

## Appendix E: CEDS Stakeholder Interviews

### On-on-One Stakeholder Interview Summary

Total Number of On-On-One Interviews: 30

#### Question 1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?

Geographic Location (7 Interviews)

People/Workforce (7 Interviews)

Natural Resources (6 Interviews)

Education (3 Interviews)

Quality of Life (3 Interviews)

Airports (2 Interviews)

Downtowns (2 Interviews)

Economic Development (2 Interviews)

Vacant Buildings (2 Interviews)

Manufacturing Solution Center (1 Interview)

Note: a person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.

#### Sample Open Responses to Question 1:

**(Education)** The community college system. North Carolina has a great university and 4-year college system, but more funding should be allocated to the existing community system for updating their physical plants as well as technology-based resources. The system needs to rebrand and enhance marketing efforts for K-12 students and their future goals. Need training focused on technology. State needs to rebrand the entire community college system. Maximize the new location and operation of NCSSM.

**(Geographic Location)** We sit very near to a number crossroads here with access to I-40, I-77, I-85, US 321 and even NC 16. The proximity of our 4-county region to great transportation corridors and to nearby larger cities. I don't believe we are emphasizing this proximity enough to businesses we are recruiting to locate here.

**(Geographic Location)** We could advertise to say "come to this region" where your commute is short compared to other regions in the nation. We can't train enough local people to fill the open jobs and we need to recruit people to move here to take the available jobs.

**(Downtowns)** **(Natural Resources)** Our downtowns and the lakes and rivers. We need to develop pedestrian friendly downtowns. Hickory is beginning to do some of this with its bond initiative. Morganton has done a good job with its downtown, but could do much more.

**(People/Workforce)** It is the workforce. The human capital that exist here. When you look at the jobs being advertised, the majority only require a high school education. It would be better to see jobs that value a higher degree or certification. We are training people to leave this area and find jobs elsewhere.

**(People/Workforce)** Inclusion of the senior experienced workforce. Those folks have had successful business careers and live or moved to here and we need to more fully utilize their knowledge and experience.

**(Manufacturing Solutions Center)** Currently the Manufacturing Solutions Center is underutilized and soon to be underutilized is the NC School for Math and Science. I don't think there is a good understanding or awareness of what they are doing. It is viewed as a "baby" of Conover and that creates some negative feelings. MSC leadership doesn't do a great job of marketing what they do at the MSC. Regarding the NCSSSM, if you went to 1,000 people in our region, 998 would not know what it is or that it is coming to Morganton. They don't know what it is or how it well help.

**Question 2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region?  
(Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier)**

- Workforce Readiness (8 Interviews)
- Job Mix/Job Wages (7 Interviews)
- Young People Leaving the Region (7 Interviews)
- Perception of the Region (6 Interviews)
- Infrastructure (5 Interviews)
- Lack of Communication about the Region (5 Interviews)
- Availability of Shell Buildings/Business Parks (4 Interviews)
- Education (4 Interviews)
- Housing (4 Interviews)
- Vacant Buildings (4 Interviews)
- State Policies (3 Interviews)
- Lack of Amenities (2 Interviews)
- Lack of Vision (2 Interviews)
- Over Reliance on Manufacturing Industry (2 Interviews)
- Region Slow to React to Problems (2 Interviews)

Note: a person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.

**Sample Open Responses to Question 2:**

**(Lack of Vision)** Hickory and this region has great proximity and access to larger urban cities and their amenities, without the downside of traffic congestion, crime and other urban ills. But, when faced with new growth and development proposals, local officials seem to turn down these opportunities out of "fear" of losing their small town community

atmosphere. The infrastructure is here we just need to look outside the box and open up to these potential endeavors.

**(Young People Leaving the Region)** **(Availability of Shell Buildings/Business Parks)** **(State Policies)** Labor force participation rates. We have difficulty in attracting and retaining younger people. If something doesn't change, we are going to have a very serious problem. Product development is a perennial problem. We have a shortage of ready buildings that are the desirable size. I don't know why we didn't learn the "Lincoln lesson" sooner. The cost of construction for adequate shell buildings is high. You can't get companies to come look unless you have building ready. The state doesn't really help develop shell buildings. The loan and carrying costs are difficult for communities.

**(Workforce Readiness)** **(No Marketing Plan)** **(Lack of Vision)** Barriers include workforce readiness; having a single, cohesive, unified marketing plan that positions all the business attributes across the four-counties; poor work ethic among many newly hired workers. The biggest barrier is that visionaries are in short supply. We need more people who are innovators and a creative environment to help them flourish.

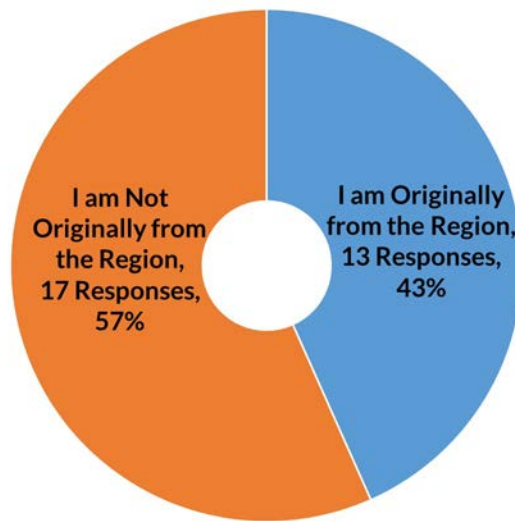
**(Risk Intolerance)** **(State Policies)** **(Education)** **(Perception of the Region)** **(Infrastructure)** **(Region Slow to React to Problems)** Extreme intolerance for risk. Lack of competitive incentives designed for attracting innovative businesses and talent to the region (vs. incentives designed to build or build out infrastructure and facilities). This is a generalize issue that applies to our area heavily, but also to the state as a whole - we are behind all of our neighboring states to the south in this area from SC to FL. Public education is grossly underfunded and not innovating to engage students in a manner they understand and enjoy, often not because they don't want to, but because our leadership fails to fund our schools at a level that supports it. Private [school] offerings are not competitive with nearby markets.

**(Young People Leaving the Region)** **(Lack of Communication about the Region)** Population growth. Attracting businesses and workers to our area. We are not selling the amenities of the area and its proximity to surrounding assets enough.

**(Perception of the Region)** **(Young People Leaving the Region)** We have an inferiority complex here. We have more going for us here than we think. I am proud of our resiliency compared to be where we have been. The biggest barrier is the loss of the 25-44 age demographic.

**(Language Barriers)** Barriers include: language - huge gap in communication; 75% [of Hispanics] do not know English - some use their children to speak for them.

**Question 3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here.**



Sample Open Responses to Question 3:

Employment opportunity and the great location and tranquility.  
This is the fifth state I have lived in over the course of a 50-year career. Moved here from Georgia, after being recruited to an executive position in healthcare.  
Born in Florida. Followed job with social security.  
Florida. The area brought me here. Climate, mountains, seasons.  
North Carolina's cache as a state. Progressive southern state.  
A job.  
Job as EDC Director. Work drew me here as a CPA.  
Job opportunity.  
Minnesota. Lived there for 30 years - left because of the snow & rain.  
Belgium; Lived in Canada, Charlotte, UNC-Chapel Hill, wife's family got here, lived here 8 years; Tons to do - not looked around, not a bad place to live; Good schools, but not perfect  
Job opportunity. Wanted to be close to the mountains. Values here are great.  
The morals and beliefs of this county match our families.  
Came here for job opportunity and raised my family here.

**Question 4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?**

Attracting High Paying/Diversified Jobs to the Region (8 Interviews)  
New Industries/Industrial Parks (7 Interviews)  
Improving Communication about the Advantages of the Region (7 Interviews)  
Investing in Education/Workforce (6 Interviews)  
New Housing Development (5 Interviews)  
Agriculture (1 Interview)

Airport (1 Interview)  
Attracting Small Business to the region (1 Interview)  
Community Colleges (1 Interview)  
Healthcare (1 Interview)  
Local Based Philanthropy (1 Interview)  
Marketing Natural Resources (1 Interview)  
Professional Sports (1 Interview)  
Research Facilities (1 Interview)  
Retaining Young People (1 Interview)  
Technology (1 Interview)  
Tourism (1 Interview)

Note: a person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.

#### Sample Open Responses to Question 4:

**(Technology) (Create Innovative Grant and Incentive Programs)** We need more engagement from Google and Apple. Capitalize more on these tech giants. We need to re-invent ourselves around technology.

**(Airport) (Marketing Natural Resources)** Airport is not used for commercial air service. We should capitalize more on that asset more than we do now. Capitalize more on the Catawba River. It is not being used or marketed as much as it could be. Maybe after a whitewater event at the center in [Charlotte] and then have a “flat water” event in our region the next day.

**(Local Based Philanthropy)** We lack a strong culture of philanthropy. We need more local based philanthropy.

**(Investing in Education/Workforce)** Recognizing the existing workforce.

**(Tourism)** Tourism. We are not enterprising and this area is considered a pass through.

**(Attracting High Paying/Diversified Jobs to the Region)** We need to figure out a way to balance the urban wage gap from the 5 counties above the average income and everyone else was well below that. We can't focus on just jobs but jobs that are above our current wage rates.

**(Attracting new retail/restaurants/breweries to the region)** I believe that new businesses, restaurants, breweries grocery stores etc. are needed, but local officials again fear greater problems with traffic, crime and other issues. Publix is a great get for Hickory, but what about an Ingles? Our proximity should be marketed more as an asset. We need to create more urban spaces out of the vacant areas that currently exist.

**(Improving Communication about the Advantages of the Region)** Economic opportunities missing include: Tell our story. "We have to do a better job telling our story;" Our attitude in Conover was to build a manufacturing center when we lost manufacturing jobs; Turn the pages - "Celebrate our successes;" RTP-Durham is not better than us, just promotes more.

**(New Industries/Industrial Parks)** **(New Housing Development)** There is a large amount of vacant land held out of the market by which could be used for new business and housing development.

**(Attracting High Paying/Diversified Jobs to the Region)** We are missing some opportunities for some advanced manufacturing because we are still perceived as a low-tech manufacturing area due to our history with furniture, etc. We are still at the same skill level with our workforce as years ago. We are not diversified enough with our workforce skills for higher manufacturing.

**Question 5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?**

Improve Community College Education/Training Opportunities (13 Interviews)  
Improve Quality of K-8/High School Education (7 Interviews)  
Improve Work Ethic/Soft Skills (7 Interviews)  
Show Students that a 4-Year Degree is Not Needed to Get a Good Job (5 Interviews)  
Create Appealing Workplace Atmosphere (3 Interviews)  
Pursue K-64 Initiative (3 Interviews)  
Better Availability/Marketing of Internships/Apprenticeships (2 Interviews)  
Better Housing Choices (2 Interviews)  
Better Promotion of the Area (2 Interviews)  
Improve Quality of Life (2 Interviews)  
Challenge Best Students More (1 Interview)  
Employer Cooperation (1 Interview)  
STEM (1 Interview)  
Support L-R University Programs (1 Interview)

Note: a person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.

**Sample Open Responses to Question 5:**

**(Improve Community College Education/Training Opportunities)** **(Show students that a 4-year degree is not needed to get a good job)** **(Improve Quality of K-8/High School Education)** Pre-K, investing in early education. K-12 keep building curriculums that would be helpful to employers. We need to continue trying to build and educate strong workers. We need a clear focus from the community to determine what courses and curriculums to achieve those local needs. Need to prepare students to go where they want to go for future education and training, not just college.

**(Show students that a 4-year degree is not needed to get a good job)** Our recent study about public attitudes about manufacturing talked to hundreds of people. It showed we have the training programs but we don't have the students. The parents and students are not getting the right info to make the best decision about their education. Right now we have 58% of students seeking education beyond high school and we need 70-80% for our area. We have a skills gap because we have an interest gap. We are about to start a 5 year informational campaign about hammering the points home about the opportunities. Young people need a basic tech knowledge that can be built upon as their career and technology progresses.

**(Improve Community College Education/Training Opportunities)** Promote career training for work in the area, but it currently takes too long to train the workforce.

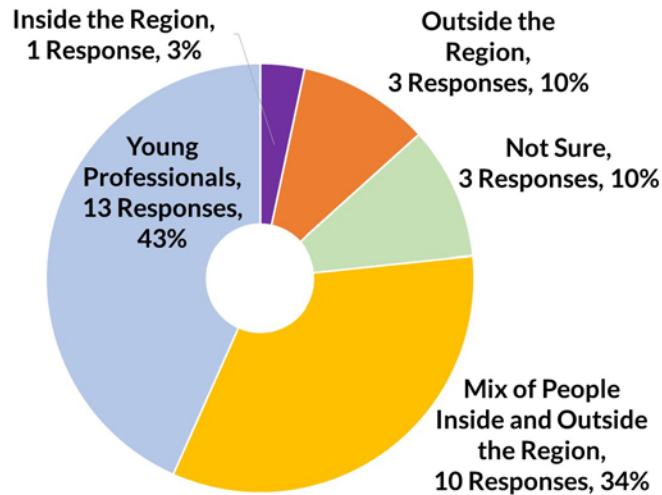
**(Improve Quality of K-8/High School Education)** **(Improve Work Ethic/Soft Skills)** Starts with where the jobs are going to be. Starts with basic education. Improving our schools and education systems, K-12. Also, we have many unhealthy young workers. Building character and discipline with the upcoming generations. . Giving an opportunity for overtime now is viewed by younger workers as a punishment.

**(Improve Work Ethic/Soft Skills)** **(Improve Community College Education/Training Opportunities)** The CVCC Workforce Center in Alexander County is a great resource. The companies need to develop training programs for their employees. We need to change the work ethic of our society. We need to develop more trade skill workers like plumbing, masons, etc.

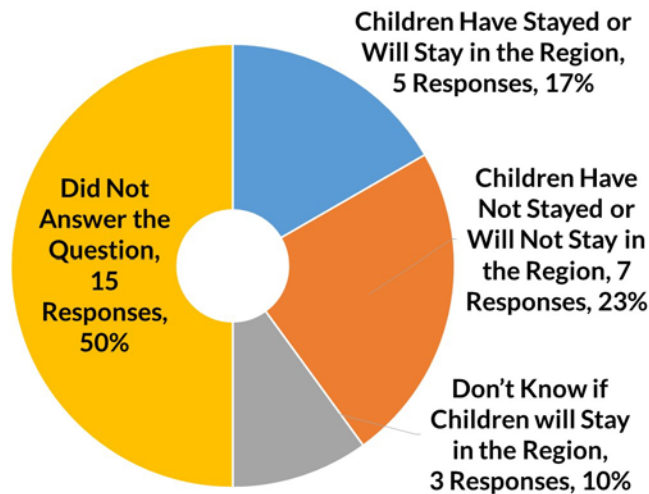
**(Improve Work Ethic/Soft Skills)** **(Create Appealing Workplace Atmosphere)** We need to instill work ethics that promote a sense of pride in the quality of work, of teamwork, of continuous improvement, of meeting and exceeding the employer's expectations and of leading by example. Companies must reengineer their workplaces to appeal to this and future generations of workers.

**(Improve Community College Education/Training Opportunities)** Community college is the key. In Greenville-Spartanburg, the college said bring your folks here and we will train them. Let industry drive what the community college offers for training.

**Question 6: (Part One) Where do you think our leadership will come from?**



**Question 6: (Part Two) Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?**



**Question 7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?**

- Improve Education System (5 Interviews)
- Quality of Life Improvements (4 Interviews)
- Change the perception of the Region (3 Interviews)
- Affordable/More Housing Choices (2 Interviews)
- Improve Communication (2 Interviews)
- Improve Political Leadership (2 Interviews)
- Increase Enthusiasm about Our Community (2 Interviews)
- Ready to Move-Into Industrial Buildings (2 Interviews)



Reduce Poverty/Higher Incomes (2 Interviews)  
Better Relationships between Local Governments (1 Interview)  
Change the Past (1 Interview)  
Get Rid of Drug Addiction (1 Interview)  
Higher Educational Attainment (1 Interview)  
Improve Motivation/Work Ethic (1 Interview)  
Increase Industry Diversity (1 Interview)

Note: a person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.

#### Sample Open Responses to Question 7:

**(Better Relationships between Local Governments)** A more functional and operational relationship between city and county government. They don't really work against each other, but they seem to work separately.

**(Merge Local Governments)** I would merge as many local governments as possible. There is no reason why some of these smaller towns should exist. West Hickory and Highland ran their course and were absorbed.

**(Improve Education System)** Encourage measured risk in education, government, and incentivize it in business. Experiment, test, tune, fail.. refine.. iterate.. succeed. Transformative push in Public Schools. Aggressively invest from existing County Budgets, Public Fund Raise for Commercial skin in the game... learn from the successes our neighbors in the North East US have learned – investing heavily in schools and universities pays dividends to public and private organizations alike.

**(Increase Retail Shopping Opportunities)** **(Affordable/More Housing Choices)** I would increase the retail shopping in my county and in the region. I would increase the medium price range housing for multi-family development and single-family homes. We need more housing for middle-income people and families.

**(Improve Education System)** I think it all starts with a solid educational system. Wave the magic wand and have an unbelievable work force. Your workforce is a magnet to businesses. Your education system is a magnet for attracting families with children. One feeds the other. You've got to have all the counties in the area focused on education. It is not just finding the best school in an area, the community must support a goal of all the schools being high achievers and creating that reputation. Some things in education seem simple to me. What is the leading indicator in student success? Student to teacher ratio, so fix it! If you fix elementary education then your high school students get better, they become better college students and they all may not return right away but the area is still their home.

**(Quality of Life Improvements)** More parks, pools, walking areas (Not enough sidewalks)

**(Reduce Apathy/More Public Engagement)** There needs to be more people that are engaged in fabric the community. Reduce the amount apathy that exists in the community.

**(Increase Enthusiasm about our Community)** Quit looking at ourselves as backwards. If you think that way, you are dead; Quit trying to be everywhere else; Woe is me has to stop.

**(Improve Education System)** Need to develop a young women's mentoring program in the community.

**Question 8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered?**

Regional Economy (6 Interviews)  
Housing (3 Interviews)  
Natural Resources (2 Interviews)  
Festivals/Events (1 Interview)  
Merging Government Functions (1 Interview)  
Regional Leadership (1 Interview)  
Tourism (1 Interview)  
Transportation (1 Interview)  
Workforce (1 Interview)

**(Regional Leadership)** The region needs more of a sense of being together. Leadership of the four counties needs to be more developed and working together.

**(Merging Government Functions)** Explore merging as many systems (economic development, utilities, police fire, solid waste, etc.). Look at examples for Fulton County, Georgia for examples and find other examples for our region.

**(Workforce)** To reinforce the basics, if you want a strong workforce you must have a strong education system, it is as simple as that. That is what is needed to attract new businesses to the area.

**(Festivals/Events)** Other comments included: Oktoberfest; Recognize Hmong culture, as well as other cultures; Latino-Hmong festivities; Multi-cultural events; September is Latino month - embrace the culture.

**(Regional Economy)** I think we are on the brink of something really big happening here. If we could measure it over the next 10 years, it would be huge.

**(Housing)** We need more multi-family (market rate) housing. We need to capitalize on our great downtowns and the NC School of Science and Math. We are drawing labor from the rustbelt now or from outside the United States. We have to make ourselves attractive to not people that are here but people that are moving from outside the region.

## Regional Aging Advisory Committee and Senior Tar Heel Legislators Group Stakeholder Interview Summary

Total Number of Persons in Attendance: 21

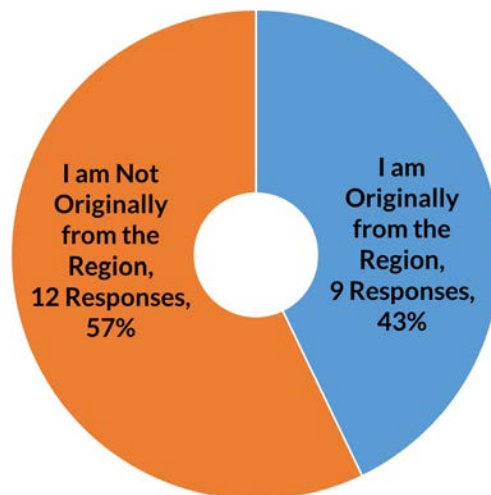
**Question 1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?**

Local Community Colleges  
Church facilities/ Churches Getting Out into Their Communities  
Libraries  
Senior Centers  
Quality Affordable Real Estate  
Transportation  
The Council of Governments

**Question 2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier)**

Money/Funding  
Bureaucracy  
Jobs – pay that brings people back to the community after they have left (i.e. college graduates).  
Lack of a Trained Workforce  
Lack of Qualified Workers  
Attitude – seeing more people that do not want to better themselves (Complacency)

**Question 3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here.**



Sample Open Responses to Question 3:

Employment , Spouse Employment, Parents Employment  
Grandchildren  
Marriage  
Affordable Real Estate and Farm Land for Horses

**Question 4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?**

Tourism – people use to come to the area for the furniture.  
Natural Resources – the beauty and affordability of this area has not been properly advertised.  
Employment  
Technological Opportunities – employment that relies on the use of technology.

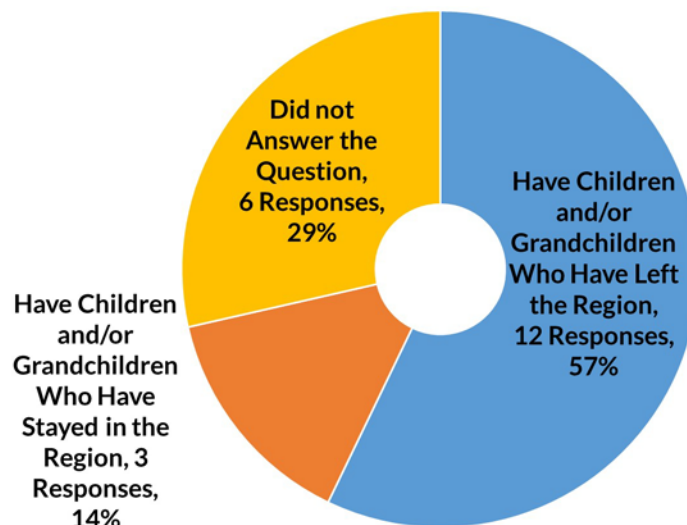
**Question 5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?**

Utilization of Community Colleges and High Schools in the Region  
Working with middle school students to broaden their horizon at a younger age to get them eager about the things they can do.  
Incentives to stay in the area  
Education – Starting when children are young to show them that hard work pays off.

**Question 6: (Part One) Where do you think our leadership will come from?**

Future leadership will be those who have stayed in the region.

**Question 6: (Part Two) Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?**



**Question 7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?**

Welcoming/Well Received Atmosphere for all Newcomers  
Plenty of Employment for Everyone  
Equal Opportunity of Everyone (you get jobs based on your qualification and not for who you know)  
Improved Healthcare for Seniors (Medicare only covers so much)  
Large Centrally Located Senior Center in Catawba County  
Cheesecake Factory!!!!!!!!!!

**Question 8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered?**

County government being more open to change and new programming or opportunities.  
Making the Region a Great Place to Age (more attention is placed on how to attract the younger generations to the region, and not so much on those who are already here and aging)

**Regional Aging Advisory Committee and Senior Tar Heel Legislators Group Stakeholder Interview Summary**

Total Number of Persons in Attendance: 26

**Question 1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?**

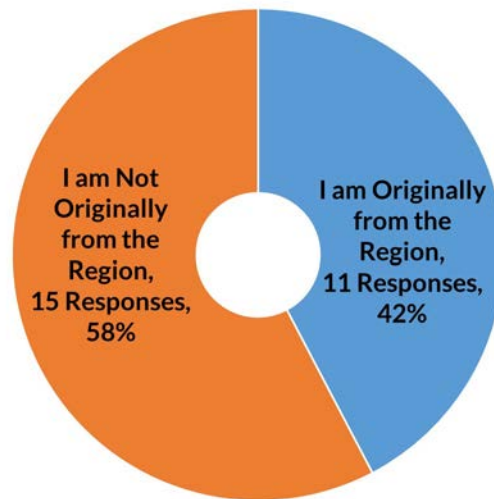
Recreation – More Potential for Businesses  
Workforce – Has potential but a lot of work to be done  
Some College – Associates graduates are under utilized in the workforce  
Level of Education Needs to Be Utilized  
High Percentage of Manufacturing Jobs Underutilized  
Manufacturing  
Community College – Needs to have a bigger effort where individuals can obtain  
Higher Education Opportunities Need to Be Utilized  
Vacant Buildings Could Be Utilized  
Diversity in all Counties  
Young People

**Question 2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region?  
(Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier)**

Drug Use – Opiates are at the core of issues in region  
Behavioral – Need more resources to help people with problems. Lack of mental health physician  
Access to Healthcare

Branding & Marketing of Region to Attract 25+ Age Group  
Entertainment for 25+ Age Group-Lack of entertainment for this age group.  
Need to Get Back to Basics in Education System  
Fix Rail system(s) in the Area

**Question 3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here.**



Sample Open Responses to Question 3:

- Moved with Family (5 responses)
- Employment (4 Responses)
- Moved Due to a Relationship (3 Responses)
- Change of Environment (1 Response)
- Commutes to Region for Work (1 response)
- Good Place to Raise a Family (1 response)

**Question 4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?**

- Recreation
- Entertainment
- Construction & Housing (more housing needed)
- Marketing/Branding – Show what Job Wages are
- Employers Finding Skilled Workers
- People not Employable Due to Not Passing Drug Tests/Background Checks
- Young People – need to focus more on young people

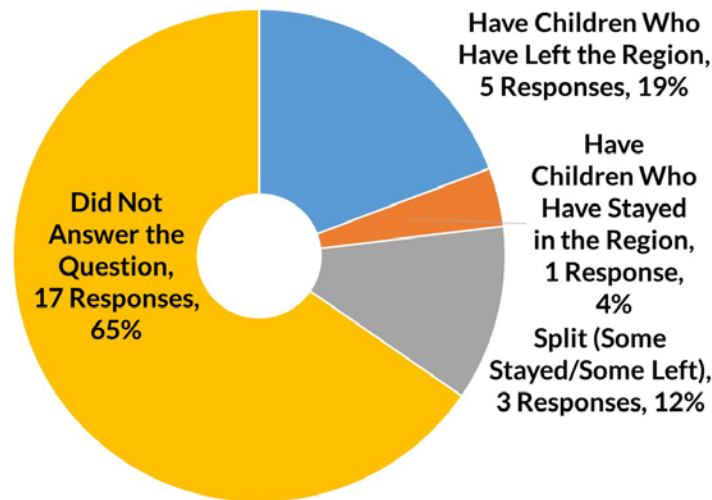
**Question 5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?**

Population is Going Down – How do we attract young people to our community?  
Individuals in Small Businesses (Entrepreneurship)  
More Resources to Improve Drug Problems (Individual & Services)  
Substance Abuse/Mental Health Issues (Schools/Parents)  
Reach Out to Younger People Sooner (Elementary School)  
Children Need to Be Made Aware of What It Takes to Earn a Living  
Gatekeeper – A lot of manufacturing jobs available  
Furniture Industry – Children need to see

**Question 6: (Part One) Where do you think our leadership will come from?**

Future leadership will come from the outside  
Future leadership will be recruiting people back those that left the region

**Question 6: (Part Two) Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?**



**Question 7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?**

LR Blvd  
Public Transportation  
More Risk Taking – try things more freely  
Make More United for Prosperity  
Common Goals  
Inclusion  
How People Perceive Manufacturing  
Fill Vacant Buildings

More Energy Like Lake Norman (Recreation & Entertainment)  
Have Pride in Community

**Question 8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered?**

Would like to see more young people involved with the decision making process with employers & community.  
Diversity has come. Growth areas make us a more diverse community  
Community Colleges in the area are underutilized.

### **Hickory Young Professionals and Greater Hickory Jaycees Group Stakeholder Interview Summary**

Total Number of Persons in Attendance: 65

**Question 1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?**

Lake Hickory (16 Responses)  
Geographical location (proximity to Winston, Asheville, Boone, Charlotte) (15 Responses)  
Lenoir-Rhyne University (14 Responses)  
Empty Commercial Buildings (8 Responses)  
Real Estate (5 Responses)  
Downtown Square (5 Responses)  
Climate (5 Responses)  
Arts Community (4 responses)  
Google (4 responses)  
Natural Resources (3 responses)  
CVCC (3 responses)  
Professional Groups (3 responses)  
Interchanges off of I-40 (1 response)  
Skilled Manufacturing Workforce (1 response)  
Social Networks (Churches, etc) (1 response)  
Leveraging Big Business partnerships (1 response)  
Partnership University City Commission (1 response)

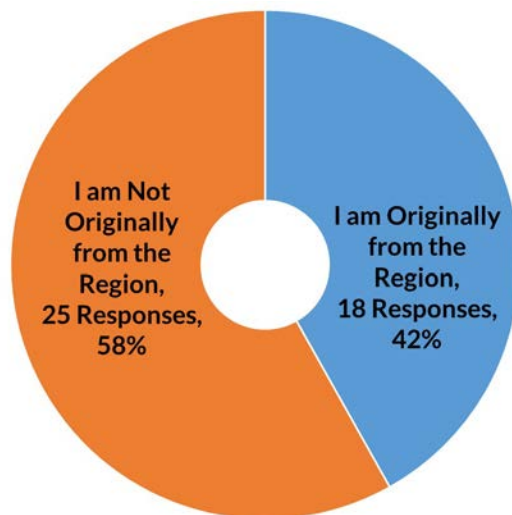
**Question 2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier)**

Young People Moving Away for College and Not Returning (8 Responses)  
Lack of Night Life Entertainment (8 Responses)  
Drug Problem (8 Responses)  
Collaboration Among Counties vs. Competition (8 Responses)



- Population Figures (Lack of Growth) (6 Responses)
- No Public Access to Lake Hickory (Shops & Restaurants on the Lake) (5 Responses)
- Skills Gap (5 Responses)
- Lack of Promoting Parks and Current Amenities (4 Responses)
- No Student Discounts (4 Responses)
- LRU Too Small (Needs More Bachelors Degree Options) (3 Responses)
- Lack of Newer Housing (3 Responses)
- Lack of Downtown Living Spaces (3 Responses)
- Parking (3 Responses)
- Lack of Educational Levels (3 Responses)
- Need Younger Leadership - City Leaders and County Leaders (2 Responses)
- Airport Not Utilized (2 Responses)
- People Leaving the Labor Force (2 Responses)
- Not Connecting Youth to Community Early Enough (2 Responses)
- Closed Mindset (2 Responses)
- Athletic League (1 Response)
- Outdated Infrastructure (1 Response)
- Educators Not Educated on What Catawba Valley Has to Offer (1 Response)
- Generalized Area for Young Professional Involvement (1 Response)
- Hickory Carries the Region - Are Other Areas Supported? (1 Response)

**Question 3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here.**



Sample Open Responses to Question 3:

- Job (13 Responses)
- Family (6 Responses)
- College (3 Responses)
- Good Place to Raise Kids (2 Responses)

Ability to Own Land (1 Response)  
Cost of Living (1 Response)  
Easy Traffic/Commute (1 Response)

**Question 4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?**

Downtown/Arboretum Style Living (8 Responses)  
Entertainment (7 Responses)  
Advertising Outdoor Recreational Activities (5 Responses)  
More Outdoor Entertainment (Trails, Watersports, Vineyards - Capitalize on Proximity to the Mountains) (5 Responses)  
Family Friendly Activities (5 Responses)  
Natural Resources (4 Responses)  
More Diversified Economy (3 Responses)  
Lake Related Business Opportunity (3 Responses)  
Market Location (Proximity to Bigger Cities) (3 Responses)  
Downtown Festivals (3 Responses)  
Shopping (3 Responses)  
Beer Related Opportunity (2 Responses)  
Employment Opportunities for Young Professionals (2 Responses)  
Revamp Old Buildings (2 Responses)  
Move-in Ready Homes (2 Responses)  
Catering to Incoming Population (2 Responses)  
Technology Companies (2 Responses)  
Higher Paying Industry (1 Response)  
Infrastructure (1 Response)  
Recognizing that Other Areas of Community Development (Health) Can Influence Economic Development (1 Response)  
Do Research on the Most Common Majors of Graduates and Having Jobs They Can Come Here For (1 Response)

**Question 5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?**

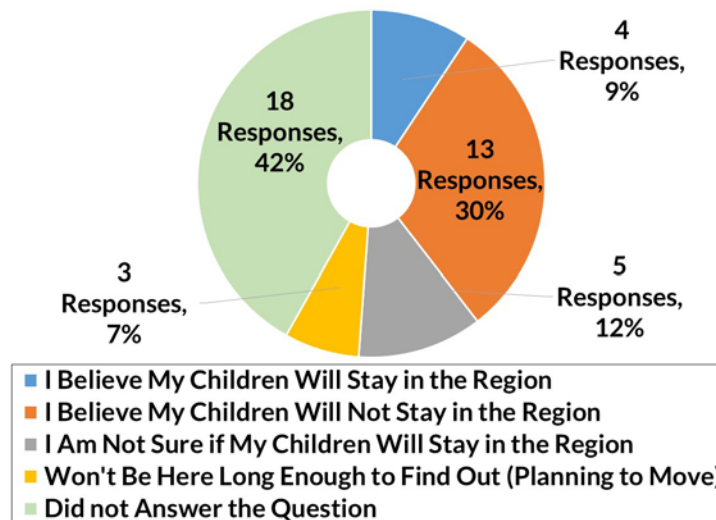
Advertise Our Location (7 Responses)  
Emphasizing Training Specialized Skills (4 Responses)  
The Selling/Perspective of Skilled Labor (Well-Crafted) (4 Responses)  
Re-Educate People Who Want to Work and Change Careers (4 Responses)  
Affordable Local College (4 Responses)  
Flexible Work Schedules (4 Responses)  
Promote Trade School and Community College (3 Responses)  
Tax Incentives (3 Responses)  
Education - K-64 View (3 Responses)  
Start Younger - Get Community Excited About Growth/Chambers (3 Responses)  
Learn a Trade in High School (2 Responses)

- Pre-K Education (2 Responses)
- Solve/Correct Drug Problem (2 Responses)
- Incentive Innovation (2 Responses)
- Furniture Businesses Coming Back/More Technical Skill Jobs (2 Responses)
- Invest in Higher Paying Jobs (1 Response)
- More Rigorous Education (1 Response)
- Make Jobs Easier to Find (Run by Local Government) (1 Response)
- Professional Development (1 Response)
- Small Groups (1 Response)
- Groups and Clubs to Connect Small Businesses (1 Response)

**Question 6: (Part One) Where do you think our leadership will come from?**

- Current Young Professionals (12 Responses)
- Educated Youth (7 Responses)
- Progressive Employers Who Support Economic Development (2 Responses)
- Outside the Region (2 Responses)
- From Within the Region (2 Responses)

**Question 6: (Part Two) Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?**



**Question 7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?**

- Downtown Redevelopment/Nightlife (11 Responses)
- Diversity in Food, Thought and Mindset (8 Responses)
- Clean Up Exits 125 and 126 (3 Responses)
- Organized Activities/Events (3 Responses)
- Support Small Local Businesses (3 Responses)
- Less Poverty/Homelessness (2 Responses)

Better Education (2 Responses)  
Lenoir Rhyne Blvd (2 Responses)  
Get Drugs Out (2 Responses)  
Newcomers Groups (2 Responses)  
Walkable (1 response)  
Number of Mattress Outlets (1 Response)  
Free Wi-Fi (1 Response)  
Land Development (1 Response)  
Clean-Up side of Roads/Beautification (1 Response)  
Re-Strengthen Furniture/Trade Industries (1 Response)  
The Way Individuals View Manufacturing Specific Jobs (1 Response)  
Dredge the Lake through Downtown to Make a NC Venice (1 Response)  
Public Transportation at Night (1 Response)  
Young Philanthropist Group (Greenville, SC as a model) (1 Response)  
More Participation from Young Professionals in the Area (1 Response)  
Increase in Manufacturing to Create Lower-Level Hour Jobs for Teens (1 Response)

**Question 8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered?**

None of this works unless?  
Job website listing all local jobs to make it easier to find a job (multiple websites, even free ones, make the search daunting).  
If we are wanting it to still feel small town, it will not [be] soon.  
Promoting current activities  
Invest in future people. Don't wait for them to come here. "If you build it they will come."  
There is a need for new housing opportunities for young professionals.  
More opportunities to connect.  
Spanish speaking at public places.  
Ask the people from here "Why do you stay in this area?"