



NORTH CAROLINA
**DEPARTMENT of
COMMERCE**

Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency Initiative (CERRI) Overview, Services, and Application Requirements

In August 2021, the Rural Planning program (RPP) of the N.C. Department of Commerce, Main Street & Rural Planning (MS&RP) Center, will begin accepting applications for new communities to participate in the **Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency Initiative (CERRI)**.

The RPP will hold a virtual CERRI information session on August 17, 2021, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., for interested communities. During the meeting, the RPP will present an overview of the program and its benefits, as well as the requirements for participation. Communities can join the session by video, [click here](#), or to join by telephone, dial 1-984-204-1487, then 312182270#.

CERRI Overview

In January 2021, the RPP launched CERRI to help small towns and rural communities, with populations under 5,000, recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and build resilient local economies. Initially, the RPP engaged ten communities (eight towns and two counties), across the North Carolina's eight Prosperity Zones, in the initiative.

CERRI provides communities with a planning process to develop local economic recovery strategies and technical services to implement them. RPP staff works with participating communities to complete an economic development assessment, prepare an economic recovery plan of work, and deliver implementation services to help them support small businesses and build local economic resiliency. The RPP currently provides its CERRI services at no cost to participating communities.

CERRI Services

The primary services the RPP provides to CERRI communities generally include:

1. *Community Economic Development Assessment (Assessment)*

RPP staff will facilitate one or more assessment meeting(s) with a local work group that will include:

- a. Presentation of local economic data relative to the current situation, economic diversity, and related information.
- b. Discussion of the impacts of COVID-19 on the local economy, identification of economic assets and drivers, and completion of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis.
- c. Review of information regarding local government support of small businesses.
- d. Conduction of stakeholder interviews and a business community survey.

2. *Development of an Economic Recovery Plan of Work*

Following the Assessment, the RPP will work with local government staff and the local work group to prepare an Economic Recovery Plan of Work. Plan development meetings will include the presentation of findings from stakeholder interviews and the business community survey, the identification and prioritization of action items from the Assessment, and the development of strategies to support small businesses and help the local economy recover and become more resilient to future crises.

3. *Delivery of Implementation Services*

When the Economic Recovery Plan of Work is complete, RPP staff will work with local government staff, the local work group, and other partners (if applicable) to determine which implementation services and resources will be the most beneficial and within what timeframe(s) the community should pursue them.

Implementation services may include:

- a. Analysis of current economic conditions and opportunities
- b. Training and capacity building opportunities
- c. Formulation of implementation strategies
- d. Project development and implementation assistance
- e. Economic development assistance and technical support

In addition to RPP services, CERRI communities will receive project development, resource identification, and implementation assistance from other project partners, including regional councils of government, local and regional economic development organizations, the NC Appalachian Regional Commission program, NC Hometown Strong, and the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

CERRI participants will also benefit from training and tools provided through the NC MS&RP Center's affiliation with [Leverage NC](#), the [North Carolina Small Business and Technology Development Center](#), and other agencies and organizations.

CERRI Eligibility and Other Requirements

In their applications for CERRI, communities will be asked to address the eligibility criteria, additional requirements, and their readiness/need for CERRI, as follows:

1. *Eligibility Criteria*

- a. NC incorporated communities (municipalities) with populations under 5,000, provided they are neither currently designated as NC Main Street or Small Town Main Street communities by the NC MS&RP Center nor currently part of the NC MS&RP Center's Downtown Associate Community program.
- b. NC unincorporated communities with populations under 5,000 that partner with NC county governments.

2. *Additional Requirements*

- a. NC local governments (municipalities and, for unincorporated communities, counties) must be the applicants; however, other entities (e.g., regional councils of government) may prepare applications on behalf of local governments.
- b. Communities with current N.C. Department of Commerce County Distress Rankings (Tiers) 1 or 2 (<https://www.nccommerce.com/grants-incentives/county-distress-rankings-tiers>) will receive preference for CERRI selection; however, the RPP will take other factors into consideration for those located in Tier 3 counties. The application will provide space for communities in Tier 3 counties to explain why the tier designation should not prevent their consideration for CERRI.

3. *General Assessment of Community Readiness/Need for CERRI*

- a. Does the community have one or more business district(s)? If yes, briefly describe them (such as their general locations and types).

- b. Is the community served by any local economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, merchants or industry associations, or other similar entities? If so, please list them.
- c. How has the community's economy been affected by the pandemic?
- d. Does the community have any economic recovery efforts underway? If so, briefly describe them.
- e. What outcomes does the community expect from participating in CERRI?
- f. Describe some examples of success the community has had with implementing past planning/economic development projects? What was critical to the success of these projects?
- g. Describe the community's capacity (e.g., in terms of organization, personnel/volunteers, time, skills, and other commitments) to participate in CERRI.
- h. List partners the community is likely include in CERRI.

CERRI Application

The application period for new communities to participate in CERRI will open on Tuesday, August 17, at the conclusion of the information session (approximately 11:00 a.m.), and run through Friday, September 17. Communities will complete and submit applications online. The RPP will share the application link during the information session, send it to community contacts, and post it on the NC MS&RP Center website.

In addition to answering application questions regarding the eligibility criteria, other requirements, and readiness/need for CERRI, applicants will be asked to acknowledge that, if selected for CERRI, they will complete several actions to start the CERRI process with the RPP, as follows:

1. *Resolution and Memorandum of Understanding*

To formalize a community's CERRI participation following its selection, the town's governing board (or for unincorporated areas, the governing board of the county in which the community is located) will adopt a resolution to accept RPP services and have its designee sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the RPP regarding the scope of work, roles, and expectations of the parties involved, and other project details.

2. *Local Coordinator and Local Work Group*

The community will designate a local coordinator for the project and establish a local work group to work with RPP staff. The work group composition will be determined by the community and may include, but not be limited to, local government elected officials, appointed board/committee members, and/or staff, business owners/operators, economic/business development organization representatives, representatives of civic organizations, and/or citizens.

Questions

If communities have questions about CERRI in general, the information session on August 17, and/or the CERRI application, please contact the RPP planner assigned to your Prosperity Zone (see map with contact information, below).

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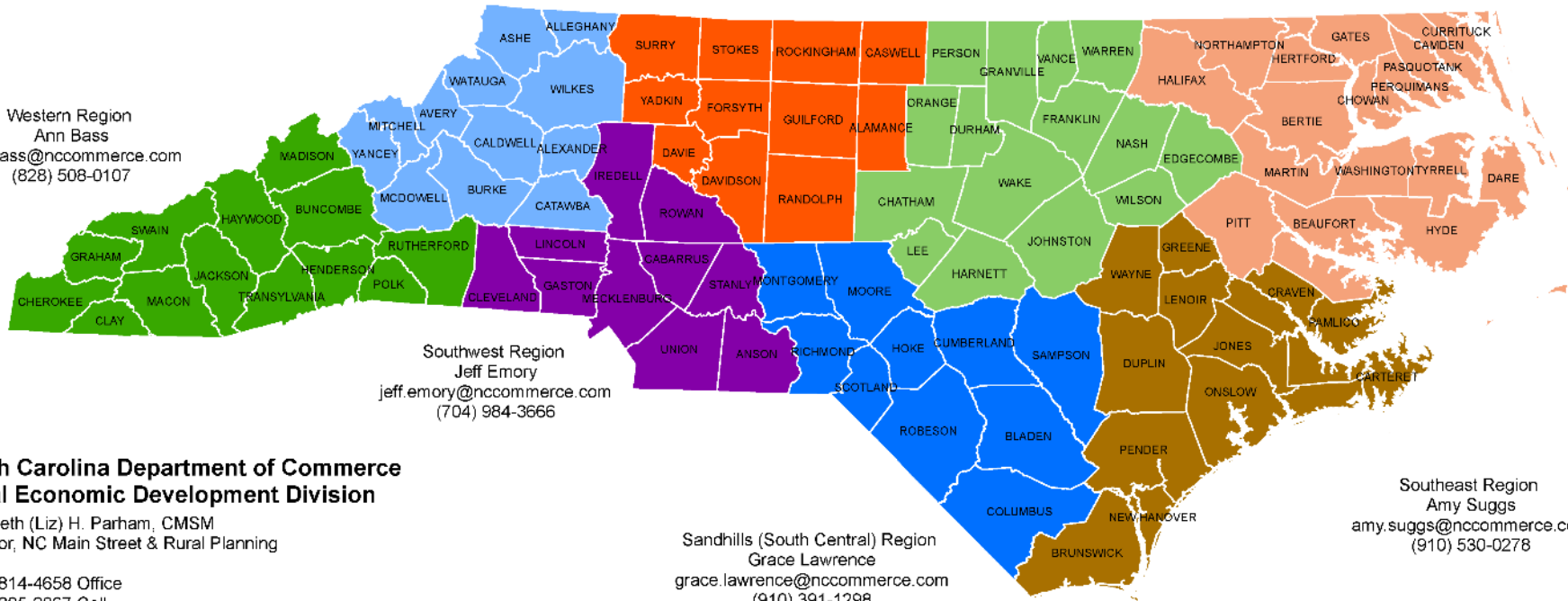
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