

# Okanogan County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

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2025–2030



Prepared by:

**POINTS**  
CONSULTING

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# I. Executive Summary & CEDS Background

The Economic Alliance of Okanogan County developed this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) with the support of Points Consulting (PC). The Okanogan County CEDS is designed to guide economic development for the County over the next five years (2025–2030). The Economic Alliance’s top-priority goals for the County include economic expansion, housing growth, improved access to services, water availability, and stronger internal collaboration.

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) recommends a CEDS as a planning tool to support regional economic development, promote economic resilience, encourage action from both private and public sectors, and enable organizations such as Tribes to qualify for EDA opportunity funds.

In this case, the Economic Alliance is conducting this CEDS primarily for its own planning purposes, rather than to meet EDA requirements. Although this CEDS project is neither funded by the EDA nor designed specifically for that audience, future funding opportunities from the EDA and other entities remain open. Such funding could be used for planning, infrastructure projects, and programs that promote economic development.

Okanogan County faces economic development challenges, but a CEDS report offers valuable guidance and a hopeful path forward for fostering economic growth.



## MISSION STATEMENT

The Economic Alliance’s mission is to facilitate partnerships with private, government, and Tribal entities that will create an environment to nurture, support and recruit businesses and industry in Okanogan County.

## VISION STATEMENT

The Economic Alliance envisions the citizens and communities of Okanogan County working together to bring prosperity to all.

*Photo: PC visit to Omak, WA in Okanogan County, 2024*

This CEDS document includes regional and organizational background information, demographic data on Okanogan County with regional comparisons, a timeline of the County's development, community engagement insights, and a Strategic Direction & Action Plan. It contains the following sections:

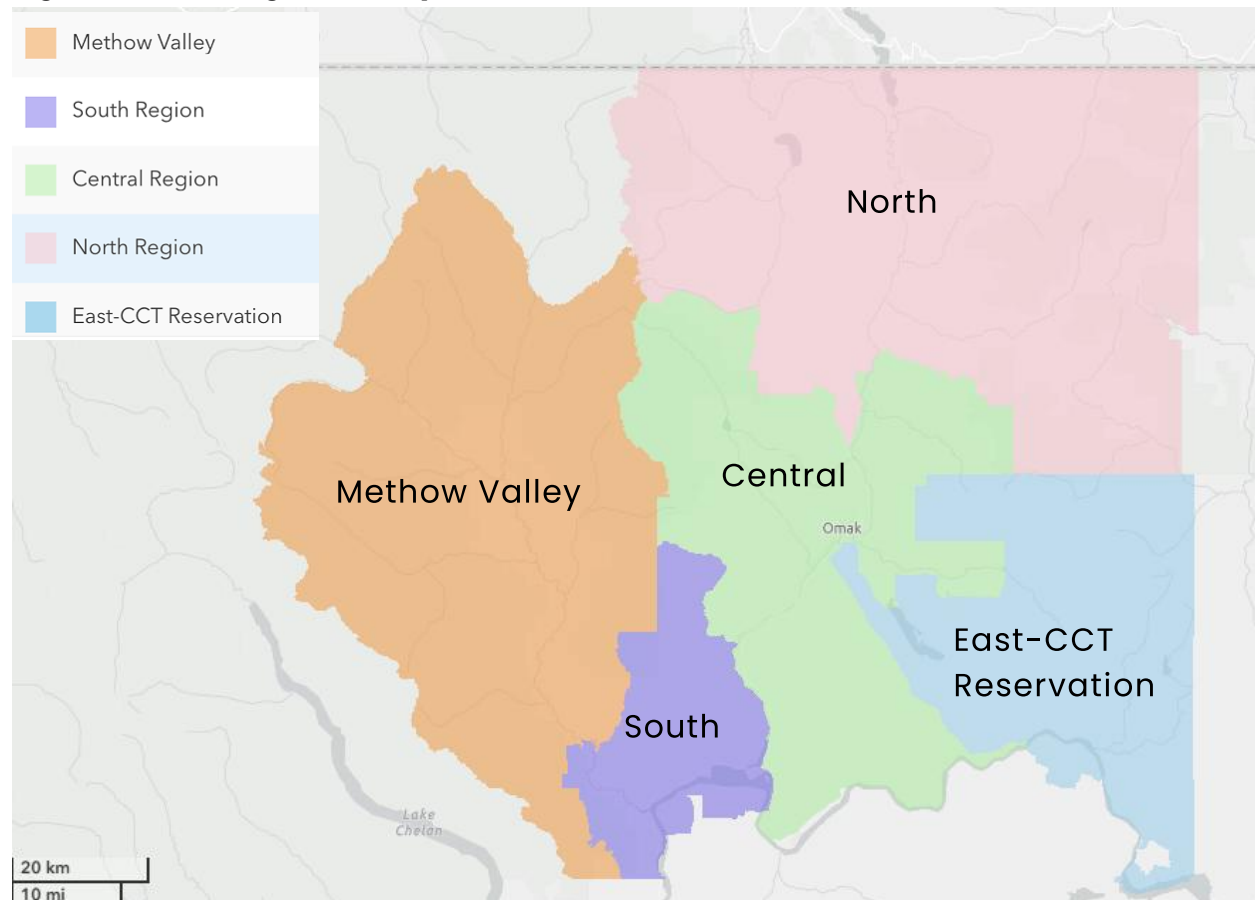
- I. Executive Summary & CEDS Background
- II. Organizational Summary Background
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- Appendix A:** Interviews
- Appendix B:** Statistical Tables by Geography
- Appendix C:** Regional Summaries
- Appendix D:** Priority Project Listings

## II. Organizational Summary Background

Okanogan County, located in the heart of North Central Washington, spans 5,281 square miles. This makes it the 54th-largest county in the United States. Despite its vastness, the County is home to just over 43,000 residents. The region is known for its scenic landscapes and year-round outdoor recreation opportunities, including fishing, boating, hiking, hunting, golf, skiing (both downhill and cross-country), snowmobiling, and off-road vehicle activities. These amenities contribute to a high quality of life and support tourism and seasonal economies.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 2.1: Okanogan County Area**



Source: Points Consulting using ESRI Business Analyst

<sup>1</sup> "About Us", Okanogan County.org, accessed May 15, 2025, [https://www.okanogancounty.org/residents/about\\_us/index.php](https://www.okanogancounty.org/residents/about_us/index.php).

## **Agriculture**

Agriculture has long been a cornerstone of Okanogan County's economy and cultural identity. While employment in the sector has declined in recent years, it remains one of the largest sources of jobs and economic output. According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, the County is home to approximately 1,000 farms covering 940,000 acres. In 2022, the market value of agricultural products sold was 364 million (an 8.0% increase from 2017). These figures underscore the continued significance of agriculture to the County's economic landscape.<sup>2</sup>

## **Arts and Culture**

The Arts sector is another vibrant and growing part of the Okanogan County economy. Local organizations and galleries support creative expression and community engagement through arts education in schools, year-round performances, and events that **connect** artists with the public. Some organizations also offer vendor spaces for local creators to showcase and sell their work. Although specific economic data for the County's creative sector is limited, the broader industry is impactful statewide.

According to a 2022 report by the Washington State Department of Commerce, Washington's creative industries generated \$71 billion in earnings in 2021.<sup>3</sup> Okanogan's arts community, while smaller in scale, plays an important role in enhancing quality of life for residents and diversifying the local economy.

## **Retail**

The Retail Trade sector in Okanogan County is a vital component of the local economy, serving both residents and visitors across its expansive rural landscape. In 2023, Retail Trade accounted for 2,267 jobs, making it the third-largest employment sector in the County, following Government and Agriculture.<sup>4</sup>

However, despite the sector's contributions to the County, it faces challenges common to rural economies, such as limited access to larger markets and a smaller customer base. Seasonal fluctuations, particularly during the off-season, can negatively impact the economy—especially for small businesses. During this time, many workers may struggle to maintain their livelihoods.

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<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, "County Profile, Okanogan County, Washington, Total and Per Farm Overview, 2022 and change since 2017," 2022 Census of Agriculture, [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/Washington/cp53047.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Washington/cp53047.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Washington State Department of Commerce, *Creative Economy Strategic Plan 2022 Update: Report to the Legislature*, Office of Economic Development & Competitiveness, March 2023, [https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=CommerceReports\\_CreativeEconomyReport\\_Final\\_b03a9c6c-ce36-49ef-a617-feba78bf08ea.pdf](https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=CommerceReports_CreativeEconomyReport_Final_b03a9c6c-ce36-49ef-a617-feba78bf08ea.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> "Okanogan County Profile," Washington State Employment Security Department, April 2025, <https://esd.wa.gov/jobs-and-training/labor-market-information/reports-and-research/labor-market-county-profiles/okanogan-county-profile>.

Additionally, housing availability affects businesses' ability to find labor, as workers may need to commute longer distances if housing options are limited. This can increase costs and create greater financial burdens.<sup>5</sup>

### **Community Culture**

Interviews with residents highlight a strong sense of mutual support within the community. People are quick to help each other through challenges and celebrate one another's successes. At the same time, there is a notable resistance to change—particularly when it comes from outside the community. Many residents are deeply rooted in traditional ways of doing things, and they can sometimes view outside assistance or new approaches as unwelcome. This mindset presents a challenge to economic development, even as the community exhibits strong internal cohesion and resilience.

### **Land Use and Governance**

The County is divided into five distinct regions: Methow Valley, Central Region, North Region, South Region and the East-CCT Reservation (Figure 2.1). Omak is the largest city, while the City of Okanogan

serves as the county seat. A significant portion of the County's land is managed by state and federal agencies, with only 22.4% of land in private ownership.<sup>6</sup> The southeastern part of the County includes the Colville Indian Reservation, adding to the geographic and cultural diversity.

The County is governed by a three-member Board of County Commissioners. Each commissioner is elected to represent one of three districts for a four-year term. The Board is responsible for overseeing the County's budget, setting policies, and managing essential services such as law enforcement, infrastructure, and land use planning (Figure 2.2).<sup>7</sup> Additional elected officials (including the Sheriff, Assessor, Treasurer, and Auditor) carry out key functions such as public safety, property valuation, tax collection, elections, and financial oversight. As one of the County's largest employers, the local government also supports several critical departments including Public Works, Public Health, and Emergency Management. These departments play a vital role in maintaining infrastructure, promoting community health, and coordinating wildfire response.

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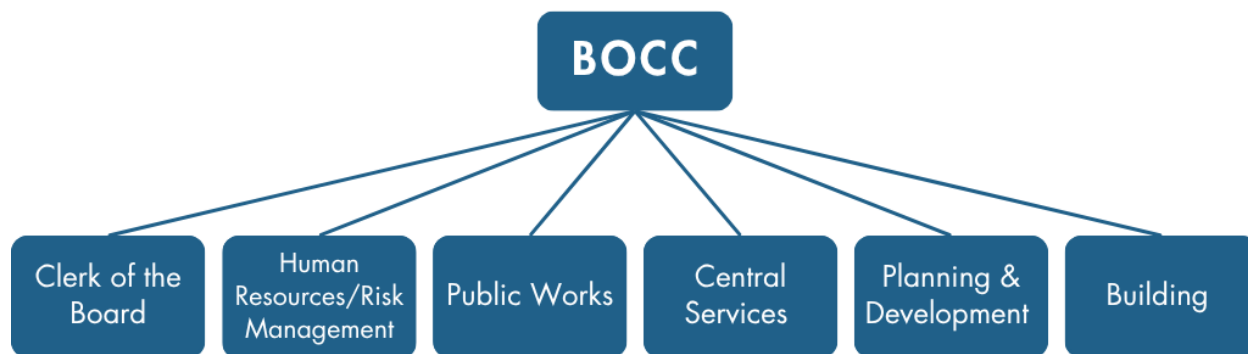
<sup>5</sup> Blue Sky Minds Nonprofit et al., *Okanogan Region Local Community Food System Assessment*, September 2024, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/642492ad34f4c9023a6143df/t/66ec8c514943b56429e62761/1726778452438/Okanogan-AssessmentBook\\_Sept2024\\_SinglePgs.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/642492ad34f4c9023a6143df/t/66ec8c514943b56429e62761/1726778452438/Okanogan-AssessmentBook_Sept2024_SinglePgs.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Geological Survey, Gap Analysis Program 2022, Protected Areas Database of the United States (PADUS) Version, via Headwater Economics, "Land Use," Washington D.C., 2024, accessed January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025, <https://headwaterseconomics.org/apps/economic-profile-system/53047>.

<sup>7</sup> "Commissioners," Okanogan County.org, accessed May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025, <https://okanogancounty.org/government/commissioners/index.php>



**Figure 2.2: Government Structure of Okanogan County**



### **Economic Alliance of Okanogan County**

The Economic Alliance promotes economic development in the region through planning, research, and small business advising. It fosters partnerships with private, public, and Tribal entities to create an environment that supports and attracts businesses to Okanogan County.

Key programs include a Small Business Development Center, which provides free one-on-one expert advising, management training and market research for businesses and entrepreneurs. The Economic Alliance also administers the Associated Development program through the Washington Department of Commerce, focusing on business recruitment, expansion and retention, and startup assistance. Additionally, they provide administrative support services for the Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC).<sup>8</sup> Figure 2.3 shows the organizational structure of the Economic Alliance.

The Economic Alliance plays a critical role in improving and expanding economic opportunities throughout the County. It has successfully supported businesses with needs that go beyond conventional startup or expansion strategies. This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) will serve as a roadmap to guide the Alliance's continued efforts to strengthen the local economy.

**Figure 2.3: Structure of the Economic Alliance of Okanogan County**



<sup>8</sup> "About," The Economic Alliance of Okanogan County, accessed November 19, 2024, <https://economic-alliance.com/about/>.



## The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR)

The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR) was established in 1872 and encompasses over 1.4 million acres.<sup>9</sup> It is a sovereign nation governed by a 14-member board of Colville Tribal members, officially known as the Colville Business Council and informally referred to as the Tribal Council.<sup>10</sup> In 1938, the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) approved the CTCR's constitution and bylaws, which established the Colville Business Council as the Tribe's governing body.<sup>11</sup>

The Council oversees a thriving, multi-million-dollar administration headquartered on the Colville Indian Reservation in Nespelem, Washington. Each fiscal year, the Tribal Council addresses critical priorities such as enhancing the quality of life for the Colville Indian population and governing as a sovereign nation.<sup>12</sup>

Business development for the Tribes is managed by the Colville Tribal Federal Corporation (CTFC), which has grown into

one of the largest and most diverse Native American enterprises in northeastern Washington. CTFC currently operates 13 businesses focused on gaming, recreation and tourism, retail, construction, and wood products. The Corporation is an economic leader in the region, employing over 800 people and generating more than \$120 million in annual revenue. Its primary goals are to generate revenue for the Tribes and to create employment and training opportunities for Tribal members.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 2.4: Government Structure of The Colville Confederated Tribes**



<sup>9</sup> CTCR History/Archeology Department, "A Brief History," CTCR, 2024, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bb31cd48d0284fa59d6f454cafabe962>.

<sup>10</sup> CTCR, *2023 Annual Report*, accessed May 28, 2025, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56a24f7f841aba12ab7ecfa9/t/65256352da67713f3a13da7a/1696949080522/2023GM.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> CTCR, *Constitution of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Certification of Adoption*, Colville Reservation in the State of Washington, October 20, 1990, accessed May 28, 2025, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56a24f7f841aba12ab7ecfa9/t/57b1d998d482e9459432e19e/1471273370457/P-Constitutionandbylaws.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> "Welcome to the Colville Business Council," CTCR, accessed May 28, 2025, <https://www.cct-cbc.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> Workforce Development Council, *Workforce Development Area 10, Eastern Washington Partnership Regional/Local Workforce Plan Program Years 2016–2020*, Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board, 74, accessed May 28, 2025, <https://wtb.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EasternStrategicPlan2016-2020.pdf>.

### III. Population & Socioeconomic Characteristics

#### Socioeconomics of Okanogan County

Socioeconomic data provides a clear understanding of the people, workforce, and living conditions that shape a region's economic potential. By analyzing trends in population, education, income, employment, and housing, stakeholders can identify strengths to build upon and challenges that may hinder growth.

Okanogan County's socioeconomic profile presents a complex mix of strengths and challenges that directly shape its economic development landscape. With a population of approximately 43,000, the County is geographically large but sparsely populated. Its communities are diverse and aging, with a demographic profile that skews older than both the state and national averages (the median age in the County is nearly five years higher). This aging trend suggests a potential future strain on the local workforce and social services.

The County is home to a majority White population, alongside sizable Hispanic/Latino and Indigenous communities, adding to the cultural and demographic complexity of the region. Population growth is projected to be modest, with an annual average increase of just 0.2% through 2050. These conditions underscore the need for strategies that invest in and strengthen existing communities, rather than relying on significant population expansion to drive economic development.

Okanogan County exhibits a mixed pattern across key socioeconomic indicators. High school graduation rates surpass those of both Washington State and the United States, yet rates of bachelor's and graduate degree attainment remain significantly lower. Housing affordability and availability are among the most pressing concerns, with nearly three-quarters of Points Consulting's (PC's) community survey respondents identifying affordable housing as the top economic development priority. Crime and health care access also present persistent challenges, particularly in more rural areas. These dynamics highlight the importance of crafting targeted, equitable strategies that address educational disparities, workforce readiness, and basic community needs while building on the County's existing assets.

In most communities in the United States, analysts rely upon a combination of data sources from state and federal statistical organizations. At the federal level, commonly used sources include the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), among others.

In addition to these public data sources, PC incorporates several proprietary datasets and insights from a community survey conducted as part of this analysis (please reference [Community Engagement](#) section for more information). Proprietary data sources are used when they offer more recent, region-specific, or otherwise higher-quality information than public sources. For example, Esri Business Analyst provides 2024

data, whereas Census data may only be available through 2022 or earlier. These socioeconomic data are essential for understanding the characteristics of the County's population and provide a foundation for developing an effective regional economic development strategy.

One of the key takeaways from this chapter is how Okanogan County compares to Washington and the United States on a range of socioeconomic indicators. For example:

- In 2022, the unemployment rate in Okanogan County was 5.8%, compared to 4.5% in Washington State and 4.3% in the United States (Table 3.7).
- In 2022, the median household income for households in Okanogan County was approximately \$58K, significantly lower than Washington State's median of \$90K (Figure 3.4).

## Demographics of Okanogan County

Okanogan County has a population of 43,000, with the majority identifying as either White or Hispanic. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 provide basic demographic details for the County, including the median age by gender, compared to Washington State and the United States. The median age in Okanogan County is roughly five years higher than in both areas of comparison. Additionally, the median age for females is about one year higher than for males across all three regions.

**Table 3.1: Demographics of Okanogan County, 2022**

Group	Population	Share
White	26,540	62.7%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	9,220	21.8%
American Indian & Alaska Native	3,422	8.1%
Black or African American	571	1.3%
Asian	247	0.6%
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	54	0.1%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

**Table 3.2: Median Age by Gender, 2022**

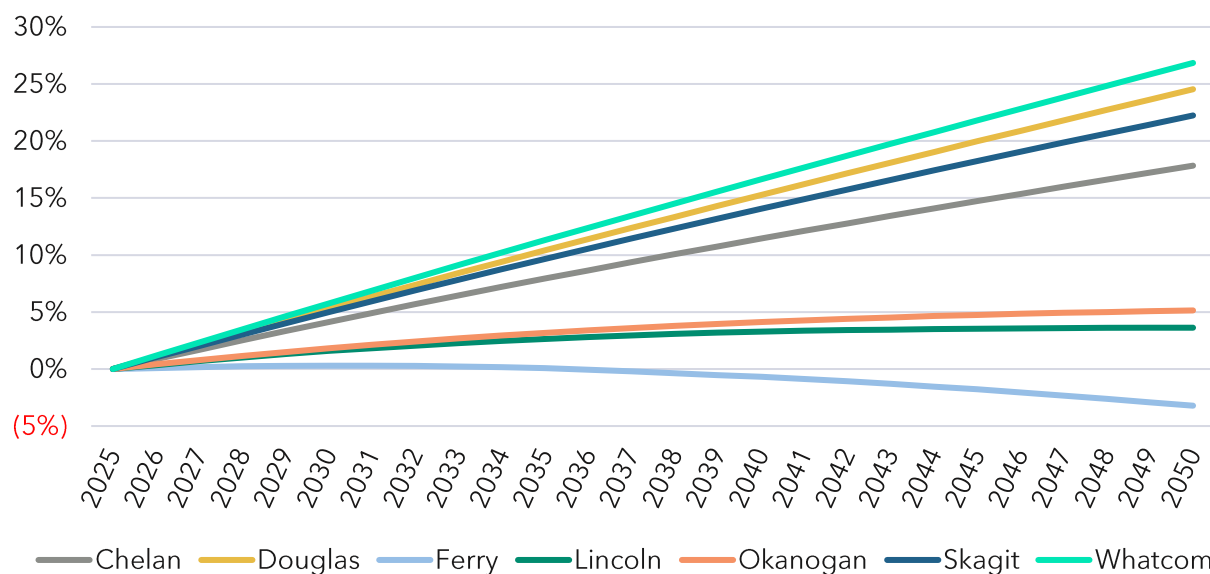
Gender	Okanogan County	Washington State	United States
Male	42.5	37.1	37.4
Female	43.3	39	39.7
Overall	42.9	38	38.5

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

According to the Washington State Office of Financial Management (WAOFM) forecast, Okanogan County's population is expected to grow an average of 0.2% per year between 2022 and 2050, adding approximately 2,400 new residents during that period (Figure 3.1). This modest growth is driven by both natural increases (current residents choosing to have and raise families locally) and in-migration (people moving into the area).

In contrast, Whatcom County is projected to grow at a slightly higher rate. The WAOFM forecast projects an average annual growth rate of 1.0% over the same period. While Okanogan’s growth may be small, it still reflects a positive trend. Ferry County is expected to experience a population decline averaging 0.2% per year through 2050.

**Figure 3.1: Population Forecasts for Okanogan and Surrounding Counties, 2025–2050**



Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management Population and Demographics

### Educational Attainment

Regarding educational attainment, Okanogan County lags slightly behind other regions in some areas but outperforms in others. Table 3.3 outlines educational attainment rates in the County by education level.

As of 2022, 86.0% of Okanogan County’s adult population have a high school diploma or higher level of education. About 6.8% of residents have less than a ninth-grade education, while 7.1% have some high school education but no diploma.

When comparing the percentage of adults with a high school diploma, Okanogan County surpasses Washington State by nearly 5.0% and the United States by 3.0% (Figure 3.2). However, 13.9% of the County’s population holds a bachelor’s degree, a rate lower than both the state and national averages.

Among all Washington counties, Okanogan ranks 24<sup>th</sup> out of 39 counties in the percentage of individuals with a high school diploma or less and 26<sup>th</sup> in those with an associate degree or higher.

Educational attainment is important to note because it is integral to good economic development outcomes. In fact, economic research shows that education plays a vital role in increasing labor productivity, contributing anywhere from 13.0–30.0% of the total



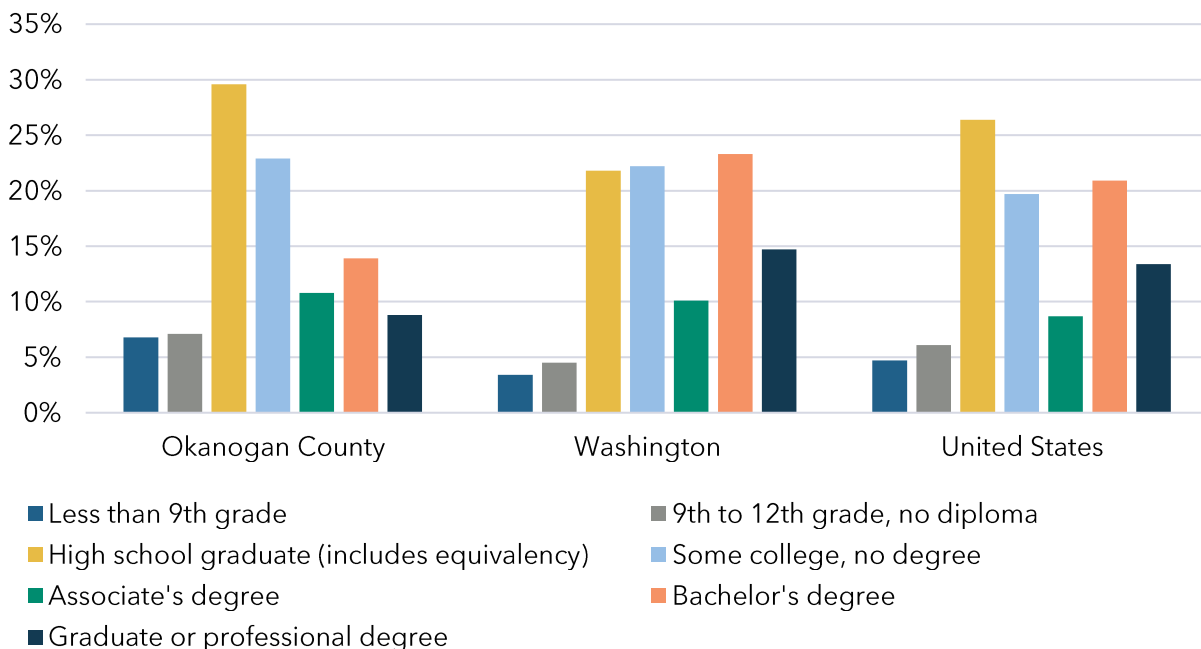
productivity increase. In essence, this means that investments in education (human capital) are comparable to investments in financial capital or equipment in terms of how they boost economic growth.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 3.3: Educational Attainment, Population 25 Years and Older Okanogan County, 2022**

Educational Level	Okanogan County	Washington	United States
Less than 9th grade	6.8%	3.4%	4.7%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	7.1%	4.5%	6.1%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	29.6%	21.8%	26.4%
Some college, no degree	22.9%	22.2%	19.7%
Associate's degree	10.8%	10.1%	8.7%
Bachelor's degree	13.9%	23.3%	20.9%
Graduate or professional degree	8.8%	14.7%	13.4%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

**Figure 3.2: Educational Attainment Comparison, 2022**



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

## Crime

Criminal activity can reduce both current and future economic productivity and generally has a negative impact on community morale. Research has shown that

<sup>14</sup> Gary S. Becker, Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education (University of Chicago Press 1994), 161–227.

individuals from low-income backgrounds are more likely to be the victims of crime.<sup>15</sup> Additional studies suggest they also face a higher risk of engaging in criminal activity.<sup>16</sup>

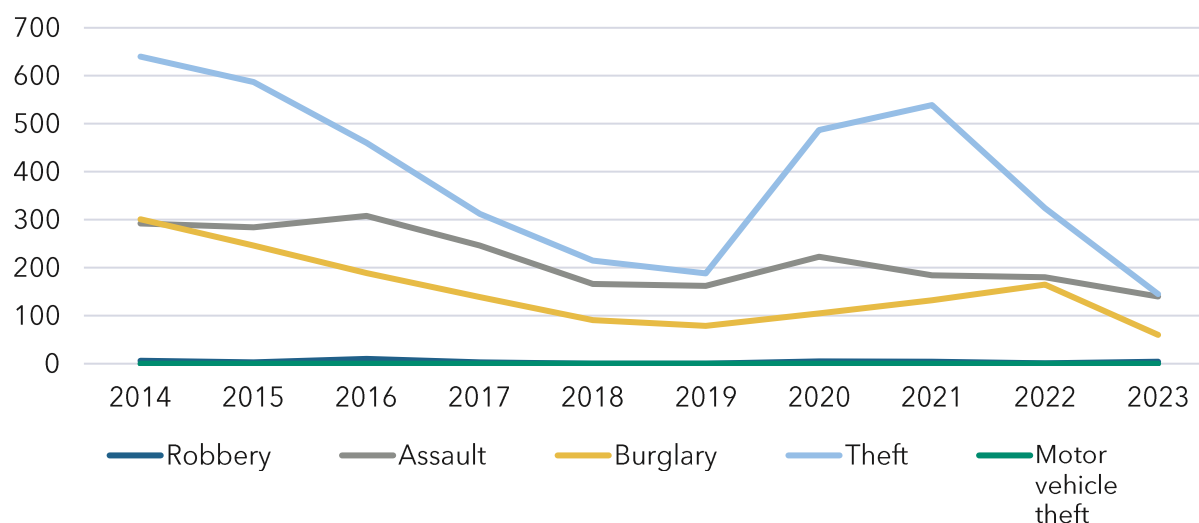
According to PC's community survey, 33.9% of respondents stated that crime is the biggest threat to the community's resiliency (Figure 6.13). Most of these respondents were from the Central and North Regions.

Figure 3.3 displays the number of reported crimes per year, covering a wide range of criminal activities. Over the years, burglary, theft, and assault have been the most frequently reported crimes in Okanogan County. Theft has been the most prevalent type of crime in the area.

Between 2014 and 2019, reported incidences of each crime type gradually declined. However, from 2019 to 2021 the number of reported crimes increased significantly. Reported assaults and thefts rose by 14% and 187%, respectively. One contributing factor to this increase appears to be the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent years, though, the number of reported crimes across these five categories has declined again, reaching their lowest levels between 2014 and 2023.

**Figure 3.3: Annual Crime Breakdown by Type in Okanogan County, 2014–2023**



Source: Washington State Statistical Analysis Center, Washington State County Criminal Justice Data Book, National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and Summary Reporting System (SRS), 2014–2023

<sup>15</sup> Erika Harrell, PhD et al., *Household Poverty and Nonfatal Violent Victimization, 2008–2012*, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 2014, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/hpnvv0812.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Brian F. Coddington, Weston C. McCool, "US homicide rates increase when resources are scarce and unequally distributed," *Evolutionary Human Sciences* 6 (2024): 56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ehs.2023.31>.

## Financial Characteristics

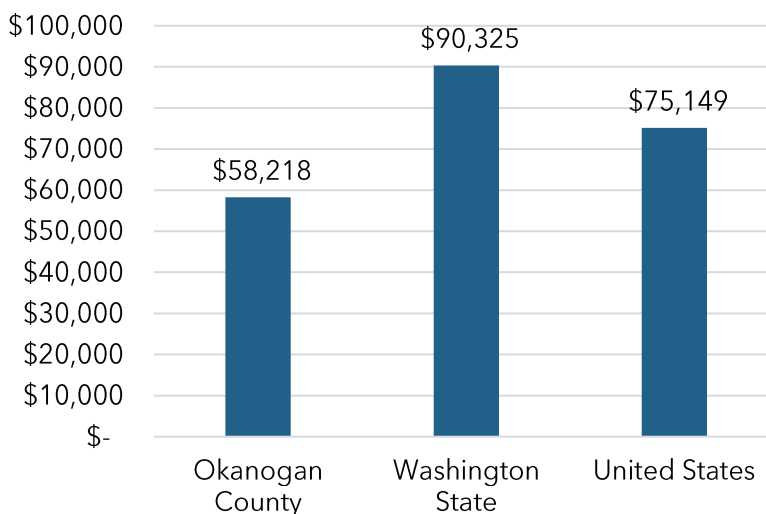
Households in Okanogan County have significantly lower median incomes compared to state and national averages. As shown in Figure 3.4, the median household income in Okanogan County is \$58,218, compared to \$90,325 in Washington and \$75,149 in the United States.

Figure 3.5 illustrates the distribution of household income across various ranges by region.

Okanogan County has a larger share of households earning less than \$10,000 compared to Washington State and the nation. However, the County also has a higher proportion of households with incomes between \$75,000 and \$99,999 than the other regions shown in the figure.

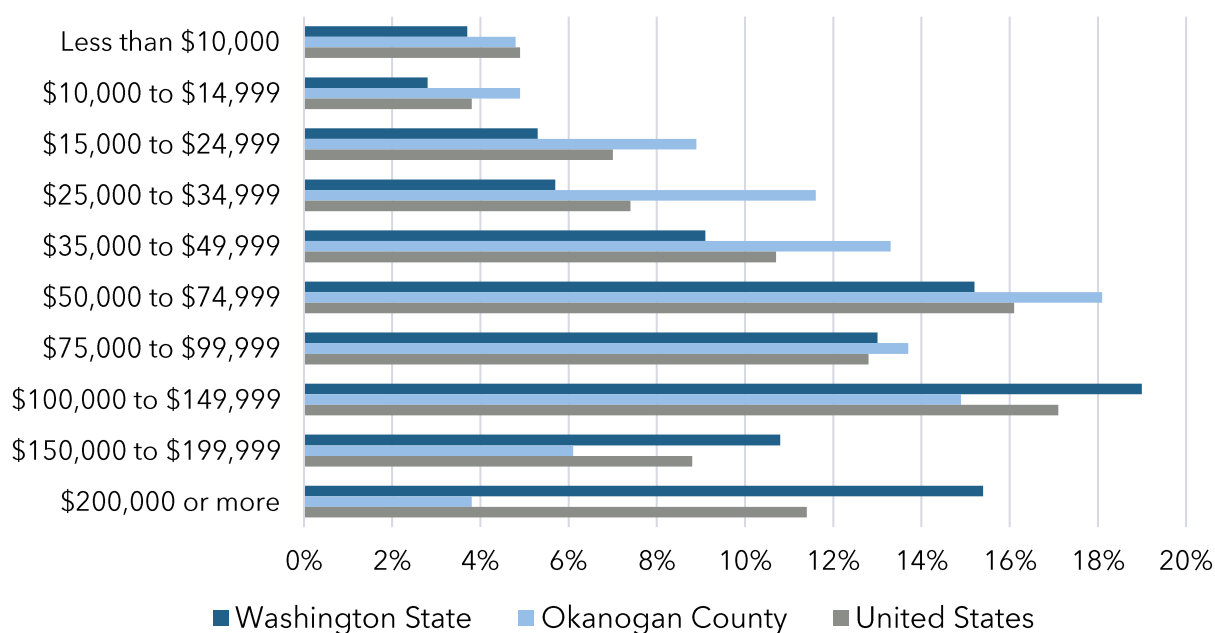
While the nation has a greater proportion of households earning over \$100,000, Okanogan County still has a notable number of households in this bracket.

**Figure 3.4: Median Household Income, 2022**



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

**Figure 3.5: Household Income Distribution, 2022**



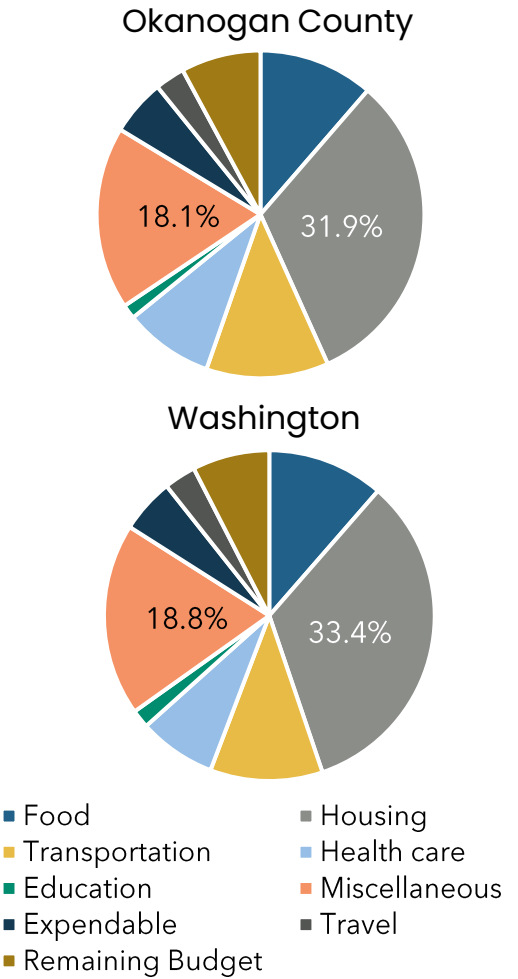
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

Figure 3.6 presents a breakdown of average monthly expenditures for households in Okanogan County and Washington State, while Table 3.4 compares available disposable income by region. Housing (including utilities) is the largest monthly expense for Okanogan County residents, followed by miscellaneous household spending—both of which are also the top spending categories at the state level.<sup>17</sup>

Housing costs and availability emerged as key concerns in the community survey. About 70.7% of respondents identified affordable housing as the most critical economic development need right now, while 66.5% saw it as the top priority over the next five years (Figures 6.8 and 6.9).

Although average expenditures in Okanogan County are generally similar to those at the state level, some categories (such as health care) are higher in the County (Figure 3.6). Residents spend 1.2% more on health care than the state average, likely due to limited local health care options. Stakeholders have emphasized that this shortage often forces residents to seek medical care outside the County.

**Figure 3.6: Comparison of Average Monthly Expenditures, 2024**



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2024

**Table 3.4: Households by Annual Disposable Income, 2024**

Annual Disp. Income	Okanogan County	Washington	United States
<\$15,000	10.6%	7.5%	9.6%
\$15,000–\$24,999	12.5%	5.7%	7.7%
\$25,000–\$34,999	11.0%	5.9%	8.4%
\$35,000–\$49,999	16.0%	10.7%	12.7%
\$50,000–\$74,999	18.6%	15.9%	18.2%
\$75,000–\$99,999	12.0%	13.7%	12.2%

<sup>17</sup> Miscellaneous household expenditures include apparel & services, personal care products, funeral expenses, legal fees, banking service charges, accounting fees, credit card membership fees, shopping club membership fees, support payments, life insurance, and pensions & social security.



\$100,000–\$149,999	13.1%	20.0%	17.9%
\$150,000–\$199,999	3.5%	10.4%	6.8%
\$200,000+	2.7%	10.2%	6.3%

Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2024

Table 3.5 provides an overview of housing in Okanogan County. Most homes in the County are single-family detached units (standalone houses on individual lots with no shared walls). Over the past two years, the number of occupied housing units has declined across all housing types except mobile/manufactured homes. This trend may be linked to shifts in regional employment over the past decade. (According to Table 4.1, the agricultural sector has been hit the hardest.)

**Table 3.5: Percent Housing by Type, 2022**

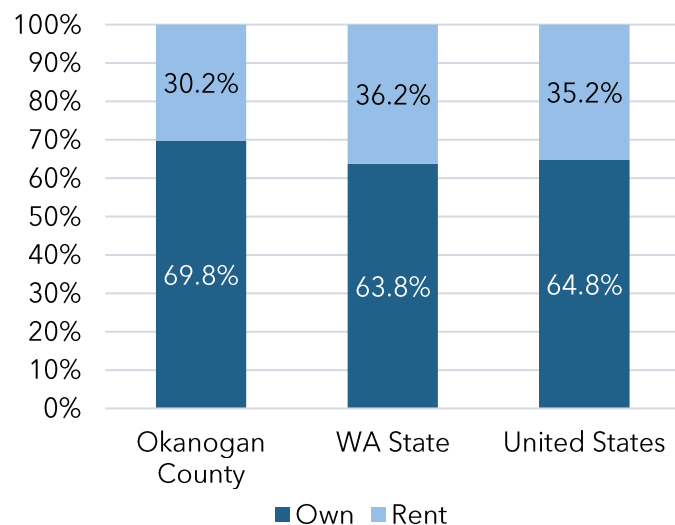
Housing Type	Units	% of Total 2022	% Change Since 2020
Occupied housing units	17,005	--	(4.9%)
1, detached	12,205	71.8%	(3.2%)
1, attached	154	0.9%	(28.4%)
2 apartments	266	1.6%	(29.4%)
3 or 4 apartments	313	1.8%	(32.0%)
5 to 9 apartments	338	2.0%	(19.9%)
10 or more apartments	331	1.9%	(26.4%)
Mobile home/other types of housing	3,398	20.0%	1.5%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

Figure 3.7 shows that in Okanogan County, 69.8% of housing units are owner occupied. This is significantly higher than the rates for both the United States and Washington State. However, interviews with local stakeholders indicate that most of these homeowners are older than average, and/or retired. Stakeholders also mentioned that many younger people are interested in moving to the area but are unable to find available housing.

Poverty rates, and how they vary by age and gender, provide a more complete profile of low-income households. Table 3.6 shows that Okanogan County has a higher

**Figure 3.7: Owner-Occupied and Renter-Occupied Homes, 2022**



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

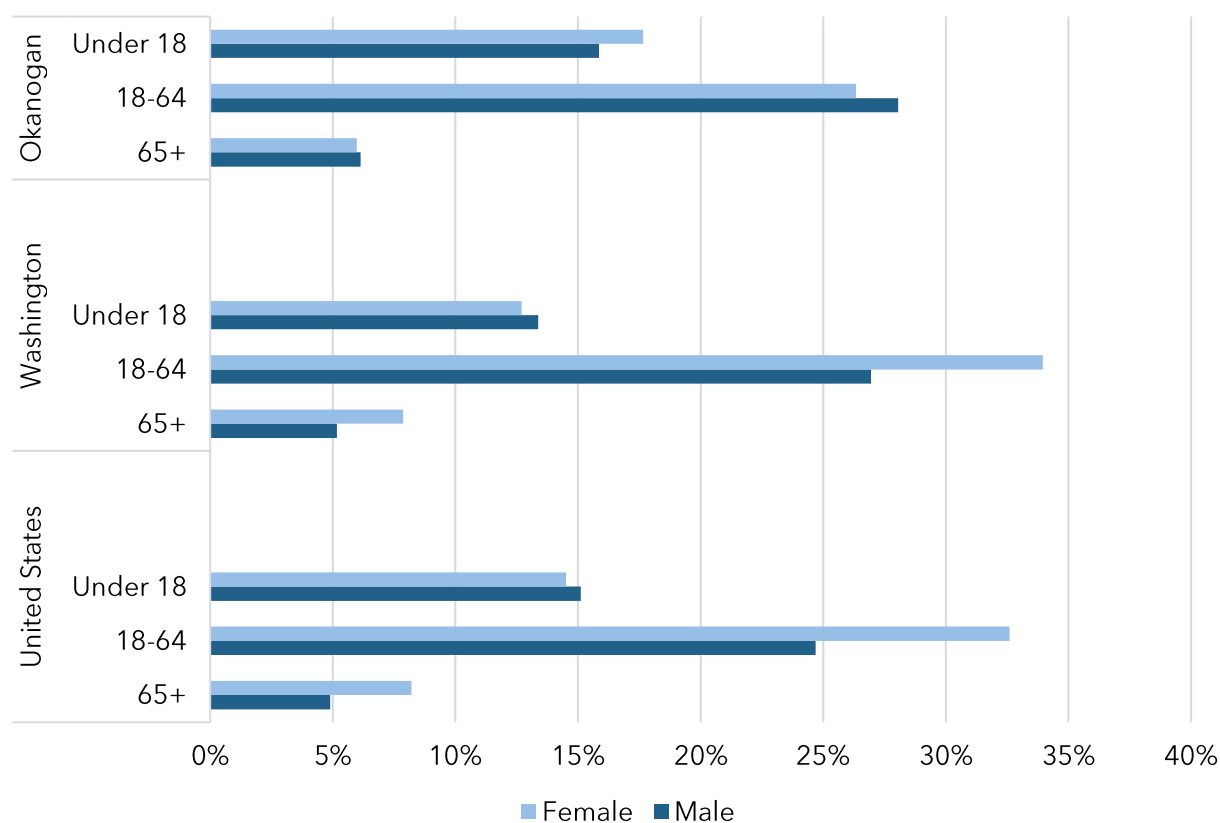
poverty rate (18.9%) compared to both Washington State (9.9%) and the United States (12.5%). Notably, 17% of households in Okanogan County were receiving Food Stamp/SNAP benefits in 2023.<sup>18</sup> Figure 3.8 illustrates that, across all age groups except children, males tend to experience the highest poverty rates in the County. This pattern contrasts with state and national trends, where females typically have higher poverty rates.

**Table 3.6: Poverty by Gender, 2022**

Gender	Okanogan County	Washington	United States
Male	3,930	340,084	18,109,332
Female	3,923	407,454	22,412,252
Total	7,853	747,538	40,521,584
% of Total Population	18.9%	9.9%	12.5%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

**Figure 3.8: Poverty by Age and Gender, 2022**



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office via Headwaters Economics, "Populations at Risk," Washington D.C., 2024, accessed April 5, 2025, <https://headwaterseconomics.org/apps/economic-profile-system/53047>.

Landownership

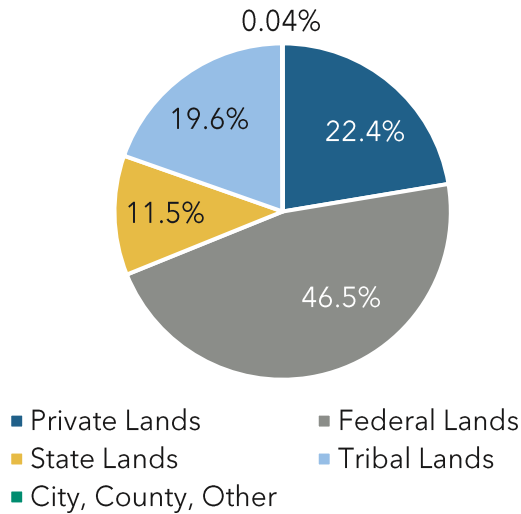
Figure 3.9 illustrates the distribution of landownership in Okanogan County. Less than 1% (0.04%) of Okanogan County land is owned by the County and its cities.

Labor Force Overview

Tables 3.7 and 3.8 present key employment metrics for Okanogan County in comparison to national figures. The County’s civilian employment-to-population ratio (measuring the share of the working-age population currently employed) is 7.1 percentage points lower than that of the United States. Similarly, Okanogan County’s labor force participation rate lags behind the U.S. 7.2 percentage points.

Unemployment rates in the County are slightly higher than the national average. However, the number of people working from home increased 153.8% from 2019 to 2022. This is a significant shift following the COVID-19 pandemic. By comparison, remote work grew 165.1% in Washington State and 130.8% nationwide.

Figure 3.9: Distribution of Landownership in Okanogan County, 2022



Source: U.S. Geological Survey, Gap Analysis Program 2022; Protected Areas Database of the United States (PADUS) Version, Via Headwater Economics

Table 3.7: Employment for Okanogan County and United States, 2022

Labor Market Indicators	Okanogan County	United States
Civilian Employment- Population Ratio	52.5%	59.6%
Civilian Labor Force Participation Rate	55.8%	63.0%
Civilian Unemployment Rate	5.8%	3.4%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

Table 3.8: Percent of Workers Working from Home in Washington State and United States, 2022

Remote Work Trends	United States	Washington State
Workers 16 years and over	156.7 M	3.7 M
2022 Percent Working from Home	11.7%	15.5%
% Change from 2019	130.8%	165.1%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018–2022

## Demographics by Region

Tables 3.9 and 3.10 provide basic demographic details for each region of the County, including race and median age. The median age in the Methow Valley area is about 10 years higher than in three of the five regions. However, most regions have a median age above 40, except for the South Region, which stands out as the youngest.

**Table 3.9: Regional Demographics of Okanogan County, 2024**

Race	Central Region	Methow Valley	North Region	East-CCT Reservation	South Region
White	10,443	5,857	8,542	778	2,588
Hispanic	2,958	375	2,362	158	3,552
American Indian	2,310	47	250	1,932	106
Black or African American	95	14	48	7	13
Asian	156	49	80	14	32
Pacific Islander	15	9	10	4	4

Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

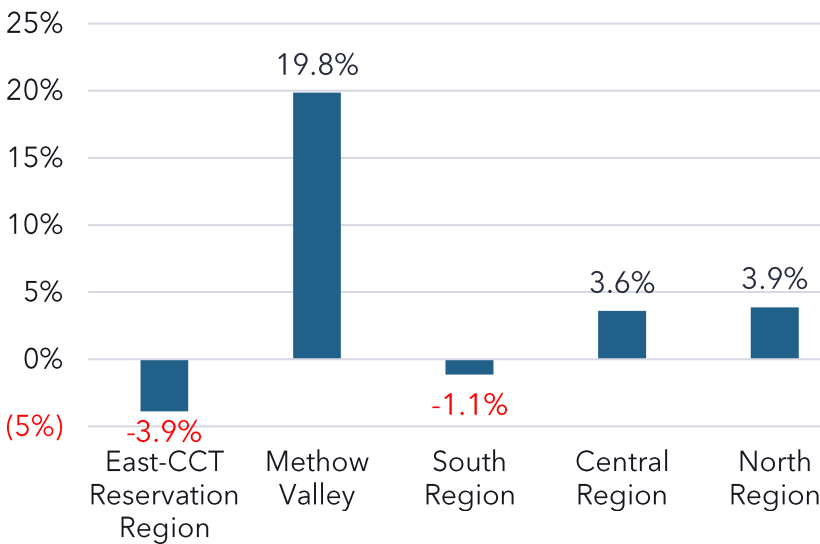
**Table 3.10: Regional Median Age 2024**

Gender	Central Region	Methow Valley	North Region	East-CCT Reservation	South Region
Male	40.8	53.1	48.9	41.0	37.1
Female	44.8	54.6	51.1	40.8	38.5
Overall Median Age	42.7	53.9	50	40.9	37.8

Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

Over the past 14 years, Okanogan County's population has shifted, with the highest growth concentrated in the Methow Valley (19.8%), as shown in Figure 3.10. Many of those moving to the Methow Valley are likely near or at retirement age, given the region's median age of approximately 53.8. Despite declines in major job sectors and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Central and North Regions have

**Figure 3.10: Regional Population Growth, 2010–2024**



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025



experienced population growth. In contrast, the South Region and the East-CCT Reservation area have seen declines of 1.1% and 3.9%, respectively.

### Regional Educational Attainment

Education levels vary significantly across the regions (Table 3.11). Methow Valley has the highest percentage of individuals with a bachelor's degree (30.6%) and a graduate or professional degree (18.4%), making it the most highly educated region. The East-CCT Reservation has a higher percentage of individuals with an associate degree (13.0%) and a bachelor's degree (15.2%) than three of the other regions. The Central Region has the highest proportion of individuals with a high school diploma or equivalent (34.9%), surpassing the rates for both Washington State (21.8%) and the United States (26.4%). Additionally, the South Region has the highest percentage of individuals who did not complete high school (11.6%).

**Table 3.11: Educational Attainment, Population 25 Years and Older Okanogan County Regions, 2022**

Education Level	Central Region	Methow Valley	North Region	East-CCT Reservation	South Region
Some high school	8.5%	2.6%	6.7%	5.2%	11.6%
High school diploma or equivalent	34.9%	18.0%	29.0%	29.6%	31.7%
Some college	25.7%	19.4%	23.0%	27.8%	16.7%
Associate's degree	9.4%	8.9%	14.4%	13.0%	7.9%
Bachelor's degree	9.1%	30.6%	4.9%	15.2%	9.2%
Graduate or professional	8.0%	18.4%	6.2%	6.5%	3.8%

Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

### Regional Labor Force Review

Table 3.12 presents key employment metrics and comparisons between the regions. The North Region has the lowest civilian employment-to-civilian labor force participation rate yet it has the second-lowest unemployment rate (following only the Central Region).

**Table 3.12: Employment for Okanogan County Regions Population 16 Years and Older, 2024**

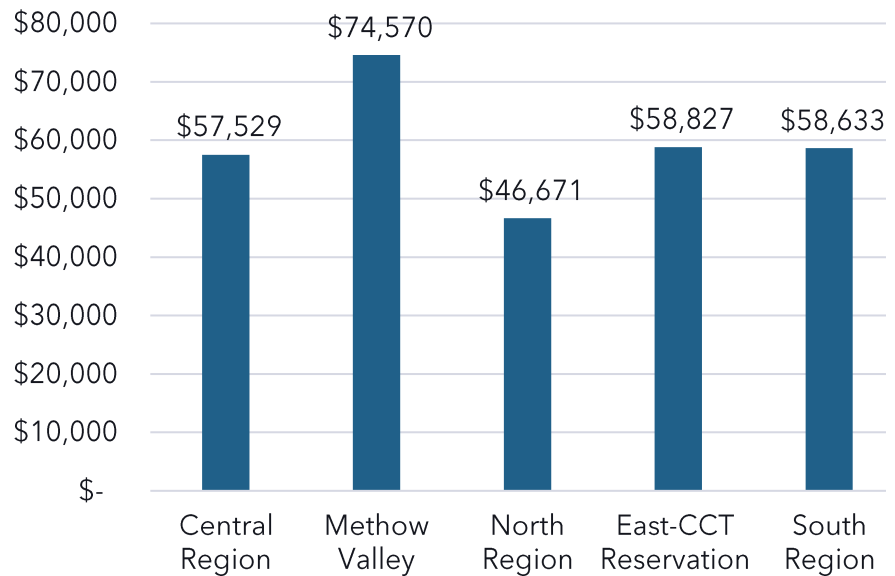
Labor Market Indicators	Central Region	Methow Valley	North Region	East-CCT Reservation	South Region
Civilian Employment-Population Ratio	50.9%	53.8%	45.4%	46.8%	59.2%
Civilian Labor Force Participation Rate	52.9%	56.4%	47.3%	50.8%	61.8%
Civilian Unemployment Rate	3.8%	4.7%	4.0%	7.9%	4.1%

Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

## Financial Characteristics

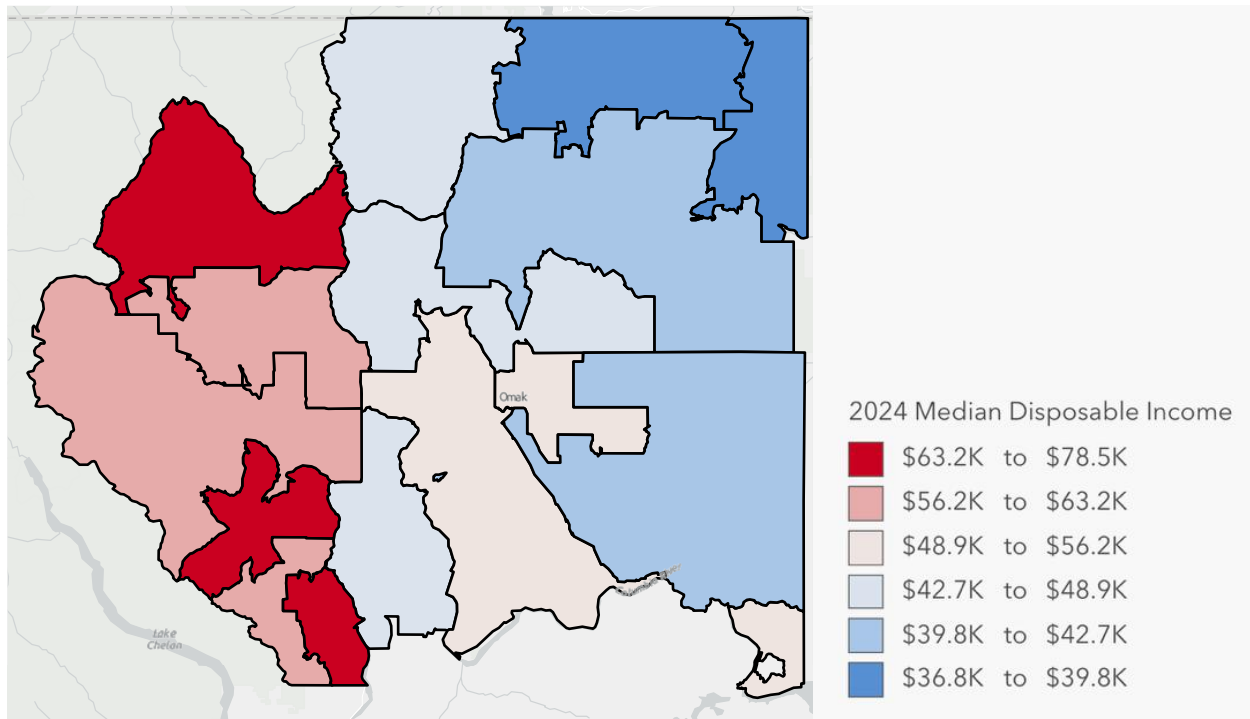
Figure 3.11 compares median household income across regions. Median household income is lowest in the North Region at \$46,671. In contrast, the median household income is \$57,529 in the Central Region and \$74,570 in the Methow Valley. Figure 3.12 presents a heat map of median *disposable* income across Okanogan County, showing an increase toward the west.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 3.11: Median Household Income by Region, 2024**



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

**Figure 3.12: Regional Median Disposable Income by Zip Code, 2024**



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

<sup>19</sup> Median disposable income is median household income after taxes and mandatory contributions have been subtracted.

## Employment by Industry

Table 3.13 presents employment by industry in the County, changes in employment over the past 10 years, and each industry's Location Quotient (LQ). To maintain consistency across geographic areas, industries in the following tables are ranked according to their federally designated NAICS code classification (e.g., Agriculture = 11, Government = 90).

The LQ is a ratio that compares the concentration of a specific industry's employment in a particular area to the national level. It provides a metric for evaluating how prevalent jobs in a given industry are within a region relative to the entire United States. For instance, an LQ of 1.0 for a specific industry indicates that its share of employment in the region matches the national average. An LQ greater than 1.0 means the industry has a higher concentration of jobs in the region compared to the national level, and vice versa. Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting in Okanogan County has an LQ of 16.92, meaning the County has significantly more agricultural jobs than the United States overall.

As shown in Table 3.13, most jobs in the County fall under Government and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting. Agricultural employment has declined significantly over the past decade, dropping 46.2%. Despite this decline, Agriculture remains the second-largest employment sector. The top three industries by employment are Retail, Agriculture, and Government.

Tables 3.14–3.18 illustrate employment trends across different regions of Okanogan County. Like the County as a whole, most regions have experienced a sharp decline in agricultural employment over the past 10 years. However, the East-CCT Reservation area is an exception.

- The Finance & Insurance sector, one of the highest-paying industries, experienced at least a 10% employment increase in four of the five regions. The South Region saw the most significant growth, with employment more than doubling (a 114.4% increase).
- At least one industry in four of the five regions has an LQ exceeding 1.5.
- The Retail Trade industry grew more than 20% in four of the five regions. The East-CCT Reservation saw the most significant growth, with a 369.4% increase.

**Table 3.13: Employment by Industry Okanogan County, 2024**

Industry	2024 Employment	% Change since 2014	Location Quotient
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	3,732	(46.2%)	16.92
Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	27	(83.9%)	0.41
Utilities	45	11.3%	0.70
Construction	857	17.0%	0.78
Manufacturing	600	12.0%	0.41
Wholesale Trade	222	(10.8%)	0.32
Retail Trade	2,466	27.0%	1.39
Transportation & Warehousing	395	36.1%	0.47

Information	139	0.1%	0.39
Finance & Insurance	180	(15.7%)	0.23
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	162	(14.2%)	0.48
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	422	33.8%	0.31
Management of Companies & Enterprises	9	(78.4%)	0.00
Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	542	(75.8%)	0.47
Educational Services	153	77.1%	0.32
Health Care & Social Assistance	1,802	4.2%	0.72
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	346	69.7%	1.01
Accommodation & Food Services	1,211	(3.9%)	0.76
Other Services (except Public Administration)	554	3.0%	0.59
Government	5,258	9.5%	1.94

Source: Lightcast, 2024

**Table 3.14: Employment by Industry Central Region, 2024**

Industry	2024 Employment	% Change since 2014	Location Quotient
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	699	(25.7%)	7.88
Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	9	(71.2%)	0.01
Utilities	7	(12.5%)	0.18
Construction	272	24.2%	0.61
Manufacturing	196	(31.0%)	0.33
Wholesale Trade	102	(10.0%)	0.37
Retail Trade	1,359	29.4%	1.90
Transportation & Warehousing	72	(14.8%)	0.21
Information	67	(16.6%)	0.47
Finance & Insurance	91	99.8%	0.29
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	72	(11.2%)	0.53
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	141	84.8%	0.26
Management of Companies & Enterprises	0	(100.0%)	0.00
Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	160	60.0%	0.35
Educational Services	41	28.2%	0.21
Health Care & Social Assistance	1,121	8.5%	1.11
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	86	23.3%	0.62
Accommodation & Food Services	432	(6.7%)	0.67
Other Services (except Public Administration)	276	(8.2%)	0.73
Government	2,499	(7.0%)	2.29

Source: Lightcast, 2024



**Table 3.15: Employment by Industry Methow Valley, 2024**

Industry	2024 Employment	% Change since 2014	Location Quotient
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	103	(68.2%)	3.14
Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	9	12.5%	0.10
Utilities	23	158.6%	2.41
Construction	280	37.7%	1.71
Manufacturing	98	80.1%	0.45
Wholesale Trade	20	6.0%	0.20
Retail Trade	333	39.6%	1.26
Transportation & Warehousing	9	12.5%	0.03
Information	23	71.8%	0.44
Finance & Insurance	32	(76.4%)	0.28
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	36	(36.5%)	0.72
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	141	(8.7%)	0.70
Management of Companies & Enterprises	0	(100.0%)	0.01
Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	101	31.2%	0.59
Educational Services	72	82.9%	1.01
Health Care & Social Assistance	166	(12.6%)	0.45
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	98	20.4%	1.93
Accommodation & Food Services	548	(9.3%)	2.32
Other Services (except Public Administration)	85	9.7%	0.61
Government	674	101.9%	1.67

Source: Lightcast, 2024

**Table 3.16: Employment by Industry North Region, 2024**

Industry	2024 Employment	% Change since 2014	Location Quotient
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	739	(53.0%)	16.73
Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	25	(80.9%)	1.92
Utilities	9	(41.4%)	0.53
Construction	139	(8.4%)	0.63
Manufacturing	50	(56.8%)	0.17
Wholesale Trade	43	(36.9%)	0.31
Retail Trade	410	4.4%	1.15
Transportation & Warehousing	205	195.8%	1.22
Information	9	(59.9%)	0.11
Finance & Insurance	28	51.5%	0.18
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	35	1.1%	0.52
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	83	65.4%	0.30
Management of Companies & Enterprises	0	0.0%	0.00

Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	217	120.6%	0.94
Educational Services	18	68.6%	0.19
Health Care & Social Assistance	261	(0.4%)	0.52
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	18	8.5%	0.27
Accommodation & Food Services	131	36.9%	0.41
Other Services (except Public Administration)	125	23.7%	0.66
Government	1,286	26.3%	2.36

Source: Lightcast, 2024

**Table 3.17: Employment by Industry East-CCT Reservation, 2024**

Industry	2024 Employment	% Change since 2014	Location Quotient
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	79	65.3%	6.16
Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	0	0.0%	0.01
Utilities	9	(20.2%)	1.68
Construction	9	(25.8%)	0.07
Manufacturing	10	14.2%	0.12
Wholesale Trade	19	113.0%	0.48
Retail Trade	172	369.4%	1.65
Transportation & Warehousing	9	(51.6%)	0.04
Information	9	12.5%	0.21
Finance & Insurance	9	12.5%	0.22
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	9	12.5%	0.14
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	9	12.5%	0.09
Management of Companies & Enterprises	9	12.5%	0.05
Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	25	11.5%	0.37
Educational Services	9	12.5%	0.08
Health Care & Social Assistance	77	91.6%	0.52
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	9	12.5%	0.38
Accommodation & Food Services	9	12.5%	0.06
Other Services (except Public Administration)	31	91.4%	0.56
Government	649	(6.0%)	4.10

Source: Lightcast, 2024

**Table 3.18: Employment by Industry South Region**

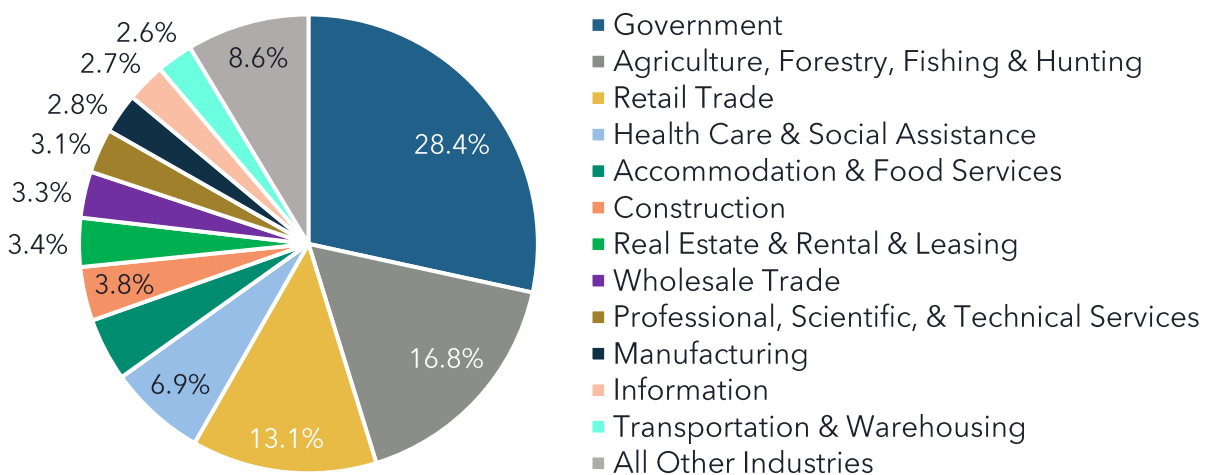
Industry	2024 Employment	% Change since 2014	Location Quotient
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	2,068	(46.6%)	51.16
Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	0	(100.0%)	0.01
Utilities	9	12.5%	0.34

Construction	156	8.7%	0.78
Manufacturing	244	233.1%	0.91
Wholesale Trade	37	2.6%	0.29
Retail Trade	192	(13.2%)	0.59
Transportation & Warehousing	107	(0.1%)	0.69
Information	37	79.9%	0.57
Finance & Insurance	19	114.4%	0.14
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	17	49.8%	0.27
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	48	101.5%	0.19
Management of Companies & Enterprises	0	(100.0%)	0.00
Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	39	265.4%	0.19
Educational Services	19	108.2%	0.21
Health Care & Social Assistance	178	(10.4%)	0.39
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	136	405.5%	2.16
Accommodation & Food Services	95	7.3%	0.33
Other Services (except Public Administration)	35	(9.7%)	0.21
Government	70	361.7%	0.14

Source: Lightcast, 2024

Gross Regional Product (GRP) is a monetary measure of the market value of all final goods and services produced in a region or subdivision of a country over a specific period (Figure 3.13). It is conceptually equivalent to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Jobs in Government and the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting sectors account for 45.2% of Okanogan's GRP. Despite employment declines across various sectors, Okanogan's GRP has increased. In 2023, Okanogan County's GRP was approximately \$1.9 billion, up from \$1.1 billion in 2022.

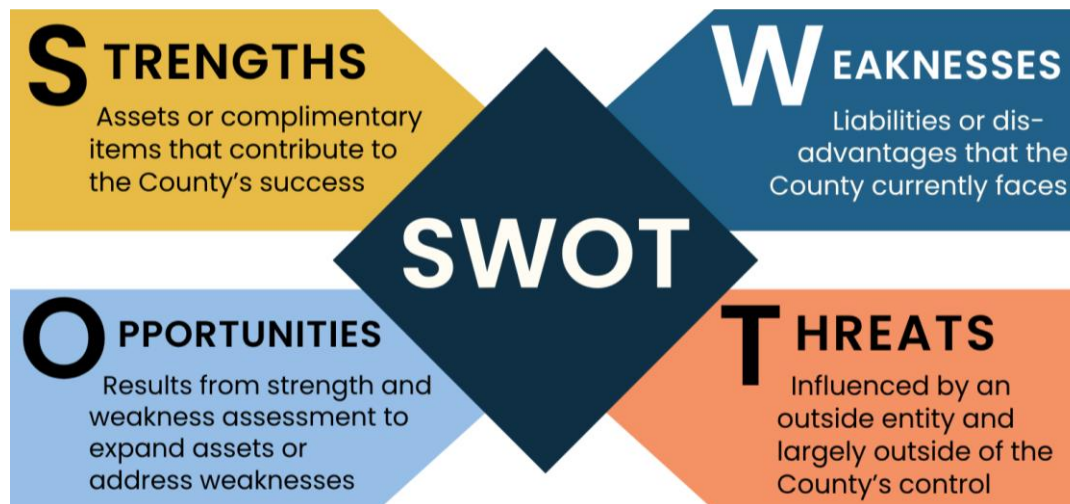
**Figure 3.13: Okanogan County Gross Regional Product (GRP), 2023**



Source: Lightcast, 2024

## IV. SWOT Analysis

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis is a strategic planning tool that helps businesses, organizations, and other entities gain a comprehensive understanding of their current situation and make informed decisions.



Each component of the SWOT Analysis was informed by input gathered through interviews with Okanogan County community members conducted by Points Consulting (PC), on-site public engagement workshops held in Omak, Tonasket, and Twisp, Washington between October 2024 and January 2025, and insights from PC's countywide community survey.

### STRENGTHS

- Abundant natural resources
- Strong community ties and sense of compassion
- Stable stone fruit industry with continued investment and growth
- Plentiful outdoor recreation opportunities
- Perception as a great place to live and raise a family
- Abundant open land and green space
- High awareness of selected tourism assets (e.g., the Omak Stampede and Methow Trails)
- Close proximity to numerous well-known Central Washington tourism hubs (e.g., Wenatchee, Chelan and Leavenworth)
- Close proximity to Canada
- Resort casino hotel and golf courses
- Relatively low energy costs
- Strong winter recreation activities (particularly in northern Methow Valley)
- Numerous strong small-town communities
- Three critical access hospitals spread across the County
- Available ground water resources (for South Region communities)
- Existing independent newspaper and radio stations
- Countywide public transportation system
- Significant recent in-migration of remote workers
- Strong schools and independent youth programs
- Active community organizations (e.g., Rotary and Kiwanis)

## WEAKNESSES

- Limited access to advanced or specialized health care services
- Lack of cohesion among various individual communities across the County's five geographic areas
- Prevalence of low-wage jobs
- Shortage of available industrial spaces for purchase or lease
- Lack of attainably priced housing
- Inconsistent access to essential utilities and infrastructure (e.g., sewer, wastewater treatment, roads)
- Shortage of lodging outside of the Methow Valley and also in Twisp
- Vacant downtown commercial buildings and storefronts (Central, Methow, and North Regions)
- High transportation costs
- Distance from major population centers
- Many communities at or near capacity for water availability
- Tendency to rely on traditional approaches in a changing environment
- Limited availability of big-box retail options
- Limited engagement from the general public ("same 10 people" syndrome)
- Presence of litter and debris in some residential neighborhoods
- Community resistance to planning and economic development in some areas
- Lack of available real estate for housing and business development

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Expansion of existing tourism assets
- Redevelopment of vacant or underutilized land
- Creation of new events to attract out-of-region visitors
- Expansion of services and housing for elderly community members
- Growth in value-added natural resource manufacturing and processing
- Broadband expansion via Okanogan PUD
- Increased collaboration among municipalities
- Growth in tourist traffic between Chelan and the South Region (Brewster and Pateros)
- Strengthening of partnerships and initiatives between the CTCR, local governments and the Economic Alliance
- Diversification of food offerings at local restaurants
- Development of more trades-based small businesses to serve the local population
- Greater engagement with the Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Capitalization on Columbia Valley AVA designation
- Pursuit of grant funding through the Commerce's Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB)
- Enhanced use of the Cascade and Columbia River Railroad for agricultural and industrial sectors
- Expansion into arts and culture tourism
- Development of apple and fruit-based tourism experiences
- Establishment of a coworking space
- Development/expansion of walking and biking trail systems
- Redevelopment of vacant downtown commercial buildings and storefronts
- Improved riverfront access for non-motorized water sports
- Support for local businesses undergoing leadership transitions due to retirement or sale
- Collaboration with partner organizations to identify root causes of low workforce engagement and design targeted incentives



## THREATS

- Aging essential utility and service infrastructure
- Community resistance to residential development in some areas
- Limited water availability constraining economic growth
- Ongoing “brain drain” due to outmigration of younger talent
- Lack of career opportunities and pathways for advancement
- Barriers to expansion for some cities
- Shortage of attainably priced housing
- Challenges in retaining existing small businesses
- Low-wage jobs increasingly subject to automation
- Risk of forest fires damaging homes and personal property
- Rising labor costs due to statewide minimum wage increases
- Crime and public safety concerns
- Potential impact of tariffs on lumber trade with Canadian partners
- Older homes in need of significant repairs
- Insurance nonrenewal related to wildfire risk
- Insufficient recognition of climate and economic changes, slowing resilience efforts
- Difficulty keeping pace with rapidly evolving technology

## Key Industry Clusters

The Economic Alliance identifies target industries that play a key role in Okanogan County’s economy.<sup>20</sup> Focusing industrial development programs on specific industry clusters typically yields greater economic benefits than pursuing more generalized efforts.<sup>21</sup> These target industries are usually selected based on the region’s natural resources, existing businesses, workforce skills, infrastructure, and educational institutions. By comparing these industry characteristics, communities can better understand the potential economic and fiscal impacts of attracting businesses in each target sector. This approach also helps local leaders identify industries they have a realistic chance of attracting, along with the associated benefits and costs. As a result, communities can allocate limited resources more strategically to achieve their development goals and strengthen their competitive advantages.

Employment in Okanogan’s key industries has fluctuated over the past decade.<sup>22</sup> These

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<sup>20</sup> “Key Industries,” The Economic Alliance of Okanogan County, accessed February 18, 2025, <https://economic-alliance.com/key-industries/>.

<sup>21</sup> David L. Barkley and Mark S. Henry, *Targeting Industry Clusters for Regional Economic Development: An Overview of the REDRL Approach* (Clemson University, 2005), accessed May 5, 2025, <https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/113803>.

<sup>22</sup> The following tables for Key Industry Clusters use six-digit NAICS data, while the Employment by Industry section relies on two-digit NAICS data. The six-digit data allows for the aggregation of additional natural resource industries that may not be included in the broader two-digit classification. This industry clustering approach provides more precise data and deeper insights into these sectors.

key industries include:

- Agriculture & Food Processing
- Natural Resources
- Health Care
- Retail Trade
- Tourism & Hospitality

**Agriculture & Food Processing**

Agriculture is the second-largest industry in Okanogan County, yet employment in this sector has declined 36.1% over the past 11 years. Rising labor costs and fluctuating food prices have contributed to the downturn, with agricultural employment shrinking at an average annual rate of 4.0% during the period. In recent years, drought has added further strain; as of February 2024, the U.S. Drought Monitor reported that 37.7% of the County was abnormally dry.<sup>23</sup> Despite these challenges, Agriculture remains one of the County’s leading employment sectors, with jobs in this industry 12.83 times more concentrated locally than the national average.

**Table 4.1: Agriculture & Food Processing Employment Trends, 2013–2024**

Industry Sector	Okanogan County
Employment 2024	4,192
Job Growth (2013–2024)	(2,364)
% Job Growth (2013–2024)	(36.1%)
2024 Location Quotient	12.83
Approx. 2024 Earnings (wages, salaries & proprietor earnings)	\$43,090
Compounded Annual Growth Rate for Employment (CAGR)	(4.0%)

Source: Lightcast, 2024

**Natural Resources**

Okanogan County’s Natural Resources sector is diverse, encompassing forestry, mining, and conservation. The County’s vast forested lands once supported a strong timber industry, but the sector has declined sharply since the 2019 fire that destroyed the Zosel Mill.<sup>24</sup> Today, Oroville Reman & Reload, located in Oroville, WA, remains operational, though it primarily processes prefinished wood products for final manufacturing.

Mining also played a major role in the County’s economic history. Numerous operations once contributed to local employment, but many have shut down over time. The closure

<sup>23</sup> National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), "Okanogan County, Washington Drought Conditions," Drought.gov, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.drought.gov/states/washington/county/okanogan>.

<sup>24</sup> Staff writers, "Fire Damages Zosel Mill Main Building," *Okanogan County Radio*, May 30, 2019, <http://www.komw.net/news/local-news/fire-damages-zosel-mill-main-building/>.

of the Buckhorn Mine in 2017 marked a significant loss, driven by economic pressures and environmental concerns. Although the Natural Resources sector still supports some jobs, employment has dropped 60.5% over the past decade. This indicates an average annual decline of 8.1%.

**Table 4.2: Natural Resource Employment Trends, 2013–2024**

Industry Sector	Okanogan County
Employment 2024	201
Job Growth (2013–2024)	(308)
% Job Growth (2013–2024)	(60.5%)
2024 Location Quotient	2.74
Approx. 2024 Earnings (wages, salaries and proprietor earnings)	\$59,326
Compounded Annual Growth Rate for Employment (CAGR)	(8.1%)

Source: Lightcast, 2024

**Health Care**

Okanogan County’s Health Care sector plays a vital role in the community, offering a broad range of services through hospitals, clinics, and specialized care facilities. Over the past 11 years, employment in the sector has grown 9.3%, averaging an annual increase of 0.8%. Stakeholders widely recognize the quality of local health services, despite the County’s rural location and smaller economy. However, workforce shortages remain a persistent challenge. While efforts are underway to address these gaps, progress will take time. Even so, the sector’s steady growth in employment is an encouraging sign.

**Table 4.3: Health Care Employment Trends, 2013–2024**

Industry Sector	Okanogan County
Employment 2024	1,487
Job Growth (2013–2024)	126
% Job Growth (2013–2024)	9.3%
2024 Location Quotient	0.64
Approx. 2024 Earnings (wages, salaries and proprietor earnings)	\$86,148
Compounded Annual Growth Rate for Employment (CAGR)	0.8%

Source: Lightcast, 2024

**Retail**

Okanogan County's Retail Trade industry is a major driver of the local economy, serving both residents and visitors. It ranks as the County’s third-largest industry by employment. With a location quotient of 1.04, retail jobs are 4.0% more concentrated locally than the national average. Over the past 11 years, employment in the sector has grown at an average annual rate of 1.7%. Although the industry experienced a dip during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has since rebounded and continues to expand. In 2023, the Retail Trade

sector generated approximately \$81.8 million in total wages.<sup>25</sup> This highlights its vital role in the County’s economic health.

**Table 4.4: Retail Trade Employment Trends, 2013–2024**

Industry Sector	Okanogan County
Employment 2024	2,306
Job Growth (2013–2024)	380
% Job Growth (2013–2024)	19.8%
2024 Location Quotient	1.04
Approx. 2024 Earnings (wages, salaries and proprietor earnings)	\$42,579
Compounded Annual Growth Rate for Employment (CAGR)	1.7%

Source: Lightcast, 2024

**Tourism & Hospitality**

The Tourism & Hospitality sector in Okanogan County supports local businesses, creates jobs, and generates significant tax revenue. Over the past decade, employment in the sector has grown 8.5%, with an average annual increase of 0.7%. Like many regions, the County saw a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, losing about 258 tourism-related jobs between 2019 and 2020. However, since 2021, employment has steadily rebounded each year, reflecting the sector’s resilience and strong recovery.

**Table 4.5: Tourism & Hospitality Employment Trends, 2013–2024**

Industry Sector	Okanogan County
Employment 2024	1,541
Job Growth (2013–2024)	121
% Job Growth (2013–2024)	8.5%
2024 Location Quotient	0.7
Approx. 2024 Earnings (wages, salaries and proprietor earnings)	\$30,908
Compounded Annual Growth Rate for Employment (CAGR)	0.7%

Source: Lightcast, 2024

<sup>25</sup> “Okanogan County Profile,” Washington State Employment Security Department, April 1, 2025, <https://esd.wa.gov/jobs-and-training/labor-market-information/reports-and-research/labor-market-county-profiles/okanogan-county-profile>.

## V. Strategic Direction & Action Plan

The Strategic Direction & Action Plan is the cornerstone of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan. It incorporates the socioeconomic, community, and external factors identified during the SWOT analysis and aligns them with targeted strategies and actions for community leaders to implement.

In this CEDS, the Economic Alliance of Okanogan County has considered the potential for future disasters and how the County can “quickly recover from the effects of natural disasters, future pandemics, fires, a changing climate, and other economic shocks.”<sup>26</sup>

The Economic Alliance’s Mission and Vision define the scope of its activities and guide which initiatives align with its overall purpose.

### MISSION

The Economic Alliance’s mission is to facilitate partnerships with private, government, and Tribal entities that will create an environment to nurture, support and recruit businesses and industry in Okanogan County.

### VISION

The Economic Alliance envisions the citizens and communities of Okanogan County working together to bring prosperity to all.

The Goals and Objectives below reflect the community’s vision for sustainable economic growth, greater opportunity for residents, and a thriving local economy. Ideally, over the next five years, community leaders can use these Goals and Objectives to track progress and evaluate performance. At its core, the Strategic Direction & Action Plan is readily accessible to key stakeholders and addresses two fundamental questions:

- “Where do we want to go as a community?”
- “How are we going to get there?”

There are two layers to the Strategic Direction & Action Plan: **Goals** and **Objectives**.

## GOALS

**Goals** are big-picture outcomes and intentions that provide direction based on the Vision Statement. Frequently, Goals are intangible and somewhat aspirational. They provide a structure for the more precise Objectives.

## OBJECTIVES

**Objectives** fold into the Goals but are more measurable and specific. Objectives identify specific actions and tactics that can be taken to achieve the Goals.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted directly from the Economic Alliance CEDS RFP, published June 3, 2024.



## **Adopted Infrastructure & Economic Development Priorities**

Through Resolution 175-2024, dated and signed on December 3, 2024, the Okanogan County Commissioners adopted the 2025 Public Infrastructure Project Prioritization and the Community/Economic Development Project Prioritization lists.<sup>27</sup>

These projects qualify for 0.09% sales and use tax funding if they secure additional non-county funding sources. Each year, the Economic Alliance coordinates the submission and review of proposed projects and provides the Okanogan County Commissioners with a prioritized master list of infrastructure and economic development initiatives for potential funding. The Commissioners' current priority listings are as follows:

### ***2025 Okanogan County Infrastructure Construction Project Prioritization List***

1. Tonasket Perfect Passage
2. Pateros Mall Improvements
3. Winthrop Kay Wagner Historic Riverwalk
4. Brewster Swamp Creek Watershed
5. Pateros Wastewater Improvements
6. Tonasket Airport Side Taxiway Rescue

### ***2025 Okanogan County Economic Development Planning Project Prioritization List***

1. Winthrop Perrygin Lake Storage/Water
2. Omak East 97 Infrastructure
3. Winthrop WW & Lift station
4. Tonasket 4<sup>th</sup> St. Multimodal Improvements
5. Omak Stampede Concourse
6. Omak Public Safety Building
7. Tonasket South Annexation
8. Tonasket Municipal Building

### ***Okanogan County Community/Economic Development Projects***

1. OVOC Building
2. FYRE Expansion Project
3. NCW Rink

With these lists confirmed, Points Consulting (PC) recommends that the Economic Alliance align future infrastructure and economic development projects with the goals and action steps framework outlined in this report. The primary regional goals identified during the planning process are listed in the following section.

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<sup>27</sup> Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners, *Resolution 175-24*, Okanogan County, Washington, December 3, 2024, <https://cms9files.revize.com/okanoganwa/175-2024%20Endorsing%20Ok%20Co%20Infrastructure%20Projects%20List.pdf>.

## Visual of CEDS Goals & Actions

The four goals outlined in this CEDS are not presented in chronological or priority order. While the actions under each goal are organized to support effective implementation, the order of the goals themselves does not imply a hierarchy of importance. For example, actions identified under Goal 3 may be implemented concurrently with those under other goals, such as Goal 1.



### **Goal 1:** Increase opportunities for external investment in economic growth

- 1.1** Align Community, Economic Development and Public Infrastructure Prioritization Process with CEDS priorities
- 1.2** Advertise regional commercial properties for sale and lease on the Economic Alliance website
- 1.3** Have the Economic Alliance Port District Subcommittee lead efforts to evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Port District in Okanogan County
- 1.4** Explore demand for and feasibility of a coworking space in the Central and North Regions
- 1.5** Embrace and expand the Creative Economy cluster as core target industry for the County
- 1.6** Support arts education through local partnerships and sustainable funding efforts

### **Goal 2:** Enhance opportunities for visitors and residents to enjoy the County's recreational opportunities

- 2.1** Coordinate with North and South Region leadership to discuss development of signature events that attract tourist spending
- 2.2** Collaborate with the Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC) in investing in external marketing for selected recreational assets in the North Region (e.g., climbing, rafting, mountain biking)
- 2.3** Advocate for expansion of the American Viticultural Area (AVA) to include Okanogan Valley

**Goal 3:** Improve community resources & connectivity

- 3.1** Invest in the Economic Alliance website to keep the events page updated, enhance connection to tourism resources, and add more content on target industries
- 3.2** Enhance connectivity between the Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC) website (Okanogan County) and the Economic Alliance to increase visibility of economic development opportunities for investors and business owners visiting the County
- 3.3** Engage with the Abandoned Building Subcommittee on abandoned buildings and lots to determine and execute opportunities for volunteer cleanup and beautification efforts on residential and commercial buildings
- 3.4** Explore workforce and affordable housing options in Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation
- 3.5** Facilitate housing development cooperative, designed to build market-rate housing for high-level talent
- 3.6** Explore land availability for allocation, including industrial, commercial and residential development land
- 3.7** Collaborate with the Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) on residential, commercial, and industrial incentive options
- 3.8** Work with the Okanogan County Farmers Market Association to revitalize and support flexible, seasonal vending opportunities and micro retail growth

**Goal 4:** Enhance workforce development opportunities

- 4.1** Sponsor young professional networking nights to facilitate entrepreneurship and networking
- 4.2** Develop workforce pipeline for healthcare professionals through high school recruitment programs
- 4.3** Collaborate with Wenatchee Valley College (WVC) to attract more healthcare programs to the Omak campus
- 4.4** Expand trade apprenticeship access and alignment with employer needs

## Evaluation Framework

The Evaluation Framework component of a CEDS defines the standards by which progress on the Strategic Direction & Action Plan will be measured over the next five years. Each CEDS Annual Update will report progress based on these metrics.

While the Strategic Direction & Action Plan focuses on where the regional economy is headed and how it will get there, the Evaluation Framework addresses key questions:

- “How are we doing?” and
- “What can we do better?”

A few clarifications are necessary regarding the Evaluation Framework. While some performance measures are highly quantitative, others focus on the development or improvement of qualitative features. Some measures require annual review, while others take longer to complete. The expected duration for each performance measure is indicated in the Period to Accomplish End Goal column in Table 5.1.

Each performance measure also aligns with one of the four Goals outlined in the Strategic Direction & Action Plan. The Economic Alliance does not have to work alone or bear sole responsibility for achieving these goals. Instead, the Evaluation Framework provides a roadmap of goals and action steps, enabling the Economic Alliance and its partners to define their roles in the process.

Given the Economic Alliance's limited staffing capacity, the timeline for each goal has been extended to reflect this constraint. Additionally, some steps can occur concurrently rather than sequentially, which is why projected completion dates are not simply the sum of each preceding step.

Finally, it is important to note that an End Goal may be considered achieved earlier than projected if the Economic Alliance determines it is unfeasible. For example, the goal of establishing a Port District in Okanogan County may be concluded ahead of schedule if deemed unviable.

## Implementation Schedule & Responsibilities

The following table outlines which departments and entities should track and monitor the identified goals, actions, and timeline over the next five years. The timeframes provided for completing these actions reflect PC's estimates. However, The Economic Alliance may adjust these timelines based on its available resources, capacity, and practical considerations

**Table 5.1: Goals with Leading Organization, Partnering Organizations, and Expected Duration**

Theme	Goal	Leading Organization(s)	Partner Organizations and Groups	Period to Accomplish End Goal
<b>1. Increase opportunities for external investment in economic growth</b>	<b>1.1</b> Align CEDS with Community, Economic Development, and Public Infrastructure Prioritization Process via Annual Updates	Economic Alliance	Okanogan County Commissioners	Ongoing
	<b>1.2</b> Advertise regional commercial properties for sale and lease on the Economic Alliance website	Economic Alliance	Chambers of commerce, cities, local real estate agents	18 months
	<b>1.3</b> Have the Economic Alliance Port District Subcommittee lead efforts to evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Port District in Okanogan County	Economic Alliance Subcommittee on Port District	Washington Public Ports Association	24 months
	<b>1.4</b> Explore demand for and feasibility of a coworking space in the Central and North Regions	Economic Alliance and WorkSource	Chambers of commerce, private-sector investors, nonprofits	10 months
	<b>1.5</b> Embrace and expand the Creative Economy cluster as core target industry for the County	Economic Alliance, TwispWorks, and Methow Arts	Chambers of commerce, cities, small businesses	5 years
	<b>1.6</b> Support arts education through local partnerships and sustainable funding efforts	Economic Alliance, Methow Arts	Local businesses, local service groups & clubs, school districts	5 years
<b>2. Enhance opportunities for visitors and residents to enjoy the County's recreational opportunities</b>	<b>2.1</b> Coordinate with North and South Region leadership to discuss development of signature events that attract tourist spending	Economic Alliance, Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC)	Chambers of commerce, cities, local service groups & clubs	36 months
	<b>2.2</b> Collaborate with the Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC) in investing in external marketing for selected recreational assets in the North Region <sup>28</sup>	Economic Alliance, OCTC	Chambers of commerce, cities, local service groups & clubs	12 months

<sup>28</sup> Examples of recreational assets include climbing, rafting, and mountain biking.



	<b>2.3</b> Advocate for expansion of the American Viticultural Area (AVA) to include Okanogan Valley	Economic Alliance	Current Okanogan County vineyards & wineries, chambers of commerce, cities, Okanogan County	6 months
<b>3. Improve community resources &amp; connectivity</b>	<b>3.1</b> Invest in the Economic Alliance website to keep the events page updated, enhance connection to tourism resources, and add more content on target industries	Economic Alliance	Website consultant, Economic Alliance Board, industry experts	12 months
	<b>3.2</b> Enhance connectivity between the Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC) website (Okanogan County) and the Economic Alliance to increase visibility of economic development opportunities for investors and business owners visiting the County	Economic Alliance, Okanogan County Tourism Council	Website consultant, Economic Alliance Board	12 months
	<b>3.3</b> Engage with the Abandoned Building Subcommittee on abandoned buildings and lots to determine and execute opportunities for volunteer cleanup and beautification efforts on residential and commercial buildings	Economic Alliance, Abandoned Building Subcommittee	Economic Alliance, Abandoned Building Subcommittee	24 months
	<b>3.4</b> Explore workforce and affordable housing options in Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation	Economic Alliance, Okanogan County Housing Coalition	Economic Alliance, Okanogan County Housing Coalition	36 months
	<b>3.5</b> Facilitate housing development cooperative, designed to build market-rate housing for high-level talent	Economic Alliance, Okanogan County Housing Coalition	Economic Alliance, Okanogan County Housing Coalition	36 months

	<b>3.6</b> Explore land availability for allocation, including industrial, commercial and residential development land	Economic Alliance	Okanogan County, cities, Colville Tribe, local real estate agents	28 months
	<b>3.7</b> Collaborate with the Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) on residential, commercial, and industrial incentive options	Economic Alliance	Okanogan County Council of Governments	Ongoing
	<b>3.8</b> Work with the Okanogan County Farmers Market Association to revitalize and support flexible, seasonal vending opportunities and micro retail growth	Economic Alliance, Okanogan County Farmers Market Association	Chambers of commerce, TwispWorks, OCTC	5 years
<b>4. Enhance workforce development opportunities</b>	<b>4.1</b> Sponsor young professional networking nights to facilitate entrepreneurship and networking	Economic Alliance	Economic Alliance, chambers of commerce, local school districts	18 months
	<b>4.2</b> Develop workforce pipeline for health care professionals through high school recruitment programs	Economic Alliance, WorkSource, Wenatchee Valley College (WVC) Omak, North Central Work Force Development Council (WDC)	Economic Alliance WorkSource, WVC Omak, WDC, local school districts	36 months
	<b>4.3</b> Collaborate with Wenatchee Valley College (WVC) to attract more health care programs to the Omak campus	Economic Alliance, WorkSource, WVC Omak, WDC	Hospitals, clinics, senior care facilities, dental clinics, Indian Health Service (IHS), local school districts	36 months
	<b>4.4</b> Expand trade apprenticeship access and alignment with employer needs	Economic Alliance, WorkSource, WVC Omak	Local trade businesses, local school districts	48 months

**Table 5.2: Implementation Steps for Goal 1: Increase opportunities for external investment in economic growth**

Goal	Suggested Steps
<b>1.1</b> Align CEDS with Community, Economic Development, and Public Infrastructure Prioritization Process via Annual Updates	Advertise via press releases and other forms of communication to eligible communities about submitting a letter of intent for project ranking and other critical information
	Hold an application readiness workshop for applicants on the full application process for priority projects
	Review pre-application letters of intent
	Invite selected applicants to submit a full application
	Email on-time applications to Economic Alliance Infrastructure Committee members for their review
	Invite and schedule selected applicants to present to the Economic Alliance Infrastructure committee
	Have the Economic Alliance Infrastructure Committee and Executive Committee identify the priority projects
	Present the Project Prioritization lists to the Okanogan County Commissioners for review and endorsement
	Provide technical assistance to organizations with priority projects to help them pursue funding opportunities, including CERB's Prospective Development and Committed Private Partner grants, as well as other programs recommended by the Economic Alliance.
<b>1.2</b> Advertise regional commercial properties for sale and lease on the Economic Alliance website	Work with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to identify funding opportunities for the priority projects
	Work with business development representatives to collect data on non-listed properties
	Collaborate with local real estate agents to gather data on available commercial and industrial properties, and add the listings to a designated section of the Economic Alliance website
<b>1.3</b> Have the Economic Alliance Port District Subcommittee lead efforts to evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Port District in Okanogan County	Select an optimal display method for the Economic Alliance website and publish the property listings
	Determine feasibility of establishing a Port District (smaller than countywide)
	Coordinate with local elected representatives on the legislative possibility of adjusting state statutes related to Port Districts
	Consider forming a separate organization to lead efforts to establish a Port District in Okanogan County, if deemed beneficial.
	Engage local businesses, economic development organizations, and Tribal governments
	Hold town halls and public meetings to gather public input
	Consider conducting a community-wide survey to assess support for a Port District

	Identify priority infrastructure projects (e.g., industrial parks, freight facilities, airports)
	Contact the Washington Public Ports Association (WPPA) for education and advocacy resources
	Attend statewide WPPA Spring or Fall meeting (if necessary)
	Complete the application process and secure required voter approval to formally establish the Port District and its governing commission (if necessary)
	Define governance structure and responsibilities of the port commission (if necessary)
<b>1.4</b> Explore demand for and feasibility of a coworking space in the Central and North Regions	Host town halls to engage with remote workers and small business owners
	Work with city leaders from the Central and North Regions to identify available spaces
	Explore opportunities for state, federal and nonprofit grant funding
	Identify potential "anchor tenants" to help defray ongoing costs
	Find nonprofit or for-profit partners interested in pursuing development
	Determine ideal location and assist with lease negotiation
	Promote and advertise location (if necessary)
	Create a project pipeline or portfolio to track and promote development across the region
<b>1.5</b> Embrace and expand the Creative Economy cluster as core target industry for the County	Identify partners in the creative community
	Bring together local artists, creative entrepreneurs, arts organizations, economic development leaders, Tribal partners, and cultural institutions to guide an audit of Okanogan County's Creative Economy
	Review audit models from successful Creative Economy initiatives, such as the Washington State Creative Economy Strategic Plan
	Apply for funding to support an audit of the County's creative assets
	Map existing creative assets (businesses, public art, studios, performance venues, festivals)
	Survey local creatives and organizations
	Analyze available economic and labor force data
	Identify key data to track over time
	Publish a report and summary highlighting the County's creative strengths and data needs
	Track recommended Creative Economy data annually
	Determine target locations for establishing creative districts
	Share the report and tracked data with those target locations
	Identify local champions within target locations
	Complete the Community Readiness Workbook available on the ArtsWA website to evaluate the community's preparedness

<b>1.6</b> Support arts education through local partnerships and sustainable funding efforts	Arrange a visit with ArtsWA's Create District Manager as required prior to submitting an application
	Submit a Letter of Interest and full application following the ArtsWA requirements (if necessary)
	Create a countywide call for volunteer teaching artists (e.g., retired teachers, local creatives)
	Develop a shared calendar outlining when and where schools need arts education support, what kind of assistance is needed, and who can step in
	Ask local businesses to "sponsor a classroom or artist" with small donations (\$250–\$500), promoted through a community arts campaign
	Partner with PTAs (where available), service clubs, community foundations, and school districts to support materials and transportation costs
	Work with Methow Arts and district leaders to track key metrics, including student participation, supplies used, program costs, and volunteer involvement
	Partner with Methow Arts to develop digital arts lesson modules and train district staff or volunteers to deliver them in classrooms
	Engage the public through one-pagers and community meetings that share the benefits of arts education, highlight student outcomes, and build support for sustained investment
	Draft sample levy language and campaign messaging in time for the 2026 levy renewal

**Table 5.3: Implementation Steps for Goal 2: Enhance opportunities for visitors and residents to enjoy the County's recreational opportunities**

Goal	Suggested Steps
<b>2.1</b> Coordinate with North and South Region leadership to discuss development of signature events that attract tourist spending	Prepare a "pitch" for communities highlighting the economic impact and benefits
	Determine ideal times of year to increase tourism
	Identify local champions
	Coordinate with chambers of commerce to assess feasibility and interest
	Brainstorm themes, titles, and activities (if necessary)
<b>2.2</b> Collaborate with the Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC) in investing in external marketing for selected recreational assets in the North Region	Coordinate with the Board to identify greatest "missing pieces" in recreational infrastructure
	Consider conducting a community survey to gather general feedback
	Coordinate with OCTC on concept development
	Identify regional champions for proposed concepts
	Explore state, federal and nonprofit grant funding for development and advertising
	Facilitate connections with similar volunteer or nonprofit organizations from outside of the region
	Make a final "go" or "no-go" decision on new asset development

<b>2.3</b> Advocate for expansion of the American Viticultural Area (AVA) region to include Okanogan Valley	Contact the AVA office at the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) to learn more about the process
	Review AVA petition requirements
	Consider the possibility of expansion versus extension of existing AVA areas
	Discuss industry trends with existing wineries in the region
	Assess interest through conversations with chambers and tourism-focused businesses in the region
	Facilitate the AVA application process (if necessary)

**Table 5.4: Implementation Steps for Goal 3: Improve community resources & connectivity**

Goal	Suggested Steps
<b>3.1</b> Invest in the Economic Alliance website to keep the events page updated, enhance connection to tourism resources, and add more content on target industries	Review event flyers and the events page to identify gaps and ensure the online events calendar is updated and synchronized
	Coordinate the online events calendar with regional chambers; consider merging or cross-referencing with calendars from other organizations
	Review target industry pages on Economic Alliance website and update or enhance as needed
	Review cross-marketing efforts with the OCTC website and explore opportunities for improvement
<b>3.2</b> Enhance connectivity between the Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC) website (Okanogan County) and the Economic Alliance to increase visibility of economic development opportunities for investors and business owners visiting the County	Convene a meeting with OCTC to discuss opportunities and benefits of cross-referenced marketing
	Coordinate with the OCTC Website Manager
	Work together to include a link to the OCTC events calendar, ensuring visitors can easily access tourism and community event information
	Develop a joint marketing approach for sharing resources and leads between organizations
	Track results using website analytics to monitor cross-site traffic and content engagement
<b>3.3</b> Engage with the Abandoned Building Subcommittee on abandoned buildings and lots to determine and execute opportunities for volunteer cleanup and beautification efforts on residential and commercial buildings	Coordinate with cities to identify the most problematic properties and their associated business owners
	Work with the Subcommittee to create a list of high-priority locations that could benefit from volunteer cleanup or beautification
	Identify regional champions to support and promote the effort
	Conduct soft outreach to property owners with the intent to offer support and services
	Help organize volunteer workdays for tasks such as trash removal, basic landscaping, painting, or simple repairs
	Promote volunteer opportunities through local organizations, schools, and social media to encourage participation and foster community pride



	Take before-and-after photos, share improvement stories, and publicly thank volunteers to build momentum for future efforts
<b>3.4</b> Explore workforce and affordable housing options in Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation	Conduct a regional roundtable on housing to discuss challenges, ideas, opportunities, peer examples, and potential courses of action
	Hold individual meetings with developers to review their five-year outlook, development plans, and barriers to progress
	Meet with additional stakeholders (e.g., Washington Association of Builders, Building Industry Association of Washington, and Central Washington Home Builders) to explore opportunities for housing expansion
	Research Washington's Housing Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) and identify steps to become more competitive for tax credit housing investments
	Attend Planning Commission, Board of Adjustment and City Council meetings related to land use decisions to understand the regional context and build relationships
	Support and advocate for all housing development opportunities that align with the Economic Alliance's priorities and mission
<b>3.5</b> Facilitate housing development cooperative, designed to build market-rate housing for high-level talent	Brainstorm the concept with the Economic Alliance Board and identify businesses and individuals to approach
	Invite local businesses, school districts, and city governments to a roundtable discussion on creating or supporting employee housing
	Develop a return on investment framework for partnering organizations
	Identify individuals or organizations who can serve as project champions
	Explore the economic benefits of donating a home to a qualified nonprofit organization for potential tax deductions
	Facilitate the establishment of a business entity for incorporation (if necessary)
<b>3.6</b> Explore land availability for allocation, including industrial, commercial and residential development land	Facilitate connections between builders and project champions (if necessary)
	Work with the County GIS office to identify parcels based on zoning, geographic constraints, and utility availability
	Prioritize site needs (type, size, and location) in coordination with the Economic Alliance Board and city governments
	Coordinate with Tribal representatives to identify needs and priorities for open, commercial, and industrial space
<b>3.7</b> Collaborate with the Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) on residential, commercial and industrial incentive options	Determine gaps in available land by type, location and size
	Engage with city and county leadership to identify economic development projects that cities wish to incentivize
	Review state resources to identify relevant grant funding opportunities
	Schedule individual meetings with MRSC to explore available options

<b>3.8</b> Work with the Okanogan County Farmers Market Association to revitalize and support flexible, seasonal vending opportunities and micro retail growth	Partner with the Okanogan County Farmers Market Association to assess existing market conditions, needs, and opportunities in different communities across the county
	Conduct an inventory of local policies, infrastructure, and permitting processes that affect seasonal vending and micro-retail activities in participating towns
	Develop a countywide best practices toolkit for communities interested in expanding or starting farmers markets, pop-up events, or vendor-friendly public spaces, including model vendor ordinances
	Focus on attracting vendors offering produce, flowers, value-added farm products, crafts, and other goods for participating cities
	Support the formation of local or regional vendor/market coordinators, either community-based or through a shared countywide model, to oversee operations, outreach, and vendor support
	Assist potential vendors in finding and applying for booth setup funding, such as USDA Rural Business Development or ArtsWA grants
	Promote vendor events and seasonal markets in communities across the county through shared marketing and outreach.

**Table 5.5: Implementation Steps for Goal 4: Enhance workforce development opportunities**

Goal	Suggested Steps
<b>4.1</b> Sponsor young professional networking nights to facilitate entrepreneurship and networking	Conduct an inventory of existing young professional organizations, networking events, and informal groups in the region to identify current resources, participation levels, and potential gaps.
	Identify key partners by reaching out to local business associations, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, and coworking spaces
	Engage community college campuses and corporate sponsors willing to support the event
	Connect with industry-specific networks to broaden outreach
	Clarify the primary purpose of event (e.g., general networking, startup pitch night, mentorship pairing)
	Determine the ideal attendees (e.g., young entrepreneurs, recent graduates, industry professionals)
	Design the event format and agenda
	Promote the event through targeted channels
	Facilitate meaningful engagement during the event
	Conduct post-event surveys to assess attendee satisfaction and gather feedback
	Identify volunteer champions to sustain and grow future events
	Plan for ongoing need and determine the optimal cadence for future events

<b>4.2</b> Develop a workforce pipeline for health care professionals through high school recruitment programs	Work with local health care facilities that have experience running high school engagement programs to increase student participation
	Connect with high school guidance counselors to share local occupational demand data
	Research state or national best practices for health care workforce development
	Identify the most critical and undersupplied roles through conversations with local employers
	Implement a targeted improvement plan based on findings
<b>4.3</b> Collaborate with Wenatchee Valley College (WVC) to attract more health care programs to the Omak campus	Contact WVC to learn what is needed to expand health care programs and collaborate with local health care organizations to build partnerships
	Research programs offered at similar small institutions for best practices
	Work with WVC to determine requirements for expanding health care program offerings at the Omak campus
<b>4.4</b> Expand trade apprenticeship access and alignment with employer needs	Engage Okanogan County employers and trade unions to identify in-demand trades and key barriers to apprenticeship entry.
	Meet with regional trade union representatives to clarify requirements and incentives for establishing apprenticeship programs in Okanogan County
	Have the Economic Alliance develop a regional framework outlining core skills, certifications, and training requirements for union-affiliated trades
	Coordinate with local school districts and WVC Omak to align curricula with the Economic Alliance's regional framework for union-affiliated trades

## VI. Community Engagement

### Interview Key Themes

During this study, Points Consulting (PC) conducted 36 community interviews. PC has provided a full list of interviewees in [Appendix A](#). The project team conducted both in-person and virtual conversations via telephone, Zoom, and other platforms.

Interviewees represented a broad cross section of the community, including elected officials, city staff, major employer representatives, nonprofit leaders, and others recommended by the Economic Alliance of Okanogan County. The team's primary goal was to gather diverse perspectives on the Okanogan County area.

Below is a summary of key themes identified by PC as most important to interviewees, based on both their relevance to the study and how frequently they were mentioned.

### Lack of Housing

Like many regions across the United States, Okanogan County is experiencing a severe housing shortage. Finding a home is difficult for both current residents and those who wish to move to the area. Soaring housing prices continue to push local buyers out of the market. While nonprofits and government agencies are working to address the issue, their efforts cannot keep pace with demand.

One major challenge is the shortage of skilled workers needed to build homes. Many construction workers and developers choose to work in nearby Chelan, where wages are higher. Additionally, although housing units exist in the area, many remain vacant for much of the year because they are used as second homes or short-term rentals. This trend is particularly common in the Methow Valley, a region popular for its ski resort.

Another complicating factor is Okanogan County's seasonal economy. The region sees an influx of tourists and visitors during the spring and summer months but is largely dormant in the fall and winter. This is due in part to its remote location and the difficulty of traveling in snowy conditions.

The lack of affordable, available housing is not just a challenge for individuals; it also affects local governments and businesses. Many Okanogan natives who want to return home find themselves priced out of the market. Local governments also struggle to fill essential positions. For example, one city offered a competitive salary and benefits for a police officer position but was unable to hire anyone because applicants could not find housing.

This ongoing crisis raises concerns about the County's long-term future. As the average age of residents continues to rise and younger generations are forced to leave, the vitality of local communities is at risk. Without action, the County and its cities could face population decline and economic stagnation.

## **Low-Paying Jobs**

Retail and recreation are major industries in Okanogan County, but many jobs in these sectors, such as hotel staff and sales associate positions, pay only minimum wage. In fact, a large share of jobs across the County fall into this category of low-paying positions, making it increasingly difficult for workers to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Some businesses, like Oroville Reman & Reload, offer higher wages, but they do not generate enough demand to employ a significant portion of the County's workforce. Other higher-paying opportunities exist, particularly in health care, yet a shortage of trained professionals persists. As a result, local hospitals frequently rely on temporary staff, which contributes to higher health care costs.

To address this issue, hospitals are actively working to attract younger workers by promoting the benefits of careers in local health care. However, even when people are interested in returning to work in Okanogan County, the lack of available housing remains a significant barrier.

## **Vacant Downtown Buildings and Debris**

One of the key challenges to economic development in Okanogan County is the prevalence of vacant buildings and excessive debris. Many areas are affected by significant clutter, including properties where residents keep more than 10 inoperable vehicles on their lawns. This creates an uninviting environment that can discourage business investment and deter potential residents or visitors from spending money locally.

The City of Okanogan has taken steps to address these issues by implementing a code enforcement program aimed at removing litter and debris. However, similar problems persist in areas outside the City, where large amounts of debris and neglected properties remain unaddressed.

Another challenge is the high number of vacant storefronts in downtown shopping districts. One local business owner noted that while new businesses do open, many close within a year. This may be due to limited market demand, increased competition (such as multiple restaurants targeting the same niche), or the rising costs of doing business. Many local business owners have expressed concerns about increasing labor costs, particularly minimum wage hikes, which have reduced profit margins and, in some cases, forced closures.

Local government officials have also identified vacant commercial properties with strong potential for redevelopment. However, property owners are often unwilling to sell, holding out for prices well above market value. As a result, these buildings remain unused and continue to deteriorate. In some cases, officials warn that without intervention, these structures could become safety hazards due to neglect and structural instability.

Addressing these barriers will be critical to fostering long-term economic growth and revitalizing communities throughout the County.

### **Funding Issues**

Okanogan County has numerous opportunities for economic and infrastructure improvements, but a significant barrier is the lack of sufficient funding. Many projects that could benefit the community remain stalled due to high costs and limited financial resources. For example, restoring the dam in Oroville could greatly enhance regional power production, but the estimated cost of at least \$10 million makes the project difficult to pursue. Similarly, Oroville Reman & Reload expressed interest in purchasing and restoring a nearby lumber mill that burned down several years ago. However, the costs associated with bringing the facility up to code have made the investment financially unfeasible.

Local governments are also exploring incentives to encourage housing development and other community projects. However, they often face uncertainty about what they are legally permitted to offer, as they lack dedicated staff with expertise in navigating economic development policy. At the same time, many residents remain hesitant or resistant to accepting outside government funding. There is a widespread perception that such funding comes with restrictive conditions that may not align with local priorities. Additionally, distrust of state and federal government agencies further discourages communities from pursuing financial assistance, even when it could support essential improvements.

Addressing both financial and trust-related barriers will be critical to unlocking Okanogan County's full economic potential and ensuring long-term, sustainable growth.

### **Resistance to Change**

Some residents are reluctant to embrace change, even as the broader world evolves rapidly. Conversations with stakeholders revealed that many in Okanogan County are either content with the status quo or actively resistant to change. This poses a challenge to progress.

As one interviewee stated, "Many people in Okanogan County are fine living in poverty." This sentiment is echoed in survey responses, where "Resistance to Change" emerged as the second most commonly cited barrier to economic improvement, surpassed only by the lack of job opportunities (Figure 6.4). A key factor behind this resistance is a deeply rooted belief in self-reliance. Many residents adhere to a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality and are hesitant to accept outside assistance.

While this mindset can foster resilience, it can also limit opportunities for economic and community development—particularly when it leads to resistance against new ideas or external support. Overcoming this challenge will require a thoughtful balance: honoring local values while promoting sustainable growth and innovation.



## Lack of Participation

As previously mentioned, there is strong resistance to change among many Okanogan County residents. Some locals oppose the involvement of outsiders in shaping their community, expressing a desire to preserve it as it was in their grandparents' time. This mindset can make community engagement efforts (such as collecting survey data) particularly difficult. As a result, participation rates across all regions in the County have remained below 2.0%.

## Broadband Access

During stakeholder meetings, participants identified the lack of reliable internet access as a significant barrier to economic growth. Improved broadband connectivity could attract more remote workers to the region and support the development of shared workspaces. This would enable professionals to live and work in the community for extended periods. While this remains a challenge, substantial progress has been made toward expanding access.

In 2023, Okanogan PUD received a \$30 million grant from the USDA's Rural Utilities Service ReConnect Program to expand broadband services across rural Okanogan County. The project will span more than 300 square miles (from Highway 20 to the Canadian border) and involves the installation of 245 miles of fiber optic cable. It will provide broadband access to 745 residences and 21 businesses in communities such as Nine Mile, Molson, Chesaw, Havillah, and Siwash Creek. Construction began in spring 2024 and includes infrastructure upgrades such as pole replacements and vegetation mitigation.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, Okanogan County Electric Cooperative secured \$5 million in funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce in 2024. This funding includes a \$3.5 million loan and a \$1.5 million grant for the Okanogan County Connect Phase Two project. This initiative will construct 42 miles of fiber to extend service to 244 users in the Methow Valley. That same year, Okanogan PUD received an additional \$3.8 million in broadband funding, consisting of a \$2.66 million loan and a \$1.14 million grant, for the Conconully FTTx project. This project will install 22 miles of fiber to connect 367 users to the PUD's existing network.<sup>30</sup>

The Colville Tribe is also making significant progress in broadband development. In meetings with Tribal members, PC learned that construction of a fiber project across the Colville Reservation is scheduled to begin in March 2025, excluding a few areas in Omak,

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<sup>29</sup> Ann McCreary, "Okanogan PUD will use \$30M grant to expand rural internet service," *Methow Valley News*, September 14, 2023, <https://methowvalleynews.com/2023/09/14/okanogan-pud-will-use-30m-grant-to-expand-rural-internet-service/>.

<sup>30</sup> "Public Works Board Approves \$21 Million in Broadband Construction, Pre-Construction, and Emergency Grants and Loans," Washington State Department of Commerce, May 7, 2024, <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/public-works-board-approves-21-million-in-broadband-construction-pre-construction-and-emergency-grants-and-loans/>.

WA. The project is expected to be completed within two years, and the Tribe is actively pursuing additional funding through the USDA for future broadband initiatives.

## **Progress Made**

While Okanogan County faces significant challenges, it is also home to several notable success stories that highlight the region's resilience and innovation. The Methow Housing Trust, established in 2017, has made significant progress in addressing housing needs. Between 2018 and 2022, it has constructed over 15 homes and has plans for continued development in the coming years. Similarly, the Housing Authority of Okanogan County, founded in 1993, has advanced its mission of expanding housing access by developing 60 properties across the Methow Valley, Central Region, and South Region.

Beyond housing initiatives, TwispWorks, a nonprofit in the Methow Valley, has contributed to local economic development. Its Methow Investment Network connects local investors with business owners seeking capital for startup costs or expansion. According to TwispWorks' Executive Director, approximately 88 investors have contributed nearly \$4 million to local businesses over the past five years, fostering economic growth in the region.

As previously mentioned, the Colville Tribal Federal Corporation (CTFC) has grown into one of the largest and most diverse Native American businesses in northeastern Washington. The corporation employs over 800 people and generates more than \$120 million in revenue annually. It manages 13 enterprises related to gaming, recreation and tourism, retail, construction and wood products.

## **A Need for Metrics to Track Progress**

During PC's community engagement, some individuals suggested that developing a robust, metric-based system to track progress over time could help guide and evaluate improvement efforts across the County.

Community members noted that while the Economic Alliance has made meaningful progress in improving Okanogan County, there is an opportunity to strengthen how that progress is communicated through data. While many positive stories exist, it would be helpful to present clear, year-over-year metrics (such as the number of new housing units added or the amount of funding allocated to projects annually) to demonstrate tangible outcomes.

Participants specifically referenced the 2021 Comprehensive Economic Development and Recovery Strategy (CEDRS), which includes an objective to support the recovery of tourism. They emphasized the importance of defining concrete metrics to track tourism trends, making it easier to assess whether recovery efforts are successful.

Effective metrics help translate broad goals into actionable targets. They allow teams to focus, measure progress, and make informed decisions. Funders, elected officials, and community members are more likely to support initiatives backed by measurable results.

For example, stating that “the number of businesses increased 5% in one year” is far more compelling than saying “we think things are improving.”

## Community Survey

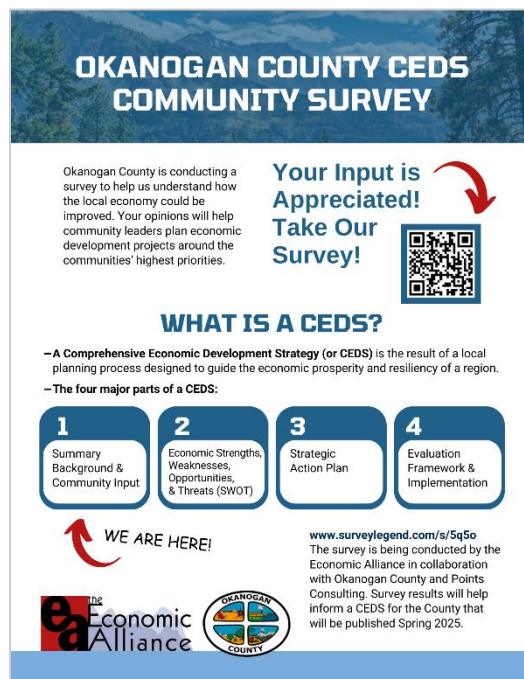
The PC project team conducted an electronic survey of community residents from September 5, 2024, to January 29, 2025. PC collected a total of 319 complete responses, with 471 total surveys returned. The survey, open to all citizens of the Okanogan community, included a mix of fixed-response questions (e.g., multiple-choice and scaled responses) and open-ended questions. PC, in collaboration with the Economic Alliance, promoted the survey widely both online and offline using various methods such as flyers, email, and social media to maximize participation. PC also employed a thematic coding method to group open-ended responses into largely similar categories.

For quality assurance, the project team identified and removed suspicious responses (e.g., fast completions, strange IP addresses, or irrelevant input). PC also excluded responses if the survey taker did not live in or around Okanogan County or had no connection to the area. Additionally, PC meticulously reviewed open-ended responses to ensure uniqueness and prevent identical or nearly identical answers. The response rate for residents of the County was 1.4%. Although this number may seem small, accurately surveying a county with over 34,000 residents is challenging. The survey was conducted in all major towns across Okanogan County, and the sample size resulted in a margin of error of 4.48% in either direction. This means the project team is confident that the community’s sentiments have been accurately assessed.

The survey process also included a teenage survey to gauge the opinions of the younger generation. This survey generated 18 responses from teenagers across Okanogan County.

As previously mentioned, the response rate for Okanogan County was 1.4%, but when broken down by region, the response rate varied:

- Central Region: 1.2%
- Methow Valley: 1.4%
- North Region: 1.8%
- East-CCT Reservation: 1.2%
- South Region: 0.6%



PC Okanogan CEDS Survey Flyer, 2024

## Summary of Findings

The North and Central Regions of the County, including Okanogan, Omak, Oroville, and Tonasket, had the highest participation rates (Figure 6.1). More specifically, ZIP codes 98841 and 98855 had the highest response rates, with each receiving over 70 responses (Figures 6.2 and 6.3).

## Economic Development

The survey included multiple questions on economic development to gauge the community's sentiments about Okanogan County's current economy and future. The first question asked, "What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan County?" The top response identified job opportunities as the biggest challenge, followed by "resistance to change" as the next most common concern (Figure 6.4). (A recurring theme throughout the survey was a perceived lack of urgency and overall resistance to improving the community.) Affordable housing also emerged as a major issue in the open-ended responses to this question (Figure 6.5).

Respondents prioritized improving the availability of affordable housing when asked which economic development activities the community needs most (Figure 6.8). Like resistance to change, affordable housing was a recurring theme across survey questions and open-ended responses. Another top concern was business retention, as many local businesses struggle to establish themselves in Okanogan County. Respondents emphasized the need for support systems to help businesses thrive and keep money circulating within the local economy (Figure 6.8).

Looking ahead, respondents identified the same top three priorities for the next five years: housing affordability, community planning, and business retention. They also highlighted the importance of actively recruiting and expanding businesses (Figure 6.9).

Overall, satisfaction with economic conditions in Okanogan County remains low. Several Likert-scale questions asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with various economic factors on a scale of one to five, with one being least satisfied and five being most satisfied (Figure 6.6). Most participants expressed dissatisfaction, particularly with housing availability, housing costs, and the overall cost of living. However, transportation infrastructure received somewhat better ratings, with only one-third of respondents reporting dissatisfaction. Most other topics fell within the dissatisfied to very dissatisfied range.

## Community

The Community section of the survey examined overall sentiments about living in Okanogan County, including opinions on its residents, available services, and more. Given the County's size and diversity, it is important to assess how different communities perceive various aspects of life, as perspectives can vary widely from one town to another.

To gauge community satisfaction, the survey included a series of Likert-scale questions similar to those in the Economic Development section. As in that section, respondents expressed dissatisfaction with many aspects of life in Okanogan County. Two of the most common concerns were the lack of living-wage jobs and the County's vulnerability to forest fires. However, outdoor recreational opportunities stood out as the most satisfying aspect of living in Okanogan County (Figure 6.7). These responses suggest that the County's outdoor lifestyle is highly valued by residents, making the preservation and utilization of natural spaces key to overall satisfaction.

Despite widespread dissatisfaction in many areas, responses indicated that Okanogan County is still considered a good place to live. More than two-thirds of respondents said they would be "likely" or "very likely" to recommend Okanogan County as a place to live, with similar responses regarding raising a family or visiting (Figure 6.10). However, the County received far less favorable ratings as a place to start or expand a business, reinforcing the concern that it is not business friendly.

Community resiliency (defined as the ability to hold up and recover from economic challenges) is another critical factor in any CEDS study. When asked, "How resilient do you consider your community to be?" 52.7% of respondents said Okanogan County is at risk, while only 35.9% believed it is resilient (Figure 6.12). These concerns may have been influenced by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which tested communities worldwide. Regardless, the responses suggest that many residents lack confidence in the County's ability to withstand disasters.

To better understand these concerns, the survey asked, "What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency?" The top three responses were low incomes, lack of career growth, and vacant buildings or storefronts (Figures 6.13 and 6.14). Given the recurring themes throughout the survey, these concerns are not surprising. Many respondents expressed a sense that there are too few opportunities (whether in wages, housing, or local business development). This sense of being economically disadvantaged contributes to a broader concern about the community's ability to recover from major disruptions or disasters.

### **Strengths**

Respondents highlighted community, access to nature and recreational activities, tourism and location, and local businesses as Okanogan County's strongest assets (Figure 6.15). These findings are consistent with earlier survey responses that emphasized the value residents place on these features.

### **Weaknesses**

Respondents identified the lack of living-wage jobs, affordable housing, and long-term planning as the most significant challenges facing the County (Figure 6.16). These concerns are consistent with earlier survey findings that highlighted gaps in these critical areas.

## **Opportunities**

Respondents highlighted increased industry and business opportunities, affordable housing, and expanded community centers, events, and resources as the top areas for growth (Figure 6.17). These priorities indicate that residents see meaningful untapped potential for both economic and community development in Okanogan County. In particular, expanding affordable housing may help attract young families and support a more stable, resilient local economy.

## **Threats**

Respondents cited wildfire and other natural disasters, crime and drug use, taxation and regulation, and housing availability and cost as the most pressing threats to the community (Figure 6.18). These concerns are common in rural areas, where residents often prioritize protecting their land and preserving local character. Many see government regulation, public safety issues, and environmental risks as direct threats to these values.

## **Perspective Differences Among Communities**

As Okanogan County is geographically large and socioeconomically diverse, the Economic Alliance must understand the varying perspectives of its residents. Using statistical analysis, PC identified key differences by examining responses to the geography question (Figure 6.1) alongside other survey data. This process, known as cross-tabulation, allows for a deeper understanding of regional variations. Importantly, the project team not only analyzed differences by geography but also highlighted cases in which there were statistically significant deviations from the regional average. More details on this process are provided in [Appendix B](#).

## **Central Region**

Survey respondents from the Central Region share the following characteristics:

- They identify “crime” and “state-level policies” as threats to community resiliency.
- They report satisfaction with the availability and cost of broadband internet.
- They express dissatisfaction with the appearance of buildings and public spaces.
- They cite the “lack of larger businesses” as the biggest challenge to improving Okanogan County’s economy.
- They report dissatisfaction with career advancement opportunities.
- They view the “lack of skilled workers for available jobs” as another threat to community resiliency.

## **Methow Valley**

Survey respondents from the Methow Valley share the following characteristics:

- They view “climate stressors” and “forest fires” as threats to the community’s resiliency.
- They report satisfaction with the appearance and functionality of buildings and public spaces.



- They cite the “lack of larger businesses” as the biggest challenge to improving Okanogan County’s economy.
- They report feeling “neutral” about retail and shopping opportunities in the community.
- They express strong satisfaction with outdoor recreational activities in their community.
- They identify the “availability of affordable housing” as an economic development need both now and in the next five years.
- They report satisfaction with regional attractions and visitor destinations in the community.
- They describe the community as “somewhat resilient.”
- They consider “disaster preparation and risk protection for businesses” as additional economic development activities needed now and in the next five years.
- They are “very likely” to recommend the community as a place to visit.
- They report satisfaction with common accommodations such as events and community centers.
- They report satisfaction with cultural activities in their community.

### ***North Region***

Survey respondents from the North Region share the following characteristics:

- They believe “planning for the future of the community” and “improved access to broadband internet” are important needs over the next five years.
- They express dissatisfaction with “education and training opportunities.”
- They report satisfaction with “outdoor recreational activities” in their community.

### ***East-CCT Reservation***

Survey respondents from the East-CCT Reservation share the following characteristics:

- They identify “tourism development services” are the most needed economic development activity at this time.
- They identify “climate stressors” as the biggest threat to the community’s resiliency.

### ***South Region***

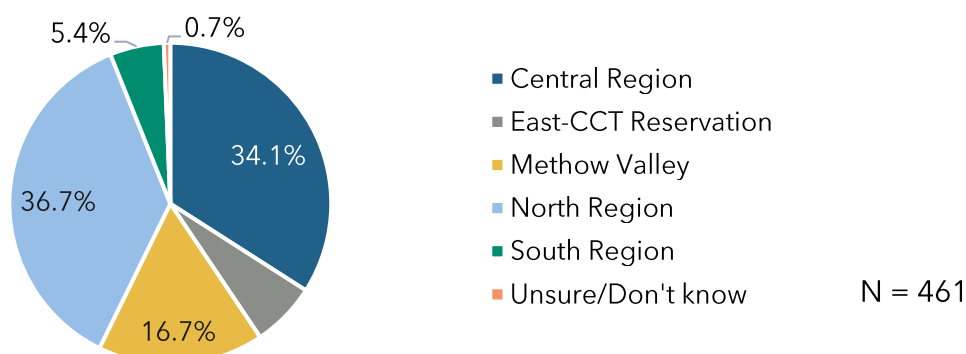
Survey respondents from the South Region share the following characteristics:

- They report strong dissatisfaction with how well the community meets expectations for employment in hands-on professions such as agriculture and manufacturing.
- They are “very unlikely” to recommend the community as a place to start or expand a business.
- They express dissatisfaction with retail shopping opportunities in the community.

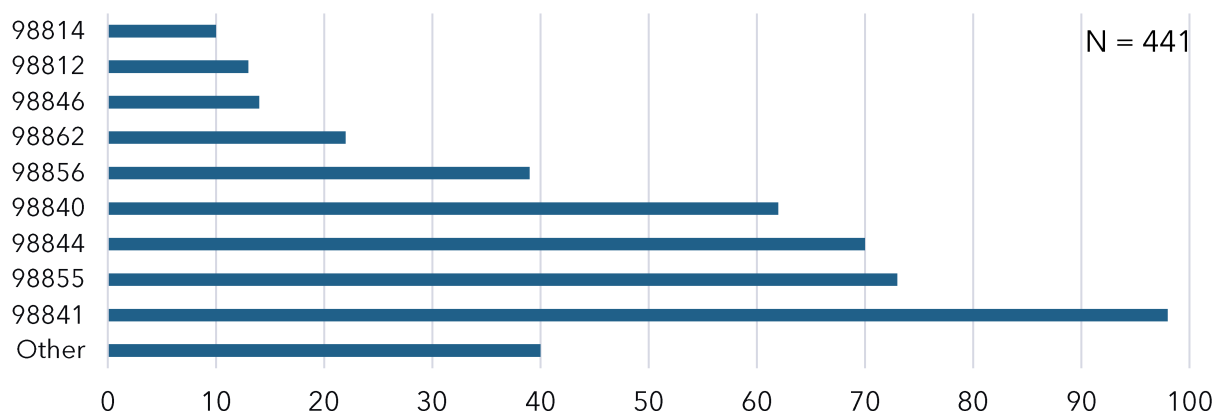
## Survey Responses

The following are the survey results from PC's CEDS [Community Survey](#).

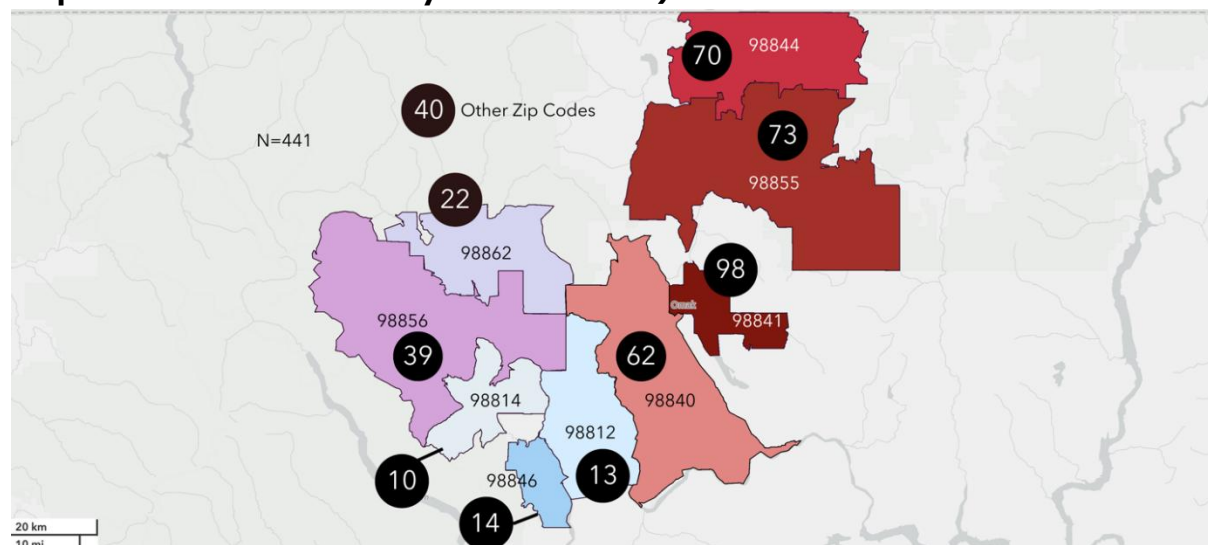
**Figure 6.1: Do you work and/or live in one of the following regions of Okanogan County?**



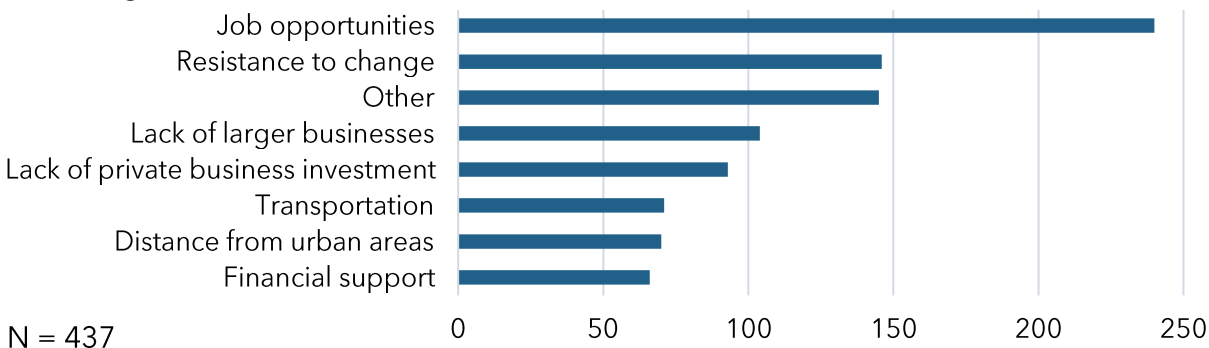
**Figure 6.2: In what ZIP code within the region do you spend the most time? (Based on either where you live or work)**



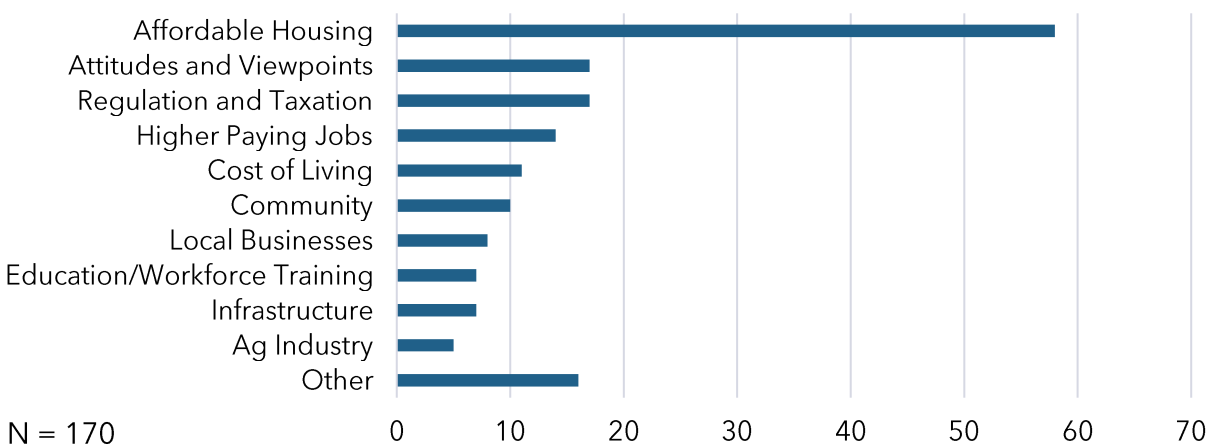
**Figure 6.3: In what ZIP code within the region do you spend the most time? (Heat Map based on either where you live or work)**



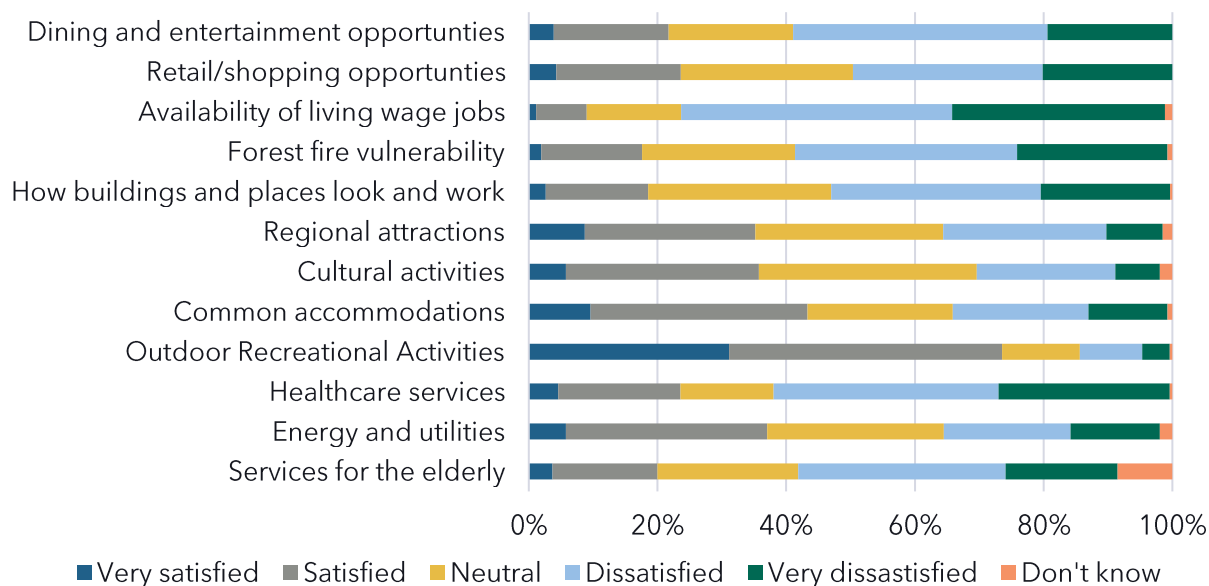
**Figure 6.4: What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan?**



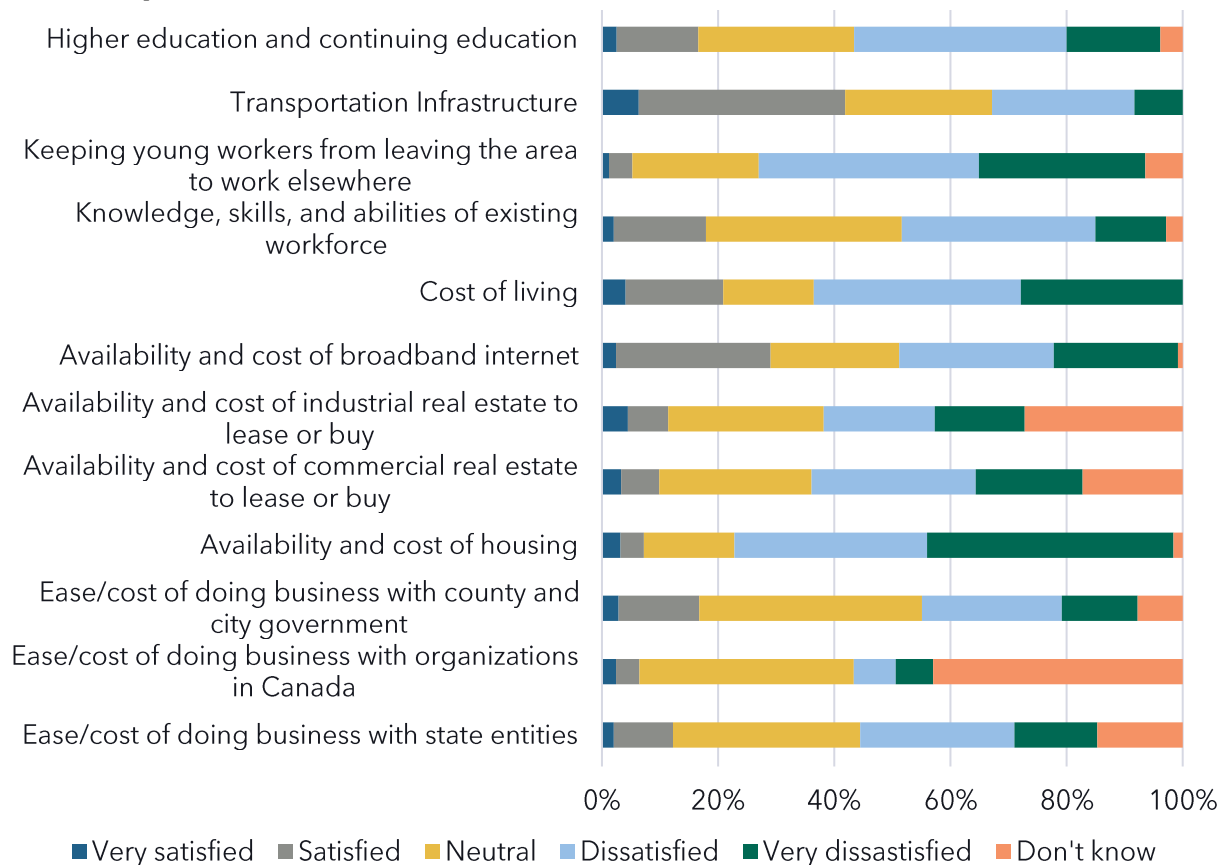
**Figure 6.5: What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan? (Open-ended)**



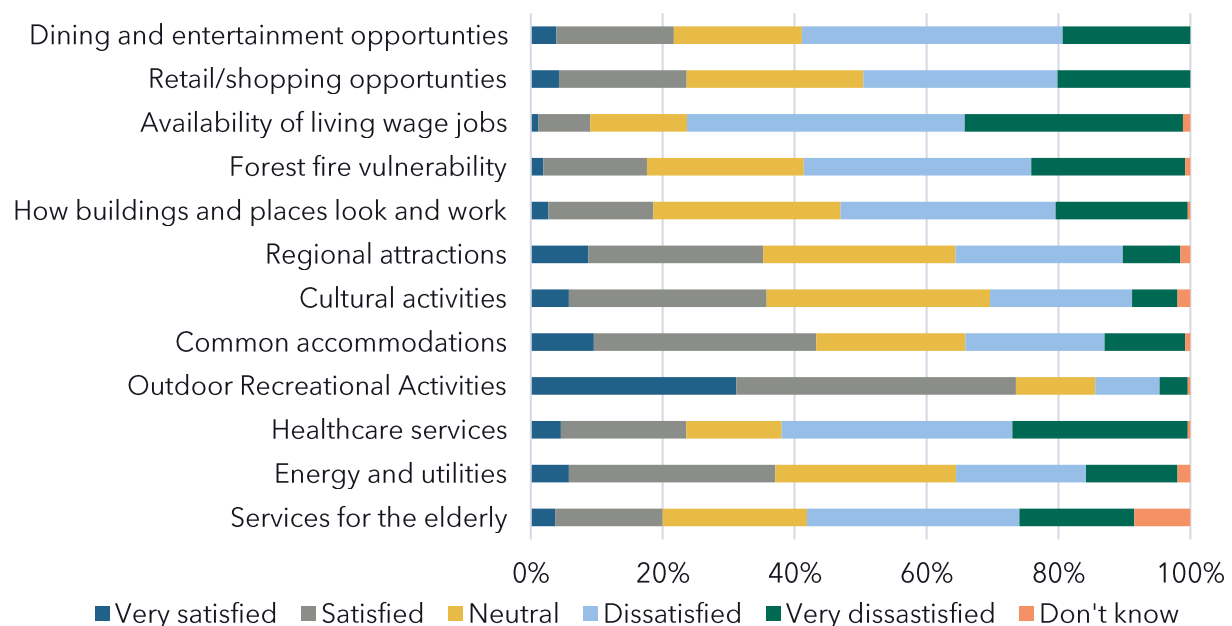
**Figure 6.7: How satisfied are you with the following community factors in your community?**



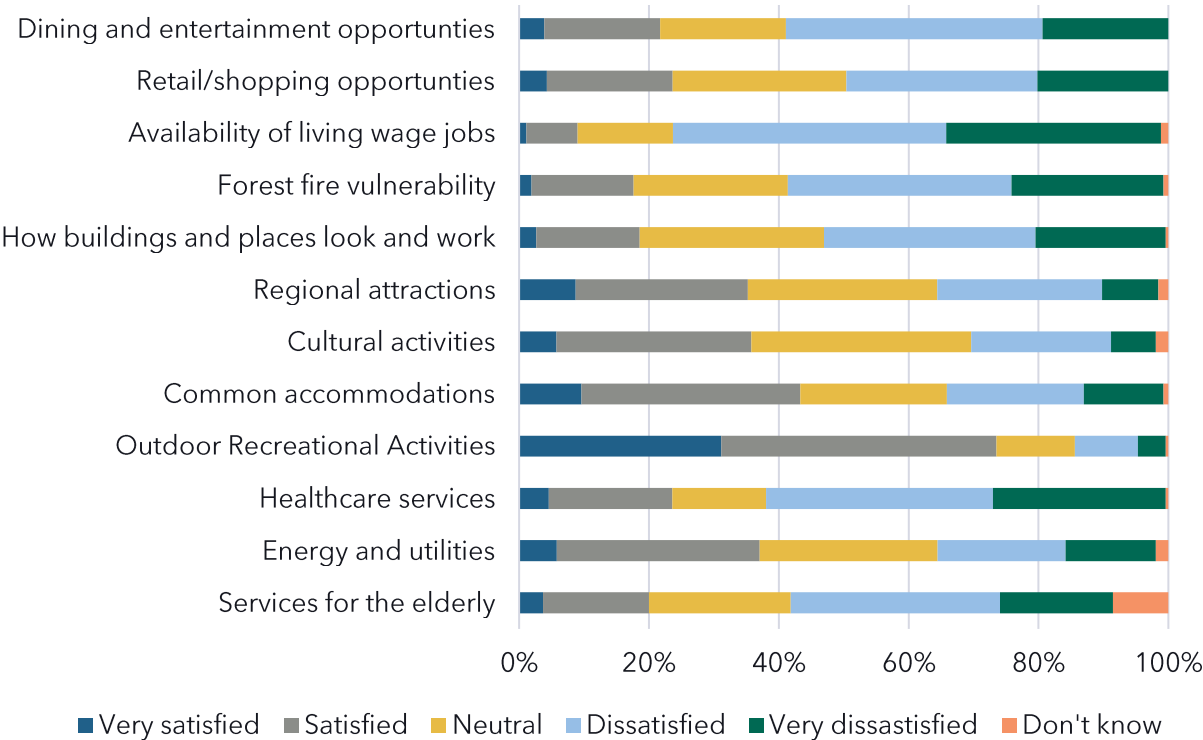
**Figure 6.6: How satisfied are you with the following economic factors in your community?**



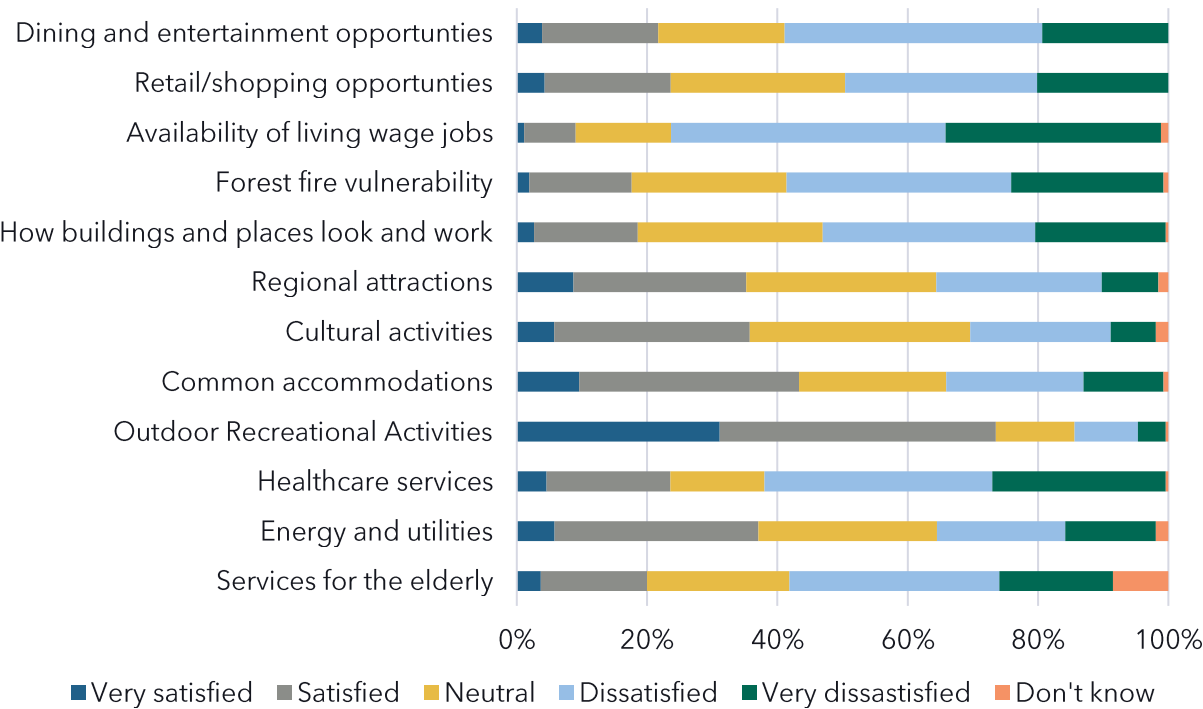
**Figure 6.8: What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now?**



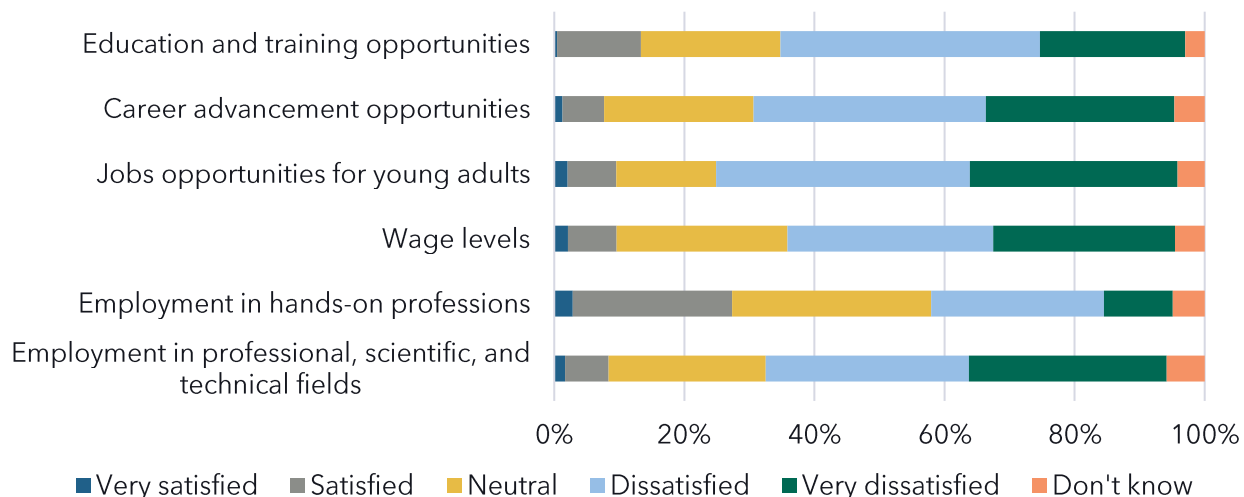
**Figure 6.9: What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need of over the next five years?**



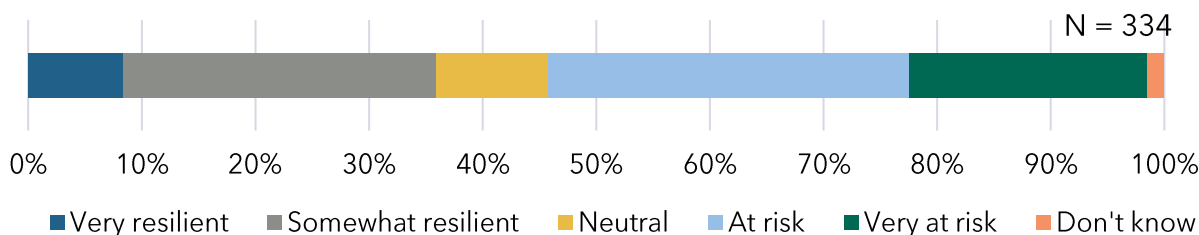
**Figure 6.10: I am \_\_\_\_\_ to recommend my community as a place for:**



**Figure 6.11: How well does your community meet your expectation in the following wage and employment fields?**



**Figure 6.12: Community resiliency describes the ability to hold up and recover from economic challenges. How resilient do you consider your community to be?**

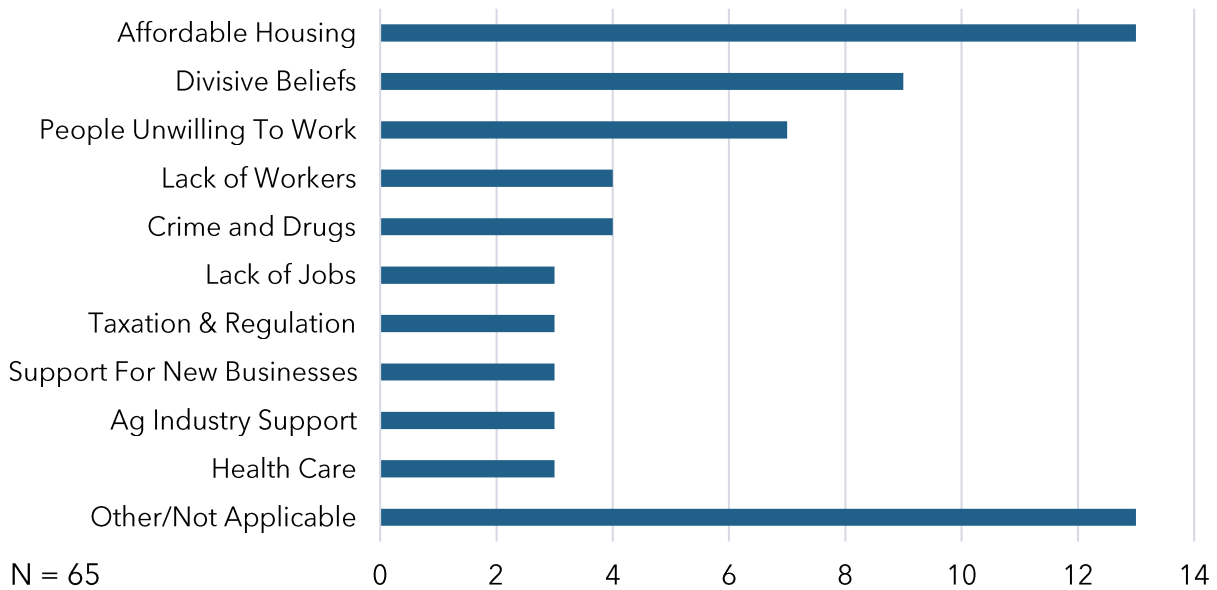


**Figure 6.13: What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency?**

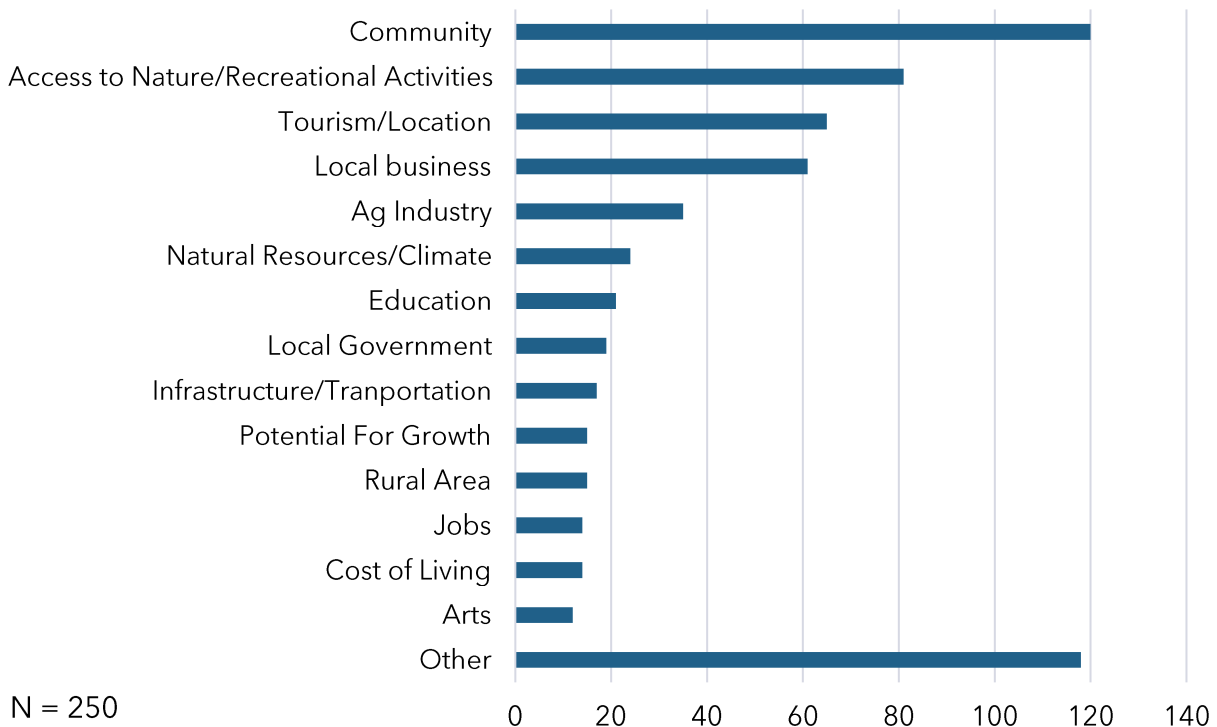




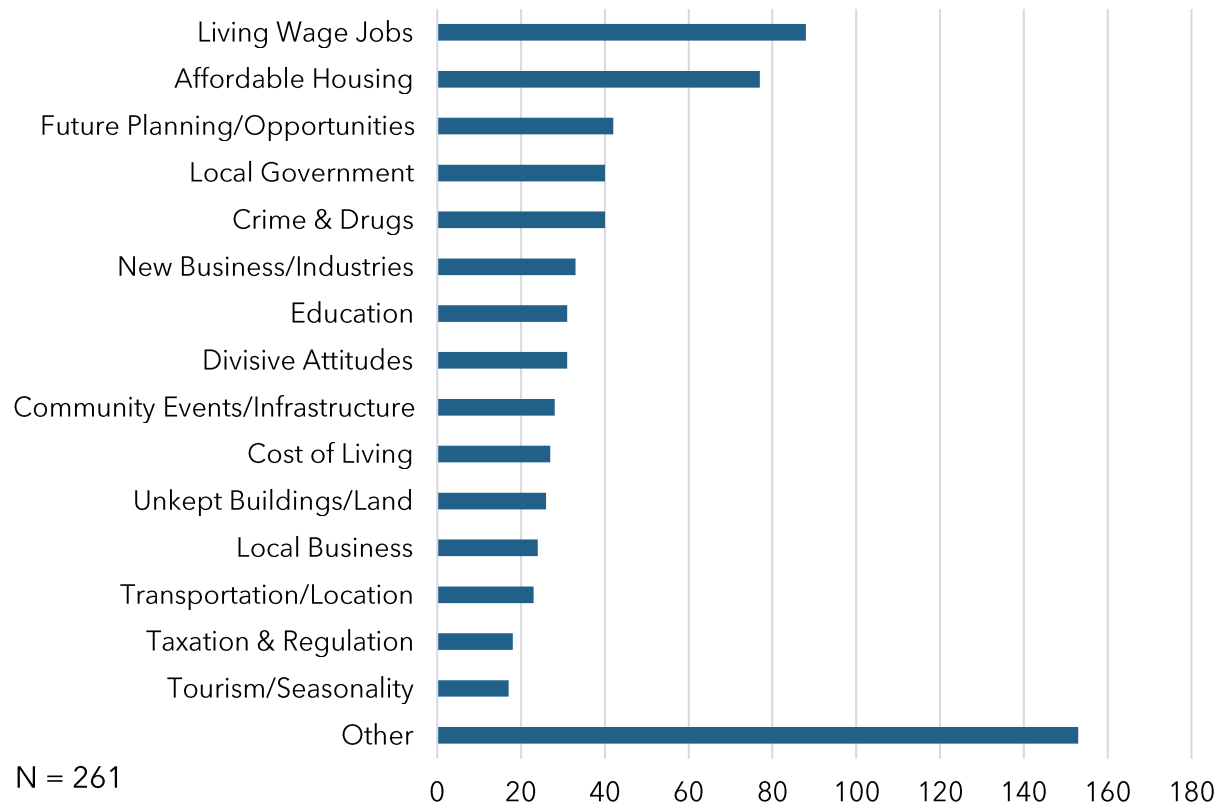
**Figure 6.14: What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? (Open-ended)**



**Figure 6.15: List up to three of the greatest strengths of your community's economy:**



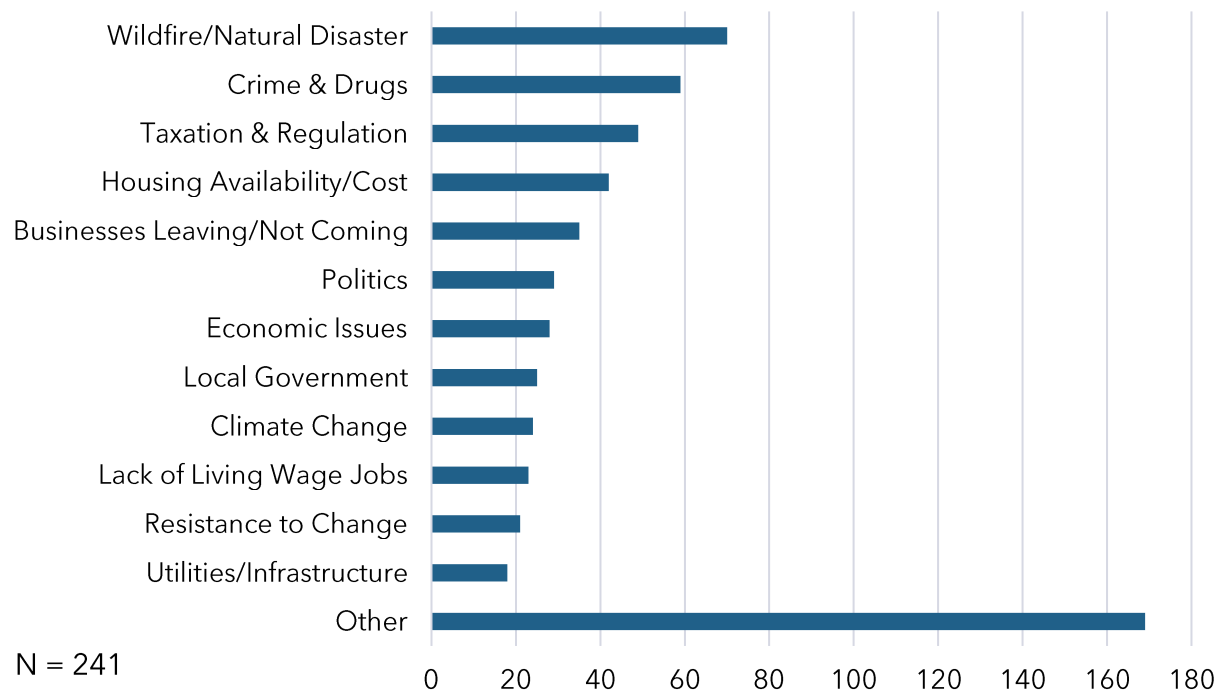
**Figure 6.16: List up to three of the greatest weaknesses of your community's economy**



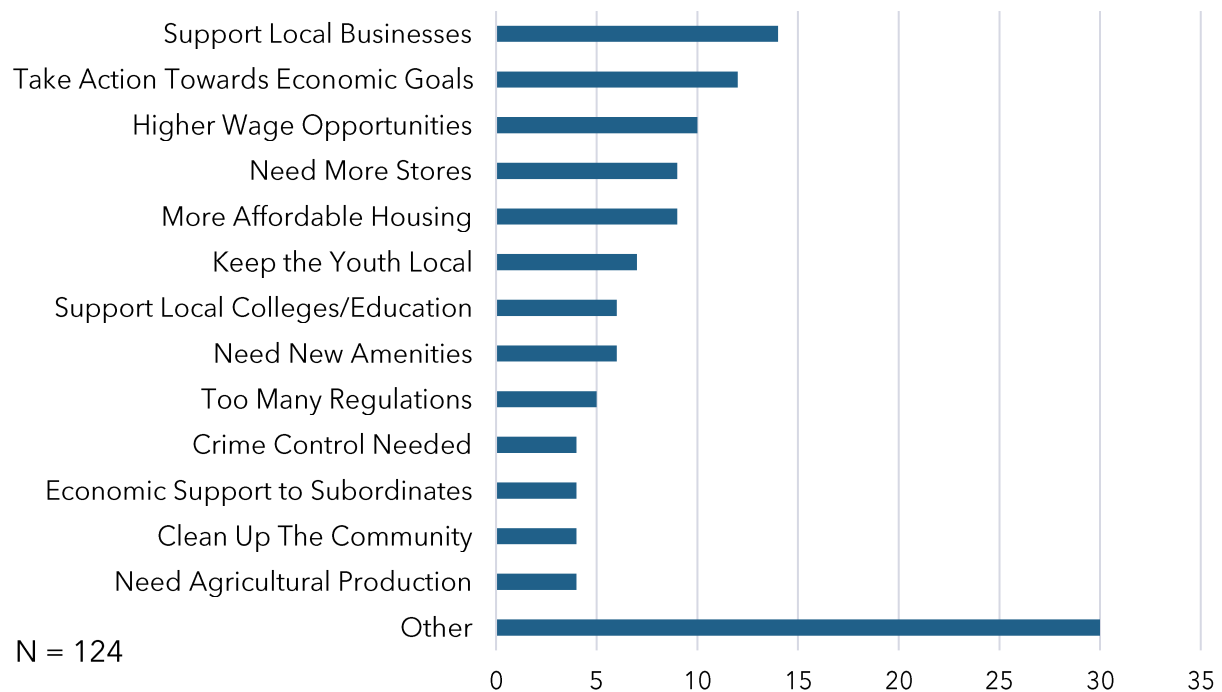
**Figure 6.17: List up to three opportunities for your community's economy**



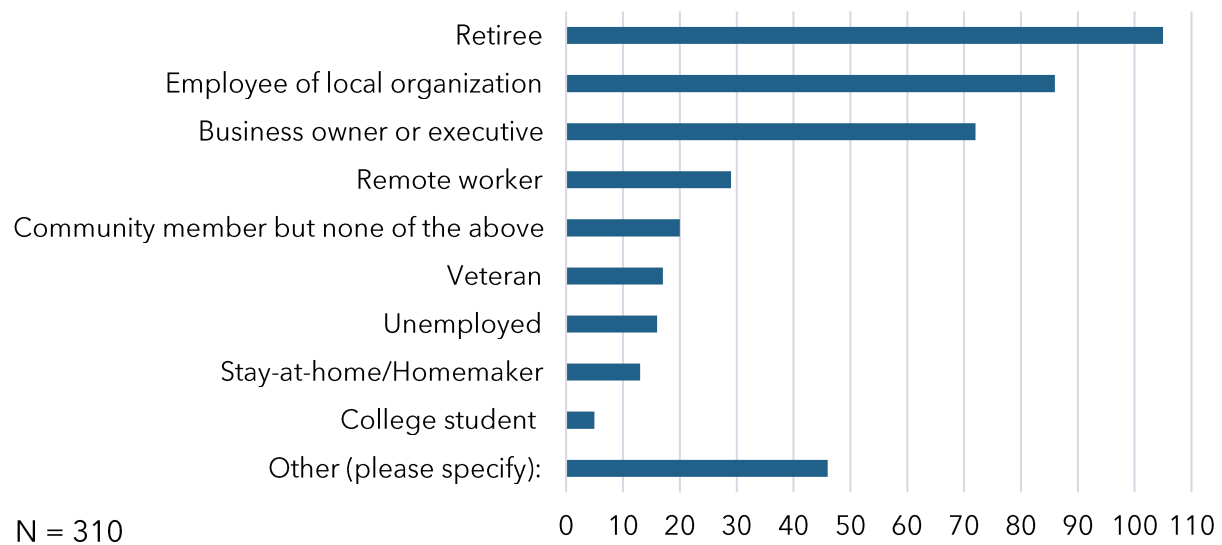
**Figure 6.18: List up to three threats for your community's economy**



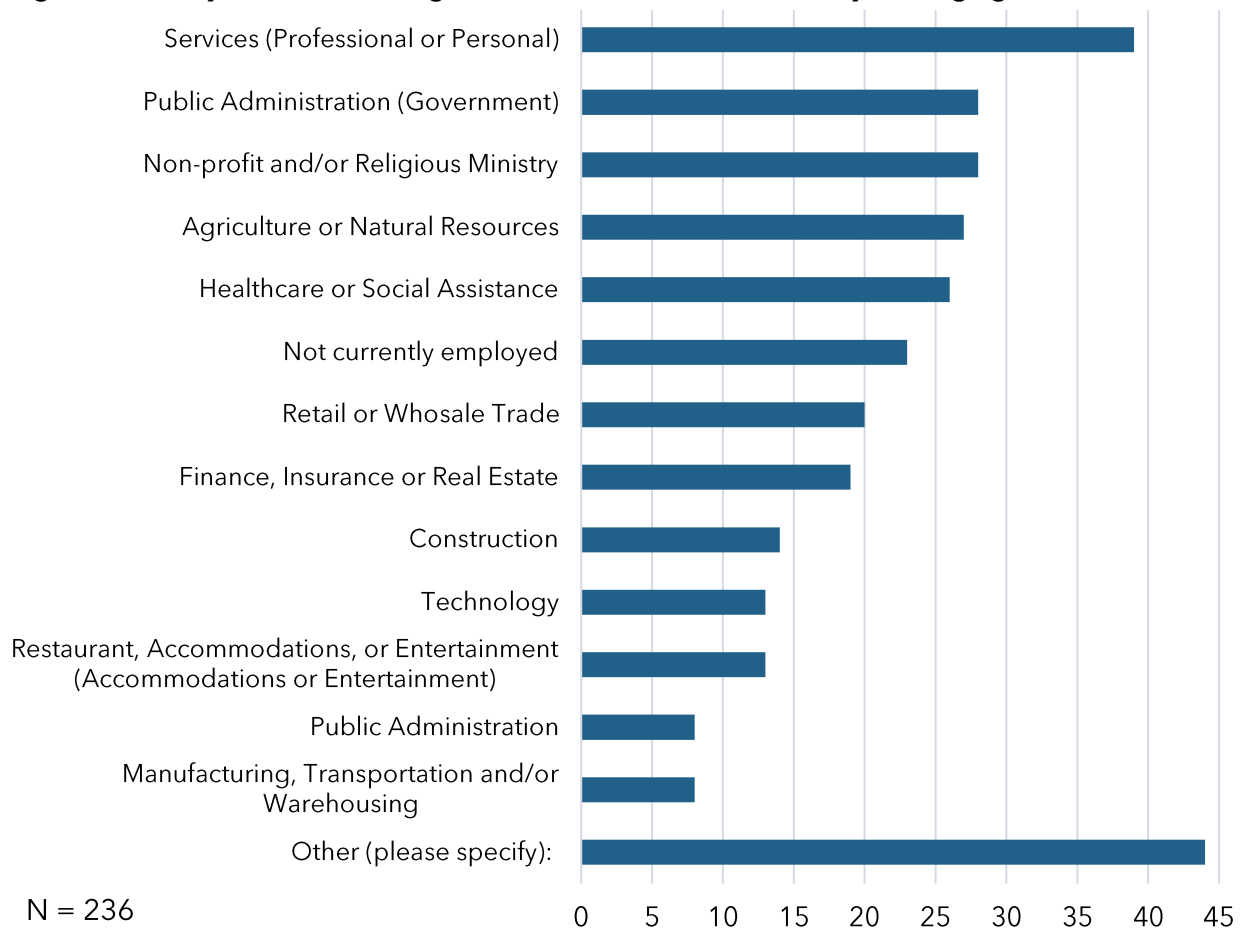
**Figure 6.19: Do you have other thoughts about the regional economy that you would like to share? (Open-ended)**



**Figure 6.20: What categories describe your work situation?**



**Figure 6.21: If you are working, what kind of business are you engaged in?**



## VII. Background Review

This summary highlights key documents and resources related to long-range planning for Okanogan County and its communities. Whenever possible, Points Consulting (PC) identified overlapping goals and key themes in existing publications.

### **Washington State Conservation and Recreation Plan 2023**

The 2023 Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan, published by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), provides a strategic framework for investing in public land conservation and outdoor recreation development.<sup>31</sup> Updated every five years to address evolving management challenges, the Plan ensures that grant programs align with statewide priorities and community needs. At the time of publication, Washington's population was 7.8 million, with an anticipated increase of 2 million residents by 2050, creating added demand for outdoor spaces. As the state's population continues to grow, the higher density and increased outdoor recreation use have strained resources, leading to environmental degradation and diminished user experiences. To address these challenges, the Plan incorporates extensive public input, drawing on over 12,000 survey responses and detailed analyses of outdoor recreation availability. The Plan outlines four priorities to address issues of conservation while maintaining outdoor public spaces. It also addresses collaboration with federal, state, and local agencies to meet these priorities. The four priorities are listed below:

1. Provide equitable access to outdoor recreation for all.
2. Protect natural and cultural resources through sustainable practices.
3. Demonstrate the importance of parks, natural areas, and recreation infrastructure.
4. Support connected and adaptable communities through outdoor recreation opportunities.

RCO administers grant funds for creating outdoor recreation opportunities along with facilitating other projects. Since RCO's creation in 1964, \$2.6 billion in grants have been provided to more than 10,000 projects across the state, contributing significantly to outdoor recreation and conservation efforts. Key programs administered by the RCO are listed below.

- Land and Water Conservation fund
- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program
- Youth Athletic Facilities program
- Firearms and Archery Range Recreation
- Habitat and Conservation lands

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<sup>31</sup> Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, *2023 Recreation and Conservation Plan*, accessed April 5, 2025, <https://rco.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SCORPExecSummary.pdf>.

In summary, the 2023 Washington State Recreation and Conservation Plan serves as a comprehensive guide to preserving the state's natural and cultural resources while enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities. By addressing the pressures of population growth and environmental degradation, the plan ensures that Washington's public lands remain accessible, sustainable, and beneficial for both residents and visitors.

### **Okanogan Country Tourism Destination Master Plan 2021**

The Okanogan County Tourism Destination Master Plan, created in March 2021, provides a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing the County's competitive position as a tourism destination. It also offers strategic guidance for future tourism development to meet the County's evolving needs.<sup>32</sup>

Tourism is a vital pillar of the County's economy, with outdoor recreation identified as a key driver. The Master Plan cites a 2020 report from the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office on the Economic Benefits of Outdoor Recreation in Washington highlighting the sector's significance. This report revealed that outdoor recreation supports more jobs (199,000) in Washington than the tech industry (191,000). In 2019, Washingtonians spent \$18.8 billion on trip-related expenses and \$7.6 billion on outdoor recreation equipment, bringing total spending to \$26.42 billion. Of that, \$222 million was spent on tourism-related activities in Okanogan County. In addition to tourism, agriculture and forestry remain key economic drivers.<sup>33</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted the tourism industry, but Okanogan County's vast outdoor spaces aligned well with post-quarantine travel trends. In summer 2020, the County's parks and outdoor recreation areas experienced a surge in visitors, aiding the industry's recovery.

The Master Plan also provides a historical perspective on Okanogan County. By 1900, the County was thriving, with 71 post offices established. The 1910s saw significant population growth, fueled by expanding industries like fruit farming. While the Great Depression affected the region, its impact was less severe than in many parts of the country. Many residents maintained self-sufficient lifestyles, and the robust apple industry continued to provide employment, mitigating economic hardship.

To establish a shared vision for sustainable tourism, the Master Plan outlines 14 guiding principles. These emphasize regional collaboration, preserving natural and historic assets, eco-friendly practices, enhancing tourism infrastructure, and balancing visitation with environmental sustainability.<sup>34</sup> Specific recommendations include:

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<sup>32</sup> Okanogan Country Tourism Council, *Okanogan County Tourism Destination Master Plan 2021*, Okanogan County, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://okanogancountry.com/2021-destination-marketing-plan>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 17.



- Expanding tourism facilities, particularly in eastern and northern areas of the County.
- Promoting authentic experiences tied to outdoor recreation and local history.
- Fostering stewardship through education and responsible tourism initiatives.
- Developing wayfinding tools and infrastructure to improve the visitor experience.

Recognizing the need for adequate tourism infrastructure, the Master Plan identifies areas where hotels and support facilities are needed. It also integrates the four stages of the visitor experience to enhance tourism offerings:

1. **Pre-Trip:** Strengthening marketing efforts and accessibility of visitor information.
2. **En-Route:** Improving wayfinding signage and travel amenities.
3. **On-Site/In-Region:** Offering diverse, immersive activities.
4. **Post-Trip:** Encouraging lasting impressions and word-of-mouth promotion.

In summary, the Master Plan positions the County to leverage its natural beauty, rich history, and economic potential to strengthen its tourism industry sustainably. By prioritizing collaboration, responsible stewardship, and strategic infrastructure development, the Master Plan ensures that Okanogan County remains a premier destination for outdoor recreation and cultural exploration. If effectively implemented, it promises long-term economic growth and an enhanced quality of life for both residents and visitors.

### **Okanogan County Broadband Action Team, Expansion of Broadband Internet Strategic Plan, June 2022**

The 2022 Okanogan County and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR) Broadband Action Team Expansion of Broadband Internet Strategic Plan presents a comprehensive analysis and business plan for deploying a broadband network to underserved communities across Okanogan County. The strategic plan identifies 24 priority areas for broadband expansion and provides detailed cost estimates, financial forecasts, and funding opportunities to assess the feasibility of this investment.<sup>35</sup>

Broadband infrastructure in the region remains limited. The Okanogan Public Utility District (PUD) and the Colville Confederated Tribes (CTCR) currently own and operate fiber facilities, but their networks have restricted service footprints. Much of the PUD's infrastructure was built through an ARRA BIP award, while recent CTCR efforts have focused on deploying fiber along major roads to connect Tribal communities. These existing networks serve as critical middle-mile backhaul points for the proposed expansion.

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<sup>35</sup> Okanogan County and Colville Confederated Tribes Broadband Action Team, *Okanogan County and Colville Confederated Tribes Expansion of Broadband Internet Strategic Plan 2022*, July 2022, [https://economic-alliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/OK.CCT\\_.BAT\\_.2022.pdf](https://economic-alliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/OK.CCT_.BAT_.2022.pdf).

Construction contractors and equipment suppliers provided detailed cost estimates for three service areas: the 24 identified priority areas, the Northeast Okanogan County and Palmer service areas, and an expanded South Pine Creek service area. Estimated costs are as follows:

- 24 Okanogan & CCT Service Areas: \$92.80 Million
- Northeast Okanogan & Palmer Service Areas: \$14.31 Million
- South Pine Creek (NTIA) Service Area: \$5.57 Million

These estimates are based on competitive contractor bids, adjusted for the region's challenging terrain and ongoing maintenance needs. The proposed fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) network aims to deliver broadband access to 100% of households and businesses in the designated areas.

The strategic plan includes five-year financial forecasts (pro-formas) based on projected network costs, subscriber growth, revenue, and expenses. Two funding scenarios (100% loan-based and 100% grant-based) were analyzed:

- **Loan-Based Funding:** This scenario projects a \$5 million negative net income by Year Five due to depreciation. Although the project reaches cash flow breakeven (excluding depreciation) over time, it remains financially unsustainable without external support.
- **Grant-Based Funding:** This model forecasts a \$2.38 million negative net income by Year Five, also due to depreciation. However, it begins accumulating cash reserves as early as Year Two, demonstrating the viability of grant funding.

The Strategic Plan also outlines funding opportunities from the USDA Rural Utilities Service, emphasizing grant and low-interest loan programs, including:<sup>36</sup>

- Rural Broadband Loan Program
- Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan Program
- Community Connect Grant Program
- ReConnect Loan & Grant Program
- Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program
- Electric Loan Program

The Strategic Plan presents a transformative opportunity for the region. By bridging the digital divide, it addresses critical connectivity gaps while fostering economic growth, enhanced public services, and a higher quality of life for residents. However, securing substantial grant funding will be essential to offset initial costs and ensure the project's long-term sustainability.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

## **Colville Confederated Tribes (CTCR) Comprehensive Plan, 2020–2040**

The 2020–2040 CTCR Comprehensive Plan is the first major Comprehensive Planning update since the existing General Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the Colville Business Council (CBC) in August of 1988.<sup>37</sup> A Comprehensive Plan serves as a tool for community accountability and helps guide future decisions for the region.

CTCR Planning aimed to create a plan that aligns with local communities by incorporating both Urban & Regional Planning best practices and locally grounded planning approaches. In Washington State, many of CTCR’s neighboring communities are required to base their planning efforts on the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA).

As a sovereign Indian Tribe, CTCR is not bound by the state-mandated GMA. However, CTCR strives to apply best practices across all areas of the organization. Recognizing the value of the GMA framework, the CTCR Comprehensive Plan incorporates key GMA guidelines while adapting them to meet the Tribe’s unique needs. The plan focuses on the following interconnected areas:

### **Land Use and Growth Management:**

- Urban Growth
- Reduce Sprawl
- Property Rights

### **Infrastructure and Mobility:**

- Transportation
- Transportation Network
- Forest Roads

### **Community Development:**

- Housing
- Economic Development
- Open Space and Recreation
- Citizen Participation and Coordination
- Public Facilities and Services

### **Natural Resources and Environmental Stewardship:**

- Timber/Forestry
- Fisheries
- Environment
- Historic Preservation

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<sup>37</sup> Colville Confederated Tribes, *Comprehensive Plan 2020–2040*, accessed November 21, 2024, [https://www.cctplanning.com/\\_files/ugd/79c0f4\\_9d968a6584104c34b1ab6559f0a0b04e.pdf](https://www.cctplanning.com/_files/ugd/79c0f4_9d968a6584104c34b1ab6559f0a0b04e.pdf).

The 2020–2040 Comprehensive Plan reflects a forward-thinking approach to community development, rooted in cultural preservation and environmental stewardship. By integrating modern planning frameworks with Indigenous values, the plan establishes a foundation for sustainable growth and resilience for future generations.

### **Okanogan County Comprehensive Plan 2021**

The Comprehensive Plan guides policy decisions for future growth and development in Okanogan County over the next 20 years.<sup>38</sup> This plan was created using the following guiding principles:

- Sustaining agriculture, forestry, tourism, and commerce that provide a wide range of family-supporting employment opportunities.
- Honoring and supporting traditional uses and lifestyles while accommodating orderly development.
- Supporting a broad range of housing options, complemented by efficient public services.
- Ensuring the wise and efficient use of water to protect senior water rights and ecosystems while supporting sustainable development.
- Recognizing distinct communities in Okanogan County through sub-area plans.

As previously mentioned, agriculture and forestry are important economic drivers for the County and serve as the foundation of the region's economy. To advance economic development, Okanogan County collaborates with agencies such as the Economic Alliance. These partnerships address critical issues such as infrastructure, development space, and marketing. This supports growing industries and tourism while also diversifying the agriculture, timber, and mining sectors.

To meet transportation and infrastructure needs over the next two decades, the County has developed guidelines that closely mirror those in Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA). While the County is not required to fully comply with the GMA, it has chosen to align with its principles to shape its transportation framework. Efforts will focus on maintaining and improving road networks to enhance connectivity within and between communities.

The County also recognizes the importance of maintaining its eight airports. Although commercial air services are not currently available, these airports play a vital role in emergency operations, such as transporting critical supplies and injured individuals to specialized medical facilities. They may also offer infrastructure to support compatible industrial and commercial enterprises.

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<sup>38</sup> Okanogan County, *Okanogan County Comprehensive Plan 2021*, Okanogan County Washington, accessed November 12, 2025, [https://cms9files.revize.com/okanoganwa/Document\\_Center/Department/pLANNING/Comp%20Plan/Comp%20Plan%20adopted/Okanogan%20County%20Comprehensive%20Plan.pdf](https://cms9files.revize.com/okanoganwa/Document_Center/Department/pLANNING/Comp%20Plan/Comp%20Plan%20adopted/Okanogan%20County%20Comprehensive%20Plan.pdf)

Given the size of Okanogan County, it is crucial to locate essential services close to where residents live. Service centers should be designed to minimize the need for long commutes for basic necessities. The development of neighborhood commercial centers will depend on the needs of area residents and landowners.

Agriculture and forestlands remain vital contributors to the County's economy. The Comprehensive Plan prioritizes the preservation of these lands and emphasizes the importance of supporting them to ensure their continued role in both economic and environmental sustainability.

Through thoughtful planning and collaboration, the Comprehensive Plan aims to balance economic growth, environmental stewardship, and community well-being to shape a prosperous future for Okanogan County.

### **Okanogan County Comprehensive Economic Development & Recovery Strategy (CEDRS) June 2021**

The Economic Alliance conducted the most recent iteration of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in 2021. This current document serves as the 2025 update to that version. Much of the information from the 2021 CEDRS remains relevant and is reflected throughout this report. Four years ago, Government and Agriculture were the largest employment sectors. This trend continues today. However, the 2021 version placed greater emphasis on the COVID-19 pandemic, as it was conducted during its peak.

In the SWOT analysis section, there are notable similarities between the two reports. For example, both the 2021 version and this update identify youth retention as a threat. One key difference, however, is the perception of the local housing market. In the 2021 report, a "wide range of housing options and pricing" was listed as a strength, while "increased housing prices and reduced affordability" was listed as a threat.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, PC's research and stakeholder meetings indicate that no one currently views any aspect of the housing market as a strength. While many concerns from the previous report persist, the shift in housing affordability is a significant change between the two versions.

The 2021 report outlines the Core Economic Development Priorities as follows:

- Business and Industry Development
- Downtown and Main Street Revitalization
- Tourism Market Recovery
- Opportunity Zone (OZ) Investment
- External and Internal Marketing

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<sup>39</sup> "Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)," The Economic Alliance of Okanogan County, June 2021, 27, <https://economic-alliance.com/demographics/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy-ceds/>.

These priorities share a common goal of increasing employment, expanding business opportunities, and supporting tourism recovery. PC's discussions with stakeholders suggest that tourism has largely rebounded since the pandemic lows noted in the 2021 report. However, many priorities remain consistent with ongoing community concerns. Stakeholders continue to emphasize the need for downtown revitalization and small business support.

Additionally, the 2021 report identifies Supporting Opportunities, including:

- Affordable Housing
- Broadband Internet Expansion
- Wildfire Risk Management
- Health Care Stabilization
- Community Infrastructure

Some of these areas have seen progress since 2021. For instance, the Colville Tribe is set to break ground on a broadband project in 2025, which will provide fiber internet access to the Tribe. They also now have two medical clinics—one operational and the other expected to open within a year. However, the lack of affordable housing remains a significant challenge. Although organizations are working to address this issue through community land trusts and other initiatives, progress has been slow.

Another notable recommendation in the 2021 report is the need for performance metrics to track economic progress. It suggests updating key indicators such as annual population growth, unemployment rate, median household income, health insurance coverage, and average wages. During PC's stakeholder meetings, participants also recommended tracking additional metrics, such as the number of new businesses started and housing units built. These measures could provide a clearer picture of economic progress and highlight areas requiring further support.

## Retail Strategies for Okanogan Communities, 2022

In 2022, Retail Academy conducted research on the retail market for various communities in Okanogan County, including:

- **Cities and Towns:** Brewster, Conconully, Coulee Dam, Elmer City, Nespelem, Oroville, Omak, Okanogan, Pateros, Riverside, Tonasket, Twisp, Winthrop
- **Broader Regions:** Okanogan County, Colville Reservation

Each location has an individual report containing key demographic and economic indicators, such as population, median household income, and homeownership rates. In addition to these standard data points, the reports provide unique insights into consumer spending patterns and visitor trends for each area.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Okanogan County Communities," The Economic Alliance of Okanogan County, accessed February 19, 2025, <https://economic-alliance.com/site-selection/communities/>.



A particularly valuable aspect of this research is its analysis of potential business opportunities and the specific requirements for attracting retail chains to each community. For example, the Conconully report identified IGA as a strong candidate for the area but outlined specific site selection criteria, including:

- A minimum retail space of 15,000 square feet
- A local population of at least 30,000
- An average household income of \$50,000

Each city's report notes recommended retail chains and business types based on local economic and demographic conditions. While these reports do not include detailed implementation strategies, they nevertheless provide substantial information on the retail market landscape and opportunities for business development in each community.

## Appendix A: Interviews

Points Consulting (PC) conducted interviews with the following Okanogan Community members that were recommended by The Economic Alliance:

- Stephanie Palmer, Okanogan County planner
- Sarah Brown, TwispWorks Executive Director
- Rocklynn Culp, Winthrop Planner
- Michael Porter, Omak School District Superintendent
- Dale Schrock, Colville Housing Authority Executive Director
- Crystal Gage, Confluence Health Practice Manager
- John McReynolds, North Valley Hospital District CEO
- Howard Zosel, Zosel Timber
- Hans Smith, Mayor of Twisp, WA
- Wayne Turner, Mayor of Okanogan City, WA
- Jarred-Michael Erickson, Colville Confederated Tribes Chairman
- Colville Tribe Council
- Lisa Bauer, Okanogan City Council Member
- Todd McDaniel, Omak City Administrator
- Don Linnertz, Community Foundation North Central Washington
- Nancy Nash-Méndez, Executive Director Housing Authority of Okanogan Housing
- Brent Timm, General Manager, TRANGO
- Scott Graham-Three Rivers Hospital CEO
- Sarah Jo Lightner, Methow Arts Executive Director
- Kurt Danison, Omak Planner, board member
- Anthony Popelier, Oroville Reman & Reload
- Andy Hover, Okanogan County Commissioner
- Nick Timm, Okanogan County Commissioner
- Jon Neal, Okanogan County Commissioner
- Steve Quick, Okanogan City Superintendent
- Beth Stroshane, Economic Alliance Board member
- Maria Lassila, Economic Alliance Board and manager of local movie theatre
- Anna Marie Dalbey, Economic Alliance Board member and realtor
- Nancy Zimmerman-Boord, Grand Coulee Chamber of Commerce Director
- Tiffany Circle, Colville Tribe IT
- Kayla Wells, WSU Okanogan County Extension
- Simon Windell, Methow Housing Trust, CFO
- Jenn Tate, Okanogan County Tourism Council Consultant
- Kelly Ross, City of Elmer, WA Clerk/Treasurer
- Jimmer Tillman, City of Elmer, WA Maintenance/ Water specialist
- Jord Wilson, City Administrator, Pateros, WA

## Appendix B: Statistical Tables by Geography

For the following tables asterisk are used to identify statistical significance levels, where “\*\*\*” is significant at the 99% level and “\*\*” is significant at the 95% level.

**Table B1: Central Region Survey Question Responses**

Question Broad	Question Specific	Overall Survey Response	Central Region Response	Difference
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	Crime	34.2%	53.6%	19.4%
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Improved access to broadband internet	30.6%	19.6%	(10.9%)
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? **	Improved access to broadband internet	38.0%	26.7%	(11.3%)
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	State-level policies	26.1%	36.4%	10.2%
How satisfied are you with the availability and cost of broadband internet in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	29.3%	39.3%	10.0%
How satisfied are you with how buildings and places look and work in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	18.6%	6.7%	(11.9%)
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? *	Climate stressors	15.3%	8.2%	(7.1%)
What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan County? *	Lack of larger businesses	23.9%	31.1%	7.2%
How well does your community meet your expectations in career advancement opportunities? *	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	8.0%	11.5%	3.5%
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? *	Forest Fires	32.4%	23.6%	(8.8%)
If you are working, what kind of business are you engaged in? *	Public Administration (Government)	14.1%	21.7%	7.7%
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? *	Workers that don't have skills needed for available jobs	23.7%	31.8%	8.1%

What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? *	Services for the elderly	42.9%	34.8%	(8.1%)
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? *	Services for the elderly	44.7%	37.1%	(7.6%)

Source: Points Consulting Community Survey, 2024

**Table B2: North Region Survey Question Responses**

Question Broad	Question Specific	Overall Survey Response	North Region Response	Difference
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? **	Tourism development services	28.2%	44.3%	16.0%
Community resiliency describes the ability to hold up and recover from economic challenges. How resilient do you consider your community to be? **	Somewhat Resilient/Very Resilient	36.5%	27.3%	(9.1%)
How satisfied are you with the availability and cost of housing in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	7.3%	12.8%	5.4%
What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan County? **	Resistance to change	31.5%	41.0%	9.5%
How well does your community meet your expectations in education and training opportunities? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	13.7%	10.6%	(3.1%)
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? **	Networking for existing and upcoming businesspeople	21.0%	31.3%	10.3%
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	Population decline	6.3%	10.8%	4.5%
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Transporting products to customers internationally	6.8%	11.5%	4.8%
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Planning for the future of the community	55.3%	64.6%	9.3%
How satisfied are you with the availability and cost of	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	11.9%	20.3%	8.4%

commercial real estate to lease or buy in your community? **				
How satisfied are you with the availability and cost of industrial real estate to lease or buy in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	15.6%	25.0%	9.4%
How satisfied are you with outdoor recreational activities in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	73.8%	68.8%	(5.0%)
What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan County? **	Other	37.2%	24.8%	(12.4%)
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Tourism development services	28.8%	39.2%	10.4%
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Business recruitment and expansion	47.9%	59.2%	11.3%
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	Lack of quality local leadership	33.9%	43.8%	9.9%
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? *	Improved access to broadband internet	38.0%	45.0%	7.0%
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? *	Improved access to broadband internet	30.6%	36.9%	6.3%
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? *	Services for the elderly	42.9%	50.8%	7.8%
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? *	Availability of affordable housing	70.6%	60.3%	(10.3%)
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? *	Lack of career growth potential	43.5%	50.0%	6.5%
If you are working, what kind of business are you engaged in? (Select best matching option; if there are multiple industries select the one where you spend the most time) *	Construction	7.0%	1.4%	(5.6%)

What categories best describe your work situation? *	Retiree	35.7%	42.2%	6.5%
How satisfied are you with dining and entertainment opportunities in your community? *	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	21.7%	20.9%	(0.8%)
How satisfied are you with regional attractions/visitor destinations in your community? *	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	35.8%	31.6%	(4.2%)
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? *	Business recruitment and expansion	46.7%	52.7%	6.0%
How satisfied are you with the ease/cost of doing business with county and city government in your community? *	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	18.1%	11.4%	(6.7%)

Source: Points Consulting Community Survey, 2024

**Table B3: East CCT-Reservation Survey Question Responses**

Question Broad	Question Specific	Overall Survey Response	East CCT-Reservation Response	Difference
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? *	Tourism development services	28.2%	5.0%	(23.2%)
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? *	Climate stressors	15.3%	0.0%	(15.3%)

Source: Points Consulting Community Survey, 2024

**Table B4: South Region Survey Question Responses**

Questions Broad	Question Specific	Overall Survey Response	South Region Response	Difference
If you are working, what kind of business are you engaged in? (Select best matching option; if there are multiple industries select the one where you spend the most time) **	Finance, Insurance or Real Estate	9.5%	44.4%	34.9%
How well does your community meet your expectations in employment in hands-on professions (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, maintenance/repair, etc.)? *	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	28.8%	38.5%	9.7%
I am _____ to recommend my community as a place to start or expand a business. *	Somewhat Likely/Very Likely	39.8%	11.8%	(28.1%)

I am _____ to recommend my community as a place to visit. *	Somewhat Likely/Very Likely	79.6%	58.8%	(20.8%)
How satisfied are you with retail/shopping opportunities in your community? *	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	23.6%	0.0%	(23.6%)
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? *	Crime	34.2%	11.1%	(23.1%)

Source: Points Consulting Community Survey, 2024

**Table B5: Methow Valley Area Survey Question Responses**

Question Broad	Question Specific	Overall Survey Response	Methow Valley Response	Difference
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	Crime	34.2%	1.8%	(32.4%)
How satisfied are you with how buildings and places look and work in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	18.6%	50.0%	31.4%
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	Climate stressors	15.3%	42.9%	27.5%
What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan County? **	Lack of larger businesses	23.9%	6.9%	(17.0%)
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	Forest Fires	32.4%	60.7%	28.3%
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? **	Business recruitment and expansion	46.7%	23.0%	(23.7%)
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Business recruitment and expansion	47.9%	15.0%	(32.9%)
What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan County? **	Other	37.2%	65.3%	28.0%
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Tourism development services	28.8%	8.3%	(20.5%)
How satisfied are you with retail/shopping opportunities in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	23.6%	34.6%	11.0%
How satisfied are you with dining and entertainment opportunities in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	21.7%	41.3%	19.6%



What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	Lack of quality local leadership	33.9%	12.5%	(21.4%)
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? **	Tourism development services	28.2%	6.6%	(21.7%)
How satisfied are you with outdoor recreational activities in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	31.3%	67.4%	36.1%
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Availability of affordable housing	66.5%	90.0%	23.5%
How satisfied are you with regional attractions/visitor destinations in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	35.8%	69.6%	33.8%
Community resiliency describes the ability to hold up and recover from economic challenges. How resilient do you consider your community to be? **	Somewhat Resilient	36.5%	54.5%	18.1%
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? **	State level policies	26.1%	8.9%	(17.2%)
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Keeping businesses in the area (that is, preventing businesses from leaving or closing	53.2%	30.0%	(23.2%)
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Network for existing and upcoming businesspeople	20.9%	5.0%	(15.9%)
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? **	Disaster preparation and risk protection for businesses	15.6%	27.9%	12.3%
I am _____ to recommend my community as a place to visit. **	Somewhat Likely/Very Likely	79.6%	91.1%	11.4%
How satisfied are you with the availability and cost of housing in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	7.3%	0.0%	(7.3%)
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? **	Disaster preparation and risk protection for businesses	15.9%	28.3	12.5%

What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? **	Availability of affordable housing	70.6%	85.2%	14.6%
How satisfied are you with common accommodations (e.g., parks, events, community centers, etc.) in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	43.6%	61.7%	18.1%
How satisfied are you with cultural activities in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	36.5%	57.4%	21.0%
How satisfied are you with the ease/cost of doing business with state entities in your community? **	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	14.4%	23.1%	8.7%
What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan County? *	Resistance to change	33.5%	20.8%	(12.7%)
What economic development activities do you think your community will be the most in need over the next 5 years? *	Addition of more community activities	34.4%	18.3%	(16.1%)
How well does your community meet your expectations in education and training opportunities? *	Dissatisfied	13.7%	18.9%	5.2%
How satisfied are you with the ease/cost of doing business with county and city government in your community? *	Neutral	18.1%	21.4%	3.3%
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? *	Microloans	15.6%	24.6%	9.0%
If you are working, what kind of business are you engaged in? (Select best matching option; if there are multiple industries select the one where you spend the most time) *	Nonprofit and/or Religious Ministry	14.1%	23.1%	9.0%
How satisfied are you with energy and utilities in your community? *	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	37.8%	55.6%	17.8%
What do you think is the biggest challenge for improving the economy in Okanogan County? *	Financial Support	15.2%	6.9%	(8.2%)
I am _____ to recommend my community as a place to retire. *	Somewhat Likely/Very Likely	59.0%	45.6%	(13.4%)
I am _____ to recommend my community as a place to live. *	Somewhat Likely/very Likely	65.4%	76.3%	10.9%
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? *	Population Decline	6.3%	0.0%	(6.3%)

What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? *	Networking	21.0%	9.8%	(11.2%)
What are the biggest threats to the community's resiliency? *	Vacant buildings/storefronts	40.2%	26.8%	(13.5%)
How satisfied are you with transportation infrastructure (e.g., highways, bridges, airports, etc.) in your community? *	Satisfied/Very Satisfied	41.9%	55.8%	13.9%
What economic development activities is your community most in need of right now? *	More community activities	38.3%	24.6%	(13.7%)

Source: Points Consulting Community Survey, 2024

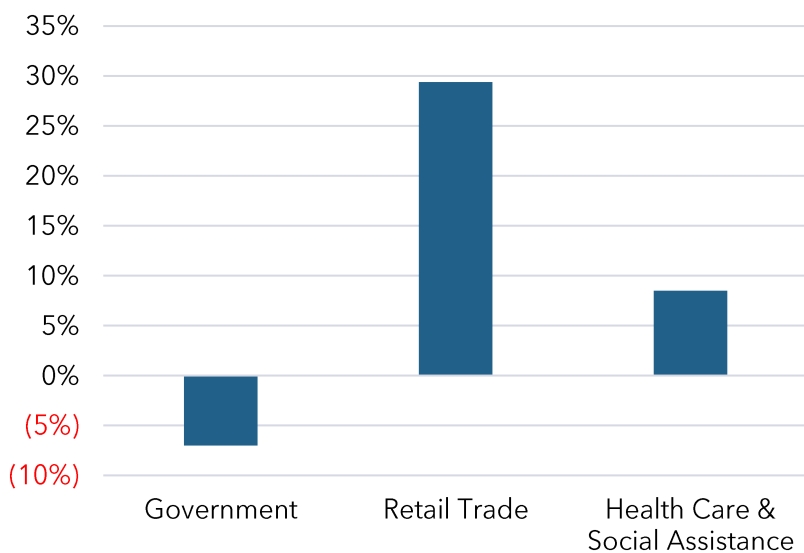
## Appendix C: Regional Summaries

### Central Region

In the Central Region, employment in Retail Trade has grown 29.4% since 2014, while Government (the largest employment sector) has experienced a 7.0% decline over the past decade (Figure C1). Despite this, as shown in Figure C6, the region's labor force participation rate remains the same as Okanogan County's (52.9%). This stability may be partially attributed to a 3.6% population increase since 2010 (Figure C3). The Central Region's median age is 42.7, four years higher than the state median of 38.0 (Figure C4).

#### Central Region Top Employment Sectors

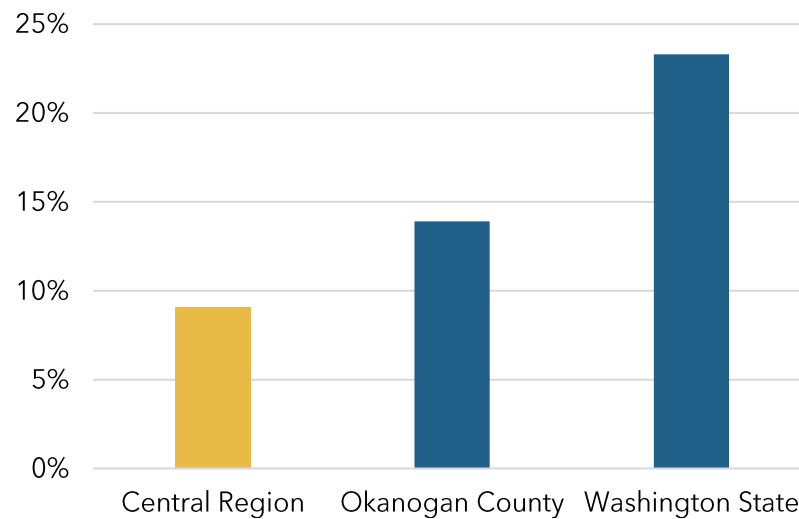
**Figure C1: Central Region, Change in Employment, 2014–2024**



Source: Lightcast, 2024

#### Central Region Educational Attainment

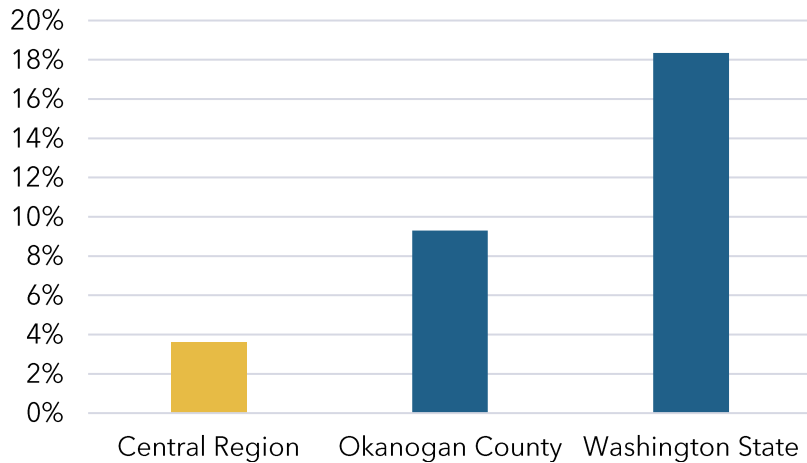
**Figure C2: Percentage of Individuals who Possess a Bachelor's Degree, Central Region, 2022**



Source: Points Consulting using Esri Business Analyst and U.S. Census

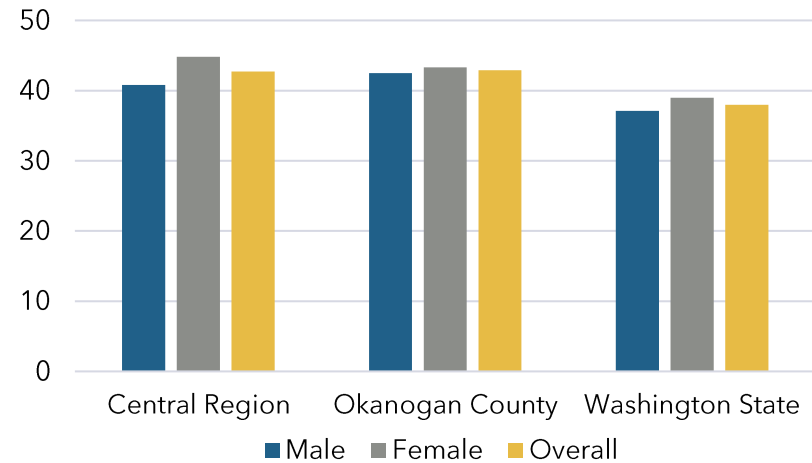
### Central Region Population Growth

**Figure C3: Population Growth, Central Region (2010–2024)**



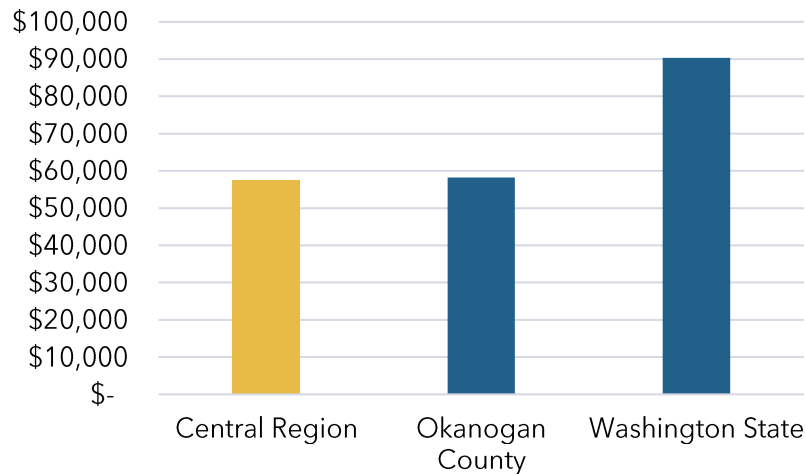
### Central Region Median Age

**Figure C4: Median Age by Gender, Central Region, 2024**



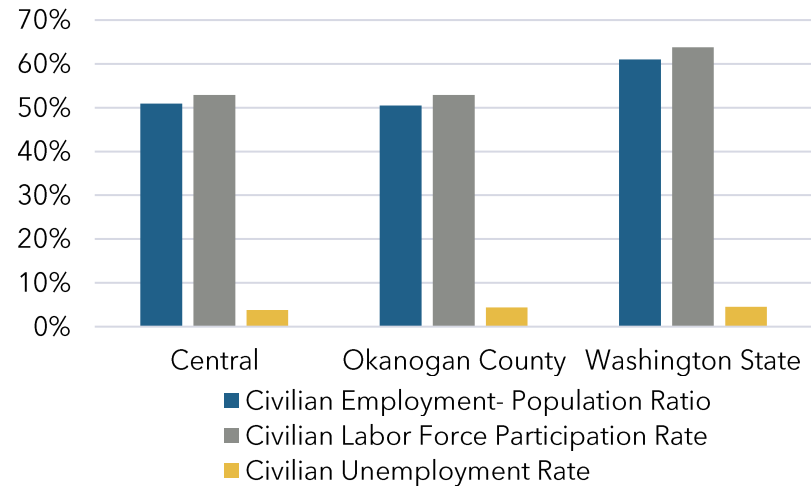
### Central Region Median Household Income

**Figure C5: Central Region, Median Household Income, 2024**



### Central Region Labor Force Participation Rate

**Figure C6: Central Region, Labor Force Participation Rate, 2024**



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

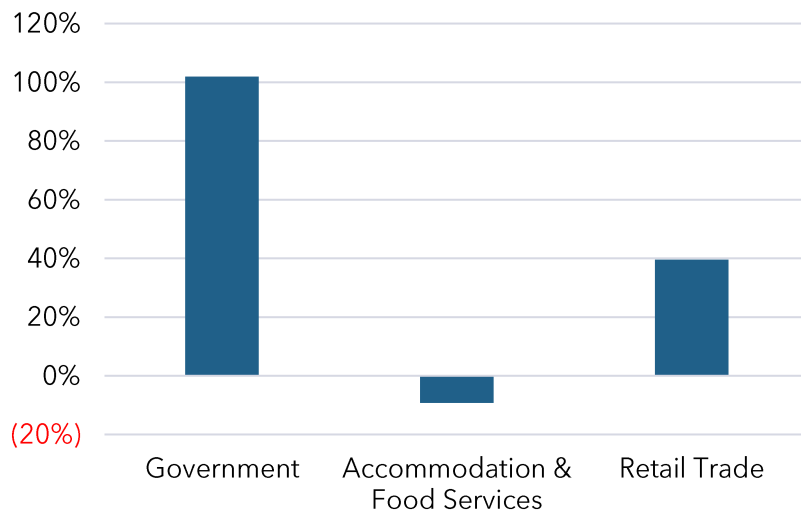
## Methow Valley

Like many other regions, Methow Valley has seen significant growth in Retail Trade employment since 2014, with an increase of 39.6% (Figure C7). Government, Methow Valley's largest employment sector, has experienced a remarkable 101.9% increase in jobs over the same period. This growth may be driven by a greater demand for government services, as the population has grown 20.8% since 2010 (Figure C9). This is a higher rate than noted in Okanogan County (9.3%) and Washington State (18.3%).

Some of these new residents may be retirees, as Methow Valley's median age is 53.8 (Figure C10). This is significantly higher than the respective median ages of both Okanogan County and Washington State (42.9 and 38.0 years, respectively). Additionally, Methow Valley's median household income of \$74,570 suggests that the area attracts retirees and remote workers seeking a higher quality of life (Figure C11). Despite an older population, the Methow Valley's labor force participation rate remains relatively strong at 56.4%, exceeding that of three of the five comparison regions (Figure C12).

### Methow Valley Top Employment Sectors

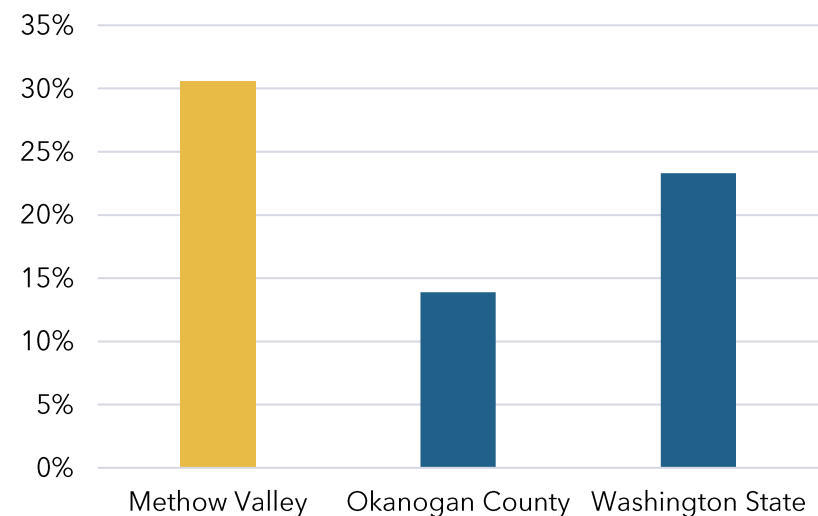
**Figure C7: Methow Valley, Change in Employment, (2014–2024)**



Source: Lightcast, 2024

### Methow Valley Educational Attainment

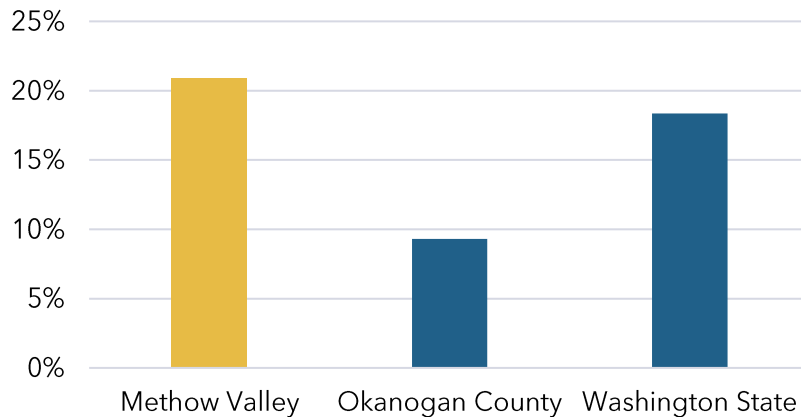
**Figure C8: Percentage of Individuals who Possess a Bachelor's Degree, Methow Valley, 2022**



Source: Points Consulting using Esri Business Analyst and U.S. Census

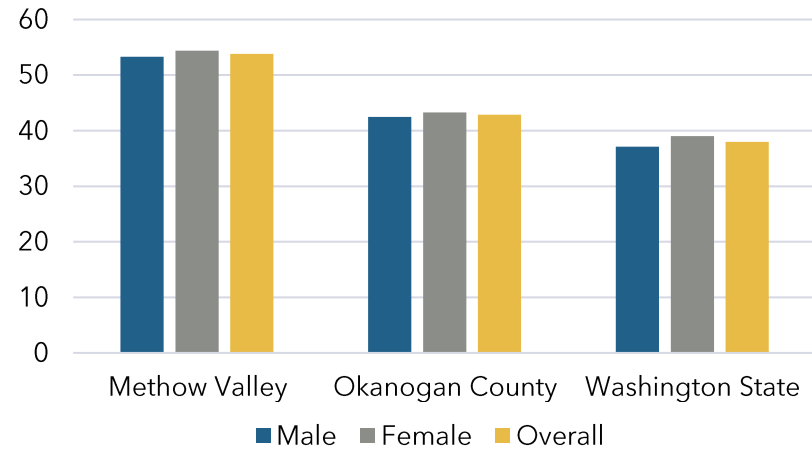
### Methow Valley Population Growth

**Figure C9: Methow Valley Population Growth, (2010–2024)**



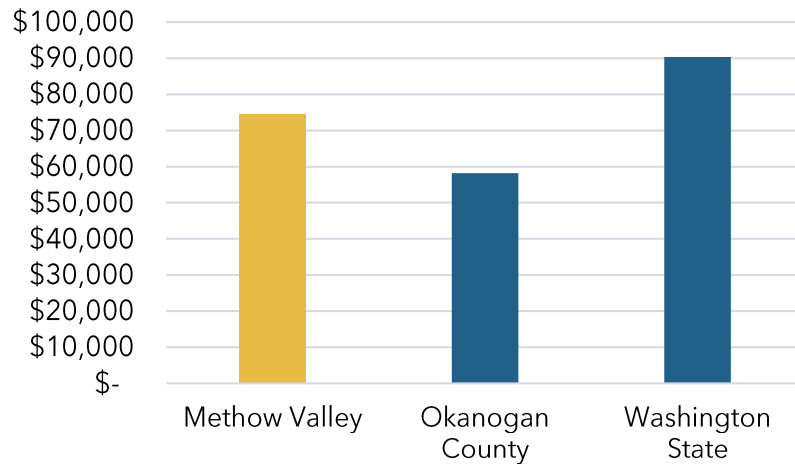
### Methow Valley Median Age

**Figure C10: Methow Valley Median Age by Gender, 2024**



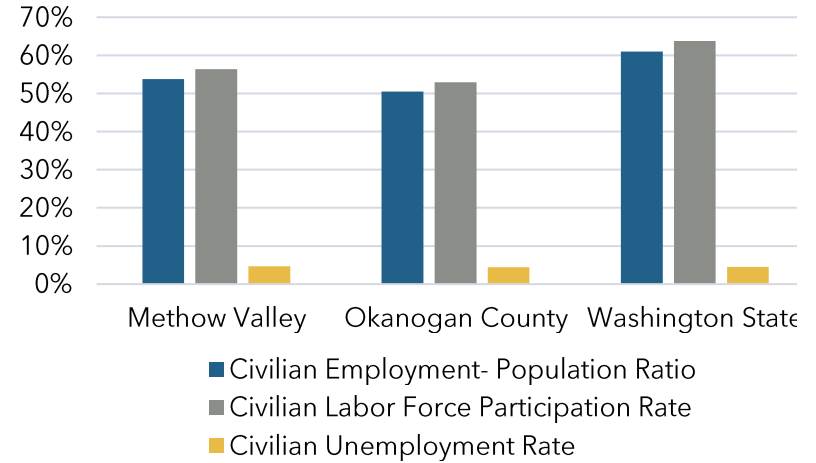
### Methow Valley Median Household Income

**Figure C11: Methow Valley Median Household Income, 2024**



### Methow Valley Labor Force Participation Rate

**Figure C12: Methow Valley, Labor Force Participation Rate, 2024**



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025



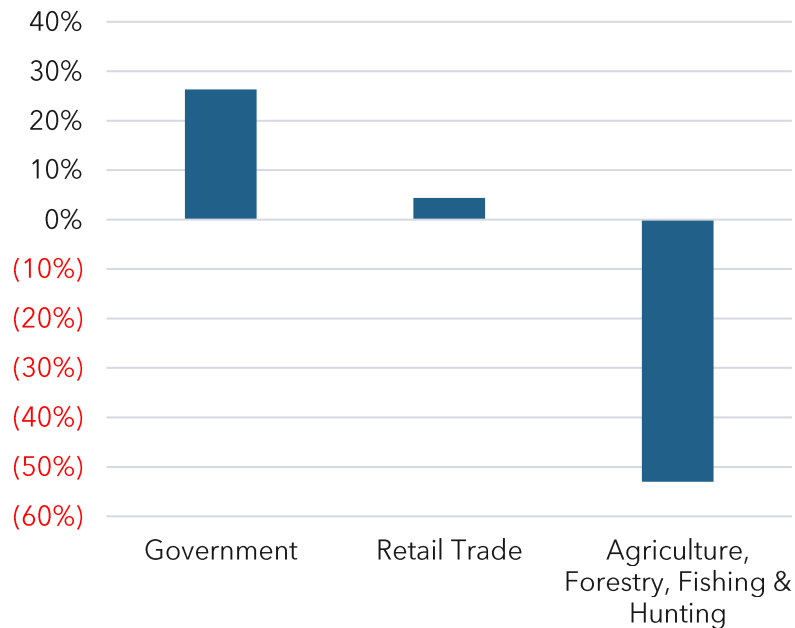
## North Region

The North Region's largest sector, Government, has experienced a significant increase (26.3%) in the number of employees since 2014 (Figure C13). Similarly, employment in Retail Trade has grown 4.4%, reflecting trends seen in other regions. However, employment in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting has declined 53.0% over the same period.

Despite this substantial drop in agricultural employment, the North Region's population has grown 3.9% since 2010 (Figure C15). An increase in retired residents may be driving this growth, as the region's overall median age is 50.0 (Figure C16). Supporting this idea, the region's labor force participation rate is 47.3%—the lowest of all Okanogan's regions (Figure C18).

### North Region Top Employment Sectors

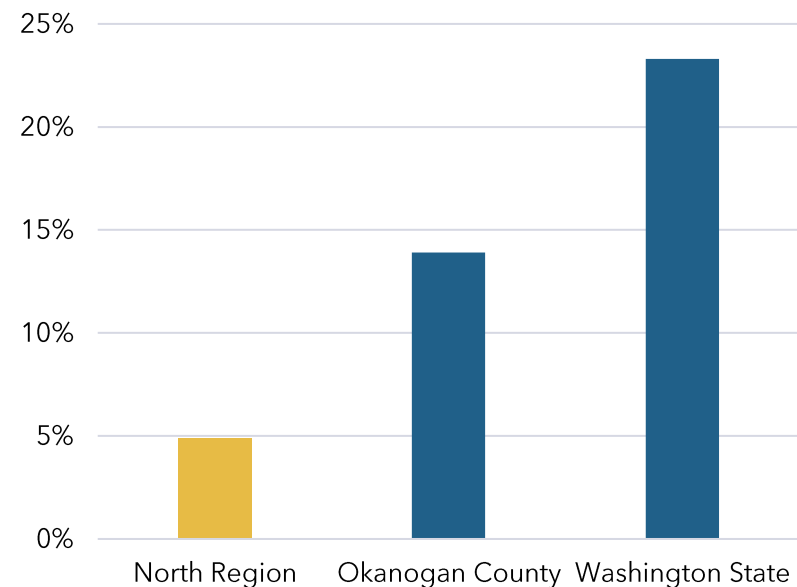
**Figure C13: North Region, Change in Employment, (2014–2024)**



Source: Lightcast, 2024

### North Region Educational Attainment

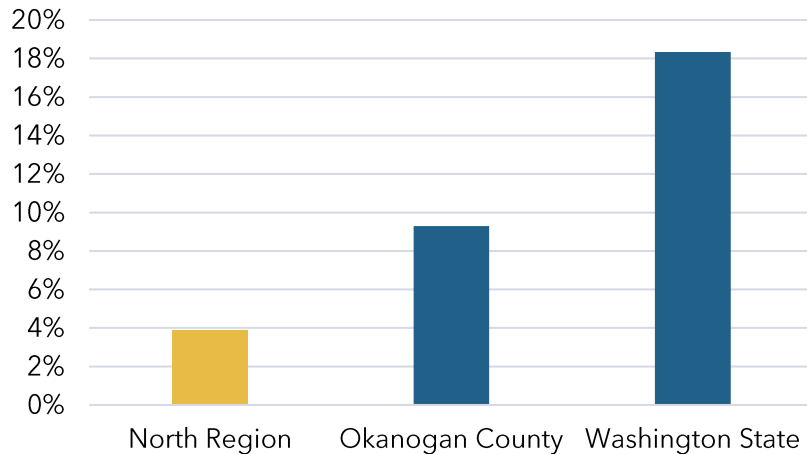
**Figure C14: Percentage of Individuals who Possess a Bachelor's Degree, North Region, 2022**



Source: Points Consulting using Esri Business Analyst and U.S. Census

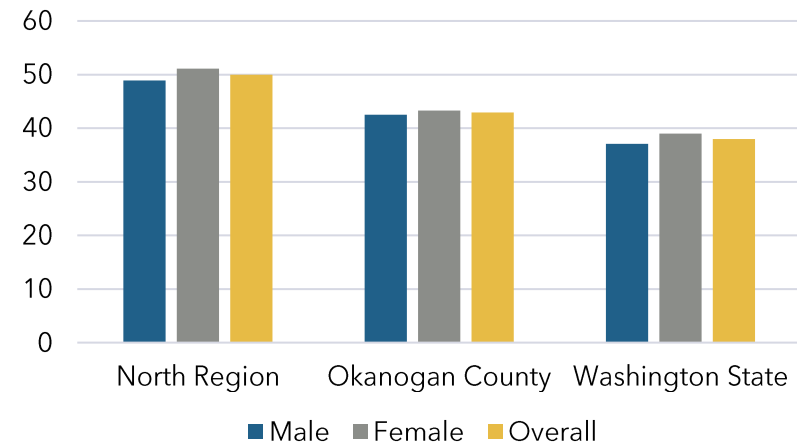
## North Region Population Growth

**Figure C15: North Region Population Growth, (2010–2024)**



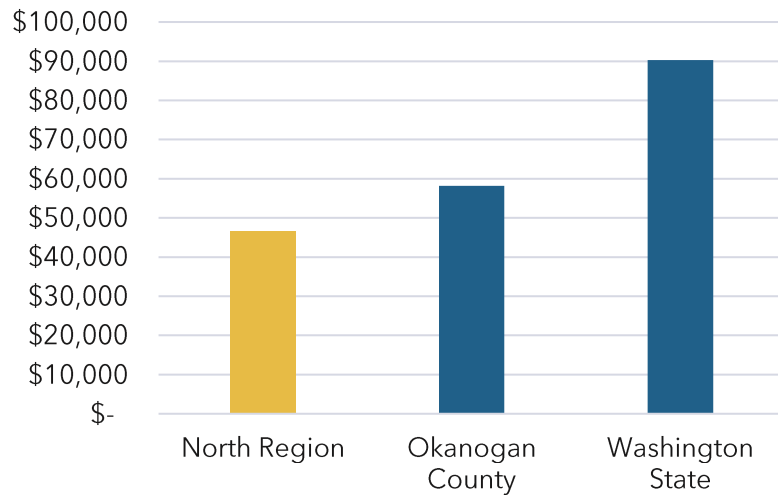
## North Region Median Age

**Figure C16: North Region Median Age by Gender, 2024**



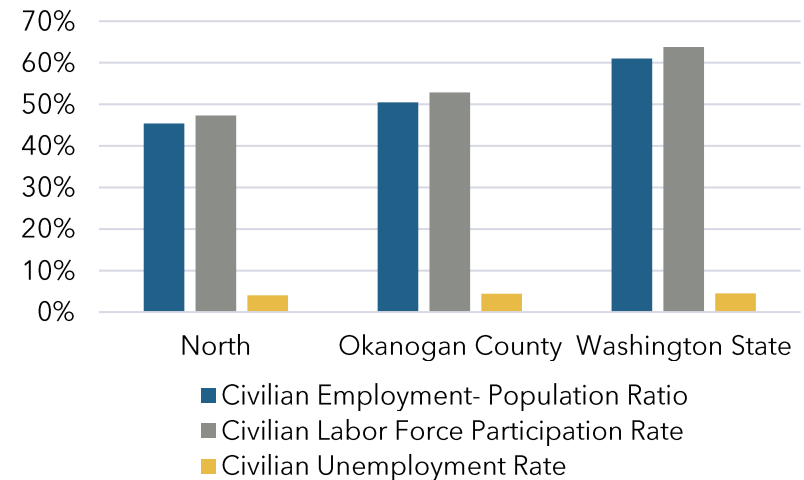
## North Region Median Household Income

**Figure C17: North Region Median Household Income, 2024**



## North Region Labor Force Participation Rate

**Figure C18: North Region Labor Force Participation Rate, 2024**



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

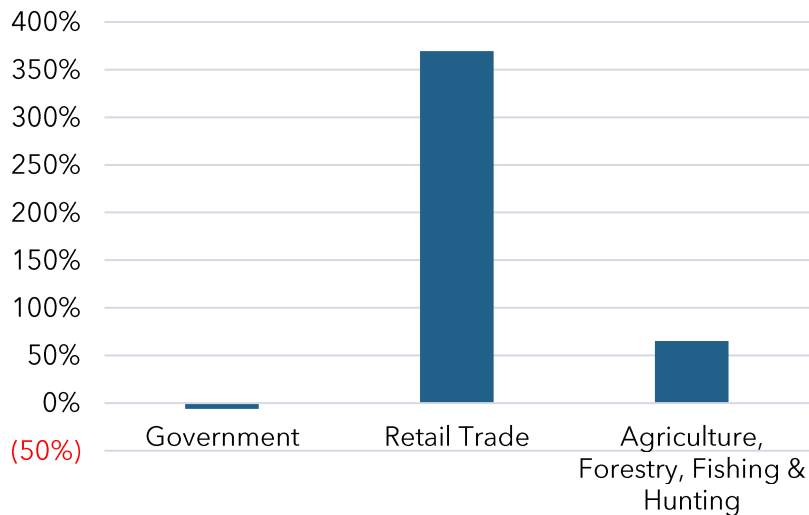
## East-CCT Reservation

Among the five regions, employment in Retail Trade has grown at the highest rate in the East-CCT Reservation, increasing 369.4% since 2014 (Figure C19). Over the same period, Government (the region's largest sector) declined 6.0%. This is possibly due to residents shifting toward other industries (Health Care & Social Assistance, though a smaller employment sector, experienced significant growth, with employment rising 91.6% since 2014). Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting has grown 65.3% since 2014, in complete contrast to every other region.

Opportunities for employment diversification exist, as 15.2% of East-CCT Reservation residents hold a bachelor's degree (Figure C20). However, despite growth across multiple industries, the region's overall population has declined 3.9% since 2010 (Figure C21). This contrasts the countywide population growth of 9.3%. Even with this population decline, East-CCT's median age remains relatively low at 40.9, significantly younger than the North Region and Methow Valley (Figure C22). Despite its younger population, the labor force participation rate is 50.8% (Figure C24). This is the lowest among all regions.

### East-CCT Reservation Top Employment Sectors

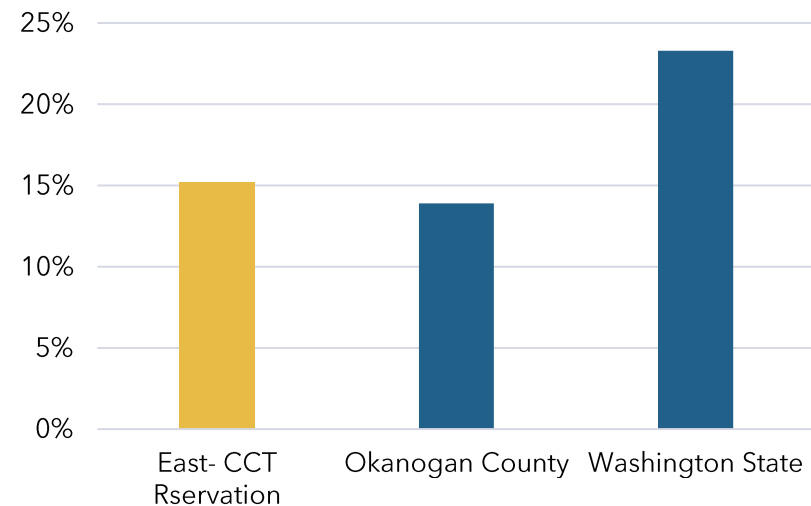
**Figure C19: East-CCT Reservation, Change in Employment, (2014–2024)**



Source: Lightcast, 2024

### East-CCT Reservation Educational Attainment

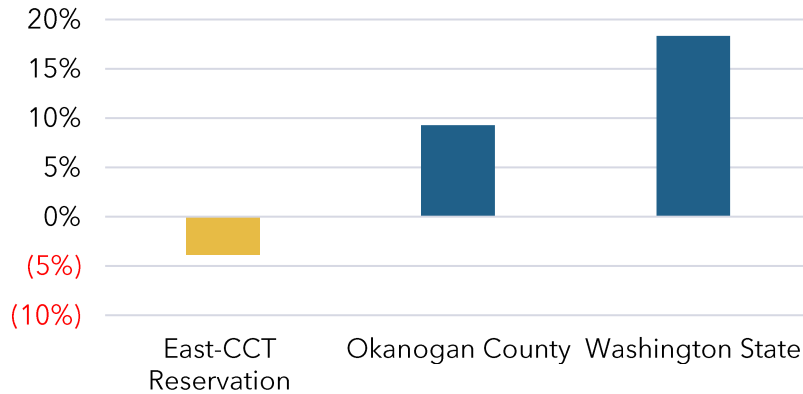
**Figure C20: Percentage of Individuals who Possess a Bachelor's Degree, East-CCT Reservation, 2022**



Source: Points Consulting using Esri Business Analyst and U.S. Census

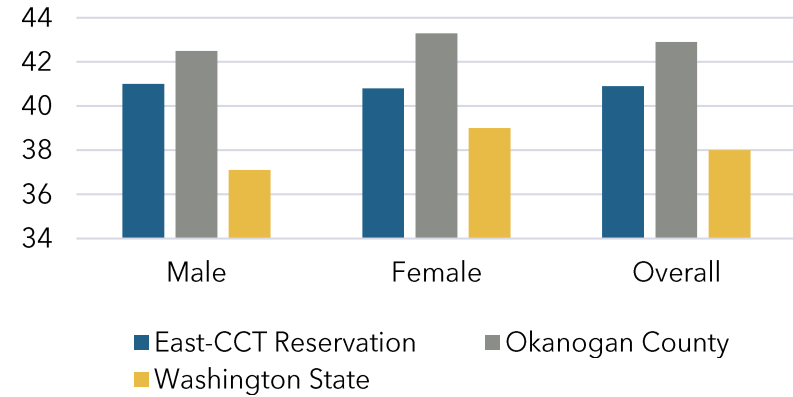
### East-CCT Population Growth

**Figure C21: East-CCT Reservation Population Growth, (2010-2024)**



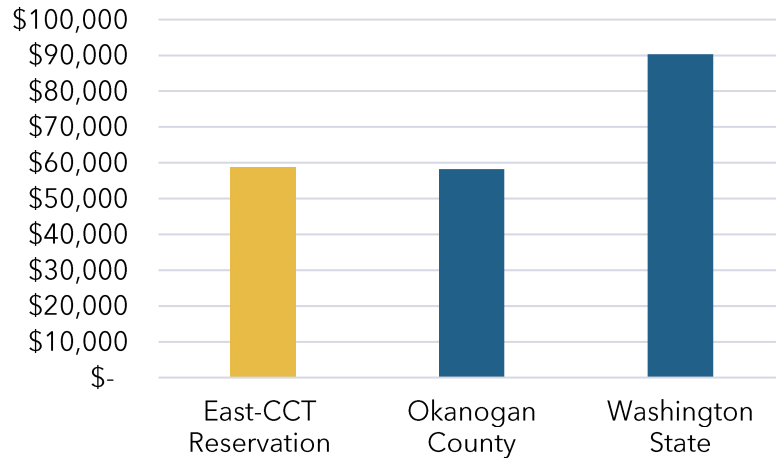
### East-CCT Median Age

**Figure C22: East-CCT Reservation Median Age by Gender, 2024**



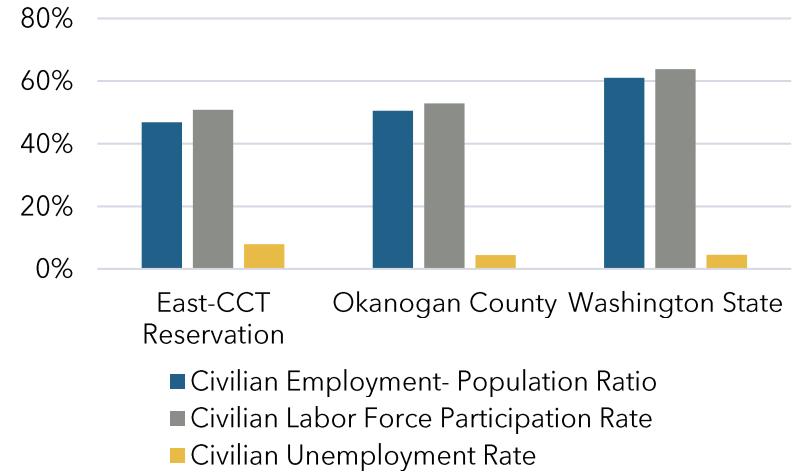
### East-CCT Median Household Income

**Figure C23: East-CCT Reservation Median Household Income, 2024**



### East-CCT Reservation Labor Force Participation

**Figure C24: East-CCT Reservation Labor Force Participation Rate, 2024**



Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

## South Region

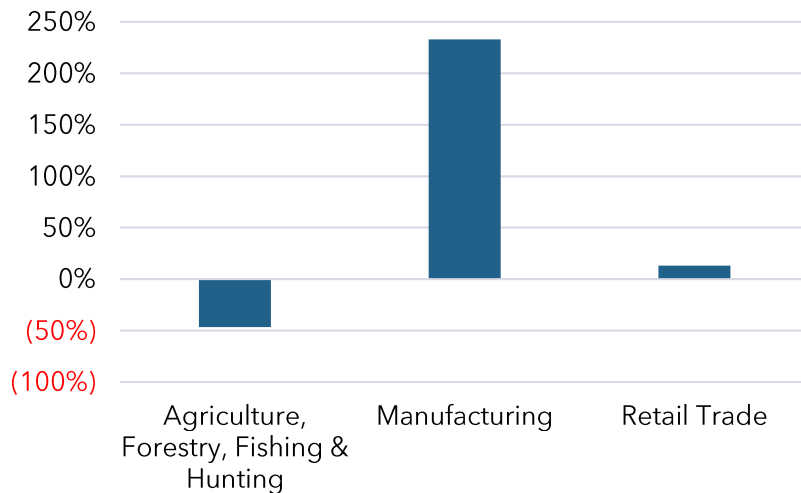
Following trends seen in three other regions, employment in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting has declined 46.6% in the South Region (Figure C25). Employment in Retail Trade has increased 3.2% since 2014, mirroring growth in other parts of the County. Manufacturing employment has surged 233.1%, in contrast to trends in the Central and North Regions.

With substantial opportunities in Manufacturing, the incentive to pursue higher education after high school may be less compelling for many residents. Only 9.2% of the region's population holds a bachelor's degree (Figure C26). Despite this lower level of educational attainment, the South Region has the highest labor force participation rate in Okanogan County at 61.8% (Figure C30). This suggests that many residents enter the workforce directly after high school (Figure C30).

Even with employment opportunities concentrated in Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Retail Trade, the median income in the South Region is \$58,633 (C29). Only Methow Valley and the North Region report higher median incomes. Notably, those two regions have a higher proportion of residents nearing retirement age. The South Region's population is younger, with an overall median age of 37.8 (Figure C28).

### South Region Top Employment Sectors

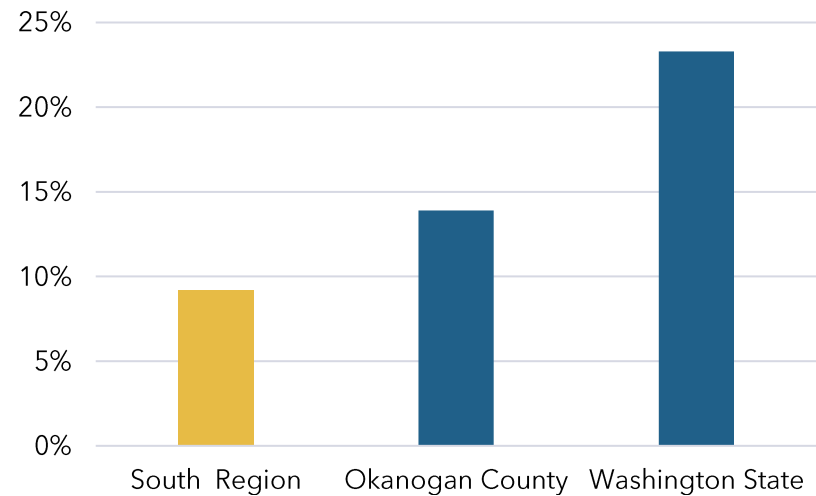
**Figure C25: South Region, Change in Employment, (2014–2024)**



Source: Lightcast, 2024

### South Region, Educational Attainment

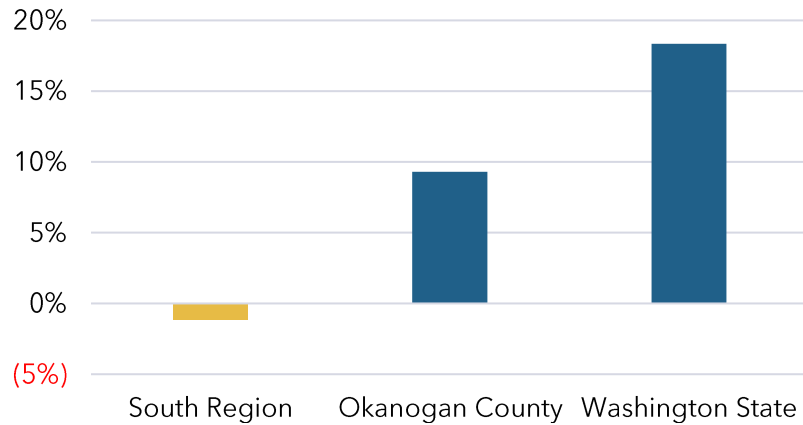
**Figure C26: Percentage of Individuals who Possess a Bachelor's Degree, South Region, 2022**



Source: Esri Business Analyst and U.S. Census

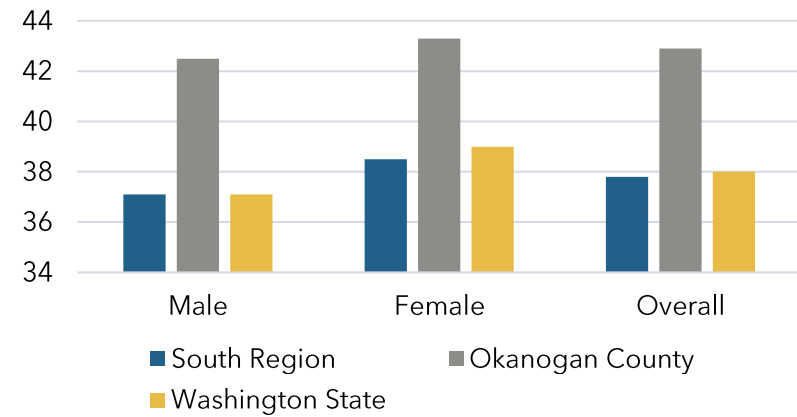
## South Region Population Growth

**Figure C27: South Region Population Growth, (2010–2024)**



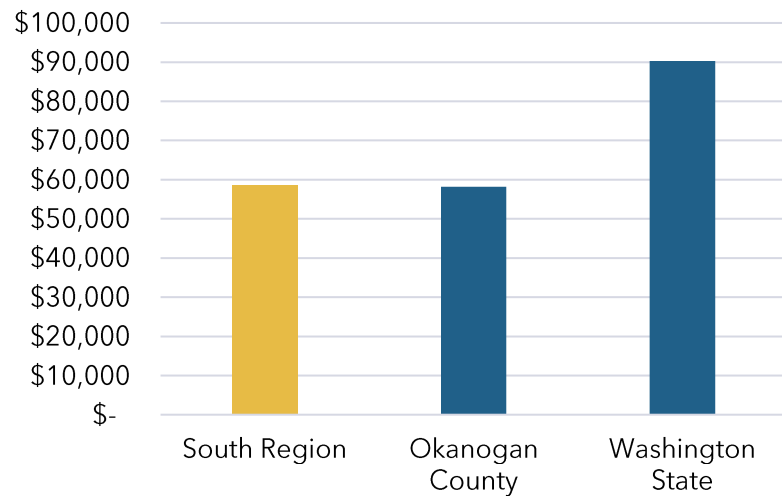
## South Region Median Age

**Figure C28: South Region Median Age by Gender, 2024**



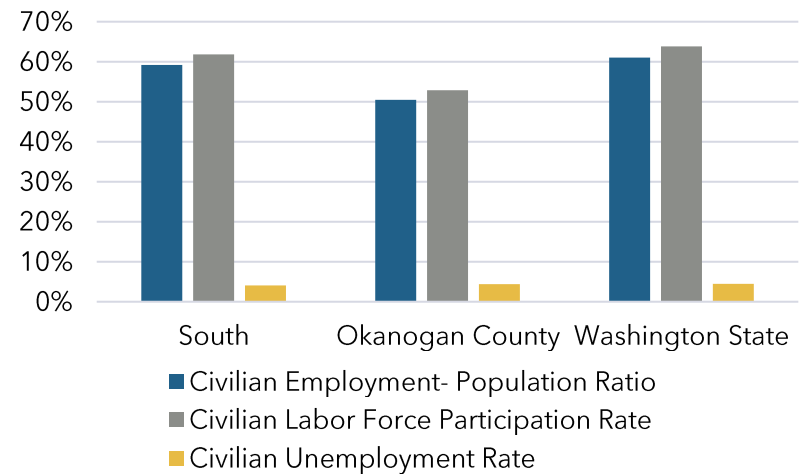
## South Region Median Household Income

**Figure C29: South Region Median Household Income, 2024**



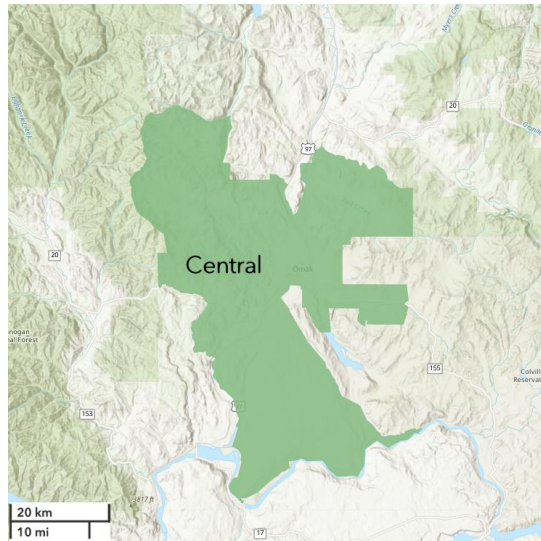
## South Region Labor Force Participation Rate

**Figure C30: South Region Labor Force Participation Rate, 2024**

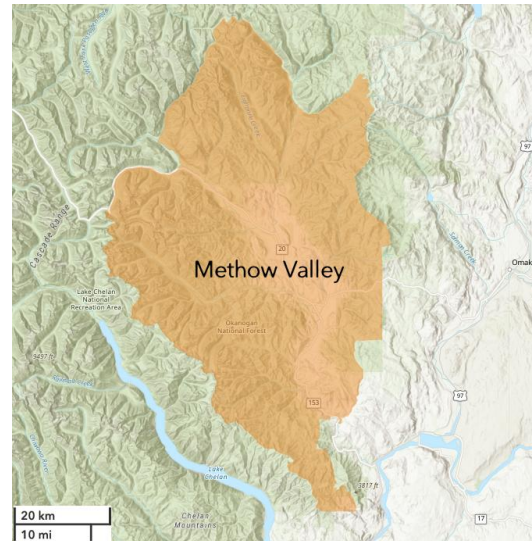


Source: Esri Business Analyst, 2025

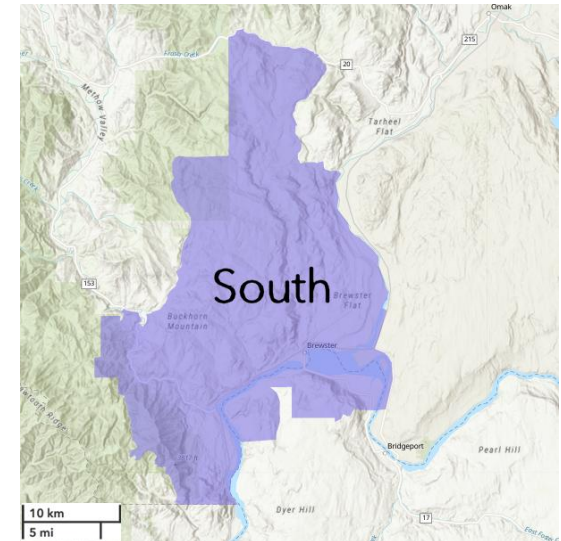
**Central Region Geographic Area**  
**Figure C31: Central Region Map**



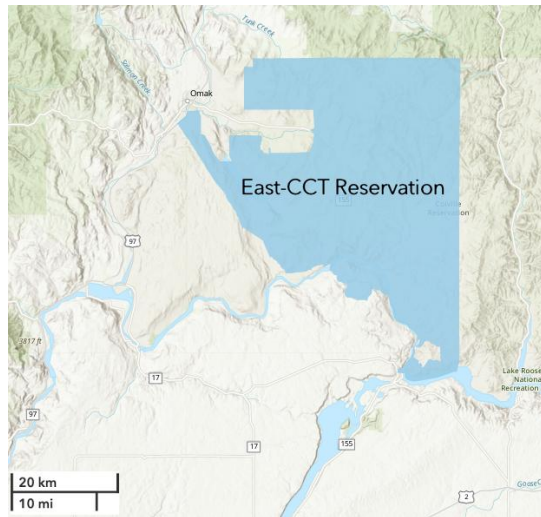
**Methow Valley Geographic Area**  
**Figure C32 : Methow Valley Map**



**South Region Geographic Area**  
**Figure C35: South Region Map**



**East-CCT Region Geographic Area**  
**Figure C34 : East-CCT Map**



**North Region Geographic Area**  
**Figure C33 : North Region Map**





## Appendix D: Priority Project Listings

Under RCW 82.14.370 of the code of Washington, qualifying counties may charge a maximum of 0.09% sales and use tax, which may be used to fund public infrastructure and economic development projects.<sup>41</sup> Okanogan County refers this as their Public Facilities Fund (0.09% Sales and Use Tax Rebate).<sup>42</sup>

Each year, the Economic Alliance of Okanogan County coordinates and reviews submitted projects and provides the Okanogan County Commissioners with a prioritized master list of infrastructure and economic development projects for potential funding. Entities eligible to apply through this process include, but are not limited to, Okanogan cities, the County, and public utility districts.<sup>43</sup> Many funding resources require that a project be included on this list to be eligible. Additional information on the application process and eligibility can be found on the Economic Alliance website.

The Economic Alliance heard 17 presentations on November 19, 2024, and ranked them based on priority. The Executive Director of the Economic Alliance met with the Okanogan County Commissioners on November 25, 2024, and presented the Infrastructure Construction Project Prioritization List, the Economic Development Planning Project Prioritization List, and the Community/Economic Development Projects list. All 17 projects were endorsed by the Commissioners in ranking order.

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<sup>41</sup> Revised Code of Washington (RCW) § 82.14.370 (2024), accessed May 9, 2025, <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=82.14.370&pdf=true>.

<sup>42</sup> Staff writers, "Economic Alliance Infrastructure Committee announces 2024 project funding," *Okanogan Valley Gazette-Tribune*, December 13, 2023, <https://www.gazette-tribune.com/business/economic-alliance-infrastructure-committee-announces-2024-project-funding/86992/>.

<sup>43</sup> "Okanogan County Prioritization Process," The Economic Alliance of Okanogan County, August 25, 2024, <https://economic-alliance.com/site-selection/okanogan-county-prioritization-process/>.

## OKANOGAN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS'

### RESOLUTION 175 - 2024

*A resolution endorsing Okanogan County Public Infrastructure Projects Prioritization list and Okanogan County Community/Economic Development Projects Prioritization list for ranking at the regional level by the NCW Economic Development District*

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Okanogan County Commissioners' (BOCC) recognizes the importance of promoting projects which enhance the economic health of Okanogan County and its residents; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Economic Alliance Infrastructure Committee met on November 19, 2024 to prioritize Infrastructure applications for 2025 County Wide Projects. The applications were ranked by the Infrastructure Committee to identify priority projects that County .09 funding could be used for if funding was available for award to projects: and

**WHEREAS**, the Economic Alliance Director met with the Commissioners on November 25, 2024 and presented both the Okanogan County Public Infrastructure Project Prioritization lists for 2025-.09 Construction Projects,.09 Planning Projects, and Community/Economic Development Projects as recommended by the Infrastructure Committee, which will be ranked further by NCW Economic Development District at the regional level; and

**WHEREAS**, the BOCC supports the Economic Alliance's role in facilitating the prioritization process for potential funding for projects;

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Okanogan County Commissioners hereby accepts and endorses said lists as prioritized.

#### 2025 Okanogan County Infrastructure Construction Project Prioritization List

1. Tonasket Perfect Passage
2. Pateros Mall Improvements
3. Winthrop Kay Wagner Historic Riverwalk
4. Brewster Swamp Creek Watershed
5. Pateros Wastewater Improvements
6. Tonasket Airport Side Taxiway Rescue

#### 2025 Okanogan County Economic Development Planning Project Prioritization List

1. Winthrop Perrygin Lake Storage/Water
2. Omak East 97 Infrastructure
3. Winthrop WW & Lift Station

4. Tonasket 4<sup>th</sup> St Multimodal Improvements
5. Omak Stampede Concourse
6. Omak Public Safety Building
7. Tonasket South Annexation
8. Tonasket Municipal Building

Okanogan County Community/Economic Development Projects

1. OVOC Building
2. FYRE Expansion Project
3. NCW Rink


**DATED** at Okanogan, Washington this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of December 2024.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
OKANOGAN, WASHINGTON**



ATTEST:

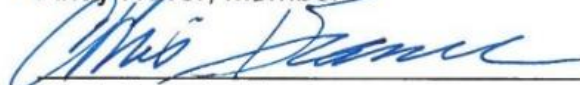
  
Laleña Johns, CMC  
Clerk of the Board



Jon Neal, Chairman



Andy Hoyer, Member



Chris Branch, Member