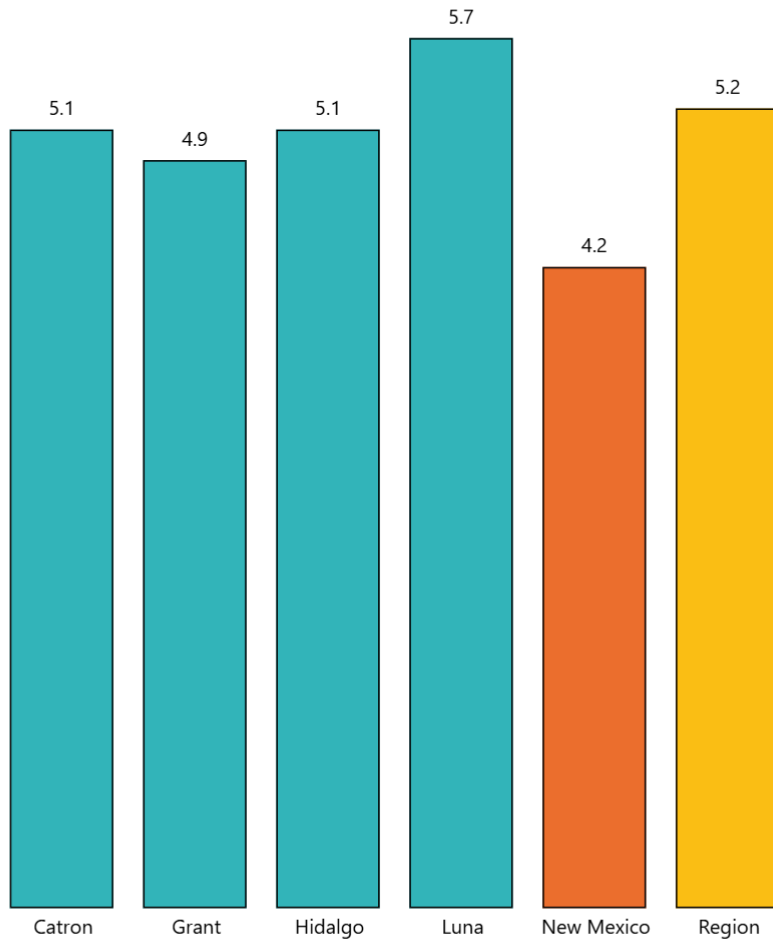
Name ● Catron ● Grant ● Hidalgo ● Luna



- Name
- Select all
 - Catron
 - Grant
 - Hidalgo
 - Luna

Health

Avg. Number of Physically Unhealthy Days



Percentage of Adults Reporting Fair/Poor Health

