



NORTH COUNTRY RISING

RECOVERY & RESILIENCY OF COMMUNITY



Prepared by
North Country Council

This plan is incorporated into and will be carried forward in the North County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region. The CEDS can be found at www.nccouncil.org.

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Overview & Roadmap for the Plan

“Without leaps of imagination or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.”
Gloria Steinem

The Layout for the Plan.

The North Country Rising Plan is organized in a way that states the Recovery and Resiliency Goals and Strategies that emerged from the planning process and guides future work and investment at the beginning of the plan. We must start this plan with what we envision for the region’s future and then share how we got there. The quantitative and qualitative data gathered through stories, interviews, focus groups, and surveys with people in the region follow these goals and strategies. This important part of the plan includes their definition of resiliency and impact analysis that redefines wealth and capital for the region. The planning principles, process, and impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic can be found later in the plan, which provided the framework for the North Country Rising Plan. The plan concludes with timelines, resources, and a full participant list.

Our Region.

The North Country Rising Plan includes communities within the North Country Council Economic Development District.

Carroll County – The northern portion of Carroll County is a part of the Economic Development District. Those same communities are also a part of the North Country Council Regional Planning Commission. Those municipalities and unincorporated places include:

Albany, Bartlett, Chatham, Conway, Eaton, Hales Location, Hart’s Location, Jackson, Madison

Coös County – All of Coös County is part of the Economic Development District and the North Country Council Regional Planning Commission. Those municipalities and unincorporated places include:

Atkinson and Gilmanton Academy Grant, Beans Grant, Beans Purchase, Berlin, Cambridge, Carroll, Chandlers Purchase, Clarksville, Colebrook, Columbia, Crawford’s Purchase, Cutt’s Grant, Dalton, Dix’s Grant, Dixville, Dummer, Errol, Erving’s Location, Gorham, Green’s Grant, Hadley’s Purchase, Jefferson, Kilkenny, Lancaster, Low and Burbanks Grant, Martin’s Location, Milan, Millsfield, Northumberland, Odell, Pinkham’s Grant, Pittsburg, Randolph, Sargent’s Purchase, Second College Grant, Shelburne, Stark, Stewartstown, Stratford, Success, Thompson and Meserve’s Purchase, Wentworth Location, Whitefield

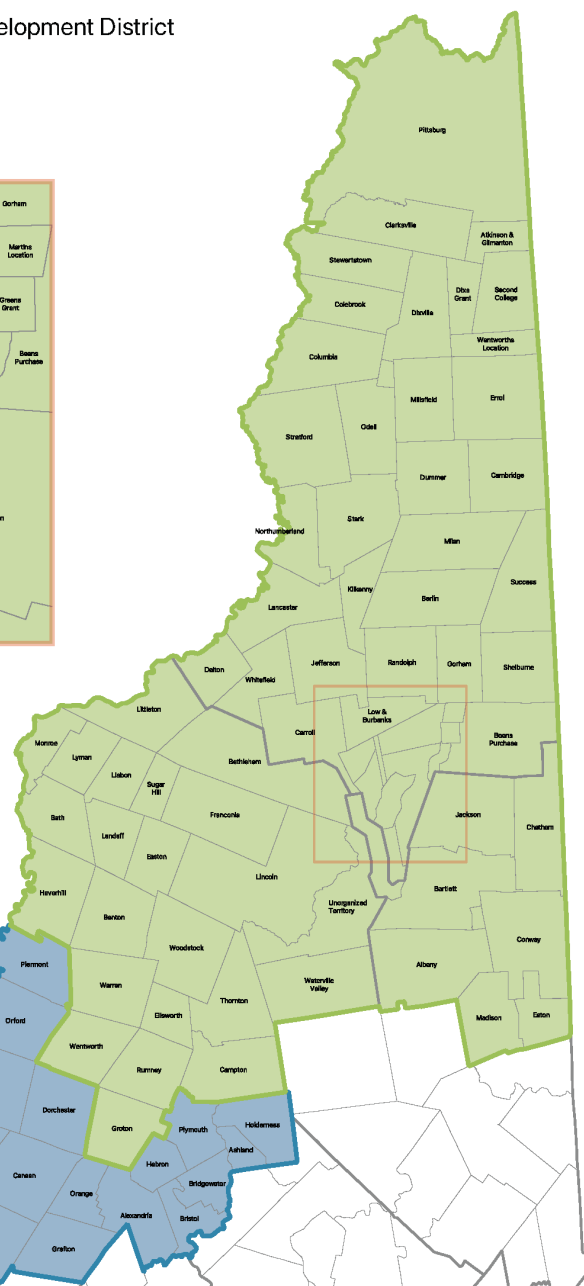
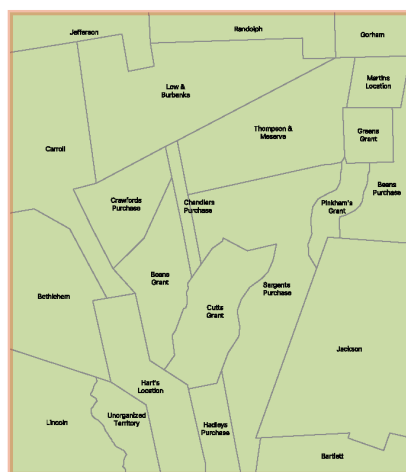
Grafton County – The entire county is a part of the Economic Development District, while only the northern portion of Grafton County is a part of the North Country Council Regional Planning Commission. Those municipalities and unincorporated places included in the Economic Development District are as follows; those in bold are part of the North Country Council Regional Planning Commission:

Ashland, Alexandria, **Bath**, **Benton**, Bridgewater, Bristol, **Bethlehem**, **Campton**, Canaan, Dorchester, **Easton**, **Ellsworth**, Enfield, **Franconia**, Grafton, **Groton**, Hanover, **Haverhill**, Hebron, Holderness, **Landaff**, Lebanon, **Lincoln**, **Lisbon**, **Littleton**, **Livermore**, **Lyman**, Lyme, **Monroe**, Orange, Orford, Piermont, Plymouth, **Rumney**, **Sugar Hill**, **Thornton**, Warren, **Waterville Valley**, **Woodstock**

North Country Council

Planning Region & Economic Development District

- Planning Region
- Economic Development District



Map for planning purposes only

Acknowledgments

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Our Recovery & Resilience planning is possible because of our Collaboration.

This work was funded by The U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The planning process, as well as the development of the North Country Rising Plan, was led by North Country Council Economic Development District. This truly was a team effort. Every staff member at the Council participated in this work as well as many partners, leaders, businesses, and residents.

Additionally, North Country Council worked directly with Cardinal Consulting, LLC, and the New Hampshire Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) to provide business resources and advising while gathering stories and data from the North Country small business industry. The Council hopes to continue collaborating with them in the future.

The stories, strategies, and innovative solutions shared throughout this plan were made possible through honest conversations and collaboration with the people within the region. Their ability to show up and participate while still responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as long-standing challenges in the region, provides a real example of resiliency. North Country Council is grateful for their time and commitment to this planning process and the ongoing collaborative work that guides this plan into reality.

It is also important to state that this plan reflects only the stories of those who had the time to participate. We fully understand and respect that responding to the pandemic at work and home takes precedence over future planning. North Country Council is committed to keeping this planning process open to ensure all voices are heard and all perspectives are present when planning for the region's resiliency.

Participants engaged to date are listed in the appendix.

Recovery & Resiliency Goals & Strategies

*“A vision without a strategy remains an illusion.”
Lee Bolman*

A Path Forward

The recovery and resiliency goals and strategies for the region and economy are outlined below. These goals and strategies were developed through:

- Focus Groups and interviews across economic sectors
- Plans and analysis conducted by North Country Council
- Plans and assessments conducted by partner organizations in the region and the State

The goals and strategies are organized by the following focus areas that emerged from grouping common themes, challenges, and needs across economic sectors:



Collaboration & Collective Impact



Planning & Assessment



Investing & Supporting Backbone Community Systems



Equity, Connectivity & Access



Balanced Economies



Innovation, Education, & Workforce Development



Culture, Climate, & Quality of Life



Collaboration & Collective Impact

The goals and strategies outlined in this section support ongoing efforts to collaborate, share resources, build new and strengthen partnerships, and create collective impact within and across sectors of the economy to support economic and regional recovery and resiliency efforts.

Goal 1: To establish a structure, mission, and sustainability plan for regional collaborations

Strategy 1: Establish a Regional Arts and Culture Collaborative to identify common service needs for a shared service contract; work together to grow and strengthen positive relations in the community and region, and create a shared marketing program

Strategy 2: Establish a regional Food Council to co-create a food system resiliency assessment; identify and share educational programs, and develop a robust workforce development and training program for the industry

Strategy 3: Establish an Outdoor Recreation Council to co-create an Outdoor Recreation infrastructure inventory assessment, plan for the region, and secure an endowment to manage recreation infrastructure needs that works to protect the region's natural resources

Strategy 4: Establish a regional Small Business network to share resources and innovative ideas; collaborate and support community and region wide events, and identify needed small business training for the industry

Goal 2: Utilize a collective impact model for collaboration and measure the outcomes

Strategy 1: Develop a structure and platform for sharing ideas and projects that serve all regional sector collaborations and build collective impact to address common challenges that affect economic resiliency in the region

Strategy 2: Measure collective impact across the region and all forms of community capital and map the collaborative network

Collaboration & Collective Impact: Case Studies, Resiliency Stories & Resources

Case Studies:

- North Country Council Case Study: Arts & Culture Collaborations and Coalitions – <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Arts-Culture-Collaboratives-Coalitions-Case-Study.pdf>

Resiliency Stories:

- Resiliency Story: The Androscoggin Valley COVID-19 team NPR Story <https://www.nhpr.org/search?q=gorham+berlin+nh+covid+19>

Resources:

- Maine Food Councils <https://www.mainefoodcouncils.net/projects>
- Collective Impact Forum <https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/>

“Working together was key to our ongoing resiliency during the pandemic, whether weekly meetings with local superintendents and administrators or our COVID-19 group from the Androscoggin Valley. We made time to come together, ask questions, and try new things.” – Member of the Androscoggin Valley COVID-19 Task Force.

“We were a COVID group, a bunch of community stakeholders, leaders from the business community, the prisons, the hospital, and the schools. We all started these phone calls, and I’ll tell you, they became our lifeline. And I think that was where we became a little more resilient. We had a place to all talk and to help each other as a community.” – Member of the Androscoggin Valley COVID-19 Task Force.

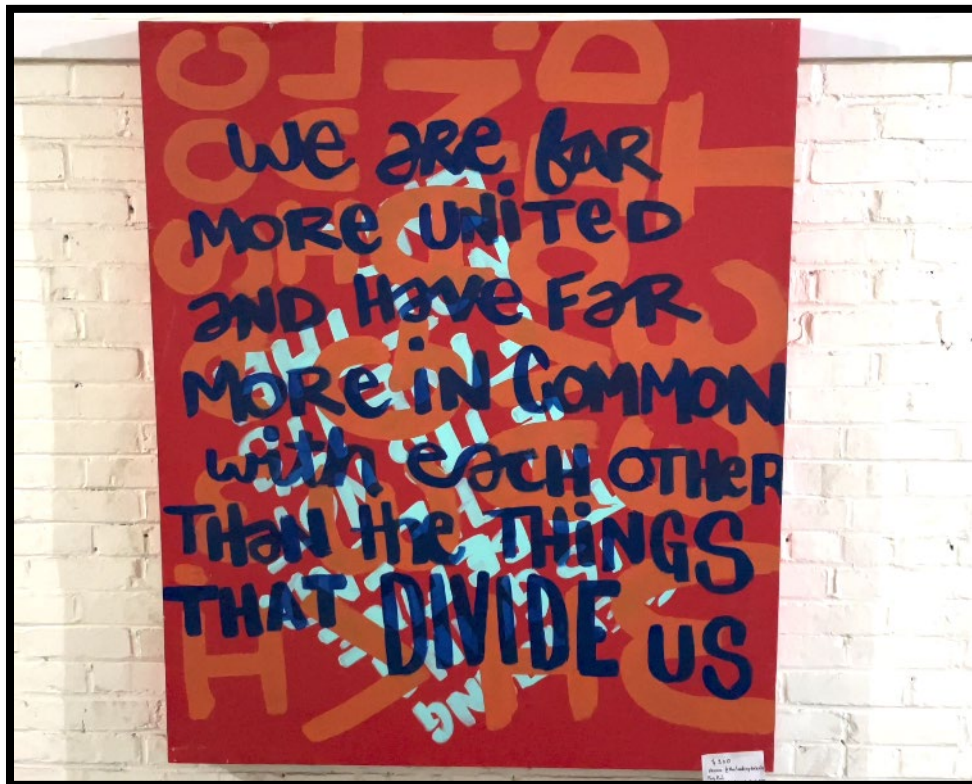


Photo Courtesy: Mikala Woods; artwork located at the Loading Dock, Littleton, NH



Planning & Assessment

The goals and strategies outlined in this section identify areas where additional planning, inventory, and assessments are needed to build a resilient future for the region.

Goal 1: To identify, inventory, and assess existing infrastructure and develop a plan for needed infrastructure in the region

Strategy 1: Create a Food System Resiliency Assessment of the region that includes an inventory of existing food processing and commercial spaces to share; identify new infrastructure needs, upgrades to current infrastructure to fill the gaps in the system, and identify policies that support a resilient food and agriculture system

Strategy 2: Develop a plan for food access and equity across the region

Strategy 3: Create an Outdoor Recreation asset and infrastructure inventory assessment, and plan to identify existing infrastructure and create a plan for needed infrastructure, including existing infrastructure retrofits and a long-term maintenance plan

Strategy 4: Invest in and create sustainable Capital Improvement Plans for regional hospitals and healthcare centers

Goal 2: To develop a central hub for sharing resources and information within the regional economy

Strategy 1: Share industry plans and inventories of assets and infrastructure needs for the region

Strategy 2: Develop a contractor and consultant list for environmental studies, assessments, and planning for infrastructure projects in sensitive environmental areas to mitigate the future impact on the environment

Strategy 3: Create a space for resource sharing for farmers' markets and small vendors for the region where everyone can sign up and see what markets are happening in the region as well as identify where new markets could be developed

Strategy 4: Create a resource portal for the healthcare industry where healthcare providers can see all medical and health resources available in the region for their patients

Goal 3: To engage with all economic sectors to develop climate resiliency, mitigation, adaptation, and sustainability plans to deepen resiliency in the region

Strategy 1: Create guidelines for sustainable infrastructure in all new and retrofitted facilities

Strategy 2: Make plans and invest in electric vehicle facilities and renewable energy projects to create and produce energy for the region

Strategy 3: Develop planning tools for communities to adopt climate mitigation and adaptation strategies in comprehensive plans, regulations, and operations, including Hazards Mitigation Plans and Climate Adaptation Plans

Strategy 4: Develop robust natural resource inventory and strategic conservation plans for the region

Strategy 5: Create a mitigation and adaptation plan for the regional outdoor recreation economy in relation to climate change and extreme weather events

Planning & Assessment: Case Studies & Resources

Case Study:

- North Country Council Case Study – Sustainable Practices in the Outdoor Recreation Industry
<http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Outdoor-Recreation-Sustainability-Case-Studies.pdf>

Resources:

- State of NH Climate Action Plan
<https://www.des.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt341/files/documents/r-ard-09-1.pdf>
- Food System Resilience
https://www.vermontlaw.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/Food%20Systems%20Resilience_Concepts%20%26%20Policy%20Approaches.pdf

“We need to develop plans to understand the natural threshold of the area, so we don't overuse it and lose our most valuable asset as a region.” – Focus Group member.

“We need to develop a sustainable plan for addressing food insecurities in our region.” – Focus Group member.



Photo Courtesy: Mikala Woods



Investing & Supporting Community Backbone Systems

Recovery and true resiliency for the region is impossible without investment and support for the backbone systems that support the community and the workforce. The goals and strategies outlined in this section highlight strategies identified in other regional plans that support housing, transportation, childcare, health, and food or have been suggested through the community engagement process.

Goal 1: To attract investment and support for developing the necessary housing infrastructure, financing, and location that supports local workforce needs.

Strategy 1: Align existing funding programs and policies with regional housing needs

Strategy 2: Market and revamp existing funding programs and policies to meet regional housing needs

Strategy 3: Support the creation of a New Hampshire Housing program to help lower-income and first-time buyers compete in today's COVID-impacted market

Strategy 4: Build or support a new platform to connect those seeking rental housing with poorly advertised and non-traditional local units and rooms

Strategy 5: Create a linkage fee associated with commercial development and luxury residential construction to new single- and multi-family housing construction in higher-density areas

Strategy 6: In recognition of the need for broad buy-in for comprehensive, regional housing solutions, launch an advocacy campaign focused on "Housing Matters" and "Wages Matter, Too"

Strategy 7: Create Workforce Housing Business Partnerships

Strategy 8: Offer enhanced technical assistance to towns through local, customized, flexible expertise

Strategy 9: Develop model ordinances and technical assistance for a variety of asset-based local housing regulations that produce desirable, locally relevant housing development and reinvestment

** Strategies identified in housing come from the North Country Housing Needs Analysis conducted by New Hampshire Housing, Stepwise Data Research, and North Country Council.*

Goal 2: To attract investment and support for developing the necessary transportation infrastructure that supports access to work as well as to other backbone community systems

Strategy 1: Obtain and maintain mobile crisis vehicles and programs for mental health

Strategy 2: Expand the rural, regional public transportation system for medical appointments, access to workforce hubs, food hubs, and childcare

Strategy 3: Increase the opportunity to live within walking distance of jobs and services

Strategy 4: Increase access to alternative transportation systems such as carpooling, vanpools, bike lanes, trails, and electric vehicle charging stations

Goal 3: To attract investment and support for increasing the necessary early childhood development infrastructure and workforce while simultaneously building the capacity of families to be a part of the early childhood system

Strategy 1: Build regional and community support for the early childhood strategic goals and objectives outlined by the State of New Hampshire and regional early childhood coalitions

Strategy 2: Further develop, support, and provide livable wages for the early childhood development workforce

Strategy 3: Support efforts to pay early childhood development providers based on enrollment versus attendance

Strategy 4: Ensure early childhood development centers receive maximum reimbursement under the Child Care Scholarship Program

Strategy 5: Work with the State of New Hampshire to reconsider how reimbursement rates are set for early childhood development programs

Strategy 6: Promote shared services to support high-quality education and improve financial and administrative efficiencies for early childhood development centers

** Strategies identified in early childhood development come from the Raising the Valley Report, Coos state of Childcare Report, and New Hampshire Strategy Plan for Early Childhood*

Goal 4: To invest and support the health of the region's residents

Strategy 1: Build regional and community support for the objectives and strategic approaches outlined in the North Country Health Consortium's Community Health Improvement Plan

Strategy 2: Provide support and resources for businesses to integrate workers' mental health into operations

Strategy 3: Recognize health as a holistic system and support the creation of healthy lifestyle programs that integrate local healthy food, outdoor recreation, movement, and work-life balance

Goal 5: To attract investment and support for the necessary food and agriculture infrastructure that supports access to local, healthy food for all residents in the North Country

Strategy 1: Develop a food and agriculture resource list for the region with information on relevant persons or institutions that can support and educate on this sector of the economy

Strategy 2: Secure funding for infrastructure to support a regional resilient food system, including food cooperatives, stores, community gardens, and community dinners; processing plants; shared commercial kitchen and storage; food pantries; regional network of distributors; community and regional composting facilities; and seed banks and seed libraries

Strategy 3: Develop programs for large regional institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons for buying bulk local food and developing long-term contracts with local food producers

Investing & Supporting Community Backbone Systems: Case Studies & Resources

Case Studies:

- North Country Council Agricultural Land Access Case Studies Report <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Food-Agriculture-Land-Trusts-Case-Study.pdf>
- North Country Council Community Composting Case Studies Report <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Food-Agriculture-Community-Compost-Case-Studies.pdf>

Resources:

- North Country Council Housing Needs Analysis <https://www.nhhfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/North-Country-Housing-Needs-Analysis-2021.pdf>
- North Country Council Regional Transportation Plan <https://www.nccouncil.org/regional-plans/>
- Raising the Valley Report – <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Raising-the-Valley-Strategic-Plan-2021-2025-FINAL.pdf>
- Coös State of Childcare Report - <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Coos-State-of-Childcare-Report-2020-Final-PDF.pdf>
- North Country Community Health Improvement Plan https://www.nchcnh.org/images/NCHCuplds/NCHC_Community_Health_Improvement.pdf
- NH Fiscal Policy Institute's report on food insecurity and the economy <https://nhfpi.org/resource/food-insecurity-and-economic-conditions-in-new-hampshire-and-the-nation/>

“Our organization heard stories of teachers who couldn't go back to work because they had to stay home and take care of their kids because there is no childcare.” – Interviewee

“People in poverty in our region often know the healthy choices, but don't have the money, access, transportation, or support to embrace the healthy habits.” – Interviewee

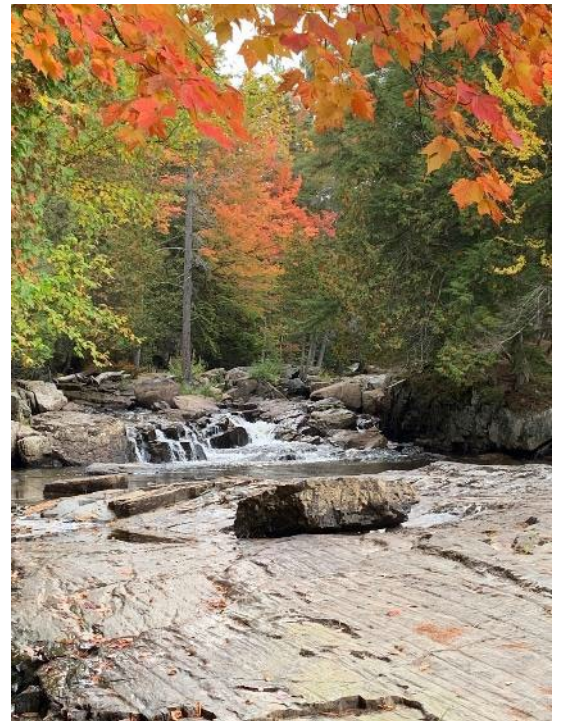


Photo Courtesy: Danica Malone



Equity, Connectivity & Access

The goals and strategies outlined in this section support equitable access and connectivity to resources for obtaining and retaining employment and living a healthy life in the region.

Goal 1: To understand income and equity disparities in the region, create plans for an inclusive environment with access for everyone, and measure progress over time

Strategy 1: Better understand and incorporate the social determinants of health framework into our healthcare system

Strategy 2: Ensure outdoor recreation facilities are accessible to everyone

Strategy 3: Invest in programs that subsidize low-income household budgets with fresh food, which would stimulate the local food industry and support the conservation of natural capital for food production

Strategy 4: Support programs that provide access to education for everyone, such as early childhood development; after-school and summer youth programs; employee continued education and workforce training, and computer and internet access for every child

Strategy 5: Support and invest in the development of connected broadband systems throughout the region and upgrade dated infrastructure

Strategy 6: Work with partners in the region and state to establish economic development and quality of life equity metrics and track progress

Equity, Connectivity & Access:

Case Studies & Resources

Case Studies:

- North Country Council Case Study on Equity, Access, and Diversity in the Outdoors
<http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Outdoor-Recreation-Inclusion-Diversity-Case-Studies.pdf>

Resources:

- North Country region Broadband report
<http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/NorthCountryRegionBroadbandReportweb.pdf>
- CDC's Social Determinants of Health
<https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/index.htm>

"Folks in poverty don't think about the future or about resiliency. They are just trying to survive the day. We need to understand this so we can figure out how to help better." – Interviewee

*"We sent home home-cooked meals for the kids in our program because we were worried about them not getting their meals from school while homeschooling. Food insecurity is a real challenge in our region."
- Interviewee*



Photo Courtesy: Mikala Woods



Balanced Economies

The goals and strategies outlined in this section support innovative financing, investing, and building of local economies in the region while ensuring a balance between investments in supply and demand and balancing investments between all the forms of community capital.

Goal 1: To build and strengthen the local economy and industries of the region

Strategy 1: Develop buy local programs for the region where local businesses are supporting other local businesses, and the resiliency of the local economy is the priority

Strategy 2: Explore innovative ways to recirculate dollars that come into the local economy and invest those dollars in the local infrastructure needed to support the local workforce

Strategy 3: Identify products and services imported into the region and build new local economies and industries to create and provide those products and services in the region for the region

Goal 2: To invest and strengthen the supply side to meet the growing demand of the tourism economy

Strategy 1: Invest and support livable wages, housing, connectivity to work, and family and child resources for the service industry

Strategy 2: Develop cooperatives within the service industry and outdoor recreation industry that provide consistent benefits and wages for seasonal and multi-job employees

Strategy 3: Invest in needed tourism infrastructure such as a network of welcome centers and public bathrooms; adequate parking at trailheads; recycling and waste receptacles, and public transportation and shuttle systems to reduce congestion and impact on the environment

Strategy 4: Invest in deferred maintenance of existing tourism facilities and develop long-term maintenance plans that do not rely solely on residents' and communities' time and dollars

Strategy 5: Value arts and culture as integral to the tourism economy and quality of life in the region and support and invest in the arts as equal to outdoor recreation and other tourism industries

Goal 3: To value, invest, and measure resilience and growth across all forms of community capital

Strategy 1: Work with regional economic development organizations to use the community capitals model within their work

Strategy 2: Develop an ongoing method for measuring community capital across the region and use annual metrics to adjust economic development priorities and strategies

Balanced Economies: Resiliency Story & Resources

Resiliency Story:

- Resiliency Story: First Friday in Littleton, NH
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyXJXC289wo>

Resources:

- Strengthening Resilience in Appalachia – a collection of rural, regional economic resiliency case studies from around the country for strengthening local economies -
<https://www.arc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/StrengtheningEconomicResilienceGuidebook-Feb2019-1.pdf>
- Human Powered Recreation Value Chain – supporting a balance of a quality experience for visitors, natural resource protection, and support for the local economy -
<https://www.wealthworks.org/success-stories/new-hampshire-recreation>
- Walden Mutual Bank – FDIC Insured bank accounts that yield interest while supporting the New England and New York food system and customizable loans for the regional food industry -
<https://www.waldenmutual.com/>

“I wasn't much of a local shopper before I started my own business, and I really think it opened a lot of eyes to see like, we're going through all these economic downfalls and to support your neighbors is huge.” – Interviewee

“The pandemic had us focusing on hyper-local activity, and so starting a farmers' market and a farm stand and building social capital in the community was so great during a time of such challenge. It brought hope and happiness.” – Interviewee



Photo Courtesy: Mikala Woods



Innovation, Education & Workforce Development

The goals and strategies outlined in this section support innovation in education and workforce training and provide the support, space, and time for innovation in education and across all sectors of the economy.

Goal 1: Continue to support an education system and school culture that values educators and invests in innovation and ongoing training

Strategy 1: Ensure every school in the North Country provides trauma-sensitive training for educators and builds the necessary programs and infrastructure for educators to provide trauma informed education

Strategy 2: Develop peer-to-peer learning and sharing in education, such as support and compensation for visiting other educators outside of the field of specialization and school and supporting rotational assignments and shared teaching models within the same school

Goal 2: To study and learn from innovative models of learning around the country and pilot them in the region

Strategy 1: Learn from and create project-based learning such as utilizing the outdoor environment to teach natural science, health, and art, and taking students into outdoor classrooms for reading, writing, and math as well as in community projects with applied learning and building skills that are transferable for careers

Strategy 2: Explore different education schedules such as teaching subjects in blocks or intensive units where one subject is the primary focus for consecutive days

Strategy 3: Consider options for multi-age classrooms and open learning where students offer greater input into what we teach and learn

Strategy 4: Offer students greater flexibility in reaching their destination on the path toward academic achievement beyond standards and test scores

Strategy 5: Create innovative internship models for students and pilot new “Senior Year” programs built on learning in community and in-school educator consulting and support

Goal 3: To establish business and community investment in education and build relationships between educational institutions and organizations with the economic industries of the region

Strategy 1: Co-create programs between education and industry that bring learning into the community, supporting the development of career skills and providing space for students to innovate and create

Strategy 2: Build a culture of community support and value for education through open houses, science fairs, art exhibitions, and other student projects that invite the community in and bring education out into the community

Goal 4: To address what is missing in the school curriculum that directly connects to industry needs in the region

Strategy 1: Develop a robust hands-on learning educational program in early and high school education for careers in the trades industry

Strategy 2: Build off STEM models of education to create curriculum for careers in healthcare

Strategy 3: Value arts and culture as a vocation and provide innovative models for supporting and valuing the growth of the creative economy

Strategy 4: Integrating courses on food production, soil biology, composting, and market operations and management into the educational curriculum to provide career pathways to the local and regional food system

Strategy 5: Create programs where students innovate and develop new industries to meet the needs of the region

Goal 5: To provide support to business development, transition, innovation, and workforce training

Strategy 1: Provide technical support and resources to small business owners who are reinventing their businesses

Strategy 2: Provide technical support and resources to businesses for the development of business resiliency plans

Strategy 3: Invest and support ongoing training within all industries to support innovation, team building, and co-creation of solutions for businesses in growth or transition

Innovation, Education, & Workforce Development: Case Studies & Resources

Case Study:

- North Country Council Case Study Report on Outdoor Classrooms and Learning <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Education-Outdoor-Classrooms-and-Learning-Case-Studies.pdf>
- North Country Council Case Study Report on Career Development & Youth Programs in the Outdoor Recreation industry <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Career-Development-Youth-Programs-Case-Studies.pdf>
- North Country Council Case Study Report on Mixed Age Classrooms – <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Education-Mixed-Age-Classrooms-Learning-Programs-Case-Study.pdf>
- North Country Council Case Study Report on In Community Learning <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Education-In-the-Community-Learning-Case-Study.pdf>

Resources:

- UNH article on Innovation and Entrepreneurship as vital to community resilience - <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2020/11/innovation-entrepreneurship-keys-community-resilience>
- American Academy of Political and Social Science article on Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure as a needed ingredient for building resilient communities <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002716293529001005>
- Forbes article on Rural Communities as hotbeds for innovation <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adigaskell/2020/01/16/a-re-rural-communities-untapped-hotbeds-of-innovation/?sh=29ebafe534cc>

“The structure of education is outdated. It does not meet the needs of our youth today nor the workforce development needs. We have to change the structure and get innovative on how to provide quality education and train the next generation of workers.” – Focus Group member

“There are people out there in the North Country, right this second, that need different skills to apply to different jobs where the workforce is needed.” - Interviewee

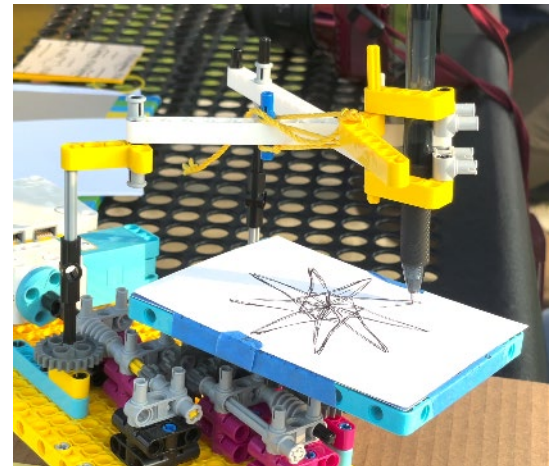


Photo Courtesy: Mikala Woods



Culture, Climate & Quality of Life

The goals and strategies outlined in this section provide investment and support for the assets that make the region unique. Protecting and valuing the region's culture, environment, and quality of life must be an integral part of economic and community resiliency.

Goal 1: To sustain a culture of honoring and protecting the people, heritage, and landscape of the region

Strategy 1: Develop resources and guidance to businesses investing in resiliency planning for their business that include life-work balance, livable wage, and investing in community and workforce needs

Strategy 2: Support the inclusion of mental health awareness and acceptance in all workplaces

Strategy 3: Create a culture of healthcare that supports and invests in different determinants of health such as movement and exercise, mental health, access to healthy local food, access to the natural environment, and community and cultural experiences

Strategy 4: Develop a local guide/ambassador program to steward the region's natural and community landscapes and provide guidance to visitors and new residents on the region's assets and culture.

Strategy 5: Invest in infrastructure and community spaces that support the culture of the region

Goal 2: To protect the natural capital of the region while investing in and supporting climate mitigation, adaptation, and regeneration planning and projects

Strategy 1: Build a culture of climate resiliency across all sectors of community and economy, including operations, maintenance, and infrastructure

Strategy 2: Invest in businesses and practices that regenerate the natural ecosystem and the local and regional economy.

Strategy 3: Support the development of new businesses and the adaptation of existing businesses that support the region's climate resilience.

Culture, Climate & Quality of Life:

Case Studies & Resources

Case Studies:

- North Country Council Case Study Report on Experimental Forests as a Science and Art Experience
<http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Experimental-Forests-Art-Science-Case-Studies.pdf>
- North Country Council Case Study Report on Volunteer/Ambassador Programs
<http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Volunteer-Ambassador-Program-Case-Studies.pdf>
- North Country Council Case Study Report on Messaging to Visitors on the protection of culture and landscapes
<http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Tourism-Messaging-Case-Studies.pdf>
- North Country Council Case Study Report on Public Art and Mural Projects for Community Revitalization –
<http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Arts-Culture-Public-Arts-Mural-Projects-Case-Study.pdf>

Resources:

- UNH Article on Belonging -
<https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2020/06/belonging>
- Smart Cities Article on the connection between GDP and natural environment -
https://www.smartcitiesworld.net/economy-and-finance/economy-and-finance/report-highlights-cities-risk-to-gdp-of-not-working-with-nature?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily%20Newsletter
- Hubbard Brook Confronting our Changing Winters -
<https://hubbardbrook.org/confronting-our-changing-winters>

“We need to define and identify the cultural capital of the region with a shared understanding and support to protect that cultural capital.” – Focus Group Member

“We have a long history of stewardship in our region – it’s a part of the North Country culture.” – Focus Group Member



Photo Courtesy: Mikala Woods

Defining Resiliency

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”
Charles Darwin

Creatively Adapt to Change.

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) states that “regional economic prosperity is linked to an area’s ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., ‘shocks’) to its economic base” and defines three attributes of economic resilience:

- The ability to recover quickly from a shock
- The ability to withstand a shock
- The ability to avoid shock altogether

Throughout the North Country Rising planning process, North Country Council asked focus group members and industry leaders to define resiliency for their sector, especially as it relates to recovering from the current pandemic and building a more resilient economy for the future. As shared with the Council through the SBDC and UNH Resiliency Academy, the Council used the following questions as a framework for defining resiliency:

- **Resilience of what?** Think about business and community resilience as beneficial.
- **Resilience to what?** Identify the threat or shock. Consider the threats beyond the pandemic, such as natural disasters or changes to the workforce.
- **Resilience for whom?** Consider the beneficiaries of this work and consider how you might include everyone.
- **Resilience for what?** Identify your goals, such as a better bottom line, jobs, social benefits, and community vibrancy.¹

The responses gathered from the focus group meetings and key informant interviews are as follows:

Arts & Culture

Resiliency for the region’s arts and culture industry would include recognition and value of the industry as an essential part of the North Country lifestyle and efforts to support the ongoing cultural capital the industry supplies for residents and the tourism economy. A resilient arts and culture industry would not have to solely rely on grants and donations to provide this essential service, nor would arts and cultural organizations work independently, but more as a collaborative unit and asset for the region. Art education would be valued and restored, and students would have the opportunity to learn in community with professional artists and cultural organizations to continue to support and grow the arts and culture workforce.

¹ Source: Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society AARES 2015; Dinh and Pearson, 2015

Education

Resiliency in education starts with valuing our teachers and supporting schools as the center of community, not just buildings for learning. A resilient education system provides innovative learning opportunities for students where there are opportunities to learn and work in the community, aligning school curriculum with workforce development training. Providing compensated time and space for educators to develop innovative curriculum for students and continued education for teachers is vital to building a resilient education system. Whereas business and industry has evolved over time, the education system, schedule, structure, and curriculum are outdated. Resiliency in education, and therefore the future workforce, depends on investing in innovative models and allowing educators to explore learning opportunities outside the classroom and the community.

Food & Agriculture

Resiliency for the region's food and agriculture industry was defined as supporting local food production, access to land for the new generation of farmers, education for new farmers, home gardeners and homesteaders, and the general public on the importance of supporting local food. A resilient food and agriculture system would include strengthening the supply chain, investing in regional processing facilities, identifying and building a network of shared food storage and preparation spaces around the region, reducing food waste, and ensuring everyone has access to healthy, local food.

Healthcare

Resiliency in the healthcare industry would include fair, equitable wages for nurses and practitioners, shared resources and collaboration throughout the industry, and re-established trust between the public and the healthcare providers. Resiliency in healthcare is predicated on integrating health into every aspect of our communities and lives and working across sectors on the social determinants of health. A resilient healthcare industry for the region would include opportunities for existing practitioners to work on the social determinants of health and build relationships with other sectors of our region to build a more holistic vision of healthcare and develop innovative health solutions that put lifestyle at the center of healthcare.

Outdoor Recreation & Tourism

Resiliency in the outdoor recreation and tourism industry begins with adopting a triple bottom line approach of people, planet, and profit. Without valuing and investing in the livelihood of the workforce within this industry and the environment where people recreate and visit, resiliency is not possible for outdoor recreation and tourism. Currently, investment and support for the industry is out of balance. Emphasis is placed on marketing and promoting the industry (demand) and not the workforce, infrastructure, and maintenance needs of the industry (supply). A resilient outdoor recreation and tourism industry would balance supply and demand and work with regional outdoor recreation leadership to identify what is most needed for the industry. The industry itself is best served regionally through collaboration and working together. A resilient outdoor recreation and tourism industry serves all people and respects the traditional, Indigenous, cultural, and natural stewardship and relationship to the land and the people of the North Country.

Small Business

Resiliency for small businesses requires changes in infrastructure, education, and culture. The small business sector views resiliency as the ability to pivot as needed, have foundational elements in place that allow it to recover in the event of a setback, provide a diverse offering of business products and services through a culturally diverse workforce, and be based around a community that values collaboration across the sector. To support a resilient small business sector, additional focus on infrastructure, including equal access to high-speed internet, is crucial both for the growth of businesses in the region and to support a culture of remote workers growing in the region. Educating the region's young people, offering them diverse opportunities, and focusing on the importance of continued education is pivotal to sustain and remain resilient. Culturally as the demographic of the population changes, so will the level of tolerance, diversity, and focus on health, wellness, and community.

In Summary, a resilient economy and region would include:

- Access for Everyone
- Local Economy and Local Production
- Building and Strengthening the Networks
- Valuing our Workforce
- Fair, Equitable Wages
- Balance of Supply and Demand
- Innovative Learning
- Ongoing Collaboration
- Triple Bottom Line Approach to Economic Development
- Establishing Trust
- Social Determinants of Health
- Adaptive and Flexible Plans
- Culturally Diverse Workforce
- Infrastructure Investments

Broadening Resiliency

Beyond the Pandemic: Extreme Weather Events and Climate Change

While we work to recover our economy and community from the pandemic, it is critical that we broaden our scope of resiliency to include other significant global events. In the summer of 2021, as the Council set up booths at farmers' markets to learn more about the impacts of the pandemic, the United States recorded the hottest June on record. "The first six months of 2021 also brought eight-billion-dollar weather disasters, ranging from destructive severe weather to a historic deep freeze."¹

In the North Country, organizations such as the Mount Washington Observatory and the Appalachian Mountain Club, as well as colleagues at the University of New Hampshire, have been collecting data for years on the impact our changing climate has on the region. Warming trends on top of Mount

¹ Source: National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's National Centers for Environmental Information <https://www.noaa.gov/news/june-2021-was-hottest-june-on-record-for-us>

Washington and Pinkham Notch, increased weather whiplash events, and warmer winters that severely impact the region's economy, are all occurring.¹

The industries in the North Country are already feeling the effects of extreme weather events and a changing climate. When asked to define resiliency by answering the question "Resilient to What," as in what other shocks or threats should we consider, every focus group stated extreme weather events and climate change.

**"We need to prepare for increased variation and intensity of large weather-related storms and climatic events."
– Outdoor Recreation focus group participant**

As we develop strategies for resiliency, we must broaden our perspective and ensure we are building a future that can withstand and adapt to these changing climate conditions. Whereas industries and individuals identified working on extreme weather events and climate change solutions as the broader need in planning for recovery, adaptation, and resiliency, the participant conversation was mostly centered around the pandemic, and industries continue to respond to it. Therefore, climate mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency planning are identified in the Strategies and Solutions part of this plan.

¹ Winter Whiplash Report http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Earths_Future_AGU100.pdf

Impact Assessment: Redefining Wealth & Capital

*“Wealth is the ability to experience life fully.”
Henry David Thoreau*

Redefining Wealth & Capital

Economic development and wealth are traditionally measured in forms of financial assets, the number of jobs created or retained, and new business development; however, this planning process took a more comprehensive approach to defining wealth that takes into consideration all the features that make the region a great place to live, work and play. One of the common themes that emerged during the planning process was the need to remove silos and develop interconnected strategies across economic sectors, including wealth building across all aspects of living in the region. Utilizing the Eight Forms of Wealth and Capital Model¹, the participants were able to holistically evaluate the assets and needs of the region and build cross-sector goals and strategies for economic and community recovery and resiliency.

While responding to the pandemic, regional residents were reminded of both the wealth that is present in the region as well as the wealth that is lacking or underutilized. In some cases, the attributes that make the region abundant were used to respond efficiently and effectively to the impacts of the pandemic. In contrast, in other cases, the region’s abundance was overutilized, causing additional stressors on the economy and the workforce as well as depleting the region’s assets and resources. An evaluation of the region’s forms of capital takes into consideration the quality of those resources, not just the quantity. In other words, just because the resource exists does not necessarily mean that it meets the region’s current needs or will meet the region’s needs in the near future.

What proceeds is a summary of the greatest assets and needs for each form of community capital in the region as defined through the community engagement process conducted across all economic sectors. Each statement of need is accompanied by the icon that relates to the Goals and Strategies developed to address this need. This summary represents a comprehensive look at wealth building for economic and community resiliency in the region.

¹ Source: Wealthworks - <https://www.wealthworks.org/basics/explore-regional-wealth-building/wealth-eight-capitals>; The Rural Policy Institute - <https://rupri.org/about-rupri/key-frameworks/>

Built Capital & Wealth

Built capital can be defined as the region's fully functioning constructed infrastructure that is essential to the economy and livability of the region. Investments in built capital include construction, retrofits, and maintenance of infrastructure, which depreciates over time and may require ongoing investments to ensure it remains fully functioning.

Assets

Most of the North Country's built capital can be found within the historic buildings that host community centers, town halls, and libraries and the infrastructure that makes up the downtown villages and Main Streets. Many of these structures and spaces serve multiple purposes and are often utilized to bring community together. Other built capital assets include the region's arts and cultural venues such as the North Woods Center for the Arts, Jean's Playhouse, the Weathervane Theater, and the Bethlehem Colonial, just to name a few. New infrastructure and investment in community and regional facilities has been an asset to the region, such as the development of the Hanover and Littleton Food Cooperatives, and the plans for the Androscoggin Valley Food Cooperative. These facilities not only support jobs within the organizations themselves but also support the growth and development of the regional food chain providing more jobs in food and agriculture growing, processing, transportation, and delivery. In addition, a new environmental education center with an outdoor amphitheater is being planned for the Rocks and the space owned by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forest in Bethlehem. Like the Highland Center in Crawford Notch, the new facility will be a space for locals and visitors to enjoy and come together in community to appreciate what the region has to offer. Other built capital assets include the region's grand hotels and resorts, public water and wastewater systems, trail systems, backcountry camping, and lodging sites, and campgrounds that support the region's tourism economy.

Needs

Although the region has assets within built capital, much of the infrastructure is aging with no plan in place for ongoing investment to ensure these assets can remain in use. Often times these infrastructure projects are left to the individual communities to raise support and investment to keep the doors open, however, when faced with an abundance of infrastructure needs, it's difficult to prioritize projects in a rural community. Additional [planning and investment](#) is needed to develop a regional infrastructure inventory and plan for the region.



One of the greatest built capital needs in the region is [housing](#) for the local workforce and residents. The current housing stock for both renting and owning is low, there is a lack of housing affordability for low-wage workers as well as a lack of affordability for the middle class as a result of increased demand because of the pandemic. A lack of awareness and buy-in from the business community and the lack of capacity at a local level to create housing solutions are complicating this important need within the region's built capital. If the region can't house its workforce, it will never fill vacant positions nor support new businesses from moving to the area. These key findings as well as strategies and recommendations can be found in the North Country Housing Needs Analysis conducted by North Country Council Regional Planning Commission and the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority.



Another important need within built capital is [connectivity and access](#) to broadband throughout the region. Every industry commented on the need for broadband to continue to provide service to customers, workers, and students. Suggestions and comments included:



- Leveraging available funds for development of high-speed broadband connections in the region to facilitate the development of networks and the virtual infrastructure that helps bring the food and agricultural community to the 21st century.
- Bringing reliable access to broadband with reasonable bandwidth to the region as the connectivity is so poor in some areas that alternative schedules need to be developed and methods of interaction altered to ensure everyone has access.
- Reliable internet connection and broadband is needed if we are to continue any type of online learning. In general, internet access and connection are vital to the education system.
- Broadband is needed to support any ongoing form of telehealth which was an important service during the pandemic and continues to be an important service to be able to provide better access to healthcare.
- Broadband should be installed in every senior housing and public housing space in the North Country.
- Any reliable, fast internet service provided should be packaged in a way that supports all businesses. Right now, businesses must spend time shopping around, switching to new systems when one becomes slow - all things businesses don't have time to do.
- There needs to be a focus on making sure we are connecting the region's most vulnerable communities to broadband.
- There also needs to be a plan for upgrading and recognition that the broadband installed 10 years ago does not meet the standards of today.

In addition to housing and broadband, the region has several public infrastructure needs that address the increased demand on local services and spaces from tourism as well as amenities that support the [quality of life](#) for the region's residents, including:



- A robust network of welcome centers with public facilities (bathrooms, information, etc.) throughout the region.
- Sufficient parking and access to trailheads and recreational sites that include public bathrooms, educational information and signage, and waste, recycling and pet waste receptacles. In addition, there is a need to provide more dispersed camping opportunities that are maintained around the region.
- More public outdoor spaces for the performing arts, with appropriate facilities, for year-round use.
- There is a lack of physical infrastructure for large gatherings. The physical assets the region has are dispersed and remotely located.
- Public bathrooms in every community.

There is a need to develop and support food and agriculture local supply chains and **local economies** through the creation of both soft and hard infrastructure such as:

- Identifying and highlighting the need to improve the number, efficiency and access to local food processing facilities that are in compliance with local, state, and federal regulations.
- An inventory of existing food processing and storage facilities that can be shared.
- Promoting the creation of food supply businesses in our region such as jars, labels, and other supplies needed to store local food.



As the region plans and develops new infrastructure, it is important to the region's resiliency to ensure all new or renovated infrastructure projects consider the impacts of the changing **climate**, such as:

- Sustainable infrastructure across all outdoor recreation spaces.
- A transportation system that encourages public transportation as well as an EV infrastructure.
- Ensuring that any new infrastructure (housing, transportation, public buildings, schools) are built sustainably with minimal impact on the environment and utilizing renewable energies.



"The housing challenge for our local workers and those for secondary out-of-state owners is one of the biggest issues (gaps) that need to be addressed within our industry, along with existing infrastructure and its use beyond expected capacity limits."

– Outdoor Recreation industry leader and employee

"I know so many small businesses that are trying to get up off the ground, but they don't own a home or are in a rental situation that isn't ideal. And so, that stops people from innovating and growing business in our region." – Small Business owner

"The pandemic has us thinking more about how we can streamline the review process for new businesses and people seeking housing and transportation. We shouldn't let the process get in the way of creating a strong community."

– Community Governance leader and employee leader and employee

"Right now, trucking is impossible to get. I mean, one of the geneses of all these shortages is there's just a lack of trucking. If we decentralize the system, instead of driving 3,000 miles for your strawberries, we can buy strawberries locally produced. Decentralizing our food system will really help in alleviating the shortages caused by transportation. It'll be shorter trip to the local market." – Food and Agriculture industry leader and employee

Cultural Capital & Wealth

Cultural capital can be defined as the traditions, customs and beliefs shared across the region and investments may support local arts and cultural events, preservation of tradition and history of place, and efforts that bring people together to co-create, shift and align shared values.

Assets

Cultural capital and quality of life are one of the pillars of wealth in the North Country. In addition to natural capital, it's the culture that attracts people to visit, live, work, play, and stay in the region. Cultural capital runs prevalent through the landscape in the form of historic sites, stone walls and cellars, and long-standing cultural traditions. There is a long history of heritage sports and stewardship of the land that is an important asset to the region's cultural capital. Participation in arts and cultural events, community gatherings, and civic engagement are strong forms of cultural capital. The pandemic has heightened cultural capital in some spaces where businesses and organizations are rethinking the way in which they schedule the workday, value their employees, or assist with community needs. For example, schools found a way to shift the culture to provide free, delivered meals to all students regardless of their pre-COVID eligibility for reduced or free meals. Other examples that existed before the pandemic would include hosting an Under 21 Open Mic night at the Loading Dock in Littleton where relationships were built between educators and artists to provide a space for young creatives to showcase their skills and provide a unique cultural experience for the community.

Needs

Even though cultural capital is in abundance in the region, it is important to the resiliency of the region to **protect these assets** and ensure cultural capital is an important piece of the rural economy and landscape. This includes:

- Defining and identifying the cultural capital of the region with a shared understanding and investing in that cultural capital.
- Maintaining areas of "low use" to protect wild lands and the culture of the region.
- Educating visitors on the shared cultural capital of the region so there is respect for the place they visit, stay and play. To that extent, create a culture whereas a visitor, you want to be a local and you adopt the same shared cultural understanding of the residents.



Building a resilient economy means investing in **workforce training and innovation** and making it a part of the culture of every job. Across economic sectors, workers are asking for support in the following ways:

- Within healthcare as new opportunities become available, such as integration of the social determinants of health, training should be supported to ensure it becomes a part of the healthcare culture.
- Build a culture and society that supports the creative economy and that works to overcome some of the barriers to entry for the next generation of creators.
- Push the boundaries beyond what is the norm in a rural region and let go of the "this will do" mentality. Recognize that the region can, and often does, produce the same or better talent and skills than in an urban setting.
- Focus on resilient and sustainable job creation as a part of revitalization of the region's downtowns.



- Create a culture of buy local, support local, live local and play local.

Another strong need in the region is to create a culture of care, where investing in **livable wages, workforce housing, transportation and childcare** are a part of all economic development. Engage businesses in investing in these **backbone systems** and actively seek funding and support to build the culture needed to support a healthy, happy, valued and cared for workforce.



The educational institutions and spaces are a vital part of the region’s cultural capital and there are needs within the culture of **education** such as:

- Developing guidelines for educator self-care, setting boundaries, and helping each other in the classroom. Creating a culture where no teacher feels like they are going alone.
- Developing a new model for substitutes for teaching remotely. How do we build a culture where teachers are helping teachers, where substitutes can step in to help with remote learning, without creating additional work for our teachers?



Across all economic sectors and communities there needs to be a culture of **mental health**. A culture that understands and respects mental health is one that:

- Enables workers and residents to talk with others with similar lived experiences and share what we are collectively going through.
- Brings awareness to medical trauma such as mental health issues, sobriety issues, incarcerated family members, etc. and invests in the social services needed to support the region’s mental health challenges.
- Rebuilds trust between the public and healthcare industry.
- Works to understand the impact the pandemic has had on the workforce and works to create a culture of checking in on each other at work, home and in community.
- Develops policies at work for integrating mental health check-in as part of management review and the cultural norm in the workplace.



“Starting your business at a community, cultural event that is supported by other artists, businesses and the entire community is so inspiring.” – New Business Owner & Artist

“There is so much creative talent in the North Country - it really is the hub for arts and culture. And the quality of the creative industry products is amazing.”
– Arts and Culture industry leader and employee

“Quality of life and the culture of the North Country is why people choose to live and work here.” – Food and Agriculture industry leader and employee and employee

Financial Capital & Wealth

Financial capital can be defined as creating monetary returns that will most likely be used for consumption, investment or savings. Financial capital is traditionally the only recognized form of capital in the current economic system and yet, the most resilient of financial investments are made when they support the other forms of capital.

Assets

While financial capital can be hard to come by in the North Country, the region has created and invested in a strong local economy and has developed programs to give back to the community. In addition, the region often draws on the surplus of other forms of capital to attract financial capital, as well as offset reliance solely on financial capital. Such as through donations of various components of infrastructure, platforms for shared advertising, and pursuing services to run local business from other local businesses in the region. The region's local banks and regional development corporations have been instrumental in supporting businesses by providing technical assistance and loans for business start-ups and emergency response during the pandemic. Organizations, such as the Granite State United Way, provide small loans to social service organizations who, in return, work to meet the needs of those most vulnerable in the region. The Littleton Food Cooperative, through the round-up program at the cash registers, raises between \$50,000 - \$70,000 for local partner organizations in the region who also provide services to the region's residents. The Cooperative also has a micro-loan program for farmers and growers in the region that is available and currently underutilized. Although additional funds are needed to support the ongoing maintenance of recreational spaces in the region, the Forest Service does collect fees and the majority of those park fees go toward maintenance and upgrades to physical infrastructure on-site. In other words, monies received go back into the locations where they were received, a model that could be useful in other situations around the region.

Needs

Every economic sector focus group spoke to the [need for financial capital](#) in the region. Those needs include:

- Within education, resolve funding disparities between different schools and regions of the state on a per capita level. Communities with a greater tax base have a greater capacity to provide the education needed for their students which puts the North Country at a great disadvantage. It is imperative that the same opportunities are provided to students regardless of where they live or what constraints society has placed on them.
- There is limited funding for the supply side of the outdoor recreation industry including a lack of funding for maintenance, infrastructure (both new and retrofits), and basic needs of the workforce. We need long-term sustained investment in the North Country for the resources we provide to the State through the tourism economy. The short-term help has been great, but the region has long-term maintenance needs that must be addressed.
- A huge barrier in the food and agriculture industry is the cost of insurance. Insurance is especially high for food processing, buying land for agricultural purposes, and even for farms themselves (ex. Christmas Tree farms that must generate other business on property to make up for high insurance cost).
- There is a need for funding to support a sustainable capital improvement plan for nonprofit hospitals and regional healthcare including mental health services.



- There is a need to develop alternative funding opportunities for the arts. The pandemic shed light on many of the underlying issues that have plagued the arts and culture sector of the economy for years. As cultural capital is a vital component of the North Country economy and quality of life, the arts and culture industry must have sustainable funding models that do not rely solely on them applying for grants to provide services.

In addition to providing sustainable funding for the ongoing resources the region offers, providing **livable wages** is vital not just for the region, but for the State.



In addition to livable wages, the region must explore alternative and **innovative financial capital** programs that support the region’s workforce, such as:

- New business/entrepreneur support for the investment they are making in the region
- Collaboration and leveraging of resources/funding in new and broader ways
- First time home buyer incentives to compete with out of state all-cash offers
- Developing programs that support local buying and local economies



“What we lack in financial capital we make up for in human capital. We have the ingenuity and innovation, the North Country mindset, that helps us get things done so I'm optimistic about our recovery and resilience.” – Education industry leader and employee

“The local banks have been right with us the whole way, helping us through the pandemic, which I'm sure was scary for them as well.” – Local Small Business owner

“We need long term sustained investment in the North Country and the resources we provide to the State. The short-term help has been great, but we have long term maintenance needs.” – Outdoor Recreation industry

Individual Capital & Wealth

Individual Capital, or what is sometimes referred to as Experiential Capital, can be defined as the skills, experience and capacity to be engaged, productive members of the region and investments may include spending on access to education, healthcare, and financial stability as well as investments in training, skill development and business development.

Assets

The region's individual capital is built upon Yankee ingenuity, thriftiness and innovation. The region challenges the people who live here to develop interesting and innovative solutions to complex problems, and many believe that the North Country is more resilient because of it. During the pandemic, many people shifted their business models or careers to adapt to changing circumstances. Employees who were let go of a business that had to shut its doors during the pandemic utilized their unemployment checks to invest in new businesses. Arts and culture businesses and organizations utilized outdoor spaces and creative platforms for sharing and revitalizing the creative economy. Organizations such as the North Country Health Consortium and the Granite State United Way are assets to the region for bringing health and social service businesses and organizations together to network and collaborate around solutions. The Rural Development Councils and Chambers of Commerce have supported new start-up businesses as well as existing businesses in the region with short-term loans, technical assistance and marketing and promotional support. Many participants within the small business industry stated their gratitude towards these organizations for helping them open their business, operate their business or transition their business. One of the greatest individual capital resources in the region is our volunteers and local clubs. The outdoor recreation, tourism, and creative economy rely heavily on volunteers for operating and maintaining services and often collaborate with local community clubs such as the snowmobile and ATV clubs for multi-modal recreation trail maintenance.

Needs

As individual capital takes stock of the capacity of the workforce to be productive and engaged, and the necessary skills and support needed for ongoing workforce training and development as well as ensuring access to education, healthcare, and financial stability, the following needs were identified.

The pandemic exposed the socio-economic imbalances that can impact a child's ability to have [access](#) to quality education. For many families, COVID-19 brought unemployment or reduced hours and financial instability. As the schedule for education shifted from in-person to remote and hybrid, those families most impacted financially from the pandemic now had to react and respond to school schedules that were constantly changing. For some, a lack of access to broadband made at-home learning a challenge. From teachers' experiences, students with the most socio-economic and access challenges were also the students who were most challenged to actively participate in remote and hybrid learning models.



Within education and healthcare, there is a strong need to develop strategies to support and value these essential workers through building trust and community support while offering ongoing support for [mental health](#) wellness and [workforce training](#). This includes:



- Providing clear guidelines in relation to the educator code of ethics and boundaries as teachers explore innovative education models.

- Recognizing educator self-care, mental and physical well-being is critical as they train students for life and work outside of the classroom.
- Growing and training an adequate supply of workers in healthcare and all supportive services for healthcare. We don't have a workforce in healthcare to take on any additional stressors in our region. We don't have the workforce to support the growing demand of tourism population. If there is an outbreak while we have a population growth of visitors, we do not have the space or the staff to take care of them.
- Integrating more reflective supervision into these essential worker positions which requires the mental health and wellness of the worker to be a vital role in supervisor oversight and setting realistic goals for workers.

Ensuring people have access to healthy, **local food**, and that the regional food and agriculture industry has support to grow and meet the local demand is an important part of sustaining the region's individual capital. This includes:



- Bringing partners together to create a North Country Food Council that could oversee the work needed in access to local food and growing the local food and agriculture industry.
- Developing a sustainable plan for addressing food insecurities in our region.
- Exploring winter indoor markets for existing producers while creating a space for new small start-ups to sell. Many new businesses utilize the farmers' market as an incubator for their business. With only summer markets, and a relatively short market season, new businesses that rely on this venue are limited in getting the products to the public.

The outdoor recreation industry is also in need of workforce to meet **current demands** and the outdoor recreation tourism economy is growing. To meet this demand, the region needs:



- More people to share the workload and responsibility of running and maintaining the outdoor recreation economy.
- Connect local outdoor recreation enthusiasts to existing volunteer opportunities and ways to steward the land and share the message of stewardship with family, friends and visitors.
- Clear career pathways and space for innovation and entrepreneurship within the outdoor recreation industry. Our youth need to know that they can stay here, work here, and live here, that we have opportunities to grow right here in the North Country.

To continue to grow and support the region's individual capital, we must provide space and support for the workforce **innovation** that was fueled by the pandemic as well as developing sustainable workforce models for industries we most need. This includes:



- Providing technical support for small business owners who are reinventing themselves.
- Providing technical support for businesses to develop resiliency plans
- Supporting industries that incorporate work life balance into the culture and operations of their business.
- Developing a robust education and workforce training program for the trades industry.
- Providing support to our existing trade workforce to shift business operations to as needed and providing on-site training to existing employees to meet the growing demand.

- Developing a sustainability plan for the service industry that has been hit hard by the pandemic. This includes examining fair livable wages, benefits, affordable housing, and a balanced schedule

“I know several people who left the service sector industry and started their own business and work for themselves now. Or they had found a whole new career, or they went back to school and are doing something entirely different. And it’s hard to attract people to the industry because of the wages or lack of benefits or all the crazy hours that you have to work.” – Community Governance leader

“I got into this as a retirement job. Use to be a game warden. Then I decided to harvest this untapped food source in the region and go door-to-door selling to chefs in the area. Now I service many local restaurants all the way to the coast of Maine.”
– Small Business owner in food and agriculture

“As a newer business, just two years old when the pandemic hit, it’s difficult to plan for the future. We were growing exponentially when the pandemic hit and now our numbers are skewed and it’s hard to predict the future and therefore, future development and expansion.”
– Small Business owner

Intellectual Capital & Wealth

Intellectual Capital can be defined as the education, knowledge, and innovation within a region that it used to create new ideas, businesses, and solutions to challenges while investing in the resources needed to support innovation and sharing the results of that innovation with others.

Assets

The region's intellectual capital is wide and diverse. It includes institutions of higher learning in the region such as White Mountain Community College, Plymouth State University, Dartmouth College, Dartmouth Regional Technical College, and River Valley Community College. As well as neighboring schools like Northern Vermont University who has connected students in the creative arts and outdoor recreation to those industries in the region. Individual capital includes organizations who provide education, training and technical assistance for businesses and industries such as the NH Small Business Development Incubator Class, held at Plymouth State, the Women's Rural Entrepreneurial Network and regional technology and career centers. The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and New Hampshire Food Alliance bring education, training and collaboration to the region's food and agricultural industry. Other businesses and organizations provide support for youth exploring careers in the region such as Granite State Independent Living which can give five-credits to high school students for hands-on outside-of-the-classroom training and education that connects schools and commercial businesses. The Weathervane Theater offers a grant opportunity to allow young people to access the arts through free or reduced admission and subsidized educational opportunities. Some schools also have an individual as part of staff whose sole purpose is to connect students with employers locally, whether it be for education, training, or employment purposes. Outdoor recreation education and safe, sustainable practices outdoors are provided through initiatives such as Hike Safe, Ski Kind, Ride Kind, Leave No Trace, and Granite State Safe. Other tourism destinations educate visitors as well as new and transient residents through agro-tourism and ecotourism which also brings additional financial capital as value-added experiences and products. In addition to the intellectual capital in the region, New Hampshire's system for determining academic value for accreditation is becoming increasingly flexible with the new world of hybrid, remote and online learning and as much as these systems, rules and regulations will take time to full adjust, present a real opportunity for innovation in education in the region.

Need

The needs identified in intellectual capital throughout the region all revolved around [workforce training](#) and [education](#), both formal and informal education as well as the education system.

For [workforce training](#):

- Align local college and university programs with regional workforce needs. Meet people where they are and make sure they have access to the education they need
- Invest in trades training and education for electricians, builders, plumbers, etc. and the necessary workforce housing and infrastructure needs to support the trades industry
- Collaborate with the New Hampshire Farm Bureau and the New England Farmers Union to promote food and agriculture education universally, whether it is for farmer training or primary/secondary school education



- Create and support comprehensive healthcare workforce training that includes trauma informed care, social determinants of health, and understanding prejudice and bias. We must ensure we are supporting livable wages at every level within the healthcare system.

For the education **workforce**, we need to:

- Increase continuing education on matters such operating a virtual learning environment and distance in-person education as in accordance with state and federal guidelines are needed. Educators need and will continue to need education on virtual communication tools for virtual instruction.
- Create and support the time and space needed to allow educators to develop innovative curriculum and emergency plans prior to any new challenge that can affect schools the way the pandemic did.
- Take stock in what is sustainable capacity of our teachers. Just how much can we expect them to do if we want to have a resilient education system.
- Increase the number of available substitutes.



Within the **education** system, it is imperative that we:

- Identify and address the perception that arts and culture classes are optional and elective. The school system must support the creative economy by investing and supporting in art and culture education and see art as a vocation.
- Create experiential education and training as young as 9th grade to develop the next generation of healthcare workers, farmers, and trades people.
- Develop more innovative internships for college and the high school level students to get them trained on site for real world experience and knowledge building in both hard and soft skills. This way students have an understanding of what the business world needs in the form of communication, follow through, attentiveness, research, and being confident in presenting innovative ideas.
- Learn from other models around the country as well as from private schools and charter schools. Some models of block programs and intensive schedules have found popular success among students and faculty based on different metrics of performance and assessments of academic satisfaction and individual well-being.



In an effort to support the region's **cultural and natural capital** while supporting the outdoor recreation and tourism economy, the region should consider:

- Integrating existing messaging initiatives identified as assets in intellectual capital, create a regionally led education and communication campaign for visitors and residents accessing the region's natural capital and engaging with the region's tourism industry.
- Create a centralized hub to share resources, information and outdoor recreation inventory of assets and needs for the region
- Develop a contractor and consultant list for environmental studies, assessments and planning for outdoor recreation and sensitive habitat projects
- Provide education to landowners on the importance of public access to trails and open space and ensure concerns on liability are addressed



Create a resilient local food system and economy that supports the **basic needs** of the region's workforce by:

- Providing education and access to resources for homeowners and new growers who are growing their own food, composting, and raising animals (community homesteading)
- Providing education to residents and visitors on the importance of buying local produce to support the local economy and support their own health
- Encouraging younger folks to enter the industry, facilitating land purchase for new farmers and producers, and providing start-up support for those new agricultural businesses.
- Providing education and connections between farms and schools as well as other institutions where large scale purchase of local products will boost the local agricultural economy.



“Early childhood education is so important to establish and develop a foundation of academic excellence.” – Education industry leader and employee

“I think in order for us to continue to recover and build more resiliency throughout the region, we've got to look to the other areas such as larger urban and metropolitan areas and try to bring it down to the rural level. You don't have to be in Boston to build Boston level stuff. You don't have to be in L.A. to produce L.A. level video or movie. A lot of that comes from education and imagination.” –Small Business owner

“Educators have had to perform extraordinary tasks in a virtual (remote) environment over the past year which is no small feat. We need to provide recognition of that, give credit to persons where due and broadly work to increase educator value in the minds of public perception.” – Education industry leader and employee

Natural Capital & Wealth

Natural capital can be defined as the region's environmental assets and activities and investments that align with the conservation, protection, regeneration, and maintenance of natural spaces.

Assets

The North Country is known for its rich natural capital and many of the region's employment is either directly or indirectly related to this form of wealth. The greatest assets identified for natural capital are the ecological characteristics that make the North Country unique including protected alpine zones, floodplain forests, viewsheds, wildlife and wildlife habitats. Assets include the region's waterways (rivers, lakes, and ponds) and the access to and crossing of those waterways. It also includes the forests and trail systems. Natural wealth is managed by so many great organizations which are valuable assets to the region, such as the Appalachian Mountain Club, Mount Washington Observatory, Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust, Northern Canoe Trail, Conservation Fund, Forest Service, and community conservation commissions, just to name a few. Additionally, several businesses and organizations who provide outdoor recreational amenities, products and services also rely on the region's natural capital and the quality of that capital. The creative economy in the North Country works with the natural capital as inspiration for their work and the region's farmers and producers are grateful for the natural capital the region provides for agricultural and wood production. Educators in the region are working with students to grow and maintain community gardens and are increasing opportunities for outdoor learning and engagement with our youth.

Needs

To support the region's assets in natural wealth, investments in **planning and assessment** must be made to:

- Develop a robust natural resource inventory across the region.
- Understand the impact visitor growth has on the region's natural resources and develop solutions to mitigate that impact.
- Evaluate the natural threshold of the region's natural assets and develop strategies to ensure those assets are not over utilized.
- Develop strategic conservation plans for the region to identify important land to conserve for specific regional needs.
- Develop long-term trail maintenance planning and invest in the true cost of that maintenance
- Understand and plan for the disconnect between the historical aspects of the region's recreation facilities, sites, and current usage rates. Presently, capacity is being exceeded by demand which is increasing the rate of deterioration of existing natural spaces and infrastructure. COVID-19 and the increasing resurgent interest of getting outdoors is adding to the deferred maintenance backlog.



As the region continues to be a destination for those who want to experience the natural wealth of the area as well as invest in activities that rely on that natural capital, it is important to **support balance** and plan for:

- Environmental sustainability that allows for an array of broad experiences in the natural environment without sacrificing the quality of that experience for the quantity of experiences.
- Landowner Engagement (public, private, commercial) in natural asset stewardship, and working together with environmental organizations and the outdoor recreation industry to decide what needs to become more resilient as well as how we can increase our volunteerism.



Also, educating new landowners on the importance of access to tracts of land for forestry and heritage sports that support the livelihood of the region's residents so as to not lose those valuable connections and access points.

- Engaging community members in the development of the outdoor recreation economy ensuring that any future expansion balances the needs of the local communities and the opportunities gained from tourism investment.

Creating unified **messaging and education** around the importance of the region's natural capital is vital to the region's resiliency. This includes:

- Becoming a model for sustainable outdoor recreation and tourism economy, inclusive community participation in balancing natural resources and economic growth and investing in natural capital as a primer for economic development.
- Educating guests on the importance of respecting the region's natural capital and the lifestyle of the residents who call the North Country home.
- Developing messaging that supports the natural capital of the region to share with businesses who can share with their clients.
- Learning from examples in bordering states, develop strategies for education and preservation of local trout rivers and streams



In an effort to ensure everyone has **access** to natural capital and cultural diversity is respected in the outdoor industry:

- Diversity and inclusion need to be at the center of the development of the outdoor recreation industry. This includes respecting the cultural differences in recreating on the land, ensuring we preserve heritage sports like hunting and fishing, and limiting impact on the wildlife that rely on the same natural assets for their food and home.
- Develop and evaluate the region's ability to increase health & wellness, economic prosperity, investment in natural resources, and conservation of finite assets in conjunction with each other.



Within the **food and agriculture** industry, it is important to invest and build natural capital by:

- Increasing local food production and access to agricultural land so that the region can become more resilient to any future disruptions in the supply chain.
- Investing in programs that subsidize low-income household budgets with fresh food which would stimulate the local food industry and support the conservation of natural capital for food production.
- Investing in community and regional composting facilities that would create jobs, reduce waste, build soil for agricultural use, and sequester carbon.



To build resiliency through natural capital, the region must work together with partners in **collaboration** on the best solutions for the region, such as:



- Engaging with the State on the importance of supporting and investing in the outdoor recreation and environmental workforce that must meet the demands of visitors and the pressure put on the region's natural capital. Currently, there are challenges in managing and meeting the demand on travel and tourism in the region. In addition, the region and state must work together on developing a strong statewide effort to promote not only tourism but sustainable tourism.
- Developing cross sector collaborations to enhance the natural capital, leverage resources, and create innovative experiences for locals and visitors. An example could be a collaboration between art and science in telling the natural history and cultural history of a space through scientific data and creative expression. Another example could be a collaboration between the food and agriculture, outdoor recreation and the healthcare industry where programs and investments are made in healthy eating and healthy living. A collaboration between local schools and new technology businesses that are developing regional renewable energy systems where education and workforce training are one in the same.
- Ensuring that any natural capital assessment and planning efforts, as outlined above or completed in the future, are done through collaboration with environmental and outdoor leadership in the region, sharing resources, data, tools, and co-creating solutions together.

As the region develops strategies for resilience, preparing for **climate** impacts on the region's economy and wellbeing will be critical and actions to mitigate and adapt to those impacts should be included in further planning and assessment efforts. As stated by leadership in the region:



- The outdoor recreation industry has been trying to overcome the fluctuations in weather and seasonal climatic cycles which continue to change and impact the industry's ability to provide service.
- Climate impacts on the ski industry have become more challenging with warmer winters with increasing rain events. The ski industry is spending more funding on snow making to meet the increasing demand for the ski season.
- We cannot forget the impacts of CO2 emissions or the progress we need to make with electric vehicles and renewable energy to mitigate impacts now and in the future.
- We need to prepare for increased variation and intensity of large weather-related storms and climatic events and consider ways to adapt and transition part of the region's economy.

"Our location is our greatest asset. Nature, the surrounding mountains, overall landscape, and our panoramic views are inspirational to artists and the creative economy. It's why we are here." – Art and Culture industry leader and employee

“There is a disconnect between the historical aspects of our natural assets and recreation facilities and sites and the growing usage of these spaces. Presently, capacity is being exceeded by demand which is increasing the rate of deterioration of existing trails and the environment. COVID-19 and the increasing resurgent interest of getting outdoors is adding to our deferred maintenance backlog for infrastructure.” – Outdoor Recreation leader and employee

“We chose to open our business and stay here because of the sense of community in our region and the natural environment that is so much a part of our business and our lifestyles.” – Small Business Owner

“Our world feels so different right now so giving kids an opportunity to give back to the environment, to give back to nature, is so important right now - now more than ever.” – Education industry leader and employee

Political Capital & Wealth

Political capital can be defined as local, state and regional power and influence to support the region's goals and ensure equitable distribution of resources and can include investments in building and strengthening partnerships, providing access and gaining support from decision makers, and sharing information on legislation and policies that support the region's needs.

Assets

The region is comprised of many local, regional and state political representatives that work on behalf of North Country communities and the region. This includes the town managers and planners, selectboards, town committees, and local business development groups as well as representatives from our state and national legislature. It also includes the citizens that actively participate in civic engagement and decision making. This makes up the political capital ecosystem of the region. During the most challenging of times, these entities typically unite as a common front to support the needs of the North Country residents and businesses. It is imperative that the region continues to build relationships across economic sectors with political representation on building the economic recovery and resiliency strategies outlined in this plan.

Needs

Political capital was the least talked about form of wealth for assets, needs or new endeavors in the community engagement process. In other words, of all the other forms of capital, participants placed less emphasis on political capital than any other form of capital.

However, a few political capital needs were shared, and they include:

- Support from the state for new businesses that is equal to the level of support provided for existing businesses.
- Developing partnerships with the state and federal government to help reduce barriers to the growth of the **food and agricultural** industry as opposed to just overseeing regulations to food and agriculture.
- Having a political voice for recreation industry workforce that supports the **tourism economy**.
- A greater presence, understanding, and support in Concord of the challenges that the North Country region faces with regards to visitor overcrowding and demand, **livable wages**, and **housing** and **childcare** needs.
- Supporting our educators and providing them with the resources needed to build more resilient, sustainable **education** systems.
- The region does not need political support **FOR** the region. The region needs political support **WITH** the region. Having the state and federal government work by our sides, with our people, meeting the needs that we have identified and supporting the innovation that the region is leading, is more important than the region being seen as a place that only receives help and assistance on goals and strategies that were developed outside of the region.



"We received federal support as a new business when one of our senators not only listened but helped." – New Business Owners

"The State of NH ends in Concord. There is no emphasis and support for infrastructure needs in the North Country."
– Healthcare industry leader and employee

"As an educator, I do not feel we have political support. After all that we did during the pandemic, we feel undervalued."
- Education industry leader and employee

Social Capital & Wealth

Social Capital can be defined as the relationships, connections, and trust needed within the community and region to accomplish the needs of the people for that specific area and investments can be made in gathering people together to share stories and resources and building new or strengthening existing networks.

Assets

Social capital is one of the greatest forms of wealth in the region and was the most utilized form of capital during the pandemic. Strengthening existing partnerships and building new ones during the pandemic was critical. Businesses, organizations and communities shared resources and stories of resiliency to support each other's recovery efforts. Zoom meetings and webinars helped to continue engagement and expand access to collaboration in a large, rural region where in-person meetings and trainings require extensive travel and time commitments. The focus groups held by North Country Council were seen as an important form of social capital, bringing people together to share, collaborate and create innovative solutions for economic recovery and resiliency. New businesses in the region relied on allies and collaborations to develop resources for starting and operating a new business during challenging times and many new businesses commented on the importance of community collaborative events where they could showcase their new product and build their clientele. This is vital to the success of their business, such as the regional farmers' markets. In addition, these spaces are a public forum for social interaction and intellectual capital exchange. Building and retaining a local, supportive customer base has been important to the resiliency of businesses in the region as well as building relationships and gaining support from other local businesses so that products and services needed for one business are sourced from another local business. Businesses expressed the importance of their partnerships with local nonprofits, town highway and safety departments, selectboards, and planning boards. Businesses also relied on their committed workforce, whether that's seasonal or full time here, that has the knowledge base and passion to pivot as needed.

Needs

Although the North Country Rising planning process created structured collaboration within economic sectors and across economic sectors, it is imperative to develop long-term, sustainable **collaborative models** to support the region's social capital and create spaces for sharing resources, creating cross-sector innovations, and forming collective impact. Collaborations could include:



- A North Country Food Council that focuses on building a resilient regional food system and economy, food access and equity, training the next generation of growers and producers, and obtaining land to grow the food economy and a resilient food system.
- A Regional Council that creates an endowment to manage recreation infrastructure and protect natural resources across jurisdictions with collective coordination among government, NGO's and business to accommodate visitors at the right scale for the benefit of the economy and lifestyle of the region.
- A functioning network of outdoor recreation players (business, community, nonprofit, education, conservation, and health) to facilitate information flow, mutual support and discussion resulting in collaborative progress that benefits all.

- Partnering the food and agriculture industry, arts and culture industry and outdoor recreation industry with the healthcare industry to support access to healthy living as a foundation for healthcare and address the social determinants of health.
- Creating a small regional business network so if we are facing similar challenges in the future, we can work together to meet our needs and share resources and strategies for recovery
- Creating models of shared leadership in creating solutions that cut across all sectors of the economy including, but not limited to, housing, childcare, food, and broadband.
- Creating a young outdoor recreation industry professionals' group
- Creating advisory groups or small peer/colleague groups that support the education industry and build social capital with our teachers across the region.
- Creating a central hub for resource sharing for farmers' markets and small vendors for the region; one central place for everyone to go to sign up and see what markets are happening in the region and identify where new markets could be developed.
- Developing more open spaces for people to feel like they don't need to know the answer to be a part of the discussion. One does not have to come to an open space with all the ways to fix the problem. Just come to discuss the problem and be willing to work together towards a solution.

"Regional support, collaborative spirit and information sharing on best practices is what helps us get through tough times." – Education industry leader and employee

"There is a need for larger collaborative efforts, such as the collaboration happening through this North Country Rising plan, on a regional level to increase our resiliency to future challenges whether they be health-induced, economic, social, financial, or environmental." – Outdoor Recreation leader and employee

"We invite local community groups to meet at the restaurant because if you support the community, the community will support you."
– Small Business owner

Planning Principles

*“We will either find a way or make one.”
Anibal Barca*

A Plan for Economic and Community Recovery and Resiliency.

The goals, strategies and impact assessment emerged from the planning process developed by North Country Council, guided by the vision:

To create a resilient, inclusive and caring economy that can withstand, adapt, innovate and transform in the face of major disruptions

To provide a foundation for the North Country Rising planning process and support this vision, North Country Council established the following guiding principles. A resilient economy for the region includes:

- Supporting a triple bottom line approach that balances People, Planet and Profit.
- Valuing all eight forms of community capital including Human, Social, Natural, Cultural, Intellectual, Physical, Financial, and Political.
- Using systems thinking methodology when evaluating needs and defining innovative solutions for economic and community resiliency.
- Investing in our local economy, building connections, leveraging resources, and working together across economic sectors.

These principles support taking an inclusive, whole systems approach to defining economic and community resiliency as well as the challenges and barriers to resiliency for the rural region. These principles require taking a deeper look at the ways in which industries, infrastructure, accessibility, relationships, and culture, amongst other attributes, are all connected and impact each other in ways that can either build resiliency or deter from it. The result of working with these guiding principles was a more complete understanding of the region’s assets and needs and the complex, interconnected solutions that must be developed for the region to recover from recent shocks and be better prepared for future shocks.

A Closer Look at the Guiding Principles.

Triple Bottom Line

Traditionally, economic development planning takes an approach that places financial capital as the primary goal, and at times, this can be at odds with the natural and cultural capital that makes a community and region unique. The North Country is not known for its financial wealth; however, it is known for its social, cultural and natural wealth that makes the region an attractive place to live and visit. If economic development goals were not in alignment with those assets, the region could experience financial and economic growth while losing cultural and natural wealth. As was relevant throughout the pandemic, the people of the North Country have a strong relationship to the environment and to each other which they relied on during the most challenging of times. Economic development strategies should support the local economy and workforce while also strengthening the relationship between the people and the ecosystem. The Triple Bottom Line principle shows up in

the Impact Assessment of this plan as well as in the Goals and Strategies section as it relates to balancing needs and economic development. It is also present in the definitions of resiliency which account for the need to define resiliency in broader terms, beyond the pandemic, to account for climate resiliency.

Community Capitals

To expand the concept of economic development beyond balancing a triple bottom line, it is also important to the North Country's resilience to invest in and support all forms of community capital. There are eight forms of community capital that, when working together, enhance economic development in rural communities and regions. These eight forms of capital help us understand our assets and needs in a more holistic way. The Community Capitals framework clarifies that financial wealth is not the only form of capital flowing throughout region and that other resources such as social and professional relationships, natural environment, infrastructure, land, knowledge, experience, and more can provide not only abundance to the region but the tools needed to recover and build resiliency for the future. The Community Capitals principles provide the framework for organizing stated assets and needs across all sectors of the economy in this plan under the Impact Analysis section.¹

Systems Thinking

The most adaptive, innovative, resilient system known is the ecosystem. It is complex, interconnected, and every element of the system plays a role. As the North Country develops strategies for economic and community resilience, it is essential that each asset and need be evaluated and planned as a part of a larger system. In other words, we must remove the silos that put economic development challenges and resources as separate and/or at odds with housing, childcare, food, equity, transportation, and environmental challenges and resources. They are all interconnected, and the more we develop interconnected solutions, the more likely we are to build sustainable solutions for building resiliency. The Systems Thinking principle helped us recognize the importance of identifying assets and needs across all sectors as opposed to identifying them separately for each economic sector. These principles also guided the way in which strategies are identified in the Strategy and Solutions section of this plan.

Local Economy & Collaboration

The pandemic exposed the fragility of current systems that rely on importing and exporting products and services outside the region. Whereas building and strengthening an economy that can be competitive in a global market may have been the driving force before the pandemic, ensuring the local workforce is healthy and safe while making sure residents had food, shelter, and care became the priority. This has provided a new perspective on what is most important for the region moving forward. When outside markets were closed to the region, local producers and suppliers stepped up to try to fill a void. In addition, businesses, organizations, and community leadership found new ways to collaborate and build a supportive network for the region's response and recovery efforts. As the North Country invests in economic development strategies that build resiliency, supporting the local economy and ongoing collaboration will be essential. The collaboration principle guided how North Country Council collected information in focus group collaborative sessions and by engaging in existing collaborations. The local economy principle is present throughout the Capitals section of this plan as well as in the Strategies and Solutions section.

¹ Source: Wealthworks, <https://www.wealthworks.org/basics/explore-regional-wealth-building/wealth-eight-capitals>

“The Littleton Food Cooperative purchases over \$3 million worth of local goods from farmers and producers. That money goes right back into the food system as direct payments to those over 200 local suppliers. So, we're our own little economic engine here in the North Country.”

– Ed King, Executive Director, Littleton Food Cooperative

“In our rural communities, people looked out for one another. And that was true business to business and neighbor to neighbor.”

– Chris Thayer, Appalachian Mountain Club

The Planning Process

*“How you climb a mountain is more important than reaching the top.”
Yvon Chouinard*

How we climbed a mountain.

If the vision is to build an inclusive, caring, and resilient economy for the region, the planning framework must include open collaboration across all economic sectors and communities, and with partner organizations who provide technical assistance and support to the region’s businesses and communities. In other words, everyone needs to be invited to the table.

Existing Collaborations & Planning Efforts

The process began by reaching out to organizations where the Council was currently collaborating and reaching out to organizations to build future collaborations. Emails, phone calls, and zoom meetings were made with leaderships from the region’s Regional Development Corporations, the North Country Health Consortium, North Country Educational Services, Coos County Child Care Task Force, social service leadership through the Granite State United Way Working Better Together initiative, regional Chambers of Commerce, the Neil and Lois Tillotson Foundation and the Conservation Fund.

The goal was to:

- Reconnect and check in on the impacts of COVID-19 on their work and organizations
- Ask if they needed any immediate assistance or resources
- Gather their input into framing the North Country Rising planning process
- Request their assistance in gathering people together to inform the planning process
- Ensure we continue to check-in and collaborate during the pandemic and beyond

In addition, North Country Council staff attended the Resiliency Academy hosted by the New Hampshire Small Business Development Corporation and the University of New Hampshire. This forum allowed the Council staff to learn and interact with fellow planners as well as community, business, organizational and educational leadership across the State. Information from the Academy is woven into the Strategies and Solutions section of this plan as well as in the Resource Section.

From those initial conversations, North Country Council began to review and digest the articles, reports, and plans that were shared or suggested as additional data and stories that could help inform the plan. Some resources were focused on addressing long-standing, underlying challenges in the rural region whereas other resources took a broader perspective of the systemic challenges brought to light in part by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those articles, reports, and plan findings are integrated into this North Country Rising Plan and are shared in the Resource Section.

The Council also engaged with existing North Country Council committees to provide information about the planning process, invited them to participate, and provide updates from community engagement sessions and planning effort. This included the regional Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee. A new resiliency chapter was created for the CEDS Plan and reviewed and supported by the CEDS

Committee. The 2022 CEDS Rewrite will include integrating the Strategies and Solutions outlined in the North Country Rising Plan into the CEDS Plan.

Engaging Everyone

North Country Council created an inclusive community engagement process that began early winter 2020. The goal of the community engagement process was to:

- Create forums for people to gather, share stories and resources, and work together on a plan for economic and community recovery and resiliency
- Better understand how people, communities and industries defined resiliency for the region, the economy, and themselves
- Learn about economic and social impacts from the pandemic
- Uncover strategies employed in response to the pandemic
- Define assets and resources that were critical to daily survival and response efforts
- Name the region's greatest challenges, barriers and needs that stemmed from the pandemic or were pre-existing and exacerbated by the pandemic
- Identify projects, programs and innovative solutions for economic and community recovery and building a more resilient region in the face of future shocks

North Country Council has hosted focus groups across six economic sectors including Food & Agriculture, Arts & Culture, Education, Healthcare, Outdoor Recreation & Tourism, and Small Business. The Council continued to conduct in-person, over-the-phone and Zoom interviews with leadership around the region representing child and family services, entrepreneurs, hospitality, cultural commissions, chambers of commerce, rotary clubs, and the building, trades and lumber industry.

North Country Council set up booths at farmers' markets around the region to poll individuals and vendors, participated in local arts and cultural events, and provided presentations to partner organizations around the region and State.



Throughout the planning process, North Country Council had an open form to submit stories of resilience or to request a meeting/interview with the Council staff. Summary reports from focus group meetings were posted on the Council's website with options to sign-up for focus group meetings. The Council also shared a monthly update on the North Country Rising Planning process in the Council's newsletter and provided means for people to contact the Council for more information or to set up a time to talk.

The work does not end with this plan. Therefore, additional perspectives and strategies are welcome as we continue to work together to put this plan into action.

In Summary, North Country Council has:

- Held 22 focus group meetings, engaging with 142 workers
- Conducted 35 in-person interviews and 14 over-the-phone interviews

- Attended 5 standing meetings with rotary clubs, regional superintendents, childcare task forces, and social service networking meetings, engaging with 87 workers and business leaders
- Participated in 4 farmer’s markets and 2 arts and cultural events, engaging with roughly 70 additional residents, small business owners and farmers from the region
- Presented at the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee meeting with 20 members and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee at their bi-monthly meetings with 25 members

The Methodology and Framework for the Planning Process.

The Council utilized a few different data gathering and organizing methods to collect and sort the stories and lived experiences gathered in focus group conversations and interviews. Those models included:

The Appreciative Inquiry Model

The Council learned about this model through one of the speakers at the Resiliency Academy hosted by the Small Business Development Corporation and the University of New Hampshire. This model is built around identifying collaborative, asset-based strengths within a business, organization or region and leveraging those strengths to design or redesign systems to build resiliency.¹ For this plan, North Country Council used this model to frame the questions and provide structure for the conversations around the region on economic recovery and resiliency. It included asking the region’s businesses and organizations to not only define the greatest needs, but also the greatest assets, possibilities, creative ideas, and innovative solutions. The responses to these conversations provide the content in this plan for:

- Defining Resiliency
- Redefining Wealth & Capital
- Strategies & Solutions

Rural Policy Institute and Wealthworks – Eight Forms of Capital

The Eight Forms of Capital Model, as described in the Impact Assessment and Planning Principles section of this plan, supports a more comprehensive view of wealth and assets. This resulted in identifying common themes across economic sectors rather than just an assessment of each industry individually. In addition to Wealthworks², the Rural Policy Institute is also using the comprehensive model for capital as a key framework, stating, “As a result, the *Comprehensive Rural Wealth Framework* has emerged as a powerful, comprehensive, and dynamic approach to more fully understand not only the assets and opportunities rural communities and regions hold, but also the challenges they must confront in achieving development and sustainability. In short, this framework seeks to measure what is valued, rather than to value what is measured.”³ The responses provided throughout this planning process are organized by assets and need using the Eight Forms of Capital model.

¹ Source: <https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/what-is-appreciative-inquiry-ai/>

² Source: Wealthworks - <https://www.wealthworks.org/basics/explore-regional-wealth-building/wealth-eight-capitals>

³ The Rural Policy Institute - <https://rupri.org/about-rupri/key-frameworks/>

Codifying Qualitative Data

The responses shared throughout the planning process were documented through summary reports, zoom recordings, videos and transcripts. The Council was able to draw out specific statements, quotes and stories from these narratives and organize the information through coding the data by:

- Type of Industry
- Conversation Type – In-Person, Focus Group, Interview, Survey
- Category (What best describes the type of statement made) – Definition of Resiliency, Story, Asset, Need, Barrier, or New Project/Program
- Form of Capital – Built, Cultural, Financial, Individual, Intellectual, Natural, Political or Social
- Theme – (What common theme/trend is emerging) – Workforce Development, Infrastructure, Access and Equity, Local Economies, etc.
- Recovery or Resiliency – Is this statement related to recovery or a resiliency effort

A Snapshot of the Coded Qualitative Data entered, coded and defined from statements made in focus groups, interviews and in-person events. In total, 686 individual statements were coded and integrated into the Impact Assessment and Goals & Strategies section of this plan.

Name	Industry		Statement/Quote	Category	Form of Community Capital	Theme	Recovery or Resiliency
	Outdoor Recreation	Focus Group	Greater, deliberate connections and visibility with indigenous populations	Need	Individual	Access for Everyone	Resiliency
	Outdoor Recreation	Focus Group	We need to debunk the perception that having trails for public access to outdoor recreation on your property is a liability	Need	Intellectual	Access for Everyone	Resiliency
	Outdoor Recreation	Focus Group	Broad experiences for users - how do we preserve this different experiences? Quality VS. Quantity and environmental sustainability need to be a big part of this plan.	Need	Natural	Access for Everyone	Resiliency
	Outdoor Recreation	Focus Group	Diversity and inclusion needs to be a big piece of this conversation. Cultural and user access, thinking about the many different ways cultures have recreated on the land. Ensuring we preserve heritage sports like hunting. Paying attention to impact of wildlife (not just consumption) effects the overall environment and think long term of these impacts.	Need	Natural	Access for Everyone	Resiliency
	Outdoor Recreation	Focus Group	Many of our "new" private landowners in the region are out-of-state buyers who may have different thoughts or ideas on what their land is used for and who can access it. We are seeing an increase in posted signs on much of the private land restricting user access. There is also an increase in international conglomerates and foreign buyers picking up tracts of land in the region as simple forms of asset allocation as part of larger investment plans within diversified corporate entities.	Story	Financial	Access for Everyone	Resiliency
	Outdoor Recreation	Focus Group	An issue of concern is the status of motorized trails developed on private land, often held for timber (fiber) extraction and forest easements. We have a concern that future landowners may be more averse to allowing non-resident or commercially zoned tracts of land to be accessed by outdoor recreationists – namely those who are motorized vs. non-motorized.	Story	Natural	Access for Everyone	Resiliency
	Outdoor Recreation	Focus Group	An example of an organization which operates a sustainable funding model for access to resources and facilities is the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) which does charge guests a set fee to stay overnight in their facilities and more for any extra services. This allows the club to operate recreation sites and facilities in a financially sustainable way which correlates with use and capacity.	Asset	Financial	Case Study	Resiliency

The Pandemic

“When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change; at such a moment, there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or in saying that we are not yet ready. The challenge will not wait.”

Paulo Coelho

How Did We Get Here?

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has altered the lives of people across the globe for the past three years and has brought a series of challenges to human life including, but not limited to:

- Unprecedented illness and death
- Temporary and permanent business closings
- Labor shortages
- Supply chain disruptions
- A shortage of housing, food, and childcare
- Increased mental illness and addiction
- Localized environmental impacts from overuse
- Social and racial injustice
- Increased vulnerability to the most vulnerable populations

In many respects, the pandemic highlighted the imbalances and challenges that already existed in many places around the world. The places that have limited resources found themselves with even less. Businesses and organizations with limited support struggled to keep their doors open and many closed permanently. Those who could only afford to lease found their rent doubling, and the housing market increased so drastically that many within the local workforce were displaced.

A Timeline of the Coronavirus pandemic can be found in the appendix.

The View from the North.

The region experienced widespread impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and pre-existing challenges in the region were exacerbated. The most significant impacts to the regional economy were related to business closures and adjustments, outdoor recreation and the region’s natural capital, childcare, and housing.

North Country healthcare providers prepared for what would become months of emergency response and ongoing trauma, both with patients and from personal experience. The region’s social service sector was stretched beyond capacity as homelessness, addiction relapse, tending to the senior population, and a variety of transportation and access needs increased rapidly. The region’s education system was truly tested as teachers shifted between in-person and remote learning while responding to the growing needs of children and families adapting to life, work, and school at home. Local farmers could not keep up with demand for food and products as supply chains around the country shut down. The arts and culture industry came to a halt as performances, exhibitions, galleries, and classes in the arts were subject to social distancing and maximum capacity guidelines established by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); an industry that not only supports the tourism economy but provides the rich cultural capital that makes the region unique to

its residents. Businesses, organizations, community groups, neighbors, and friends had to adapt to a life of access to less in a region where resources are already scarce in a global crisis.

Business

In a survey conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center for the NH Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to assess the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses throughout New Hampshire:

- 37% of respondents whose business is located in the region say that their business reduced their hours of operation since February 15, 2020
- 38% say that their business closed temporarily
- 1% say that they closed permanently
- 42% say their business has had no change in its open status since that time
- Respondents whose business is located in the region are more likely than businesses located elsewhere to report having closed temporarily since February 15, 2020¹

Among those whose business is located in the region and who say their business reduced their hours or closed temporarily since February 15th, 2020:

- 42% reduced their hours or closed temporarily because they were required to close per government order
- 37% reduced their hours or closed temporarily due to health and safety concerns
- 32% reduced their hours or closed temporarily due to being unable to get a sufficient workforce to maintain operations.
- 20% say that they closed or reduced their hours due to a loss in revenue
- 17% had suspected or confirmed COVID-19 exposure
- 15% cite employees being unwilling or unable to work
- 6% cite a need to homeschool children or care for a family member
- 5% mention being closed for the season

The national average unemployment rate was 14.8% and New Hampshire's unemployment rate was 16% in April 2020. Thirty-five of the region's communities experienced unemployment rates over 20%.

New Hampshire is recovering quicker with an unemployment rate of 2.8% in April 2021, compared to the national average of 6.1% Coos County has a higher average unemployment rate of 3.8%, ranking as the highest unemployment county in the State. Carroll County, at 3.3%, ranks second highest county for unemployment. Both counties are located within the region.²

¹ Source: Small Business Development Center

² Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Outdoor Recreation & the Region's Natural Capital

While businesses shut down, unemployment and flex schedules increased, and families were spending more time at home, the draw to spend time outdoors, where the virus is less likely to spread, became more and more appealing to people. The region is known for its abundant natural capital and the White Mountain National Forest within the region, is located within one day's drive of more than 70 million people.¹ Michael Ferguson, a professor of recreation management and policy at the University of New Hampshire, says visitorship in New England's national forests increased by more than 60% throughout the summer of 2020. He's also seen a 400% increase in visitation to congressionally designated wilderness areas throughout the pandemic.

As people began making plans to escape to the region, the White Mountain National Forest, on March 26, 2020, shut down several recreation sites and toilet facilities for the health and safety of visitors and staff. On April 24, 2020, the White Mountain National Forest shut down several high use trailheads, day-use areas, and dispersed recreation facilities in alignment with federal, state and local guidance for physical distancing and to ensure health and safety of employees, visitors, and volunteers. An announcement on that date stated "while the White Mountain National Forest remains open, we are reminding the public to please recreate responsibly. New Hampshire has a Stay Safe at Home order in place and has asked the public to recreate locally."²

By early May 2020, the Appalachian Mountain Club announced the closing of all high summit huts and other facilities for the summer season to keep staff and the general public safe from exposure in indoor spaces. As recreational facilities had to close during this time, and the outdoor recreation workforce was already working at capacity, there was a significant increase in visitors during the 2020 summer and fall tourism season. As a result, the outdoor recreation industry was challenged with overcrowding in parking lots and trailheads, substantial litter and waste at recreational sites, trailheads, and on trails, increased need for trail maintenance and emergency response, and significant impact to the natural environment.

Child Care

The childcare industry is essential to supporting all other industries. The region has been challenged with meeting the needs for childcare which has disproportionately impacted women, single-parent households, and low-income families. The pandemic exacerbated these challenges and created a significant childcare crisis in this rural region for parents of school-age children as schools switched from in-person learning to remote and hybrid schedules. These challenges had a profound impact on the workers in the region and impacted people's ability to be available to work.

"There are more than 53,000 children under the age of 6 in working families in New Hampshire. There are 423 center-based childcare programs and 166 family childcare homes in the state, with an overall total of 30,887 available spaces for young children. This leaves a deficit of more than 22,000 licensed childcare spaces across the state of New Hampshire. This means that **2 in 5 children in working families in New Hampshire does not have access to licensed childcare while their parents are at work.**"³

¹ Source: [National Forest Foundation NFF, 2020](#); [United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service USDA FS, 2020](#)

² Source: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/whitemountain/news-events/?cid=FSEPRD729207>

³ Source: NH Connections <http://www.nh-connections.org/communities/nh-child-care-desert-map/>

In a report of NH's Child Care Workforce Constraints, the North Country's percentage of unmet childcare needs before the pandemic compared to during the pandemic were as follows:

- Carroll County – 24% unmet need pre-COVID and 52% unmet need in October 2020, a 27% increase
- Coos County – 52% unmet need pre-COVID and 71% unmet need in October 2020, a 20% increase
- Grafton County – 40% unmet need pre-COVID and 59% unmet need in October 2020, a 19% increase¹

Housing

Another challenge the region faced was the demand and cost of housing increases that arose from the pandemic. The North Country is geographically located within two hours of several large, urbanized areas and was home to many second homeowners before the pandemic. As people shifted to remote working and learning, many second homeowners chose to stay in the region where transmission rates were lower, and families could enjoy spending time outdoors. As people visited the region, the area's natural and cultural capital, combined with relatively affordable prices for a second home buyer, made the region attractive for those seeking new investments, putting more demand on the market.

The short-term rental market expanded in the region, and data suggests this expansion may be impacting the availability and price of traditional long-term rentals. With relatively lower wages in the region, many workers rely on long-term rental as affordable housing. "According to AirDNA, advertisements for short-term rentals in the towns that make up the North Country Economic Development Region have increased 74% since 2017. Three-quarters of these rentals are for an entire home (as opposed to just a room). The economics of short-term rentals also differ from longer-term rentals. AirDNA reports that the median monthly revenue for units in these towns is more than \$2,600, a full \$1,600 more than the median rent for long-term rentals."

Before the pandemic, home prices were already rising faster than inflation rates, and because of the pandemic, were accelerated. In the North Country, where housing stock is low and home prices were relatively affordable, this created a spike in demand that would put additional pressure on the region's businesses and workforce.²

¹ Source: <https://econsultsolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/03-Child-Care-Workforce-Constraints.pdf>

² . Source: North Country Housing Needs Analysis, 2021 – <https://www.nhhfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/North-Country-Housing-Needs-Analysis-2021.pdf>

The sun will rise tomorrow.

Despite all the challenges and losses experienced during these unprecedented times, the people of the North Country are:

- Identifying strategies for strengthening the rural regional economy and resources,
- Supporting intentional community building and collaboration
- Creating innovative education and training programs
- Investing in the region's quality of life in an effort to build a resilient North Country.

North Country Rising is the roadmap to help the region get there.

Appendix

Participants

Case Studies, Resources & Reports

Timeline of the Pandemic



NORTH COUNTRY RISING
RECOVERY & RESILIENCY OF COMMUNITY



Participants

Below is a list of the people, businesses and organizations North Country Council had the pleasure to connect with during the community engagement process. In addition, we are grateful to the rotary clubs and chambers who spoke with our team and the hundreds of residents who shared their stories on Main Streets, at farmers' markets and at cultural events.

Adam Alderin	The Beal House
Adam Hammil	Exile Burrito
Adam Reczek	Littleton Opera House
Alan Smith	Hugh J. Gailen Career & Technical Center
Alicia LaDouceur	excavation contractor
Amanda Aspinall	Granite State Independent Living
Amy Huter	Milan Village School
Ann Auger	ECE Visions
Anne Cote	Gorham Middle School
Ashley Brown	Haven Floral Co.
Becky Colpitts	Littleton Food Cooperative
Bill Hart	SAU 84
Bob Tortorice	Building Alternatives
Brian Chamberlain	Visit NH
Bridget Freudenberger	Conservation Fund
Brooke Brown	Forest Service
Carolyn	Ikigai Jewelry
Carrie	Conway Farmers Market
Carrie Myers	CarrieMichele Coaching, VitaMom Club
Chad Fillion	Phlume Media
Charlie Jordan	Great North Woods Center for the Arts
Charyl Reardon	White Mountain Attractions
Chris Knapp	Geo. M. Stevens Insurance
Chris Sweeney	Crumb Bar
Chris Thayer	Appalachain Mountain Club
Christine Kelly	The Colonial Theater
Chuck Henderson	Senator Shaheen
Chuck Lloyd	White Mountain Community College
Clare Brooks	Little Village Toy & Book
Corrine Rober	Bear Rock Adventures
Courtney Vashaw	Whitefiled Library and Upstage Players
Dave Harkless	Littleton Bike and Fitness, Parker Mtn Trails, Ski Mt. Eustis
Dave Ziebart	Lord of the Strings
David Blanco	Integrity Merchant Solutions
David Craxton	Roots & Fruits Farm
Deborah Allen	Debbie's Data Service
Debra Madin	Family Resource Center

Denise Valle	Town of Gorham
Dennis McFadden	Haverhill Heritage Incorporated
Derek Ibarguen	Forest Service
Doug Gralenski	White Mountain Forager
Eamon Kelly	White Mountain Lumber
Ed Duffy	Littleton Regional Healthcare
Ed King	Littleton Food Cooperative
Ed Shanshala	Ammonoosuc Health Services
Elijah Sobel	North Country Kayak
Emma Bogardus	BY EMMA B.
Erin Talcoot	White Mountain School
Ethan Paulini	Weathervane Theater
Gal Potashnick	Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust
Heather Bryant	UNH Extension
Heidi Barker	UNH Extension
Ian Dowling	Reklis Brewing Co
Janice Mercier	White Mountain Apairy
Jarrett Stern	Littleton Regional Healthcare
Jason Tors	Loading Dock and Littleton Culture and Arts Commission
Jennifer Wilhelm	NH Food Alliance
Jessica Bahrakis	NOCO Mural Project
Jessica Griffiths	Upstage Players and Littleton Studio School
Jessica Williams	Profile School
Jesstina Murphy	Family Resource Center
Jessyca Keeler	Ski NH
Jim Alden	Chutters/Main St
Jim Innes	Forest Service
Joanna Santilli	Mountain Lathers
Jody Fried	Catamount Arts
John Alberini	Alburrito's Mexican Restaurant, LLC
Jorge Donoso	Weathervane Theater
Joshua Sjostrom	Forest Service
June Hammond-Rowan	Town of Plymouth
Karen Hall	A La Carte Bookkeeping
Karen Marks	Lafayette Regional School
Karen Moore	Berlin Elementary
Karrie Thomas	Northern Canoe Trail
Kasey Nightingale	Custom Source Marketing
Kassie Eafрати	Northern Human Services
Kathie Lovett	Franconia Art Walk
Kaylee Klein	Crumb Bum Bakery
Kelly Jackson-Bacon	Berlin Elementary
Ken Gordan	Family Resource Center
Kendra Bell	Cohos Advisors

Kim Delutis	RIDE INDOOR CYCLING, LLC
Kim Doolan	Guaranteed Rate
Kimberely Force	Littleton Regional Healthcare
Koren Superchi	Littleton Regional Healthcare
Kristina Zontini	Super Secret Ice Cream
Laurie Korzen	Rustic Flags
Linny Kenny	Linny Kenny Leathers
Lisa Burk-McCoy	NH State Council on the Arts
Liz & Steve	Libbys/Saalt
Lori Langolis	North Country Educational Services
Lori Silva	Littleton Studio School
Lyn Osborne Winter	North Country Cenert for the Arts and Jean's Playhouse
Lynn Mcaloon	Forest Service
Lynne Warren	Lynne Warren State Farm Agency
Magda Randall	Polish Princess
Marcia McCaffrey	NH Department of Education
Marghie Seymour	Littleton Studio School
Marianne Borowski	Cross Country NH
Marianne Leberman	Forest Service
Mary Lou Krambear	Consultant
Melaine Luce	White Mountain Trail Collective
Melissa Grella	Taproot
Michael Sallade	Granite State Independent Living
Mike Kopp	North Country Ford
Misty Stevig	Gorham High School
Nick Rowley	UNH Extension
Nigel Manley	Forest Society and the Rocks
Paige Audrey	Eastern Styles
Pamela LaFlamme	City of Berlin
Patrick Hummel	Mount Washington State Park
Patrick Hurley	Windon Water LLC
Patrick Judge	Pak Solutions
Patti Alden	Tin Can Company
Rachel Freierman	Highwater Farm
Rebecca Hill-Larson	Littleton Food Pantry
Rich Renehan	Am. Perf. Polymers/Renco Gloves
Rob Kebalka	Upper Valley Cleaning
Russell Hirschler	Upper Valley Trails Alliance
Sally Manikian	Conservation Fund
Sam Brown	Meadowstone Farm
Sam Fregeau	Personalized Gifts by Sam
Sarah Clemmitt	Gorham High School
Sarah Cox	Organic Farmer from the Seacoast
Sarah Sallade	Homeschooling Programs

Scott Crowder	NH Outdoor Recreation Director
Scott Hunt	White Mountain School and Weathervane Theater
Scott Peters	Golf and ski warehouse
Sean Doll	Northern VT University/Littleton Parks and Recreation Commission
Shad Lawton	THE D. LAWTON COMPANY, INC.
Stacey Lucas	Veggie Art Girl
Stacey Purslow	NH Farm-to-School
Stanley Carte	Forest Service
Stela Pleischl	Littleton School District
Stephanie Gray-Lemay	Hugh J. Gailen Career & Technical Center
Stephanie Potter	Littleton Middle/High School
Steve Bissonnette	Rise Private Wealth Management
Sue Greenlaw	Bethlehem Elementary School
Ted McCormick	Berlin High School
Tiffany Benna	Forest Service
Tim Wennich	Meadowstone Farm
Tony Ilacqua	Bank of New Hampshire
Tonya St. Cyr	SNS
Trisha Cross	Coldwell Banker Lifestyles
Tyler Ray	Granite Outdoor Alliance
Tyler Ray	Granite Outdoor Alliance
Vanessa Robbins	Littleton Opera House Commercial Kitchen Project
William Church	White Mountain Science Initiative

Case Studies, Resources & Reports

The following resources and reports were cited and used by the North Country Council staff during this planning process including the Council's Case Study reports and Regional Plans which are also listed below.

North Country Council Case Studies

The following Case Studies were developed by North Country Council staff in response to focus group members request to research best practices and case studies from around the country on topics of specific interest. Each Case Study contains several examples and hyperlinks to learn more. Case Studies include:

Arts & Culture:

- Public Arts & Mural Projects for Community Revitalization
- Experimental Forests & Art/Science Collaborations
- Art Collaboratives and Coalitions

Education:

- Outdoor Classrooms & Learning
- Mixed-Aged Classrooms and Mixed-Age Learning Programs
- In the Community Learning

Food & Agriculture:

- Land Access Programs
- Community & Regional Composting
- Mentorship & Education Programs

Outdoor Recreation & Tourism:

- Tourism Messaging
- Ambassadors & Volunteer Programs
- Career Development & Youth Programs
- Inclusion & Diversity in the Outdoors
- Sustainability in the Outdoor Industry

All North Country Council Case Studies can be found at: <https://www.nccouncil.org/north-country-rising/>.

North Country Council Regional Plans

In addition, North Country Council reviewed regional plans developed by the Council and in partnership with other state and federal agencies. Those plans include:

- A Plan for New Hampshire's North Country
- 2018 – 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- 2014 North Country Region Broadband Report
- 2021 Regional Transportation Plan
- North Country Housing Needs Assessment

All North Country Council Regional Plans can be found at: <https://www.nccouncil.org/regional-plans/>

The North Country Housing Needs Assessment can be found at: <https://www.nhhfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/North-Country-Housing-Needs-Analysis-2021.pdf>

Additional Resources & Support

North Country Council also utilized other regional, state and national reports and resources that were shared and referenced by residents, communities, businesses and organizations. They include:

Business Retention, Recovery, & Resiliency

- UNH Business Resiliency Guide - https://extension.unh.edu/resource/information-brief-communities-and-small-business-working-resilience?utm_source=AdaptiveMailer&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Community%20and%20Economic%20Development%20Update&org=785&lvl=100&ite=16499&lea=1694345&ctr=0&par=1&trk=a0W6f00000Vu30REAZ
- UNH Business Retention Strategy Blog - - <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/business-retention-strategy-2021-business-resiliency-planning>

Child Care

- Raising the Valley Report – – <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Raising-the-Valley-Strategic-Plan-2021-2025-FINAL.pdf>
- Coos State of Childcare Report - <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Coos-State-of-Childcare-Report-2020-Final-PDF.pdf>
- Family Friendly Workplace Policies – <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/IMBA-ROI-Summary-Final-2018.pdf>
- NH Connections <http://www.nh-connections.org/communities/nh-child-care-desert-map/>
- Child Care Workforce Constraints - <https://econsultsolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/03-Child-Care-Workforce-Constraints.pdf>

Climate & Natural Environment

- State of NH Climate Action Plan <https://www.des.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt341/files/documents/r-ard-09-1.pdf>
- Smart Cities Article on connection between GDP and natural environment - https://www.smartcitiesworld.net/economy-and-finance/economy-and-finance/report-highlights-cities-risk-to-gdp-of-not-working-with-nature?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily%20Newsletter
- Hubbard Brook Confronting our Changing Winters - <https://hubbardbrook.org/confronting-our-changing-winters>
- National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration’s National Centers for Environmental Information <https://www.noaa.gov/news/june-2021-was-hottest-june-on-record-for-us>

- Confronting our Changing Winters: Indicators of Changing Climate in our Northern Forest – <http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ConfrontingOurChangingWinters.pdf>
- Northern Forest Winters Report – http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Contosta_2019_EcolApps.pdf
- Winter Weather Whiplash – http://www.nccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Earths_Future_AGU100.pdf

Collaboration & Collective Impact

- Collective Impact Forum <https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/>
- Rural Development Hubs – Strengthening America’s Rural Innovation Infrastructure - <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/CSG-Rural-Devel-Hubs.pdf>

Community Capitals

- Wealthworks - <https://www.wealthworks.org/basics/explore-regional-wealth-building/wealth-eight-capitals>
- The Rural Policy Institute - <https://rupri.org/about-rupri/key-frameworks/>

Food & Agriculture

- Food System Resilience https://www.vermontlaw.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/Food%20Systems%20Resilience_Concepts%20%26%20Policy%20Approaches.pdf
- Maine Food Councils <https://www.mainefoodcouncils.net/projects>
- NH Fiscal Policy Institute’s report on food insecurity and the economy <https://nhfpi.org/resource/food-insecurity-and-economic-conditions-in-new-hampshire-and-the-nation/>

Health

- North Country Community Health Improvement Plan https://www.nchcnh.org/images/NCHCuplds/NCHC_Community_Health_Improvement.pdf
- CDC’s Social Determinants of Health <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/index.htm>

Innovation & Entrepreneurship

- UNH article on Innovation and Entrepreneurship as vital to community resilience - <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2020/11/innovation-entrepreneurship-keys-community-resilience>
- American Academy of Political and Social Science article on Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure as a needed ingredient for building resilient communities <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002716293529001005>

- Forbes article on Rural Communities as hotbeds for innovation
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/adigaskell/2020/01/16/are-rural-communities-untapped-hotbeds-of-innovation/?sh=29ebafe534cc>

Local Economies

- Strengthening Resilience in Appalachia – a collection of rural regional economic resiliency case studies from around the country for strengthening local economies - <https://www.arc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/StrengtheningEconomicResilienceGuidebook-Feb2019-1.pdf>
- Human Powered Recreation Value Chain – supporting a balance of a quality experience for visitors, natural resource protection, and support the local economy - <https://www.wealthworks.org/success-stories/new-hampshire-recreation>
- Walden Mutual Bank – FDIC Insured bank accounts that yield interest while supporting the New England and New York food system and customizable loans for the regional food industry - <https://www.waldenmutual.com/>

Quality of Life

- UNH Article on Belonging - <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2020/06/belonging>
- Quality of Life Factors in Business Location Decision - <https://www.areadevelopment.com/siteselection/dec08/quality-of-life-business-location017.shtml?Page=2>
- Arts and Economic Development - <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0192962>

Timeline of the Pandemic

On January 31, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global health emergency. The Coronavirus, or what would become known as COVID-19, was spread across our planet and people were dying at an alarming rate. Travel restrictions were put in place. Supply chains in and out of global markets came to a stop. On February 29, 2020, the first death was reported in the United States in Seattle, WA.

On March 13, 2020, an Executive Order stated, “there are 1,663 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States, including 6 in New Hampshire, and more than 275 New Hampshire residents being monitored based on potential exposure to the virus, and officials expect the number of cases in New Hampshire, the United States, and worldwide to increase”, Governor Sununu declared New Hampshire as a state of emergency.

On March 23rd, as the Governor announced limiting gatherings to no more than 10 people while making plans to build out surge capacity in hospitals, officials announced New Hampshire’s first death of a patient diagnosed with COVID-19.

Just days later, Governor Sununu ordered “all businesses and other organizations that do not provide Essential Services to close their physical workplaces and facilities to workers, customers, and the public and cease all in person operations as of 11:59 PM on March 27, 2020.” At this time, there were 137 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, and two residents lost their lives to the virus in New Hampshire.

On April 12, 2020, 1,000 cases of COVID-19 reported by state health officials.

On May 31st, the Governor announced Stay at Home 2.0, a new stay-at-home order in effect. He also announced several measures to gradually open certain sectors of the economy, such as restaurants who were allowed to reopen as of May 18th so long as in-person dining was outdoors.

On June 7, 2020, officials announce 5,000 cases of COVID-19 in the state.

On June 15th restaurants could reopen at varying capacities depending on their county and on June 16th, the Stay-At-Home order expired, and stay-at-home advisories were put into place.

On July 14, 2020, officials shared guidelines for reopening schools for the Fall 2020 semester.

On August 21st, the governor announced that all New Hampshire restaurants could open at 100% capacity, though they still must follow distancing and mask guidelines.

On October 22nd, health officials announced the 10,000 cases of COVID-19 in New Hampshire and on November 16th, the 500th death in New Hampshire related to the pandemic.

On November 19th, Governor Sununu announced a statewide mask mandate, effective November 20th for anyone over the age of five in a public space, indoors or outdoors.

On December 15th at Elliot Hospital in Manchester, NH, Heidi Kukla, an ICU nurse, was the first person to receive the COVID-19 vaccination.

On January 1, 2021, a record was set for most current hospitalizations at 335 and on January 5th, New Hampshire reached 40,000 cases of COVID-19 and announced the deadliest day on record with 24 deaths announced in the state.

On January 15, 2021, the Governor extended the mask mandate through March 26, 2021, and issued the following statement: "With high case rates, hospitalizations, and fatalities, our health care system is still under an immense amount of pressure," said Governor Chris Sununu. "To loosen or eliminate the tools we have utilized with success so far is the wrong approach to fighting this pandemic. The light at the end of the tunnel is within sight - but we must remain vigilant, and we cannot let up now."

On Friday, January 22, the State of New Hampshire began accepting vaccination appointments for individuals within Phase 1B, which included:

- New Hampshire residents 65 and over
- New Hampshire residents who are medically vulnerable at significant risk – including family caregivers for those under 16
- New Hampshire residents with developmental disabilities that receive services in a congregate residential setting, as well as staff in those settings
- Corrections officers and staff
- Populations that experience health disparities

Within one week, over 200,000 NH residents had appointments for their first vaccinations.

In a press release on February 3, 2021, Governor Sununu stated that, "The CDC Director's comments are consistent with the data and studies that show that with proper safety protocols in place, schools can be open safely for in-person learning," said Governor Chris Sununu. "I urge the Union leadership in New Hampshire that have been resistant to follow the science, to embrace the Biden Administration's call for schools to reopen for in-person learning. The will of the students is there, the will of the parents is there, and the science is there. It's time to get these kids back in the classroom."

On March 23, 2021, New Hampshire opened its second mass vaccination site and on April 5th, a third mass vaccination site was opened.

On April 16, 2021, the mask mandate in New Hampshire expired as a reduction in the state's 7-day average of daily deaths was lowered to 0.6, the lowest since October of 2020 before the mask mandate had been implemented, as hospitalizations remain at a manageable level, and as over 70% of those 65+ have been vaccinated.

On May 28, 2021, Governor Sununu stated that, "Granite Staters have managed through this pandemic incredibly well, and as a result of their hard work, New Hampshire has no commercial restrictions in place, no statewide mask mandate, and is open for business.

On June 30, 2021, the State's Emergency Operations Center and Joint Information center closed at 4:00 PM.

New Hampshire saw the lowest COVID-19 rates in the summer of 2021, however, by that fall, COVID-19 cases were on the rise at the new Omicron variant was introduced and cases, hospitalizations, and deaths spiked to a new high in the winter.

On January 12, 2022, Governor Sununu stated, "There is a very strong resurgence of omicron across New Hampshire. We are likely to see more cases than we have ever seen."

On January 18, 2022, New Hampshire saw its highest number of daily cases at 3,493.

By February 10, 2022, new cases dropped to 634. At this time, New Hampshire has lost a total of 2,292 of its residents to COVID-19.

On Thursday, May 12, 2022, President Biden announces that there have officially been one-million deaths due to the Coronavirus pandemic in the United States. ¹ ²

¹ WMUR Article - <https://www.wmur.com/article/timeline-coronavirus-new-hampshire-one-year/35702043>

² NH Governor Executive Orders - <https://www.governor.nh.gov/news-and-media/covid-19-emergency-orders-2020>



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