

Wabanaki Consortium

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2026 - 2031

Charting a Future of Sovereignty and Prosperity



FOUR DIRECTIONS
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



This CEDS was prepared by Four
Directions Development Corporation
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This strategy is the product of the collective wisdom and dedication of many members of our Wabanaki community. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Tribal Chiefs, Council members, and citizens of all four Wabanaki Nations who shared their insights and aspirations for the future. We acknowledge the foundational work and ongoing partnership with the Four Directions Development Corporation (FDDC) in championing this collaborative effort. We also recognize the support of our federal partners, including the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), whose CEDS framework provides a valuable structure for our planning.

Section 1: Executive Summary

Statement from the Wabanaki Consortium Leadership

On behalf of the sovereign Nations of the Wabanaki—the Mi'kmaq Nation, the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, and the Penobscot Nation—this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is presented. This document represents a unified commitment to forging a future of economic prosperity, resilience, and self-determination for our people. For millennia, we have been the stewards of the Dawnland, and this strategy is rooted in our sacred responsibility to honor our heritage, protect our lands and waters, and ensure the well-being of the next seven generations. It is a roadmap born from collaboration, guided by our shared values, and driven by our collective vision for a thriving inter-tribal economy that asserts our sovereignty and creates lasting opportunity for all Wabanaki citizens.

Our Vision

To build a resilient, diversified, and integrated inter-tribal economy that honors our heritage, asserts our sovereignty, and creates lasting prosperity for the next seven generations of the Wabanaki people.

The Core Challenge

The economic potential of the Wabanaki Nations has been systematically stifled by a unique and restrictive legal framework. The 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) has created a structural barrier that isolates our Nations from the federal policies of self-determination that have empowered other tribes across the United States. The consequences are stark: while the economies of other federally recognized tribes in the lower 48 states grew by an average of 61% between 1989 and 2020, the economies of the Wabanaki Nations grew by a mere 9%. This disparity is not a reflection of our capacity or our resources; it is the direct result of a legal arrangement that prevents us from exercising our full sovereign rights to govern our own economic affairs.

Strategic Response

This CEDS outlines a proactive and collaborative strategic response to overcome these systemic barriers. By leveraging the collective strength of the Wabanaki Consortium, this strategy will build the institutional capacity, physical infrastructure, and business ecosystem necessary for a modern, diversified economy. It is a dual-track strategy that focuses on building economic power within the current legal constraints while simultaneously advocating for the structural reforms needed to remove those constraints and unleash our full potential.

Priority Initiatives at a Glance

The strategy is organized around seven interconnected Priority Focus Areas designed to create a synergistic economic ecosystem:

1. **Intermodal Transportation:** Developing a tribally-prioritized, unified transportation network that strengthens Nation-to-Nation connectivity, supports local enterprise, and ensures our communities can move goods and people safely and efficiently.
2. **Agriculture & Food Sovereignty:** Strengthening tribally-controlled food systems through value-added processing facilities and shared resources that advance health, resilience, and economic independence.
3. **Sustainable Forestry & Value-Added Wood Products:** Establishing tribally-owned enterprises that manage our forests according to our environmental values, protect resources for future generations, and capture greater economic benefit from our timber.
4. **Authentic Cultural Tourism:** Developing tribally-led tourism initiatives that share our heritage on our own terms, protect cultural integrity, and generate sustainable revenue for our Nations.
5. **Wabanaki Broadband Utility:** Creating a tribally-owned utility to ensure digital sovereignty, close the digital divide, and support education, entrepreneurship, and increase economic vitality.
6. **Tribal Building Codes and Compliance:** Asserting regulatory sovereignty through a unified Building Code that reflects our environmental values, strengthens self-governance, and creates skilled employment opportunities for tribal citizens.
7. **Clean Energy and Workforce Development:** Building tribally-owned clean energy enterprises and developing a skilled tribal workforce to advance energy sovereignty, long-term economic stability, and intergenerational prosperity.

Input from Tribal Chiefs and Council members guided the development of this strategy and reaffirmed that economic sovereignty cannot be separated from cultural continuity, strong governance, youth leadership, and community wellbeing. Council responses emphasized that language, ceremony, intergenerational teaching, and transparent leadership are not separate from economic development — they are the foundation that sustains it. This CEDS reflects a shared commitment to building an economy that is culturally grounded, community-informed, and accountable to future generations.

Section 2: Background

The Wabanaki Nations: A Profile of the People of the Dawnland

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) attempts to ground economic strategy in the unique identity, history, and contemporary reality of the Wabanaki Nations. Understanding our people, our sovereign status, our lands, and the distinct economic environment in which we operate is fundamental to charting a course for a prosperous and self-determined future. Therefore, as part of our summary background, we begin with the historical context of Tribal development within the State of Maine, the regions within which Wabanaki Nations are located, and a snapshot of each of the Nations.

Historical Context

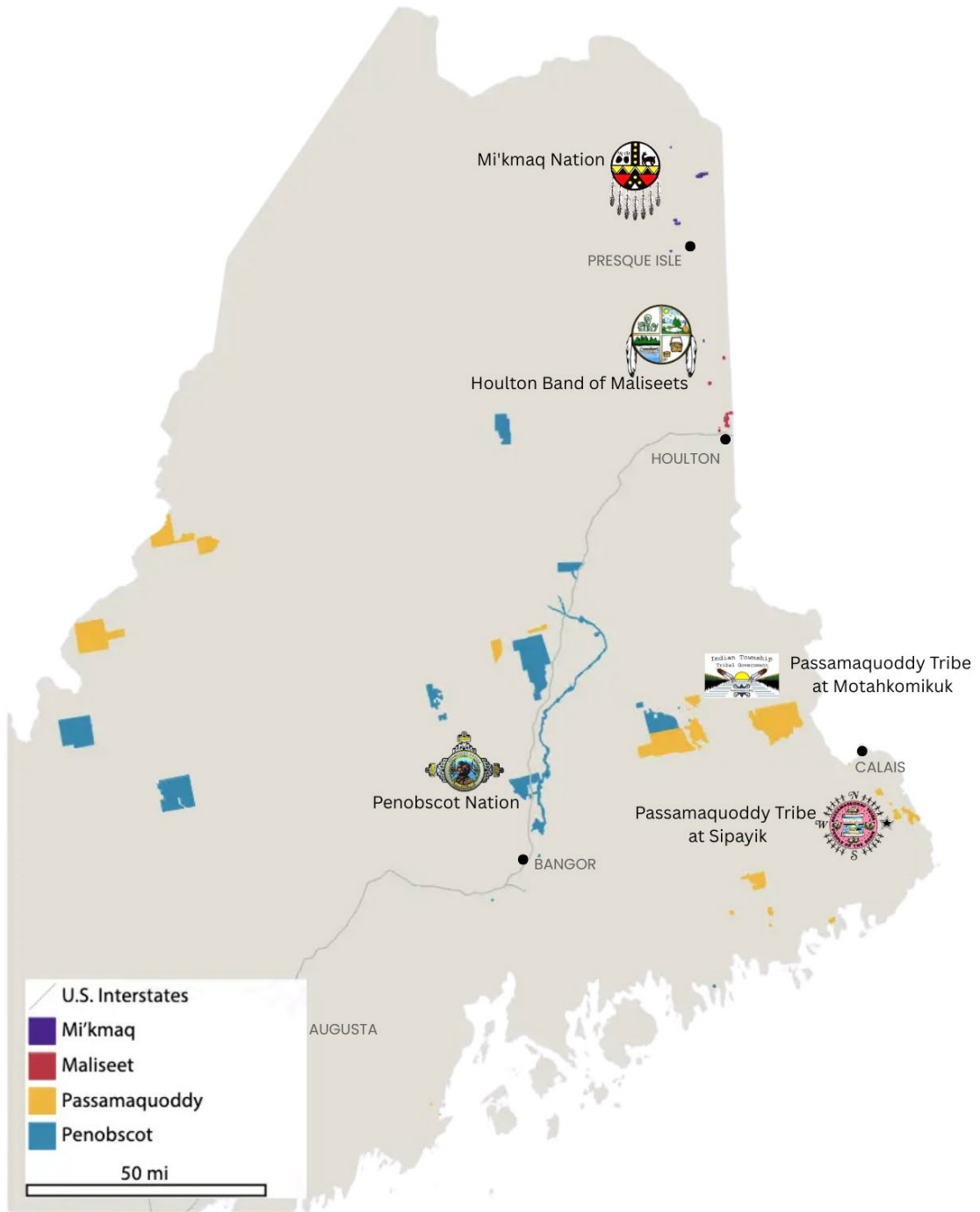
The Wabanaki, the "People of the Dawnland," have inhabited the lands now known as Maine and the Maritimes for more than 12,000 years. Our history is written in the rivers, forests, and coastlines of our ancestral territory. For millennia, we practiced a sustainable, seasonally mobile way of life, traveling across our homelands to hunt, fish, and gather, developing a deep and reciprocal relationship with the natural world. The arrival of European colonizers beginning in the 1500s brought catastrophic change, including a 96% population depletion due to disease, warfare, and land dispossession. Despite centuries of policies aimed at our destruction and assimilation—including the forced removal of our children to boarding schools—the Wabanaki Nations have endured, demonstrating profound resilience and an unbreakable connection to our homelands.

The Wabanaki Confederacy and Alliance

Historically, the five principal Eastern Algonquian nations—the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Abenaki—formed the Wabanaki Confederacy, a powerful political and military alliance established around the 1680s in response to colonial and Iroquois expansion. This confederacy was a sacred bond of brotherhood that played a crucial role in the struggle for aboriginal rights for nearly two centuries.

This spirit of inter-tribal collaboration has been rekindled in the modern era. In June 2020, the four federally recognized tribes in Maine—the Mi'kmaq Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation—formed the Wabanaki Alliance. This powerful inter-governmental organization was created to educate the people of Maine and advocate for the full recognition of Wabanaki sovereignty. The Wabanaki Consortium, for which this CEDS is developed, represents the economic development arm of this renewed alliance, building upon a long and proud history of working together for the collective good.

Demographic and Geographic Profile



(Census, 2022)

Today, the four federally recognized Wabanaki Nations in Maine are distinct sovereign entities, each with its own government, culture, and history, yet united by shared heritage and common cause. A large share of the nearly 8,700 Wabanaki citizens in Maine reside in Aroostook, Washington, and Penobscot counties. The history of colonization relegated the Wabanaki to remote and isolated lands, and as a result, our communities are now located within some of the most economically challenged counties in the United States. This geographic reality means that Wabanaki economic development is intrinsically linked to the revitalization of rural Maine. Any strategy that builds prosperity for the Wabanaki Nations will, by extension, create jobs and opportunities that benefit the entire region.

Wabanaki Nation	Primary Location(s) (County)	Enrolled Members (Approx.)	Key Land Holdings
Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (Wolastoqiyik)	Littleton (Aroostook)	1,700	Fee and trust lands along the Meduxnekeag River
Mi'kmaq Nation	Presque Isle (Aroostook)	1,500+	Fee and trust lands in the vicinity of Presque Isle
Passamaquoddy Tribe (Peskotomuhkati)	Indian Township & Pleasant Point (Washington)	3,905	Two primary reservations (Motahkomikuk and Sipayik) and off-reservation trust lands
Penobscot Nation (Panawahpskek)	Indian Island (Penobscot)	2,398	Reservation land including 200+ islands in the Penobscot River and 90,000+ acres of trust land

Sovereign Status

The Wabanaki Nations are inherent sovereign nations. Our right to self-government is not granted by the United States or the State of Maine; it is a right that has existed since time immemorial and is recognized in the fundamental principles of federal Indian law. Our governments possess sovereign powers separate from and independent of federal and state governments, responsible for providing a full spectrum of services to our citizens, including education, healthcare, housing, and natural resource management.

The Structural Barrier of MICSA

The primary obstacle to exercising our full sovereign rights and achieving economic parity is the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA). Unlike any other federal Indian land claims settlement, MICSA contains unique provisions that empower the State of Maine to block the application of federal laws passed for the benefit of tribes if the state determines they would be "affected or preempted" by Maine law.

This effectively freezes the relationship between the Wabanaki Nations and the federal government in 1980, denying us access to the more than 150 beneficial federal Indian laws passed since then. These are the very laws that have fueled the era of self-determination and led to remarkable economic growth across the rest of Indian Country. This legal and political framework creates profound uncertainty and risk, stifling tribal investment and discouraging outside partners. It is impossible to engage in effective long-term economic planning when the applicability of federal programs and protections—from the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act to the Violence Against Women Act—can be disputed or denied by the state. This CEDES is therefore designed as a dual-track strategy: one track focuses on maximizing economic development *within* the constraints of MICSA through inter-tribal collaboration and innovation, while the other track supports the ongoing political and educational efforts required to reform MICSA and unlock our full economic potential.

Regional Economic Landscape

The State of Maine’s Vision according to the Maine Office of Business Development Ten-Year Economic Development Strategy is focused on metrics of growth in real wages, real GDP per worker, and labor force participation to realize the vision:

“By 2030, Maine will be an international leader with a vibrant, sustainable, environmentally responsible economy. All across the state, the people of Maine will have access to an unmatched quality of life and good-paying jobs.”

Maine’s seven strategies to achieve “prosperity for all” are:

- A. Grow Local Talent
- B. Attract New Talent
- C. Promote Innovation
- D. Build Connections
- E. Providing Supporting Infrastructure
- F. Maintain a Stable Business Environment
- G. Promote Hubs of Excellence

Many of these strategies center the development, deployment and support of Maine’s labor force. The exceptions are strategies that focus on regulation for permitting, renewable energy production, and technical assistance towards innovative and well-branded local business hubs.

The four Wabanaki Nations, their populations and lands, all located in Northern Maine, are governed by independent Tribal Councils and their governments. These lands are located regionally in the following counties and economic development districts. Our analysis includes the infrastructure, industries, workforce, and affordability:

Wabanaki Nation	Primary Location(s) (County)	Counties	Economic Development District
Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians <i>(Wolastoqiyik)</i>	Littleton (Aroostook)	Aroostook	Aroostook-Washington Economic Development District
Mi'kmaq Nation	Presque Isle (Aroostook)	Aroostook	Aroostook-Washington Economic Development District
Passamaquoddy Tribe <i>(Peskotomuhkati)</i>	Indian Township & Pleasant Point (Washington)	Hancock, Somerset, Washington	Aroostook-Washington Economic Development District
Penobscot Nation <i>(Panawahpskek)</i>	Indian Island (Penobscot)	Penobscot	Eastern Maine Development Corporation

Infrastructure Assets and Development Need

Maine overall has the following infrastructure grade as awarded by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) in December 2024.:

C

B	Aviation
B-	Ports, Rail
C+	Schools
C	Public Parks, Stormwater
C-	Drinking Water, Energy, Hazardous Waste, Roads, Solid Waste, Wastewater
D+	Bridges, Dams, Levees, Transit

The report confirmed that while the State’s grades for energy, roads, and bridges dropped by 2 steps, 2 steps, and 1 step respectively, the infrastructure grade increased one step from the 2020 Report Card and is one step higher than the national average.

Aroostook, Washington, Penobscot, Hancock, and Somerset Counties comprise a predominantly rural, geographically expansive region characterized by small population centers, long travel distances, aging infrastructure, and exposure to environmental and economic volatility. Infrastructure conditions directly shape economic competitiveness, access to essential services, and the feasibility of private investment. While recent state and federal investments have improved baseline conditions—particularly in broadband and transportation—significant gaps remain, especially in rural, coastal, and inland communities.

1 Infrastructure Assets

1.1 Transportation Infrastructure

- Regional highway network: anchored by U.S. Route 1, Interstate 95, and key state arterials provides north–south and east–west connectivity linking rural communities to regional markets, ports, and service hubs.
- Strategic ports and marine facilities, including Eastport and Searsport, support commercial fishing, freight, and emerging offshore wind and marine industries.
- Regional and municipal airports (e.g., Presque Isle, Hancock County–Bar Harbor, Machias Valley) provide essential access for medical transport, tourism, and business

connectivity.

- Ongoing state transportation work plans are investing in road reconstruction, bridge replacement, culvert upgrades, and airport safety improvements across all five counties.

1.2 Broadband & Digital Infrastructure

- Significant progress has been made in fiber expansion and last-mile connectivity, particularly in Aroostook and Washington Counties, through coordinated state, federal, and private investments.
- Middle-mile fiber assets and open-access networks form a growing backbone supporting future last-mile deployment and institutional connectivity.
- Broadband infrastructure is increasingly recognized as essential economic infrastructure, enabling remote work, telehealth, education, and modern business operations.

1.3 Energy & Utility Infrastructure

- The region hosts a mix of electric transmission and distribution assets, including three-phase power upgrades in rural areas and grid modernization initiatives.
- Renewable energy assets, including onshore wind and hydropower, contribute to regional generation capacity and long-term sustainability goals.
- Utilities and regional partners are engaged in grid resilience and infrastructure planning, particularly in areas vulnerable to storms and extreme weather.

1.4 Water, Wastewater & Public Utilities

- Municipal and district-based water and wastewater systems serve population centers and employment hubs.
- Targeted investments using ARPA and state funds have improved system reliability in select communities.
- Public facilities, industrial parks, and working waterfronts benefit from established utility access in core service areas.

2 Infrastructure Needs & Gaps

2.1 Transportation Gaps

- Aging road and bridge infrastructure continues to limit freight efficiency, increase maintenance costs, and constrain access to employment and services in rural areas.
- Limited public transportation options reduce workforce mobility, particularly for low-income residents, older adults, and Tribal communities.
- Coastal and riverine infrastructure faces increasing risk from flooding, storm surge, and erosion, requiring resilience-focused investment.

2.2 Broadband & Digital Equity Needs

- Despite progress, last-mile broadband gaps persist, particularly in low-density, remote, and Tribal areas.
- Affordability, adoption, and digital skills remain barriers even where infrastructure exists.
- Institutional and economic development sites (industrial parks, Tribal lands, downtowns) require scalable, future-proof connectivity to support business growth.

2.3 Energy & Utility Constraints

- High energy costs and limited redundancy increase operating expenses for businesses and public facilities.
- Rural and coastal communities face challenges in grid reliability and outage duration, particularly during severe weather.
- Limited access to advanced energy infrastructure constrains opportunities for energy-intensive industries, data-driven businesses, and value-added manufacturing.

2.4 Water, Wastewater & Site Readiness

- Aging water and sewer systems require significant capital investment to meet regulatory standards and support new development.
- Many rural communities lack shovel-ready sites with adequate utility capacity, limiting their ability to compete for industrial, commercial, and housing investment.
- External stressors increase risks to drinking water sources, wastewater treatment facilities, and stormwater systems.

3 County-Specific Infrastructure Considerations

- Aroostook County: Long distances, extreme winter conditions, broadband and energy reliability remain central constraints despite recent fiber and transmission investments.
- Washington County: Port and coastal infrastructure upgrades are critical for economic diversification; broadband and transportation improvements remain foundational needs.
- Penobscot County: Strong multimodal assets and utility capacity, but aging infrastructure needs persist, particularly for bridges and waterfront facilities.
- Hancock County: High seasonal demand and harsher environments require resilient transportation, ferry, airport, and waterfront infrastructure.
- Somerset County: Inland communities face limited transit options, uneven broadband access, and aging utility systems affecting site readiness.

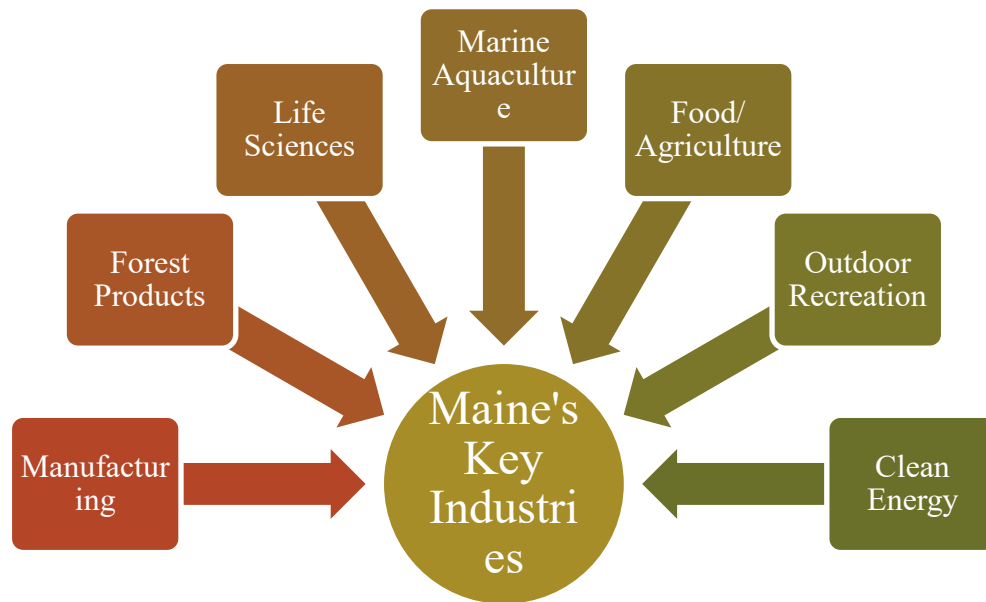
4 Strategic Implications of Infrastructure Investment for Economic Development

- Improving regional competitiveness and site readiness
- Supporting workforce access and labor force participation
- Enabling Tribal, rural, and small-community economic development

- Advancing infrastructure resilience and long-term sustainability
- Leveraging private investment alongside federal and state resources

Targeted, coordinated infrastructure strategies—aligned with EDA priorities—will be critical to closing remaining gaps and ensuring equitable, durable economic growth across the region.

Industries



The State of Maine has identified seven key industries with related programmatic support. As part of these and related efforts, the State’s strongest industries are (I) Healthcare and Social Assistance, the largest employment sector, (II) Manufacturing, primarily of forest products, food processing, transportation equipment and advanced manufacturing, (III) Tourism, Hospitality, and Outdoor Recreation, (IV) Marine, Fishing, and Aquaculture, (V) Agriculture and Food Systems, (VI) Government and Education.

Through our desktop research, data available through statisticalatlas.com, we recognize certain county characteristics summarized below: The primary industry clusters by county are:

County	Most Over-Represented vs Maine
Aroostook	Healthcare, agriculture, forestry, food processing, border-related government
Washington	Healthcare, fishing, forestry, agriculture, government
Penobscot	Healthcare, manufacturing, professional services
Hancock	Tourism, hospitality, professional & marine services
Somerset	Healthcare, manufacturing, construction, agriculture

Aroostook County has the most specialization, primarily due to resource specific cluster development and lack of proximity to retail markets.

Healthcare & Government

- Healthcare is the single largest employer due to regional medical centers serving dispersed rural populations.
- Federal presence (Customs & Border Protection, DFAS) is stronger than average due to the international border.

Agriculture, Forestry & Food Processing:

- Significantly more concentrated than the state overall, driven by potato farming, forestry, and food manufacturing.
- Agriculture and forestry employment share is over 140% more common than statewide averages.
- Aroostook is Maine’s primary potato-producing region and a hub for forest products manufacturing.

Forest Products & Manufacturing:

- Strong presence of lumber, wood products, engineered wood, and paper-related manufacturing.
- Manufacturing plays a larger role locally than in many Maine counties.

Emerging Aerospace & Advanced Technology

- Aerospace and data-center-related activity at Presque Isle Airport and Loring represent emerging diversification, not yet statewide-dominant but notable for rural Maine.

More concentrated than Maine in agriculture, forestry, and resource-based manufacturing.

Less concentrated in professional services and finance.

Washington County’s strongest industries are most dependent on natural resources.

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting

- The most over-represented industry category in the county—nearly 400% more concentrated than Maine overall.
- Includes fishing, aquaculture, forestry, and blueberry agriculture.

Healthcare

- Major employer relative to population size, reflecting limited alternatives and regional service roles.

Extremely specialized in resource-based industries.

Under-represented in manufacturing scale, professional services, and higher-wage sectors.

Government

- Government employment is more prominent than statewide averages, including local, county, and Tribal services. [statisticalatlas.com]

Manufacturing (Selective)

- Smaller in absolute size but includes food processing and forest products tied to local resource bases.

Penobscot County demonstrates some of the highest industrial diversity in the region.

Healthcare & Social Assistance

- Largest employer, significantly exceeding the state average in absolute employment.
- Anchored by regional hospitals and specialty care facilities serving much of eastern and northern Maine.



Retail, Education & Government

- Bangor-area service hub function supports above-average concentration of retail, education, and public administration.

Manufacturing

- Manufacturing employment is more concentrated than the Maine average, particularly in food, wood products, and specialized manufacturing.

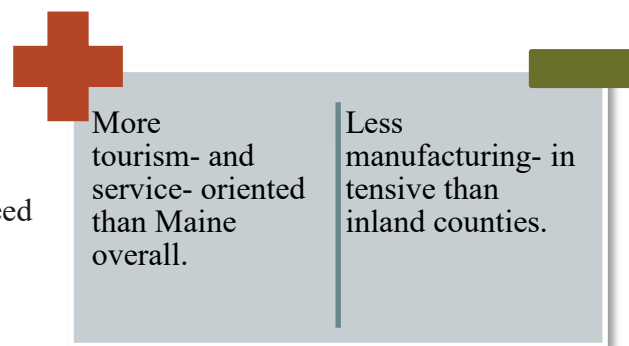
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services

- Stronger than in surrounding rural counties due to proximity to the University of Maine and regional headquarters functions.

Hancock County shows a tourism-driven economy with professional & marine strengths.

Tourism, Hospitality & Retail

- Hospitality and retail employment exceed statewide averages, driven by Acadia National Park and seasonal visitation.



Professional, Scientific & Technical Services

- Higher concentration than Maine overall, reflecting design, engineering, research, and nonprofit activity associated with marine science and conservation.

Healthcare

- Major employer but slightly less dominant than in Penobscot or Aroostook.

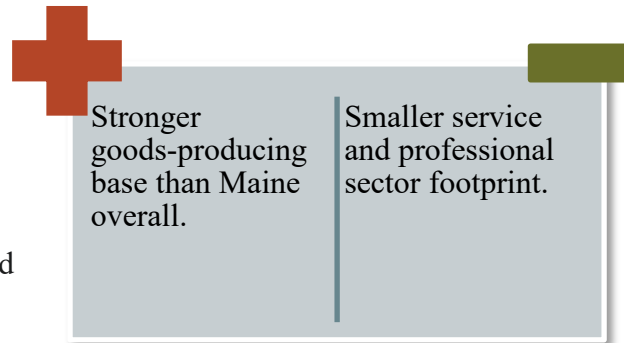
Marine & Natural Resource Industries

- Fishing, lobstering, and marine-related services remain core components of the local economy.

Somerset County demonstrates a focus in manufacturing.

Manufacturing

- Manufacturing employment share is significantly higher than Maine's average, including wood products, food manufacturing, and light industrial production.



Healthcare

- Largest single employment sector, consistent with statewide trends but more critical due to rural access needs.

Construction

- Over-represented compared to Maine overall, reflecting infrastructure, energy, and housing activity.

Agriculture & Forestry

- More concentrated than the Maine average, though less extreme than Aroostook or Washington Counties.

Regional Industry Clusters Summary

Aroostook, Washington, Penobscot, Hancock, Somerset Counties — Relative to Maine Overall

<i>Industry Cluster</i>	<i>Counties with Strongest Concentration</i>	<i>Relative Strength vs. Maine</i>	<i>Primary Assets & Drivers</i>	<i>Growth Potential vs. Vulnerability</i>	<i>EDA-Relevant Implications</i>
<i>Agriculture & Food Systems</i>	Aroostook, Washington, Somerset	Significantly more concentrated than Maine overall	Potatoes, blueberries, forestry-linked agriculture, food processing, export logistics	High growth potential through value-added processing and regional food systems; vulnerable to environmental variability, labor shortages, and thin margins	Strong case for EDA investment in processing facilities, cold storage, supply-chain infrastructure
<i>Forest Products & Wood Manufacturing</i>	Aroostook, Somerset, Washington	Over-represented relative to Maine	Timber resources, sawmills, engineered wood, paper and wood products	Moderate–high growth potential via mass timber and biobased products; vulnerable to market volatility and aging facilities	Supports advanced manufacturing, industrial modernization, site readiness
<i>Fishing, Marine & Aquaculture</i>	Washington, Hancock	Highly concentrated compared to statewide average	Lobstering, fishing fleets, aquaculture, working waterfronts	Moderate growth potential with diversification and processing; high vulnerability to environmental changes, regulatory shifts, and stock health	Strong justification for port, pier, and waterfront resilience investments

<i>Industry Cluster</i>	<i>Counties with Strongest Concentration</i>	<i>Relative Strength vs. Maine</i>	<i>Primary Assets & Drivers</i>	<i>Growth Potential vs. Vulnerability</i>	<i>EDA-Relevant Implications</i>
<i>Manufacturing (General & Advanced)</i>	Penobscot, Somerset, Aroostook	Comparable to or higher than Maine average in inland counties	Food manufacturing, wood products, light industrial, emerging aerospace	High growth potential if infrastructure and workforce gaps are addressed; moderate vulnerability to automation and energy costs	Core EDA Public Works target: industrial parks, utilities, workforce facilities
<i>Healthcare & Social Assistance</i>	Penobscot, Aroostook, Somerset, Washington	More dominant than Maine overall due to rural service role	Regional hospitals, rural healthcare delivery, aging population	Stable but limited growth; structurally vulnerable to workforce shortages and reimbursement pressures	Anchors employment; supports workforce and facility modernization investments
<i>Tourism, Hospitality & Outdoor Recreation</i>	Hancock, Washington	More concentrated than Maine overall	Acadia National Park, coastal tourism, seasonal visitation	Moderate growth potential with diversification and shoulder-season strategies; high vulnerability to seasonality and housing constraints	Infrastructure tied to transportation and environmental changes
<i>Professional, Scientific & Technical Services</i>	Penobscot, Hancock	Stronger than surrounding rural counties, near Maine average	University of Maine, marine science, engineering, nonprofits	High growth potential as a diversification pathway; low vulnerability if broadband and talent pipelines expand	Aligns with innovation, R&D commercialization, and entrepreneurship strategies
<i>Government & Public</i>	Aroostook, Washington,	Over-represented relative to Maine	Border services, regional service	Low growth potential, but stabilizing; vulnerable to	Supports coordination, planning, and

<i>Industry Cluster</i>	<i>Counties with Strongest Concentration</i>	<i>Relative Strength vs. Maine</i>	<i>Primary Assets & Drivers</i>	<i>Growth Potential vs. Vulnerability</i>	<i>EDA-Relevant Implications</i>
<i>Administration</i>	Penobscot		centers, Tribal and local government	federal and state budget shifts	shared-service infrastructure
<i>Construction & Infrastructure Trades</i>	Somerset, Penobscot	More concentrated than Maine average	Energy projects, housing, transportation investments	High short- to medium-term growth potential; vulnerable to cyclical funding and workforce capacity	Supports workforce training aligned with infrastructure and clean energy
<i>Emerging Technology & Aerospace</i>	Aroostook (emerging), Penobscot (supporting)	Nascent but growing relative to rural Maine	Aerospace research park, data infrastructure, university R&D	High upside growth potential; high vulnerability without sustained infrastructure and talent investment	Strong EDA justification for catalytic, diversification-focused investments

The lens of the regional analysis is for investors looking to establish new operations or ventures. It can be shifted to also see where industries and current businesses within them are vulnerable to shortages in talent or resources to position future investments in workforce development, real estate development, etc.

Workforce

Maine’s median age is approximately 45 years, reflecting an older population profile. Labor force participation among individuals aged 16 and older is around 61%, indicating moderate engagement in the workforce. About 34–36% of residents aged 25 and above hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, which demonstrates a solid level of educational attainment. The median household income is roughly \$75,000, while the poverty rate stands at about 11%. Population trends show modest growth overall, with aging as the most significant demographic shift impacting the area.

In analyzing the census data for each of the five counties we find that all the counties except for Penobscot are contending with aging populations and low labor force participation rates when compared to the Maine average. Educational attainment gaps remain a systemic regional challenge, particularly outside Hancock and Penobscot counties. Income and poverty disparities further reinforce eligibility for EDA investment, as these factors meet distress criteria. Importantly, workforce constraints across the region are structural rather than cyclical, which strengthens the case for infrastructure-linked workforce strategies aimed at addressing persistent issues.

Aroostook County: Aging workforce, low participation, and out-migration constrain labor supply despite strong sector specialization.

Demographic

- Older than Maine overall (median age ~48); very high share of residents 65+ (over one-quarter of the population).
- Population decline since 2010, with continued out-migration of younger adults.

Workforce

- Labor force participation ~55%, well below Maine average.
- Educational attainment is lower: ~23–25% bachelor’s degree+, compared to ~35% statewide.
- Median household income is substantially below Maine (~\$54k vs. ~\$75k); poverty rate ~15–16%, above state average.

Washington County: Severe workforce constraints due to aging, low participation, and educational attainment; strong case for workforce re-engagement and skills pipelines.

Demographic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oldest population in the region (median age ~48–49); high dependency ratio driven by seniors. • Small and relatively stable population, but long-term stagnation compared to Maine growth. • Higher share of American Indian/Alaska Native residents than Maine overall, reflecting Tribal communities.

Workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest labor force participation among the counties (~52–53%), well below Maine. • Bachelor’s degree attainment ~22–25%, significantly below state average. • Median household income (~\$56k) well below Maine; poverty rate ~17%, among the highest in the state.

Penobscot County: Acts as the region’s primary labor and talent hub; best positioned for diversification and higher-skill growth.

Demographic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youngest population in the five-county region (median age ~42–43), younger than Maine overall. • Population growth since 2020, contrasting with declines elsewhere in the region.

Workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor force participation ~60%, close to Maine average and highest in the region. • Educational attainment stronger than other counties (~30% bachelor’s+), though still slightly below statewide levels. • Median household income (~\$63k) below Maine average but higher than other regional counties; poverty rate (~14–15%) slightly above state average.

Hancock County: Strong human capital but constrained by housing costs, seasonality, and aging demographics.

Demographic
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Older population (median age ~49), driven by retirees and seasonal residents; higher senior dependency than Maine overall.• Moderate population growth since 2017, unlike most rural counties.

Workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labor force participation (25–54) is roughly on par with Maine, despite an older population overall.• Educational attainment is above Maine average in recent ACS estimates (bachelor’s+ ~37–39%).• Median household income (~\$70–73k) is near Maine average; poverty rate (~10%) slightly below statewide.

Somerset County: Goods-producing workforce with limited higher-skill depth; workforce development is essential for manufacturing and construction growth.

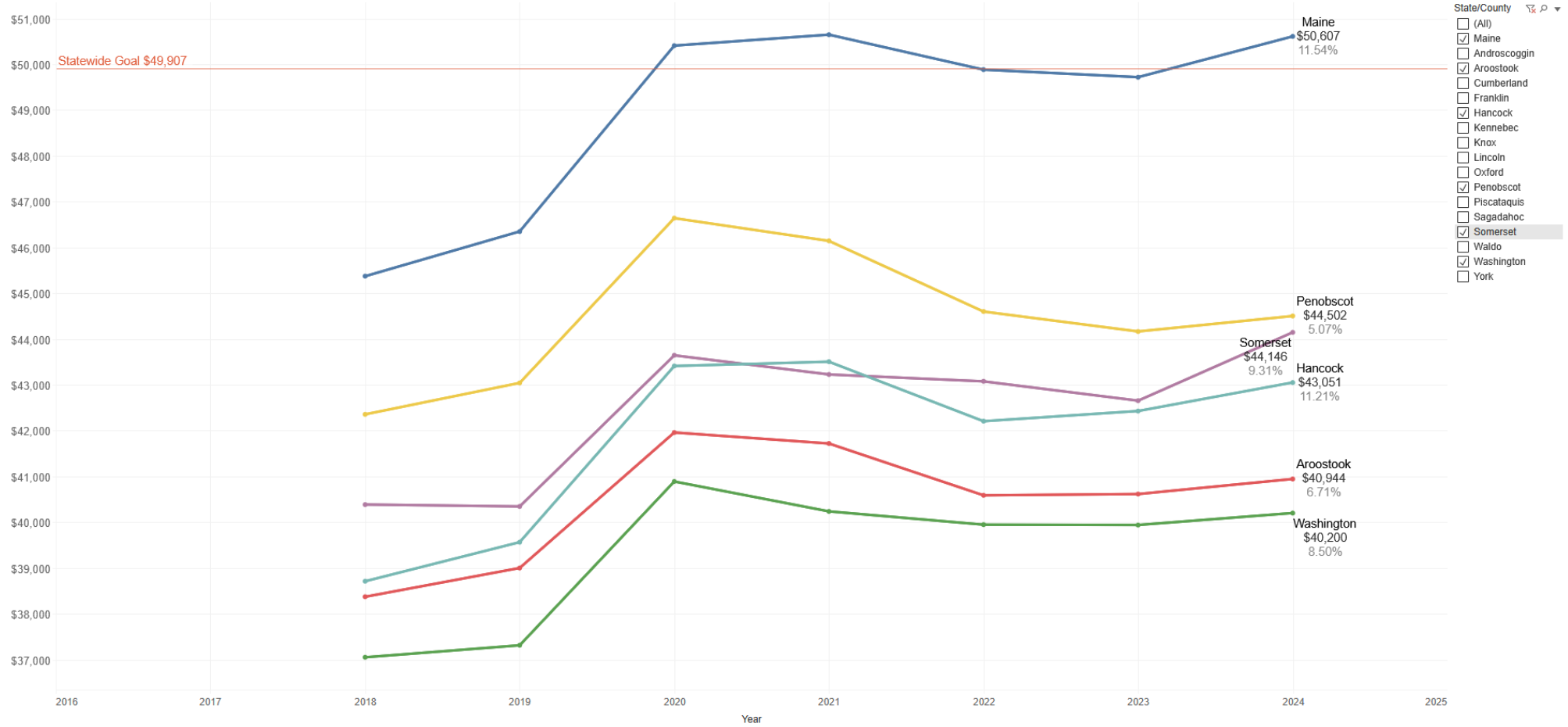
Demographic
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Older than Maine overall (median age ~47); aging trend without the in-migration seen in Hancock.• Population relatively flat with minor recent growth.

Workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labor force participation ~55–57%, below Maine average.• Bachelor’s degree attainment ~19–22%, significantly below Maine.• Median household income (~\$56–58k) well below Maine; poverty rate ~14–16%, above state average.

Real Wage Growth (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Average Annual Wage Adjusted for Inflation - Statewide and by County

Average real (inflation-adjusted) wages have neared our goal of 10% growth statewide. The major economic disruption of COVID-19 led to volatile wage data in 2020 and 2021. However, as Maine's economy returned to full employment in 2022, underlying wages rose across counties and industries and settled at a higher level than 2018.

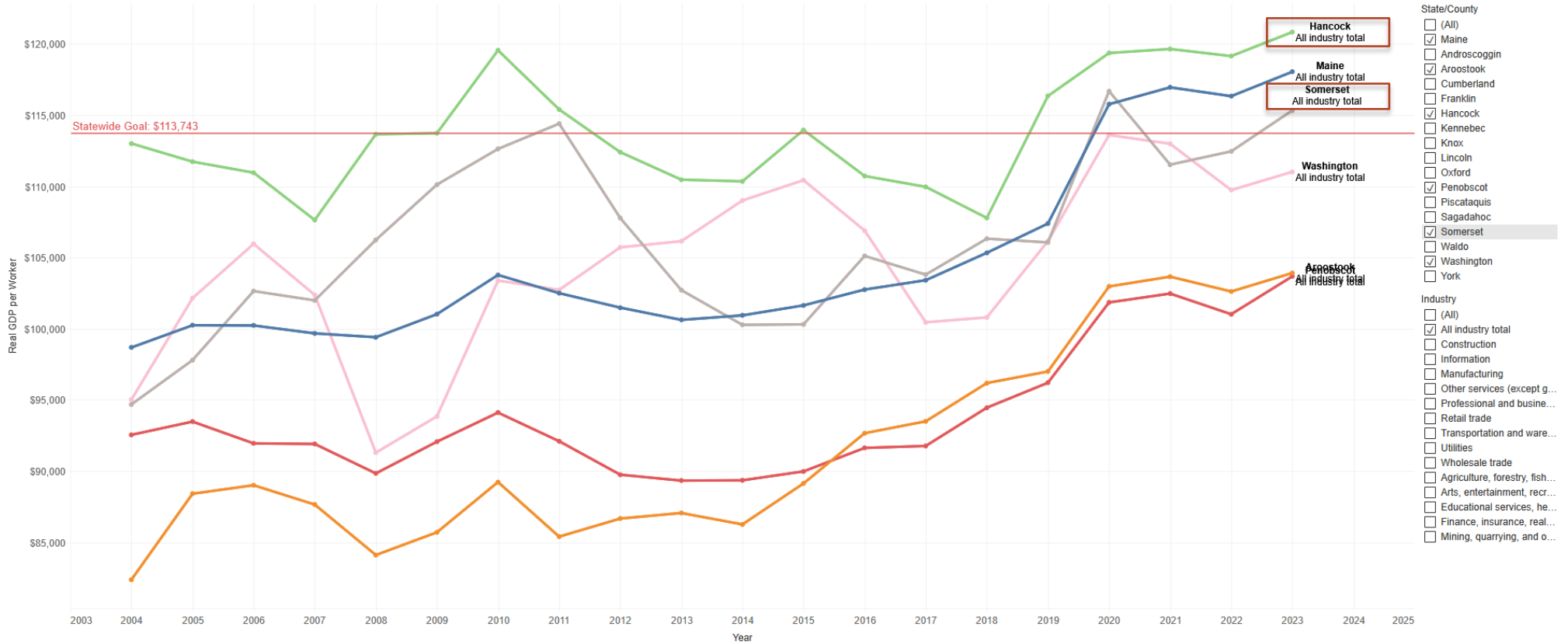


U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, series ENU2300050010, CUUS0000SA0.

Real GDP per Worker by County (BLS)

Real Gross Domestic Product per Worker - Statewide and by County

Real GDP per worker measures the average value of the things we make and do in the Maine economy. We saw a major increase in 2020 due to shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic, and those gains persisted as the economy rebounded, exceeding our goal of a 10% increase.



U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, series CAGDP9, SQGDP9; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, series ENU23XXX10010.

Summary Analysis and Takeaways of Labor Market in top 3 counties: Healthcare Industry Opportunity

We know how important it is for Tribal leadership, strategists and planners to leverage data in addition to utilizing anecdotal evidence into new ideas and opportunities. As an example, observing the prevalence of the Healthcare industry in the 5 target counties, we can conduct a deeper analysis of the labor market to understand the opportunities for targeted investment and workforce development. In this case we draw additional information using a tool called Lightcast to inform this deep dive.

Core Labor Market Signals:

County snapshot	Supply (Jobs)	Earnings per Job	Demand (Job Postings / mo)	Hiring competition (qualitative)
Aroostook County, ME	25,968	\$64,257	437	Light hiring competition + demand is low vs national-size-adjusted benchmark
Penobscot County, ME	71,819	\$68,520	1,438	Average hiring competition + demand about average vs benchmark
Washington County, ME	10,208	\$62,885	206	Average hiring competition + demand about average vs benchmark

- Penobscot County is the regional employment and job-posting center across these three—largest supply and demand, with the highest earnings per job among them.
- Aroostook County shows low posting competition (fewer postings than the national-size-adjusted average), which can indicate either weaker near-term hiring pressure or less online posting activity.
- Washington County has the smallest labor pool of the three and has the lowest earnings per job.

Growth Trajectory

County snapshot	Past growth (2019–2024)	Projected growth (2024–2029)	Stated interpretation
Aroostook County, ME	-2%	-5%	Supply is about equal to the national average and gap expected to remain roughly the same.
Penobscot County, ME	+2%	-1%	Supply is about equal to the national average and gap expected to remain roughly the same.
Washington County, ME	+1%	-2%	Supply is about equal to the national average and gap expected to remain roughly the same.

All three counties show negative projected growth for 2024–2029 in the selected industry set, with Aroostook having the steepest projected decline (-5%).

Workforce risk & indicators (retirement)

- Retirement risk (55+ “retiring soon”)
 - Aroostook: 7,452 employees 55+ vs national-size-adjusted average 6,206 → high retirement risk
 - Penobscot: 18,985 vs 17,165 → high retirement risk
 - Washington: 3,089 vs 2,440 → high retirement risk

- All three counties show a large 55–64 cohort:
 - Aroostook: 20.1% (5,229 jobs) age 55–64
 - Penobscot: 18.2% (13,084) age 55–64
 - Washington: 20.4% (2,083) age 55–64

Across all three counties, the data flags high retirement risk in all 947 industries.

Demand-side structure

County snapshot	Employers competing	Unique postings (last 12 months)	Median posting duration	Top job titles (examples listed)
Aroostook County, ME	461	5,238	29 days	Licensed Psychiatric Technicians; Lead CT Technologists; Customer Service Representatives; Farm Workers; CRNA roles (as listed)
Penobscot County, ME	1,487	17,257	25 days	Travel Registered Nurses; Registered Nurses; Certified Nursing Assistants; Licensed Practical Nurses; Lead CT Technologists
Washington County, ME	324	2,477	23 days	Travel Registered Nurses; Licensed Psychiatric Technicians; Medical Surgical Travel RNs; Travel Surgical Technologists; Medical Surgical RNs

Demand is healthcare-heavy in all three (nursing and clinical roles dominate the example “Top

Job Titles”). Penobscot shows the deepest market (most employers and postings).

Output/economic footprint: Gross Regional Product (GRP)

Each report provides a GRP block with components (Earnings, Property Income, Taxes, Total GRP) for 2024:

- Aroostook County, ME: Earnings \$2.1B; Property Income \$852.3M; Taxes \$228.0M; Total GRP \$3.2B
- Penobscot County, ME: Earnings \$6.1B; Property Income \$2.0B; Taxes \$854.3M; Total GRP \$8.9B
- Washington County, ME: Earnings \$954.8M; Property Income \$446.6M; Taxes \$116.8M; Total GRP \$1.5B

Penobscot County’s modeled economic footprint for these industries is roughly largest, followed by Aroostook County, then Washington County.

Skills being posted for (signals of direction)

- The “Top 15 Skills by Quarter” overlaps but varies by emphasis:
 - **Aroostook County, ME:** skills prominently include Merchandising, Effective Communication, Selling Techniques, Food Safety and Sanitation, Nursing, Cash Register, Warehousing, Mental Health, plus operations/process themes like Continuous Improvement Process, Inventory Management, Workflow Management, Quality Management, and “Technical Requirements.”
 - **Penobscot County, ME:** skills include Nursing, Merchandising, Patient Safety, Mental Health, Workflow Management, Selling Techniques, Nursing Care, Medication Administration, Auditing, Treatment Planning, Vital Signs, Data Entry, Effective Communication, and Statistics.
 - **Washington County, ME:** skills include Nursing, Merchandising, Emergency Departments, Quality Improvement, Selling Techniques, Newsletters, Operating Room (OR), Bloodborne Pathogens, Taking Meeting Minutes, Vital Signs, Family Medicine, Medical Records, Effective Communication, Auditing, Medical Surgical Nursing.
- Interpretive comparison:
 - Penobscot County shows a strong blend of clinical-care process skills (patient safety, medication administration, treatment planning, statistics) alongside merchandising and workflow.
 - Washington County tilts toward hospital/acute-care context terms (OR, emergency departments, bloodborne pathogens, medical records, medical-surgical nursing).

- Aroostook County includes more frontline operations/retail/logistics signals (cash register, warehousing, inventory management) in addition to nursing and process improvement.

FINDINGS

A) Workforce availability vs. hiring pressure

All three counties are described as “about average for this kind of talent” relative to size-adjusted national benchmarks, but their demand intensity differs: Penobscot’s postings and employer counts are much larger, implying a more active and competitive hiring environment at scale.

B) Replacement demand is a common challenge

With high retirement risk across all three, even modest or negative net growth can still require substantial replacement hiring (especially in healthcare roles that dominate postings).

C) Sectoral signal: healthcare dominates near-term demand

The “Top Job Titles” and many skills lists repeatedly feature nursing, clinical technicians, and care settings—consistent across all counties.

TARGETED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Targeted workforce strategy by county
 - Penobscot County, ME: prioritize healthcare pipeline + retention (largest demand volume) and cross-sector skill building (workflow, data entry, statistics).
 - Aroostook County, ME: emphasize replacement planning + multi-sector frontline skills (retail/logistics + healthcare) and mitigate steeper projected decline.
 - Washington County, ME: focus on clinical setting readiness (OR, ED, bloodborne pathogens, medical records) and mitigate smaller labor pool constraints.
- Training program alignment
- Build “stackable” training aligned to recurring skills (e.g., nursing fundamentals + documentation/medical records + quality improvement/workflow).

Tribal Economic Landscape

Economic Underperformance

The economic consequences of MICSA are not theoretical; they are documented in the stark economic realities faced by Wabanaki citizens. A landmark 2022 report from the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development quantifies the staggering cost of this stunted self-governance. While the per capita incomes for citizens of other federally recognized tribes in the lower 48 states grew by 61% from 1989 to 2020, the incomes of Wabanaki citizens grew by only 9%. During the same period, the income for the average Maine resident grew by 25%.

This stunted growth translates into persistent poverty and hardship. Per capita incomes on Wabanaki lands are drastically lower than the state average, with citizens of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation having average annual incomes of just \$11,320 and \$11,431, respectively, compared to Maine's per capita income of \$34,593. Child poverty rates are catastrophic, ranging from 40% to an unconscionable 76.9% for the Mi'kmaq Nation, compared to a statewide rate of 15%.

Economic Indicator	Wabanaki Nations (Range)	State of Maine	U.S. Tribes (Lower 48)
Per Capita Income Growth (1989-2020)	9%	25%	61%
Per Capita Income (2020)	\$11,320 - \$18,809	\$34,593	N/A
Child Poverty Rate (2019)	40.2% - 76.9%	15.1%	23.4% (2020)
Unemployment Rate (AIAN Alone, 2019)	5.7% - 8.7%	4.8% (Overall)	6.1% (Overall AIAN)
College Graduates or Higher (AIAN Alone, 2019)	7.1% - 21.1%	35.3% (Overall)	18.3% (Overall AIAN)

Existing Economic Base

Despite these profound challenges, the Wabanaki Nations have maintained a resilient, though underdeveloped, economic base. Tribal governments are significant employers in their regions, funded primarily through federal contracts and grants. Traditional and natural resource-based industries remain central to our economies and cultures. These include:

- **Artisanship:** Highly skilled artisans continue to produce world-renowned works, including ash and sweetgrass baskets, drums, carvings, and canoes.
- **Fisheries and Aquaculture:** Fishing for species like pollock and elvers is a vital source of food and income, particularly for the Passamaquoddy Nation. The Mi'kmaq Nation operates a successful brook trout hatchery, and the Passamaquoddy are developing an innovative eel aquaculture facility.
- **Agriculture:** All four Nations are engaged in food sovereignty initiatives, including community gardens and farms like Micmac Farms, which grows and sells produce.
- **Forestry:** The Nations manage extensive forest lands for timber and cultural uses, though the decline of Maine's paper industry has impacted markets for pulp-grade timber.

Recent legislative changes have granted the Wabanaki Nations the exclusive right to conduct mobile sports wagering in Maine, representing a new and potentially significant revenue stream. However, the overall economic landscape lacks the diversification seen in other tribal economies, which have expanded into manufacturing, retail, financial services, and large-scale hospitality. This lack of diversification is a direct result of the systemic barriers imposed by MICSA, which have prevented the scaling of existing enterprises and the creation of new ones. This CEDS is designed to address that gap by fostering the conditions for diversification and growth at scale.

Summary of Economic Development Community Survey Results

Across the Mi'kmaq Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Penobscot Nation, Tribal leaders consistently described an economic development landscape shaped by shared structural barriers, internal capacity challenges, and deep community resilience. Participants across all sessions identified the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) and its ongoing interpretation as the most significant external constraint, limiting sovereignty, jurisdiction, access to capital, and the ability to engage equitably with partners. Internally, common challenges emerged around workforce development, governance capacity, and infrastructure, particularly housing and broadband, with root causes tied to intergenerational trauma, historic federal policies that reinforced dependency, and limited access to sustained education and training pathways. Despite these constraints, leaders also highlighted tangible progress and momentum through Section 17 enterprise development, food sovereignty and aquaculture initiatives,

hospitality and tourism projects, energy planning, and investments in community infrastructure. Collectively, the sessions revealed a shared aspiration to move from reactive, resource-constrained decision-making toward intentional, long-term economic systems that strengthen governance, invest in Tribal citizens, and advance economic independence while remaining grounded in culture, land stewardship, and community values.

Mi'kmaq Nation

The Mi'kmaq Nation's respondents described an economic development journey marked by resilience, innovation, and growing intertribal confidence, alongside persistent internal capacity and structural challenges. Respondents highlighted tangible successes in food sovereignty and environment-responsive enterprises, including fish hatcheries, farms, and sustainable land-based projects, as well as progress in health systems, strategic planning, and being the first Tribe in Maine to pass its own LLC code, signaling leadership in governance innovation. At the same time, participants emphasized challenges related to communication, staffing, and internal capacity, noting feelings of isolation in leadership roles, uneven departmental performance, and limited access to capital rooted in distrust of federal systems. Root cause analysis connected infrastructure and workforce gaps to the Tribe's scattered and rural geography, intergenerational trauma affecting education systems, and historical federal policies that reinforced dependency rather than self-determination. Despite these barriers, the Tribe articulated a forward-looking vision centered on commercial enterprises under Section 17, job training facilities, energy projects, housing, and entrepreneurial empowerment, with respondents expressing optimism, unity, and renewed momentum for the future.

According to ACS data for the Aroostook Band of Micmac Trust Land, median household income is approximately \$28,750, which is far below both the Maine and U.S. medians, and over 70% of households earn less than \$50,000 annually. Poverty rates are extremely high, with approximately 46% of residents living below the federal poverty line, including more than half of children. Labor force participation among working-age adults is substantially lower than statewide averages, reflecting a combination of limited local employment opportunities and economic distress. Educational attainment is also low relative to Maine overall, with roughly 18% of working-age adults holding a bachelor's degree, compared to approximately 36% statewide.

Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians emphasized institutional stability and growing trust in leadership as key strengths in their economic development trajectory, alongside a clear recognition of the need for stronger governance structures to support sustainable enterprise growth. Respondents cited a cooperative Tribal Council, increased willingness to invest in existing businesses, and a strong interest in establishing a Section 17 corporation to separate governance from business decision-making and protect Tribal assets. Root cause discussions

identified the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) as a central external barrier, particularly in limiting partnerships, access to capital, and economic sovereignty, compounded by long-standing patterns of decision-making driven by limited business education and capacity. Infrastructure challenges were framed primarily as funding access issues, while workforce gaps were tied to the need for culturally responsive education and local control over schooling. Current projects reflect a pragmatic, revenue-generating approach—hospitality, recreation, real estate rentals, and food sovereignty initiatives—while future aspirations focus on economic independence, housing expansion, and addressing social determinants such as education, health, and housing. Respondents closed with a cautious but clear sense of hope grounded in incremental, deliberate progress.

Census and Census-derived fact sheets for the Houlton Maliseet Reservation and associated trust lands show very low median household income, approximately \$22,700, among the lowest reported for any Wabanaki community. Poverty rates are correspondingly severe, with roughly 45–47% of residents living in poverty. Labor force participation among adults ages 25–54 is significantly below the Maine average, reflecting barriers related to health, childcare, and limited job availability. Educational attainment levels are also well below state norms, with single-digit bachelor’s degree attainment rates among working-age adults, compared to more than one-third statewide.

Penobscot Nation

Penobscot Nation respondents described an economic development landscape characterized by emerging enterprise capacity, jurisdictional constraints, and a strong desire for long-term strategic stability. Successes included the development of PINE (a Section 17 entity), participation in federal contracting programs such as 8(a), and past gains in cultural-based tourism, as well as recent benefits from online gaming exclusivity that directly supported Tribal government and community services. However, respondents identified jurisdictional limitations under MICSA as the most significant structural barrier, directly affecting sovereignty, access to opportunity, and external confidence in Tribal partnerships. Housing shortages and infrastructure costs were described as particularly acute due to land constraints and reliance on federal funding for basic services. Workforce development challenges centered on sustaining capacity over time, supporting youth who leave the community, and building financial and decision-making literacy at the institutional level. Looking forward, the Tribe prioritized workforce development, energy independence, aquaculture, environmental leadership, and expanded community infrastructure, with an emphasis on strengthening internal decision-making frameworks to ensure future opportunities align with long-term sustainability rather than short-term urgency. Respondents expressed optimism tempered by realism about the scale of resources required to achieve these goals.

ACS data for the Penobscot Indian Island Reservation show a median household income of

approximately \$48,750, which is higher than other Wabanaki reservation geographies but still well below the Maine median. Poverty rates are similar to Penobscot County overall (around 14%) but higher than the statewide rate, with notably higher poverty among seniors. Labor force participation is moderate, but declines sharply with age due to the community's older median age (over 53 years). Educational attainment is limited, with bachelor's degree attainment well below statewide levels, despite somewhat stronger economic indicators than other Tribes.

Summary of Housing Community Survey Results

The Tribal Housing Needs Assessment survey captured responses from 111 households affiliated with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Mi'kmaq Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation, with the largest share of responses coming from Passamaquoddy (45%), followed by Penobscot (32%), Mi'kmaq (20%), and Houlton (4%). Most respondents live within or near a Tribal community, and the respondent population was predominantly female (80%), with an average age of 45 years. Households were generally family-oriented, with an average household size of 3.2 people and 70% reporting children living at home; single-person households represented 16% of responses. A majority of respondents were employed (73%), primarily full-time, though incomes were modest, with nearly two-thirds reporting annual household incomes below \$50,000. Respondents were relatively well educated compared to statewide averages, with 40% holding a four-year or graduate degree, and most reported reasonable commute times or remote/hybrid work arrangements. Overall, the respondent group reflects working-age, family-based households with strong ties to their communities, balancing employment and caregiving responsibilities while navigating limited incomes and long-term housing stability concerns.

Across all Tribes, Census data document deep income constraints, poverty, and limited housing stock on reservation and trust lands, while community input reveals broader, forward-looking housing aspirations—including homeownership, energy efficiency, and culturally appropriate design—that extend beyond what Census indicators alone capture. Together, these sources provide a more complete picture of both current housing distress and future housing demand.

Mi'kmaq Nation

Housing conditions for Mi'kmaq respondents reflect larger household sizes, relatively higher satisfaction, and strong interest in long-term homeownership, alongside clear needs for repairs and efficiency improvements. Mi'kmaq households reported an average household size of 4.0 with 2.0 dependents—among the highest across the Tribes—indicating sustained demand for family-sized units and multi-bedroom homes. Compared to other Tribes, Mi'kmaq respondents expressed the highest overall satisfaction with their current housing situation, though nearly all still reported that their homes require repairs or improvements, consistent with the cross-tribal pattern of aging housing stock. Community input indicates strong interest in homeownership

within the Tribal community, particularly in new housing developments on tribal land, with priorities centered on safety, stability, and the ability to pass homes on to future generations. Desired housing features emphasize yard or outdoor space, in-unit laundry, garages or carports, and energy efficiency, suggesting a preference for detached, single-family homes that support both cultural and household needs. Overall, Mi'kmaq housing priorities focus on expanding quality family housing, supporting affordable homeownership pathways, and investing in repair and energy upgrades to sustain long-term housing stability.

Census data for the Aroostook Band of Micmac Trust Land show a younger population and smaller average household size (approximately 2.4 persons per household), along with very low median household income (about \$28,750) and extremely high poverty rates (over 45%), suggesting that Census-counted households on trust land reflect more constrained economic conditions than those captured in the voluntary survey. The survey's emphasis on housing repair needs, energy efficiency, and future homeownership aligns with Census indicators of economic distress but also suggests latent demand not visible in Census tenure or income data alone, particularly among households living outside trust land or in dispersed sites.

Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

While the number of Houlton Band respondents was small, community input points to larger households, higher dependency, and acute housing pressure, reinforcing the Tribe's emphasis on housing as both a social and economic priority. Houlton respondents reported the largest average household size (4.3) and highest number of dependents (2.3) among surveyed Tribes, signaling a strong need for family-sized units and expanded housing supply. Disability rates were reported as higher among Houlton respondents, though the limited sample size cautions against generalization; nonetheless, this underscores the importance of accessible housing and supportive design. As with other Tribes, respondents indicated that most housing units require repairs or improvements and that limited access to financing and infrastructure costs remain barriers to homeownership. Community priorities emphasize increasing the availability of rental and ownership units, addressing overcrowding, and improving housing conditions, particularly through Tribal-led development that can generate revenue while meeting community needs. Housing is closely tied to broader goals around education, health, and economic stability, positioning it as a foundational investment area for the Tribe.

Census data for the Houlton Maliseet Reservation and off-reservation trust land show very low median household income (approximately \$22,700), poverty rates approaching 47%, and an average household size of about 2.8 persons, which is lower than what community respondents described. This divergence suggests that Census data likely capture the most economically constrained households living on trust land, while community input reflects broader housing needs across the Tribe's service area, including larger families and households living off trust land. Both sources point to significant housing instability and affordability pressure, reinforcing

housing expansion and rehabilitation as central priorities.

Passamaquoddy Tribe

Passamaquoddy respondents—representing the largest share of survey participants—described housing conditions characterized by moderate household sizes, long tenure, high repair needs, and strong interest in culturally appropriate homeownership options. Average household size (3.0) and dependents (1.5) suggest continued demand for both family and multi-generational housing, including units that can accommodate shared living arrangements, which were reported more frequently among Passamaquoddy households than in some other Tribes. Respondents reported some of the highest rates of housing dissatisfaction, driven largely by the condition of existing units—more than four-fifths of respondents indicated that their homes need repairs or improvements. Utility costs, particularly for homeowners, were identified as a significant burden, reinforcing interest in energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy features. Despite affordability challenges and limited mortgage access, interest in owning a home remains high, especially on tribal land. Community-identified priorities include repair and rehabilitation of existing housing, development of new single-family homes, support for down-payment assistance and financing, and investments in energy efficiency to reduce long-term household costs.

Census data for Passamaquoddy reservations show average household sizes around 2.9–3.4, a high share of households with children, and substantial poverty rates, particularly at Indian Township and Pleasant Point, alongside documented overcrowding and housing cost burdens in IHBG Needs data. The consistency between Census indicators of overcrowding and poverty and survey-reported dissatisfaction and repair needs suggests that housing quality, not just housing quantity, is a dominant concern, and that community-identified priorities for rehabilitation and energy upgrades are well aligned with federally recognized housing need metrics.

Penobscot Nation

Penobscot respondents reported smaller household sizes, longer housing tenure, and significant unmet needs related to housing condition, cost, and energy burden, alongside strong interest in future homeownership. Average household size (2.8) and dependents (1.0) were lower than other Tribes, but a high share of households include children, indicating ongoing demand for stable, long-term housing. As with other Tribes, most Penobscot respondents reported that their current homes require repairs or improvements, and homeowners in particular face substantially higher monthly utility costs, highlighting the importance of efficiency and weatherization investments. Satisfaction with current housing was mixed, with a notable share reporting being very unsatisfied. Community input shows strong interest in homeownership within the Tribal community, motivated by safety, stability, and intergenerational wealth-building, though respondents cited high costs, loan complexity, and limited financing options as barriers. Housing priorities for the Penobscot Nation center on developing new single-family homes, expanding

affordable financing and down-payment assistance, and reducing energy costs through efficiency upgrades, while aligning housing development with broader community infrastructure planning.

Census data for the Penobscot Indian Island Reservation show an older population (median age over 53), median household income around \$48,750, and poverty rates similar to Penobscot County overall but higher than the Maine average. Census housing unit counts also indicate a decline in occupied units over time, which may reflect land constraints, aging housing stock, or out-migration. The alignment between Census-documented aging demographics and survey-reported repair and energy burdens underscores the importance of rehabilitation, senior-appropriate housing, and efficiency investments as core Penobscot housing priorities.

Section 3: Situational Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

A thorough analysis of the internal and external factors influencing the economic environment of the Wabanaki Consortium is essential for developing a targeted and effective strategy. This SWOT analysis synthesizes the background information into a clear framework that informs the strategic direction and action plan of this CEDS.

Strengths (Internal)

- **Inherent Sovereignty and Governance:** The Wabanaki Nations possess long-standing, continuously operating governments and a deep-rooted understanding of their inherent sovereignty. The modern Wabanaki Alliance provides a unified political voice and a strong platform for inter-tribal advocacy and collaboration.
- **Rich Cultural Heritage:** The distinct and vibrant cultures, languages, and artistic traditions of the Wabanaki people are an invaluable and unique asset. This heritage provides a powerful competitive advantage for developing authentic, world-class tourism experiences and high-value, culturally branded products.
- **Access to Natural Resources:** The Nations collectively steward significant land and water resources, including extensive forests, productive rivers, and coastal access. These assets form the foundation for sustainable industries in forestry, agriculture, aquaculture, and outdoor recreation.
- **Collaborative Institutions:** The existence of established inter-tribal organizations like the Wabanaki Consortium and Four Directions Development Corporation (FDDC) demonstrates a proven capacity for collaboration. These institutions provide the necessary framework for managing complex, multi-tribal economic development projects.
- **Growing Food Sovereignty Movement:** There are active and successful food sovereignty initiatives across all four Nations, including community gardens, farms, and innovative aquaculture projects. This movement strengthens community health, preserves traditional ecological knowledge, and creates a base for new agricultural enterprises.

Weaknesses (Internal)

- **Economic Disparity and High Poverty:** Decades of stifled economic growth have resulted in persistently low per capita incomes, high unemployment, and high rates of poverty, particularly among children. This limits the formation of internal capital, constrains consumer spending, and creates significant social and health challenges that divert resources from economic development.
- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Many Wabanaki communities face significant gaps in essential

infrastructure, including a shortage of quality, affordable housing, limited public transportation options, and inadequate access to reliable, high-speed broadband. These deficits are major impediments to attracting businesses, supporting entrepreneurs, and ensuring a high quality of life.

- **Workforce Development Gaps:** Educational attainment levels among Wabanaki citizens lag behind state averages. There is a critical need for targeted education and skills training programs that align with the demands of emerging industries identified in this CEDS, such as clean energy technology, advanced manufacturing, and hospitality management.
- **Limited Access to Capital:** Systemic barriers, including the unique status of trust land and a lack of conventional credit history, make it difficult for tribal members and enterprises to access the capital needed for startup and expansion. While Native CDFIs like FDDC play a vital role, the scale of need exceeds current resources.

Opportunities (External)

- **Federal Policy and Funding:** A renewed federal emphasis on tribal self-determination has unlocked funding opportunities through programs like the American Rescue Plan, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (including the BEAD program for broadband), and the Inflation Reduction Act (for clean energy). These resources provide a generational opportunity to fund the large-scale projects outlined in this strategy.
- **Growing Markets:** Consumer demand is strong and growing in several key sectors that align with Wabanaki strengths. These include sustainable and locally sourced food products, authentic cultural and eco-tourism, renewable energy, and sustainably harvested wood products.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** There is significant potential to build and strengthen partnerships with state agencies like the Maine Connectivity Authority and the Maine Office of Tourism, federal agencies (EDA, USDA, EPA), academic institutions like the University of Maine, and non-profit organizations that share a commitment to rural and tribal development.
- **Sovereignty Recognition:** The sustained and increasingly successful advocacy of the Wabanaki Alliance to reform MICSA represents the single greatest opportunity. Achieving legislative changes that allow the Wabanaki Nations to automatically benefit from federal Indian law would be transformative, unlocking the full economic potential that has been suppressed for over 40 years.

Threats (External)

- **MICSA and Political Opposition:** The continued existence of MICSA and political opposition within the State of Maine to the full recognition of Wabanaki sovereignty remains the most significant external threat. This legal and political uncertainty can derail projects, deter investment, and perpetuate the status quo of economic disparity.

- **Environmental Shifts:** Changing environments represent a direct threat to culturally and economically vital resources. Warming temperatures are shifting the range of brown ash trees, essential for traditional basketmaking, while also impacting the health of fisheries and forest ecosystems.
- **Market Volatility:** A continued reliance on natural resource-based economies, such as timber and seafood, exposes the Wabanaki Nations to the volatility of global commodity prices. Economic diversification is critical to mitigating this risk.
- **Regional Economic Conditions:** The underlying economic distress of the rural Maine counties where Wabanaki lands are located can limit local market opportunities, strain public services, and present challenges in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.

SWOT Analysis Summary Matrix

	Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (Internal)
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inherent Sovereignty & Unified Governance - Rich Cultural Heritage & Assets - Vast Natural Resource Base - Established Collaborative Institutions (FDDC) - Growing Food Sovereignty Movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High Poverty & Economic Disparity - Critical Infrastructure Deficits (Housing, Broadband) - Workforce Skills Gaps - Limited Access to Capital
Opportunities (External)	<p>SO Strategies (Leverage Strengths to Capitalize on Opportunities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use sovereignty and collaborative institutions to secure federal funding for large-scale infrastructure projects (e.g., Broadband Utility). - Leverage cultural heritage and natural resources to develop high-value tourism and agricultural products for growing markets. 	<p>WO Strategies (Address Weaknesses by Taking Advantage of Opportunities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilize federal funding to close infrastructure and workforce gaps. - Partner with federal agencies and academic institutions to build technical and financial capacity.

<p>Threats (External)</p>	<p>ST Strategies (Use Strengths to Mitigate Threats)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employ unified political voice (Wabanaki Alliance) to advocate for MICSA reform. - Apply traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and cultural values to develop environmentally sound regenerative forestry and agricultural practices. 	<p>WT Strategies (Minimize Weaknesses and Avoid Threats)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversify the economy through the seven priority areas to reduce vulnerability to market volatility and the impacts of environmental changes on single industries. - Develop internal workforce and capacity to reduce reliance on fluctuating regional economies.
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Section 4: Approach to Building a Resilient and Sovereign Economy

Economic resilience for the Wabanaki Nations extends beyond the conventional definition of withstanding and recovering from short-term shocks. For our communities, true resilience is the sustained capacity to exercise self-determination and shape our own economic future. It is the ability to nurture a durable, adaptive, and prosperous economy that is deeply rooted in our cultural values and provides for the well-being of our people for generations to come. This CEDS is designed to build this multifaceted resilience by directly linking economic development to the principles of sovereignty. Additionally, in collaborating on this CEDS, we memorialize our vision for resilience and growth as a community of communities, seeking to cooperate and jointly acknowledge and pursue our individual economic strategies.

Defining Wabanaki Economic Resilience

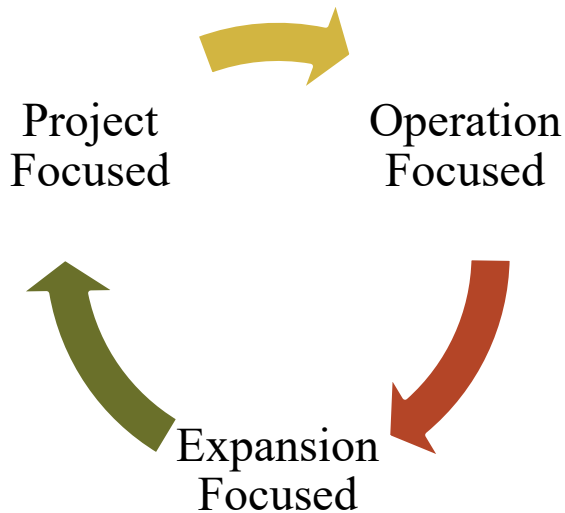
Wabanaki economic resilience is defined by three core pillars of sovereignty:

1. **Food Sovereignty:** The ability of our communities to control our own food systems, from production and processing to distribution and access. This involves revitalizing traditional agricultural practices, developing modern aquaculture and farming enterprises, and ensuring that all Wabanaki citizens have access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food.
2. **Energy Sovereignty:** The capacity to manage our own energy resources, reduce reliance on external utility providers, and transition to clean, renewable energy sources that are owned and controlled by the Wabanaki Nations. This reduces costs for families and tribal governments, creates skilled jobs, and aligns with our environmental stewardship values.
3. **Financial Sovereignty:** The power to generate sufficient, unrestricted revenue from a diverse portfolio of tribally-owned enterprises. This revenue is critical for funding essential government services—such as healthcare, education, and public safety, thereby reducing dependence on fluctuating federal and state funding cycles and empowering our governments to meet the needs of our citizens effectively.

Goal Alignment between the Nations

As demonstrated in Section 2 above, the dispersion of our communities and our lands across Northern Maine means that our lived experience, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats inform very different governing priorities for each of our Tribal governments. In iterating and creating our joint priorities, we must recognize the spectrum of institutional operating and governing frameworks, where on one end we have communities seeking to stabilize and build capacity for internal operations and on the other end we have community seeking to invest in

projects and growth strategies. In recognizing internally and individually where we lie, we are better equipped to develop strategies jointly, making fewer assumptions about baseline goals and priorities. To support future discussions, we have developed this framework.



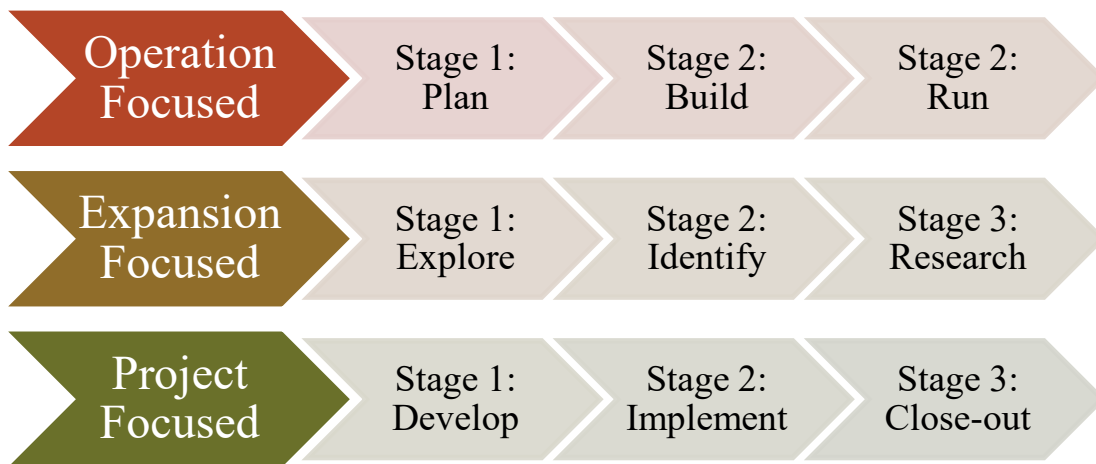
Before we define for the purpose of our planning document what each of the three stages mean, it is crucial that we recognize that these stages are cyclical. When a government decides to move forward with a new program, for example a behavioral health department, it first seeks to staff up and operationalize it, once that is done, it seeks to expand its capabilities and service offerings, by small incremental investments with available resources, and when it has been fully realized as having a well-rounded offering, generating a stream of cash flow to sustain its operations, it seeks new projects, such as a new building or offices. This is an oversimplified breakdown of the phases of

growth to illustrate how priorities shift and depending on where each government is, its priorities need to be recognized to realign the priorities of the consortium accordingly.

1. Operation Focused: The priority of an institution or organization in this stage is to build capacity to meet its basic functions and short-term goals.:
 - a. Cash outflows are expected to increase (e.g. new staff, administrative costs).
 - b. Cash inflows may be stable but unreliable (e.g. dependent on federal funding).
 - c. Staff skills range primarily from beginner to intermediate.
 - d. Staff capacity is limited and focused on day-to-day processes.
 - e. Leadership is focused on addressing day-to-day or short-term challenges and problems
2. Expansion Focused: The priority of an institution in this stage is to gradually start creating and addressing mid-term goals that may lie outside its day-to-day priorities. This may include upskilling staff through training, researching and developing new programs, identifying operational efficiencies that may require small or one-of investments.:
 - a. Cash outflows are ~90% stable and recurring may have small fluctuations (e.g. costs for pursuing a grant or feasibility study).
 - b. Cash inflows may be stable or increasing gradually as part of regular operations.
 - c. Staff skills are range from beginner to advanced depending on the nature of the operation (e.g. an internship program).
 - d. Staff capacity is limited but not constrained, i.e. there is an allowance for well-

defined side projects.

- e. Leadership is not involved in day-to-day challenges but in monitoring overall quality, staff development, and unique opportunities in the sector.
3. Project Focused: The priority of an institution in this stage is rapid growth. This may or may not include capital investment, federal or private funding, and multi-year implementations. The difference between expansion focused and project focused is the scale of projects and the frequency of projects. It affects the institution in the following ways.:
 - a. Cash outflows are significant and preferably well budgeted. These expenses require significant monitoring through internal controls and standard operating procedures to ensure compliance.
 - b. Cash inflows are primarily from external funding or financing to support the projects. Stable recurring cash inflows are minimal.
 - c. Staff skills range from intermediate to advanced, with any serious skill shortages being supplemented by external contractors or consultants. In fact, contractors and consultants with specialized knowledge make up a significant portion of the project staff.
 - d. Staff capacity may be limited and constrained depending on their skill level and the staffing needs of other operations under their purview. (e.g. a new housing project managed by the Housing Authority required staff to oversee the project while at the same time managing their day-to-day responsibilities).
 - e. Leadership is involved in decision-making and occasionally day-to-day project oversight supplementing staff constraints due to existing operations.



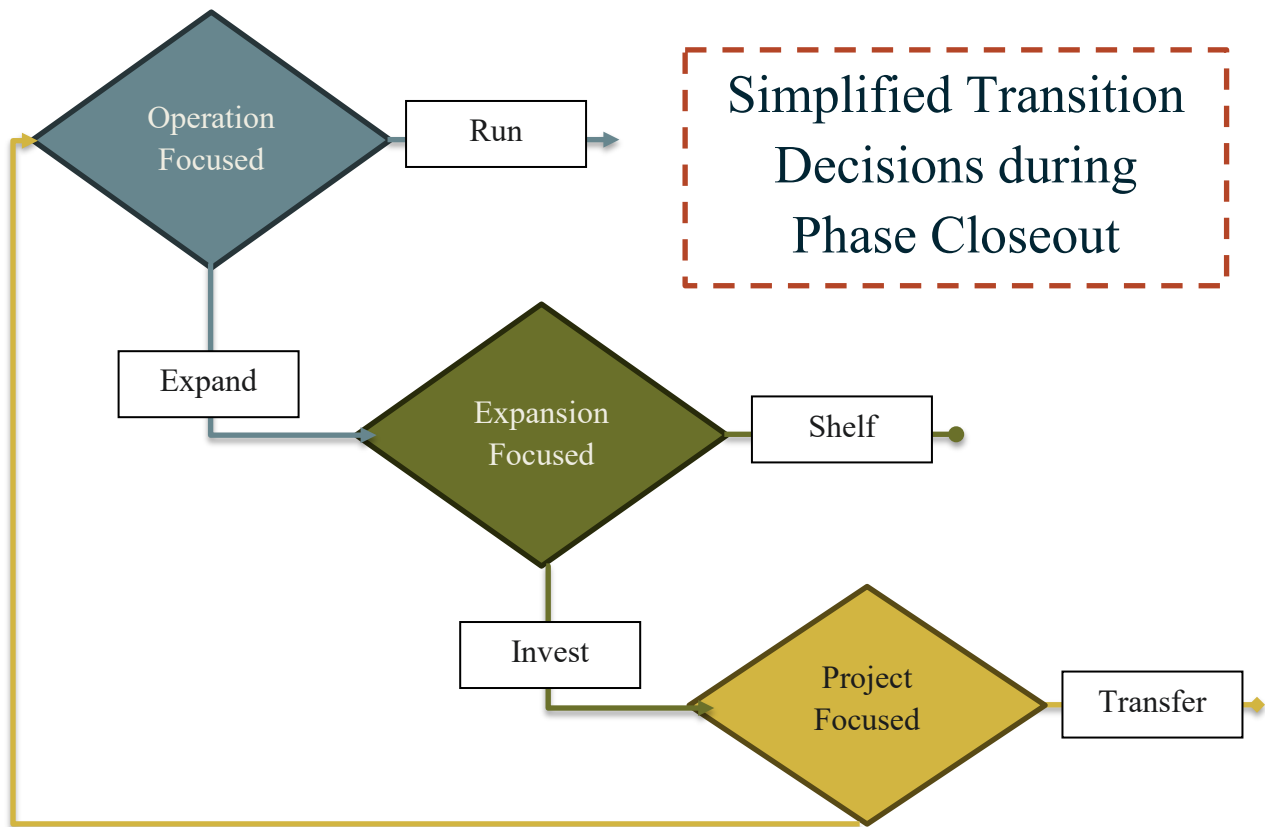
To move out of one stage and into another is challenging and dependent on:

- Defining basic function and target: At a minimum, defining its basic function and having a target for the operation to achieve where it is meeting this basic function. If for example

for an operation-focused institution, the behavioral health department is established to support the youth within the community, based on the number of youth, the number of visits and programs, the projected and expected funding, the operation can sustain 1 supervisor and 2 staff with a certain set of roles and responsibilities, this is the target to be achieved to move out of operation focused and into expansion focused. At this stage, leadership is no longer involved in the day-to-day as that responsibility has been delegated to the supervisor whom the leadership believes is reliable and who reports periodically to leadership. Once this has been achieved, leadership must also be able to recognize and move forward to the next stage or decide to maintain the operation as is.

- Monitoring and addressing changes to these definitions: Certain issues may require redefining the basic function or the target. For example, the attrition of staff is too high for the operation to self-operate, or the governing mechanism, where the supervisor's reports and/ or reliability have created cause for concern. Then, leadership must shift back into operation-focused to rectify the issue.

It is important to note that transitioning from one stage to another can happen naturally, prematurely, or not at all. These transitions can strain existing staff and resources and are strategic decisions that must be taken deliberately and thoughtfully.



Council feedback highlighted that strong governance, leadership development, and transparent systems are essential infrastructure for long-term economic success. Investments in leadership capacity, financial literacy for elected officials, succession planning, and culturally grounded decision-making practices will strengthen the sustainability of all economic initiatives undertaken by the Nations.

Mitigating Environmental and Economic Risks

A resilient economy must be prepared to face both long-term pressures and sudden disruptions. This strategy addresses these risks through a two-pronged approach of adaptation and diversification.

Environmental Shifts

Environmental shifts present a direct and existential threat to the natural resources that form the bedrock of our culture and economy. The warming environment threatens the health of the Wabanaki-Acadian Forest, alters the habitats of culturally significant species like the brown ash tree and Atlantic salmon, and increases the risk of extreme weather events. Our resilience strategy integrates traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) with modern science to adapt to these changes. This includes initiatives to restore the health and complexity of our watersheds to protect fisheries, implement adaptive silviculture to create more resilient forests, and develop agricultural systems that can thrive in changing conditions.

Economic Diversification

Over-reliance on a narrow set of natural resource-based industries creates vulnerability to commodity price fluctuations and sector-specific downturns, such as the decline of Maine's paper industry. The seven Priority Focus Areas in this CEDS are designed to work as an integrated system to build a diversified economic portfolio. Foundational investments in transportation and broadband create the necessary platform for growth in higher-value sectors. For example, a robust intermodal transportation network supports the logistics of a new sawmill, while universal broadband access enables the marketing and management of a cultural tourism enterprise. This diversification spreads risk and creates multiple, independent streams of revenue, leading to a more stable and durable inter-tribal economy.

The establishment and reinvigoration of tribally-chartered enterprise authorities, such as the Penobscot's PINE, the Mi'kmaq's Eltueg Corporation, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet's proposed development corporation, are critical vehicles for driving this diversification and ensuring business decisions are insulated from politics.

Leveraging Inter-Tribal Collaboration for Resilience

The Wabanaki Consortium is the primary vehicle for achieving this vision of resilience. For generations, collaboration has been our strategy for survival and strength. Today, it is our strategy for prosperity. By pooling financial resources, sharing technical expertise, and coordinating planning efforts, we can undertake ambitious, large-scale projects that would be beyond the capacity of any single Nation. An inter-tribal utility authority can negotiate with more power, a shared-use processing facility can serve entrepreneurs from all four communities, and a unified tourism brand can attract a global audience.

This collaborative approach not only builds economic scale but also enhances our political influence. A unified Wabanaki voice advocating for shared economic goals is more powerful in negotiations with state and federal partners. Ultimately, the exercise of our sovereignty through collaborative economic action is the most potent tool for building resilience. The ability to make our own long-term decisions about our lands, our resources, and our economic future is the very definition of self-determination. While MICSA remains a significant impediment, this CEDS provides the framework to build our collective economic power, demonstrating our capacity to govern and grow our economies, thereby strengthening the case for the full restoration of our sovereign rights.

Section 5: Strategic Direction: Vision, Goals, and Priority Focus Areas

This section translates the comprehensive analysis of the Wabanaki Nations' situation into a clear, forward-looking strategic direction. It establishes an aspirational vision for the future, defines specific and measurable goals to guide our efforts, and introduces the integrated priority areas that form the core of the action plan.

A Vision for the Next Seven Generations

The Wabanaki Consortium envisions a future where our sovereign Nations are the primary drivers of a thriving, sustainable, and culturally-rooted regional economy. We see vibrant communities where our citizens have diverse opportunities for high-quality employment and entrepreneurship on our own lands, where our youth see a clear path to a prosperous future at home, and where our languages and traditions are the cornerstones of our economic life. We will be leaders in sustainable development, stewarding the lands and waters of the Dawnland for the well-being of all.

Tribal leaders emphasized that preparing the next generation to carry forward economic, cultural, and governmental leadership is central to long-term sovereignty. Youth leadership pathways, apprenticeships, and culturally grounded career development will ensure that economic progress achieved today continues to benefit the Nations for generations to come.

Overarching Strategic Goals (SMART Goals)

To make this vision a reality, the Wabanaki Consortium adopts the following four strategic goals. These goals are designed to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART), providing a clear framework for action and evaluation over the next ten years.

- Goal A: Economic Prosperity & Wealth Creation
 - **Objective:** To significantly improve the financial well-being of Wabanaki citizens and build sustainable wealth within our communities.
 - **Metric:** Increase the median household income for Wabanaki citizens by 30% and reduce the overall poverty rate by 50% within the next 10 years.
- Goal B: Job Creation & Workforce Empowerment
 - **Objective:** To create meaningful, high-quality employment opportunities on tribal lands and empower our citizens with the skills needed for future success.
 - **Metric:** Create 500 new, high-quality, full-time jobs within Wabanaki territories and increase the labor force participation rate to match the Maine state average within 10 years.

- Goal C: Business Growth & Diversification
 - **Objective:** To foster a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem and diversify the inter-tribal economy beyond traditional sectors.
 - **Metric:** Launch or significantly expand 25 tribally- or member-owned businesses across the seven Priority Focus Areas within the next 5 years.
- Goal D: Sovereignty & Capacity Building
 - **Objective:** To strengthen our capacity for self-governance and remove the structural barriers that impede our economic self-determination.
 - **Metric:** Achieve full implementation of at least three inter-tribal authorities (e.g., Broadband, Building Codes, Transportation) and secure reforms to MICSA that allow Wabanaki Nations to automatically benefit from federal Indian legislation.

Introduction to Priority Focus Areas

The heart of this strategy lies in seven Priority Focus Areas, identified through inter-tribal consultation as the most critical levers for achieving our strategic goals. These are not isolated initiatives but an integrated ecosystem of projects designed to build upon one another. Foundational investments in Intermodal Transportation, Broadband, and Building Codes create the physical and regulatory infrastructure necessary for growth. These platforms enable the development and expansion of key economic sectors: Agriculture, Forestry, and Cultural Tourism. Underpinning all of this is a critical investment in human capital through Clean Energy and Workforce Development. By advancing these priorities in a coordinated manner, the Wabanaki Consortium will build a resilient, modern, and diversified economy that honors our past while securing our future.

Section 6: Action Plan: Catalyzing Inter-Tribal Prosperity

This Action Plan is the operational core of the Wabanaki Consortium's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. It translates the vision and goals into a detailed set of specific, actionable initiatives within each of the seven Priority Focus Areas. Each initiative is designed to be a concrete, fundable project with clear leadership, defined partners, and a realistic timeline for implementation. This plan serves as a practical guide for directing resources, coordinating efforts among the four Nations, and measuring progress toward our collective economic future.

Priority Focus Area: Intermodal Transportation

A modern, efficient, and well-maintained transportation network is the circulatory system of a healthy economy. For the Wabanaki Nations, whose lands are often rural and geographically dispersed, a coordinated transportation strategy is essential for connecting communities, moving goods to market, and ensuring safe access to jobs, healthcare, and education.

Initiative 6.1.1: Develop a Wabanaki Consortium Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

- **Summary:** This initiative will create a unified, 20-year LRTP that integrates the transportation needs and priorities of all four Wabanaki Nations. The plan will serve as the primary strategic document for securing federal funding from the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP) and coordinating investments with state and regional partners. Modeled on the comprehensive framework of the Penobscot Indian Nation's 2022 LRTP Update and incorporating the performance-based planning principles used in state-level plans, the Wabanaki LRTP will identify and prioritize projects across multiple modes. Key focus areas will include: improving the condition and safety of existing reservation roads; ensuring reliable all-season access to tribal trust lands for forestry and cultural activities; developing efficient freight corridors to support agricultural and wood products enterprises; exploring expanded rail and bus infrastructure to better connect Wabanaki communities to southern Maine and key ports like the Port of Eastport; and enhancing public transit options to connect Wabanaki citizens with regional employment centers.
- **Project Lead:** A newly formed Wabanaki Consortium Transportation Committee, with representation from each Nation's planning and natural resources departments.
- **Partners:** Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT).
- **Timeline:** 24 months for plan development and approval.

Priority Focus Area: Agriculture & Food Sovereignty

Reclaiming our food systems is a cornerstone of community health, cultural revitalization, and economic resilience. This focus area aims to build upon the growing food sovereignty movement within the Wabanaki Nations by creating the shared infrastructure needed to support tribal farmers, fishers, and food entrepreneurs in scaling their operations and creating value-added products.

Initiative 6.2.1: Establish the Wabanaki Food Innovation Center

- **Summary:** This project will develop a shared-use commercial kitchen and value-added food processing facility, accessible to entrepreneurs from all four Nations. The Center will provide the licensed space and commercial-grade equipment necessary to transform raw agricultural and wild-harvested products into marketable goods. Potential products include traditional foods, jams and preserves from Micmac Farms produce, smoked brook trout and eel products, and packaged medicinal plants and teas.
The success of individual tribal ventures, such as the Mi'kmaq Nation's fish hatchery, provides a strong model for how inter-tribal facilities can support and scale up aquaculture and other agricultural enterprises across the Consortium.
The Center will also serve as an incubator, offering technical assistance and training in food safety, business planning, packaging, and marketing, drawing on established models for shared kitchens and tribal food processing initiatives.
- **Project Lead:** Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness, in partnership with the Wabanaki Consortium.
- **Partners:** U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Four Directions Development Corporation (FDDC).
- **Timeline:** 36 months for feasibility, design, construction, and launch.

Initiative 6.2.2: Create an Inter-Tribal Shared Equipment Repository

- **Summary:** To reduce the significant capital barrier for individual producers, this initiative will establish an inter-tribal cooperative to purchase, manage, and lease specialized agricultural and aquaculture equipment. This repository could include items such as tractors, blueberry harvesters, mobile poultry processing units, and specialized equipment for aquaculture operations. By sharing these high-cost assets across the four Nations, the program will enable smaller-scale farmers and enterprises to expand production and improve efficiency without incurring prohibitive debt.
- **Project Lead:** A newly formed Wabanaki Consortium Agriculture Committee.
- **Partners:** USDA Rural Development, Native Community Development Financial

Institutions (CDFIs) like FDDC.

- **Timeline:** 18 months to establish the cooperative and complete the first phase of equipment acquisition.

Priority Focus Area: Sustainable Forestry & Value-Added Wood Products

Our forests are a sacred cultural resource and a significant economic asset. For generations, Wabanaki forestry has been guided by principles of stewardship and sustainability. This focus area is designed to reclaim greater control over our forest economy by moving up the value chain from simply selling raw timber to manufacturing and marketing finished wood products.

Initiative 6.3.1: Conduct a Feasibility Study and Business Plan for a Wabanaki-Owned Sawmill

- **Summary:** This initiative will commission a comprehensive feasibility study and business plan for a modern, small-to-medium scale sawmill owned and operated by the Wabanaki Consortium. The study will assess the sustainable timber supply across all Wabanaki-managed lands, analyze regional and national markets for high-value wood products (e.g., appearance-grade lumber, specialty timbers, flooring), and develop a detailed financial and operational plan. The business model will be informed by successful tribal forestry enterprises like Menominee Tribal Enterprises, which integrates sustainable, culturally-guided forest management with a profitable manufacturing operation, and Yakama Forest Products, which demonstrates a phased approach to mill development with a strong focus on tribal employment. The sawmill will provide a reliable market for tribal timber, create skilled jobs, and supply lumber for Wabanaki housing and construction projects. The plan will also evaluate opportunities for diversification into other value-added forest products, such as biomass energy and biofuels, which have been identified as key opportunities by individual Nations.
- **Project Lead:** A newly formed Wabanaki Consortium Forestry Committee.
- **Partners:** BIA Division of Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, University of Maine School of Forest Resources, experienced tribal forestry consultants.
- **Timeline:** 18 months for completion of the feasibility study and business plan.

Priority Focus Area: Authentic Cultural Tourism

Maine's \$3.4 billion outdoor recreation economy presents a major opportunity for the Wabanaki Nations to share our stories, arts, and deep connection to the land with visitors from around the world—on our own terms. This focus area leverages our unique cultural heritage to create a world-class, tribally-led tourism industry.

Initiative 6.4.1: Implement the Wabanaki Cultural Tourism Plan (WCTP)

- **Summary:** The Consortium will formally adopt and drive the implementation of the comprehensive *Wabanaki Cultural Tourism Plan 2024–2029*, a strategic blueprint developed through a two-year participatory process led by FDDC and the WCTI Leadership Team.

This initiative will focus on developing a diverse portfolio of authentic, tribally-led tourism enterprises. It will support the creation of immersive cultural programming such as guided canoe trips on ancestral rivers, traditional storytelling, workshops with master artisans, and culinary experiences featuring traditional Wabanaki foods. The goal is to build a multi-faceted tourism economy that distributes economic benefits broadly and allows the Wabanaki Nations to share their stories with the world on their own terms. This approach fosters a more resilient and community-based tourism model, empowering a greater number of small-scale entrepreneurs across all four nations rather than concentrating investment and risk in a single large-scale venture.

- **Project Lead:** Four Directions Development Corporation (FDDC).
- **Partners:** Maine Office of Tourism, Wabanaki Cultural Tourism Initiative Leadership Team, private hospitality investors.
- **Timeline:** Implementation is ongoing, with project development timelines varying based on the specific enterprise.

Wabanaki Cultural Tourism Goals (Wabanaki Cultural Tourism Plan 2024–2029)



Priority Focus Area: Wabanaki Broadband Utility

Access to reliable, high-speed internet is no longer a luxury; it is essential infrastructure for economic development, education, healthcare, and civic participation. This focus area will assert digital sovereignty by creating a tribally-owned and operated utility to close the digital divide for all Wabanaki citizens.

Initiative 6.5.1: Establish the Wabanaki Utility Authority (WUA)

- **Summary:** This initiative will form a legally chartered, inter-tribal utility authority to own, manage, and operate broadband infrastructure across all Wabanaki lands. The WUA will function as a "virtual utility," leveraging federal funding from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program and building on existing partnerships with the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) to oversee the deployment of a comprehensive fiber-optic network.⁵² The Authority will hold the assets, manage network operations, and ensure that service is affordable and equitable. The business and governance model will draw from established frameworks for successful Tribal Utility Authorities (TUAs) across the country, which provide tribes with full control over critical infrastructure decisions and create pathways for long-term revenue generation.
- **Project Lead:** FDCC, Wabanaki Tribal Broadband Project.
- **Partners:** Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA), National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).
- **Timeline:** Charter establishment (12 months); Network deployment (5 years).

Initiative 6.5.2: Launch the Wabanaki Broadband Utility Crew

- **Summary:** To build internal capacity and create high-skill jobs, the WUA will establish and train a tribally-staffed utility crew. This crew will be responsible for the physical installation, maintenance, and repair of the Wabanaki-owned fiber network. This in-house model reduces long-term operational costs and reliance on outside contractors, keeping economic benefits circulating within our communities. The approach mirrors the successful strategy already being deployed for the Wabanaki sustainable energy workforce, demonstrating a proven model for building a skilled tribal workforce in technical trades.
- **Project Lead:** Wabanaki Utility Authority (once formed).
- **Partners:** Maine's Community College System, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and other relevant labor unions for apprenticeship programs.
- **Timeline:** Training program development (9 months); Crew fully operational (18 months).

Priority Focus Area: Tribal Building Codes and Compliance

The authority to establish and enforce our own building codes is a fundamental exercise of sovereignty. This focus area will create a unified, modern set of building standards that reflect Wabanaki values of environmental stewardship, promote energy efficiency, and build tribal capacity in the construction trades.

Initiative 6.6.1: Develop and Adopt a Wabanaki Building Code

- **Summary:** An inter-tribal committee will be established to develop and recommend for adoption a unified Wabanaki Building Code. This code will apply to all new construction and major renovations on the trust and reservation lands of the four Nations. Wabanaki code will adopt modern standards (e.g., the 2021 International Codes) but will amend them to meet our specific needs. The code will incorporate provisions for high energy efficiency, incorporate culturally relevant design principles, and prioritize the use of sustainable, locally sourced materials, such as wood products from the future Wabanaki-owned sawmill. A key goal of this code will be to facilitate the construction of new, affordable housing and elder housing, addressing a critical need identified by multiple Wabanaki Nations.
- **Project Lead:** A newly formed Wabanaki Consortium Housing and Infrastructure Committee.
- **Partners:** EPA, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Tribal Housing Authorities.
- **Timeline:** 24 months for code development, community review, and formal adoption by each Nation.

Initiative 6.6.2: Create a Wabanaki Building Codes Compliance Office

- **Summary:** To ensure the effective implementation of the new Wabanaki Building Code, the Consortium will establish a shared compliance office. This office will employ tribally-certified compliance officers responsible for conducting plan reviews and on-site inspections for all four Nations. This centralized model creates efficiencies of scale, builds a cadre of highly skilled tribal professionals, and ensures consistent enforcement of our sovereign standards, creating a pathway for careers in the skilled trades.
- **Project Lead:** Wabanaki Consortium Housing and Infrastructure Committee.
- **Partners:** International Code Council (for training and certification), State of Maine Fire Marshal's Office (for inter-governmental coordination).
- **Timeline:** 30 months to establish the office, hire, and certify staff.

Priority Focus Area: Clean Energy and Workforce Development

Achieving energy sovereignty is critical for reducing economic burdens on our families, generating revenue, and upholding our responsibility as environmental stewards. This focus area builds on promising early-stage initiatives to create a robust, tribally-led clean energy sector and the skilled workforce needed to sustain it.

Initiative 6.7.1: Expand the Wabanaki Sustainable Energy Workforce Program

- **Summary:** This initiative will significantly scale up the existing workforce development programs focused on training Wabanaki citizens as certified energy auditors and heat pump technicians. The goal is to create a self-sustaining ecosystem where a pipeline of skilled tribal professionals can staff tribally-owned enterprises that provide energy efficiency services and develop community-scale renewable energy projects, such as solar farms. The program will aim to conduct energy audits and weatherization retrofits on all tribal administrative buildings and a majority of residential homes within the next 10 years. This will generate immediate cost savings for tribal governments and households, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create dozens of sustainable, well-paying jobs within our communities.
- **Project Lead:** Wabanaki Sustainable Energy Team.
- **Partners:** University of Maine, Maine AFL-CIO, Maine's Community College System.
- **Timeline:** Ongoing, with a specific goal to train and certify 50 new technicians and launch at least two new tribally-owned energy service businesses within 5 years.

Action Plan Implementation Matrix

Initiative	Strategic Goals Addressed	Lead Entity	Key Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Timeline
6.1.1 Wabanaki LRTP	A, B, C, D	Wabanaki Transportation Committee	BIA, FHWA, Maine DOT	BIA TTP Planning Grants, EDA	Y1-Y2
6.2.1 Food Innovation Center	A, B, C	Wabanaki Public Health	USDA, EDA, FDDC, UMaine	USDA Grants, EDA, Private Foundations	Y1-Y3
6.2.2 Shared Equipment Repo	A, C	Wabanaki Agriculture Committee	USDA Rural Dev, FDDC	USDA Grants, Tribal Funds	Y1-Y2
6.3.1 Sawmill Feasibility Study	A, B, C	Wabanaki Forestry Committee	BIA, USFS, UMaine	EDA, BIA Forestry, Tribal Funds	Y1-Y2
6.4.1 Implement Wabanaki Cultural Tourism Plan	A, B, C	FDDC	ME Office of Tourism, Private Investors	EDA, Private Equity, Debt Financing	Y1-Y5
6.5.1 Wabanaki Utility Authority	A, D	FDDC / Wabanaki Broadband Project	MCA, NTIA	EDA, NTIA, Tribal Funds	Y1
6.5.2 Broadband Utility Crew	B, D	Wabanaki Utility Authority	ME Community Colleges, IBEW	NTIA, Dept. of Labor, BEAD	Y2-Y3
6.6.1 Wabanaki Building Code	D	Wabanaki Housing Committee	ICC, EPA, DOE, Tribal Housing Authorities	EPA Grants, DOE, HUD	Y1-Y2
6.6.2 Bldg	B, D	Wabanaki	ICC, ME	Tribal Funds, Fee-	Y2-Y3

Initiative	Strategic Goals Addressed	Lead Entity	Key Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Timeline
Codes Compliance Office		Housing Committee	Fire Marshal	for-Service	
6.7.1 Expand Energy Workforce	A, B, C, D	Wabanaki Sustainable Energy Team	UMaine, DOE, Dept. of Labor	DOE Grants, State Grants, Tribal Funds	Y1-Y5

Section 7: Framework for Evaluation and Performance

To ensure this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy serves as a dynamic and effective guide for the Wabanaki Consortium, a robust framework for evaluation and performance measurement is essential. This framework will enable Tribal leadership to track progress, demonstrate accountability to community members and funding partners, and make data-informed adjustments to the strategy over time. The process will be guided by the principles of transparency, collaboration, and a commitment to measuring what truly matters to the well-being of the Wabanaki people.

Performance Measurement

Success will be evaluated through a balanced set of quantitative, qualitative, and culturally-relevant metrics. The metrics of this CEDS will draw from the performance tracking tools used by each member Tribe in accordance with their strategic planning efforts. As such, they remain general indicators for now. This approach ensures that we measure not only economic output but also progress toward our broader goals of sovereignty, community well-being, and cultural vitality. In addition to economic indicators, evaluation will consider cultural, community, and intergenerational impacts to ensure that development strengthens the Nations in holistic and sustainable ways.

Quantitative Metrics

The Wabanaki Economic Policy Center (Initiative 6.8.1) will be the primary entity responsible for collecting and reporting on key quantitative indicators. These metrics will be tracked annually and benchmarked against baseline data from this CEDS, as well as against state and national trends. Key metrics include:

- **Economic Prosperity:** Median household income, per capita income, poverty rates (overall and child), and household asset and wealth creation.
- **Job Creation:** Total number of new jobs created within Wabanaki territories, labor force participation rate, and unemployment rate.
- **Business Growth:** Number of new tribally- and member-owned businesses established, private investment leveraged by tribal enterprises, and revenue growth of Consortium-supported businesses.
- **Project Implementation:** Dollars of grant funding secured, miles of fiber optic cable deployed, number of housing units built or retrofitted to the Wabanaki Building Code, and megawatts of renewable energy installed.

Qualitative Metrics

Quantitative data alone cannot capture the full impact of this strategy. Qualitative assessment will provide crucial context and narrative. Methods will include:

- **Annual Stakeholder Reporting:** The lead entity for each initiative in the Action Plan will submit an annual progress report detailing achievements, challenges, and lessons learned.
- **Community Surveys:** Biennial surveys will gauge community perceptions of economic opportunity, quality of life, and the effectiveness of CEDS initiatives.
- **Case Studies:** The Wabanaki Economic Policy Center will develop in-depth case studies of successful enterprises and projects to highlight best practices and share stories of impact.

Culturally-Relevant Indicators

Reflecting our core values, the Consortium will develop and track a set of unique performance indicators that measure success in terms that go beyond conventional economic metrics. These indicators, to be refined through community consultation, may include:

- **Youth Engagement:** Number of youths participating in cultural enterprises, internships, and traditional skills workshops.
- **Land Stewardship:** Acres of Wabanaki land brought under sustainable, tribally-led management plans for forestry and agriculture.
- **Food and Energy Security:** Percentage of Wabanaki households reporting improved access to affordable, healthy food and reduced energy cost burdens.
- **Language Revitalization:** Number of new economic and tourism initiatives that actively incorporate and promote the use of Wabanaki languages.

Reporting and CEDS Updates

Four Directions Development Corporation will hold the primary responsibility for overseeing the evaluation framework and communicating results.

- **Annual CEDS Performance Report:** The Director will synthesize the quantitative, qualitative, and cultural data into a comprehensive Annual Performance Report. This report will be presented to the Tribal Councils of the four Nations, the Wabanaki Alliance, and submitted to the U.S. Economic Development Administration to maintain the CEDS's official status.
- **A Living Document:** This CEDS is intended to be a living document, not a static plan. It will be subject to a comprehensive review and formal update every five years, in accordance with EDA guidelines. However, the Consortium leadership may initiate updates as needed in response to major economic shifts, significant political developments (such as the reform of MICSA), or the achievement of major strategic goals. This adaptive approach will ensure the CEDS remains a relevant and powerful tool for guiding the economic future of the Wabanaki Nations.

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