The Lowcountry Council of Governments (LCOG) offers creative regional solutions to the four counties and twenty-one cities and towns within Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton and Jasper counties. Guided by a twenty-eight member board of directors appointed by the participating local governments, LCOG partners with local governments, human service agencies and local nonprofits to leverage the best resources possible in order to serve the people who need us most.

The Lowcountry Council of Governments is a member of the South Carolina Councils of Governments, a network of 10 regional councils of governments working to positively affect quality of life and economic development in South Carolina. sccogs.org

As a result, we are a stronger region that strives to have:

- A healthy aging population.
- An educated and well-trained workforce.
- Incentives to help small businesses thrive and grow.
- Safe, affordable housing.
- Planning resources that connect our land, transportation, environmental and economic assets.

Dear Lowcountry Region,

Here is the annual report for the fiscal year 2022-2023. Last year was an exciting and very productive year for the organization. The opportunities for growth abound.

This report not only summarizes the quantitative successes of each program area — Community & Economic Development, Planning & Transportation, Workforce Development, and the Area Agency on Aging — and the overall financial success of the COG, but more importantly, it shares the tremendous and positive outcomes our work has on our communities.

Families have safer homes; water quality and access to fire services were improved for thousands of residents. A Safety Action Plan is being developed to make our roadways and streets safer. Residents received training, earned certifications, and are now gainfully and successfully employed. Additional senior centers opened, and seniors at all our centers learned computer technology. These are just a few of the outcomes shared in the report.

The LCOG social media following has increased by 50% in the past year on all platforms. We are pleased that more individuals are aware of the services provided to help improve the livelihood of our citizens, whether that be knowledge of the Better Internet for a Better South Carolina campaign or the new Lowcountry Community Indicators dashboard. We aim to continue providing dynamic and informational content about the wonderful things the COG is up to in real time. Be sure to follow us on our various social media channels if you haven’t already.

The COG board and management team strategically and purposefully decided on program improvements, expansions and additions that not only addressed current needs but also anticipate future needs in the region. We would like to sincerely thank the Board of Directors and staff for your hard work and visionary planning.

Sincerely,

Phillip Taylor, Sr., Board Chairman
Lowcountry Council of Governments
Board of Directors

Sabrena P. Graham, Executive Director
Lowcountry Council of Governments
CDBG Funding
Marsh Cove Fire Station Becomes a Reality

Jasper County has seen steady population increases as well as in-migration from surrounding counties for quite a few years. Lowcountry Drive (SC 462) serves as a heavily traveled connector between 1-95 and SC 170 at the Beaufort County line, bringing tourists to southern Beaufort County as well as commuters from rural areas of Jasper County into business centers. With the marked increase in residents living in the Marsh Cove area and commuters traveling through it to get to Beaufort, Bluffton and Hilton Head, first responders saw an increase in motor vehicle accidents and structure fires in the area. In response to increased demand, Jasper County tagged this area in Marsh Cove as a priority for a new fire station. Land was donated for the project, but since the county built two other stations in recent years, available funding for fire stations was running short.

To keep the project alive, leaders reached out to LCOG to help them apply for both USDA Rural Development funding and a Community Development Block Grant. LCOG staff helped the county gather information and develop the grant application as well as a loan/grant application for USDA Rural Development funding. Firefighters and a small group of volunteers surveyed the area, knocked on doors in the summer heat, and helped residents complete the required surveys to demonstrate enough low- to moderate-income households in the station's service area to qualify for grant funding.

The new station is now fully staffed with firefighters who are also trained emergency medical technicians. This shortens response times to accidents, fires and almost any emergency in the area. Residents will likely see a reduction in insurance costs, and they will undoubtedly benefit from having first responders almost ten miles closer than before this station was built.

Accomplishments
• Awarded 3 CDBGs (Community Development Block Grants) totaling $1,518,068.
• Awarded 1 South Carolina Historic Preservation grant totaling $200,000.
• Awarded 1 FEMA grant totaling $1,188,785.
• Awarded 1 EDA grant totaling $3,257,501.
• Awarded 5 SCIIP grants totaling $25,219,689.
• Awarded 1 RIA grant totaling $475,000.
• Awarded 2 housing development projects through our HOME Consortium totaling $690,000.
• 3 SC Best projects awarded $76,488.

Awards
• Kimberly Mullinax was appointed to the South Carolina Community Development Association Board of Directors.
• Tiffany Dantzler participated in the South Carolina Economic Development Institute.
• Michelle Knight, Jessica Dailey and Kimberly Mullinax attended the First Annual SERDI Leadership Institute.

Active Projects
• Marsh Cove Fire Station Becomes a Reality

Anticipated Results From Active Projects
• 12 families living in safer houses.
• 64 families in new multi-family residences.
• 879 residents with better water quality and pressure.
• 1,384 residents with improved sewer collection systems.
• 220 elderly people with improved access to service at their local senior center.
• 379 residents with access to fire services within 5 miles of their home.
• Safe, lighted walking pathways serving 750 people.
• Two new parks that are ADA-accessible.
• 625 new jobs in the region and $138 million in private investment (jobs for our residents and increased tax base for our communities).
The LCOG Planning Department has been working hard all year to secure funding for future planning activities.

The LCOG Planning Department was awarded a Safe Streets for All grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to complete a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan for the region. The plan will be aimed at reducing and eliminating serious injury and fatal crashes in the region. LCOG is looking forward to kicking the plan off in the coming year.

After completing the Lowcountry Military Installation Resilience Review (MIRR) in 2022, LCOG was invited by the U.S. Department of Defense Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation to apply for funding to begin implementing the coastal resilience recommendations from the MIRR. The grant was awarded June 1, and the project kicked off in Summer 2023.

LCOG was awarded a Safe Streets for All grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to complete a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan for the region. The plan will be aimed at reducing and eliminating serious injury and fatal crashes in the region. LCOG is looking forward to kicking the plan off in the coming year.

The initiative is based on the belief that community indicators with timely data allow users and the organizations they represent to make more informed decisions about where the needs are and how resources should be allocated. LCOG hopes users spend time with the website and consider additional ways they can use the data to positively impact the Lowcountry region.

**Grants/Contracts**
- Transportation planning (LATS & rural combined): $955,891
- Community planning services: $50,000
- 208 conformance review: $14,678
- Lowcountry Community Indicators dashboard: $50,000

**Transportation Projects**
- Miles of roads, bridges and highway projects: $415,05
- Amount invested in construction: $1,072,417,850

**By the Numbers**
- Projects: 63
- Housing units: 5,008
- Commercial and industrial projects: 13

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**Accomplishments**
- Published 2022 People and the Economy Report.
- Developed Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Edisto Beach.
- Developed Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Town of Varnville.
- Completed Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice for the City of Walterboro.
- Created Lowcountry Community Indicators dashboard.
- Awarded Safe Streets for All Grant to complete a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan.
- Awarded funding to implement recommendations from the Lowcountry Military Installation Resilience Review.

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**Professional Development**
- Won 2022 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for the Lowcountry Military Installation Resilience Review (MIRR).
- Staff completed several training courses and webinars to learn how to better incorporate resilience in our planning activities.
- Staff presented the Lowcountry Military Installation Resilience Review (MIRR) project at several national and regional events.
- Staff completed the National Highway Institute course “Understanding the Uniform Guidance Requirements (2 CFR 200) for Federal Awards.”

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**Town of Varnville Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**

The Town of Varnville CEDS is a strategy-driven plan, intended to contribute to effective economic development. LCOG prepared a plan that is consistent with the Lowcountry Economic Development District (LEDD)’s CEDS, as required by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).

The plan highlights the economic development conditions that shape the town’s competitiveness – location, cultural resources, natural resources, demographics, infrastructure assets, economy, natural hazards and the COVID-19 pandemic. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis was used to help identify the critical internal and external factors that speak to the town’s unique assets and competitive positioning. Goals and implementation strategies were developed to help guide the planning process for the town’s economic prosperity and resiliency.

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**Town of Edisto Beach Comprehensive Plan**

The Town of Edisto Beach’s new 2022 Comprehensive Plan is an update of the town’s 2010 plan. The plan was prepared according to the requirements of South Carolina’s Comprehensive Planning Act, describing the history, current state and future vision for the community. The plan has ten elements: population, economic development, natural resources, cultural resources, community facilities, housing, land use, transportation, priority investment and resiliency.

To complete the plan, LCOG collected and analyzed town data, coordinated public participation, and developed goals and implementation time frames along with possible funding strategies. The final Comprehensive Plan provides a 10-year future vision which will guide land use planning policies intended to balance community values and character with future growth and development.
In 2022, Jacob Cox enrolled in the WIOA program, and, unlike most participants, he knew right away which career path he wanted to pursue — welding. Although Jacob had recently experienced homelessness and didn’t have reliable transportation, his can-do attitude and positive outlook made an impression on those who administered the WIOA program at LCOG.

Jacob completed the welding training program with flying colors and the related remediation courses, which improved his math and reading skills. Upon completion, he landed a job with The Fuller Pile of Walterboro, where he is still employed.

Odis Norris enrolled in the WIOA program in 2023 after being laid off from her nursing job the previous year. As an RN, she was an excellent candidate for an on-the-job training position at ComForCare in Bluffton. This allowed her to make a competitive wage and train for a permanent, full-time position as a nurse supervisor.

While enrolled, she learned new skills and gained a position with a higher wage than her previous position.

“Participating in this program gave me a certification that I can now make as much money as I desire in different areas of welding. I’ve been able to increase my pay from where I started, and through that, I gained better transportation.”

Jamie Ragonesi
Owner of Prestige Heating and Air
WIOA OJT Employer and Training Provider

“We’re thrilled with Prestige’s OJT training program. Like many in our region, finding qualified workers was challenging, limiting our growth and impacting our reputation. But, thanks to the Lowcountry Council of Governments’ Workforce Development OJT (On-The-Job Training) program and our collaboration with Business Services Manager Tony Pollen, we’ve onboarded several eager-to-learn employees, eyeing a lasting career with us. Not only does the program help shoulder some training costs, but it’s also brought us motivated and enthusiastic team members. It’s a game-changer! We genuinely believe it’s a win-win for everyone involved!”

Grant Awards
- $343,567: Engage, Build, & Serve State Grant awarded for adult/dislocated workers and youth participants.
- $392,729: Resiliency State Grant Award for adult/dislocated workers and youth participants.

By the Numbers
- 300: Total participants served in the Lowcountry service area.
- 1,654: Number of employers served (new and repeat).
- 7,280: Number of services to employers (new and repeat).
- $348,371: Total training dollars spent on WIOA participants.
- $141,446: On-the-Job Training (OJT) funds expended.
- 32 OJT agreements that facilitated employer partnerships, resulting in an average wage range of $15 to $32 per hour for trainees.
- 12 Youth OJT employer contracts totaling $35,933.

Career Sector Training
- Diversified Manufacturing: $139,916
- Transportation and Logistics: $135,600
- Healthcare: $54,880
- Technology: $17,974

Supportive Services
- $33,357 for child care, uniforms, testing fees, transportation costs, books and tuition.

Recognitions
- Two Business Service Team members received their Certified Business Services Consultant certifications.
- Client Jacob Cox received the 2023 Welding Top Producer Award from employer The Fuller Pile.
Nutrition
This year, Beaufort County Parks and Recreation began contracting as a provider of nutrition services. Initially, three senior centers received meals through our service, but three additional senior centers – Scott Center, Booker T. Washington Center and Port Royal Center – were added in the fourth quarter. ARP Funds were used to help support this expansion and the addition of nutrition and transportation at the new sites. The availability of these daily meals ensured that seniors in our community regularly received nutritious meals throughout the week despite the rising costs of food and supply and demand difficulties across the country.

Family Caregiver Support Program
The Tea Time for Caregivers virtual peer support group met monthly, marking its second successful year. Tea Time participants can better aid their loved ones by learning from one another’s experiences, receiving encouragement and taking a break from the demands of caregiving.

The Family Caregiver Support Program launched Trualta, a web-based, self-guided, evidence-based training platform designed to educate and assist caregivers.

The Seniors Raising Children (SRC) program partnered with Colleton County School District Social Worker Renee Jamison and Parent and Family Engagement Specialist Tangela Green to develop workshops and a support group for grandparents raising children.

Caregivers who were enrolled in the Family Caregiver Support Program received grants for respite care and supportive services (such as counseling, incontinence supplies, durable medical equipment, nutritional supplements and wheelchair ramp materials). This offered support and resources to provide respite from their caregiving duties and alleviate caregiver burnout.

I-CARE/SHIP Programs
A Medicare healthcare savings ad campaign was launched in two Department of Motor Vehicle locations, Bluffton and Walterboro, to reach low-income and hard-to-reach populations.

We partnered with the Human Service Alliance of Beaufort, the Non-Profit Resource Organization and other non-profit agencies to reach both those who are new to Medicare and those in underserved communities. With the help of our partners, we increased contacts and their awareness of Medicare fraud.

By increasing outreach measures, our State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) annual contacts are 85% over the annual goal of 2,160. Open Enrollment events were held at libraries and senior centers in all four counties. This allowed beneficiaries the comfort and convenience of having one-on-one, in-person counseling.

The SHIP Program continues to grow through constant research and learning. The more Medicare changes, so does the need for assistance. Being knowledgeable and empathetic allows us to grow with the needs of clients. Outreach has increased, and we have found unique ways to reach our underserved communities. It is and has been our goal to help as many individuals as possible by meeting people where they are.

Ombudsman Program
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, much attention has been given to senior care facilities. The Lowcountry AAA Ombudsman team has worked to provide training to facilities, residents and the community engaging with facilities. These trainings helped empower residents and their families to better advocate for themselves and helped staff improve the quality of care they provide for the vulnerable adults who rely on them. One of the more frequent requests was for advocacy and mediation for residents who were moving out of an assisted living facility. On several occasions, our staff was successful in mediating for the extra 30 days to be removed from the bill.
The Lowcountry AAA continues to support our region by assisting our aging population with completing community long-term care applications. This year, 16 Medicaid applications were completed to enable seniors in our region to receive assistance with their medical needs.

SCDOT (5310) Funding
The AAA acquired SCDOT (5310) funding for the seventh year on behalf of three of four counties to help purchase transportation services. By securing this SCDOT funding for transportation services, the Lowcountry AAA is able to leverage Title III-B funds to help provide additional Title III-B services to seniors across the region. Additionally, Lowcountry AAA will be able to give contracted providers the opportunity to expand existing routes and/or create new routes. The amount awarded for FY 22/23 was $187,500 (with match).

**Special Grant for Technology Services**
Through the Community Development Block Grant, written by the Lowcountry Council of Governments Community & Economic Development team, we secured 350 tablets for our region’s 14 senior centers and nutrition sites. With these tablets, seniors can participate in programming like Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less; stay in the know about weather and news; keep in touch with loved ones via email; and participate in various social programs. In addition to the tablets, interns provided technical assistance, answered questions and created engaging activities for them.

**Accomplishments**
- 104 seniors served through the homecare program.
- 1,829 comprehensive assessments conducted.
- 17,955 hours of in-home care services provided to 105 seniors.
- 169,570 home-delivered meals.
- 33,956 congregate/group dining meals.
- 87 minor home repair projects totaling $86,024.
- $10,042 in legal fees for 30 seniors.
- 72 I&R/A outreach events.
- $119,885 in Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period savings, an 81% increase from 21/22.

**Professional Development**
- Dresha Hicks maintained SHIP Certification and received Google Program Management Google IT Support Certifications.
- Dena Davidson completed an extensive list of job-related courses, including FEMA’s Hurricane Preparedness for the Whole Community, NCLER Family Violence and Abuse in Later Life, and Housing Services Resource Center Solving Homelessness Among Older Adults.
- Ashley Young attended the USAGing Leadership Institute.
- Letisha N. Scotland was elected Vice President of the South Carolina Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

**FCSP Recipient**
Ms. Ann Iademarco
When Ann Iademarco became a 24/7 caregiver for her mom with Alzheimer’s, she was looking for a lifeline. When her mother’s doctor referred her to LCOG, she began to receive valuable information and help with her mother’s care. This helped put her mind at ease, and she could “see the light.” She began attending the Tea Time for Caregivers virtual support group and received home-delivered meals for her mom. She also received an FCSP respite grant to help pay for a caregiver for her mom. She can now go shopping, have lunch with friends and enjoy a few hours away from home.

“I’m very thankful for the LCOG programs. I struggled a bit before, but having the resources, support and friends I’ve made has made me a better and stronger person. The assistance has helped extend my mother’s life and made it much better for her.”
Beaufort County
Neil Lipsitz
Gerald Dawson
Alice Howard
Herbert Glaze
Tamara Becker
Mary Beth Heyward
Larry McElynn
York Glover, Sr.
Anna Maria Tabernik
Dan Wood

Colleton County
Rev. Evon Robinson, Sr.
Ladson Fishburne
Dr. Joseph Flowers
Bob Remser
Phillip Taylor, Sr.
Scott Biering
Mayor Tim Grimsley

Hampton County
James “Pete” Hagood
Kevin Brown
Jordan Jinks
Joe Hadwin, Jr.
Mayor Nat Shaffer
Greg Alexander

Jasper County
John Carroll
Barbara Clark
Danny Lucas
Josephine Boyles
Dr. Gwen Johnson Smith

Finance Report
Fiscal year ended June 30, 2023 (Unaudited)

Revenues
Federal .............................................. $5,595,628
State .............................................. $2,011,548
Local .............................................. $696,344
Dues .............................................. $204,804
Total: $8,508,324

Expenditures
Aging .............................................. $4,640,545
Workforce ....................................... $1,626,367
Community & Economic Development ....................................... $1,472,311
Planning ........................................ $350,401
Administration .................................. $101,629
Total: $8,191,253