



# Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



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### USET CEDS Committee Members:

- Dawn Houle
- Barre Hampe
- Stephen Craddock
- Jessica Myers
- Brandy Venuti
- Fred Assam
- Traci Thompson
- Tiffany Moore
- Justin Valasquez
- Owen Herne
- Barrack Myers
- Layla Langley
- Rebecca Naragon
- Sarah Fly
- Onawa Miller
- Jenifer DeArmond

### Outreach Facilitators and Lead Content Drafters:

- SunSinger Consulting, LLC
- Dawn Houle, Chris Shrum, Natalie Charlie

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## Executive Summary

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS, is a regionally driven economic development planning process that identifies internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats that impact economic growth. The process brings together a wide range of partners to create good jobs, diversify the economy, and promote economic growth. A well-executed CEDS enables a region to optimize its economic development capabilities and establish connections with federal agencies to secure grants for infrastructure and technical assistance. A successful CEDS planning process identifies locally developed strategies that will steer regional economic development, foster partnerships, and collaboration, and enhance economic results that improve the overall quality of life.

United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) completed its initial CEDS in 2016, which guided the growth of the organization's economic development program. The CEDS update outlined below continues USET's progress towards building economic development as a core competency. USET established an Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee to provide input into the plan. Committee members were selected based on their involvement in economic development within USET member Nations.

Tribal Nations' survival depends on building and sustaining thriving, diverse economies that provide for the wellbeing of their people. The ability for a Tribal Nation to promote sovereignty, leverage strategic assets, and cultivate opportunity and innovation through robust Tribal economic development programs leads to sound Nation rebuilding and results in realizing Tribal self-determination.

Many Tribal Nations are rich with assets but lack the full capacity to convert those assets to scalable economic development. Limited resources, geographic isolation from viable markets, poor or non-existent economic development planning, staff without formal training, and a disconnection to the established infrastructure to foster economic growth adversely impact Tribal economic development efforts. To succeed in Tribal Nation rebuilding, viable economies need to be established and sustained that attract capital investment, create quality jobs, and develop strong Native businesses.

The CEDS provides USET with a roadmap to support Tribal Nations in their economic development efforts regardless of capacity. USET facilitates development by convening member Nations, fostering partnership/collaboration, delivering professional development, and serving as a conduit to resources. The CEDS recognizes the diversity of USET's membership and looks to strengthen USET's role in growing thriving economies.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMMITTEE PURPOSE**

The Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee guides USET's Board of Directors on economic development and entrepreneurship topics and concerns. In addition, Committee members provide insight to USET's economic development core competency on the development of programs and services that build capacity, facilitate collaboration, and advocate on behalf of member Nations that leads to a strong social, cultural, and economic future.

### **CEDS COMMITTEE**

When developing a five-year CEDS, it is imperative to create a committee that will oversee the CEDS development. An Appreciative Inquiry process was used to confirm with the USET Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee members, and Tribal Nation staff would serve as the CEDS Strategy Committee. With the many demands on Tribal delegates, those at the first meeting became the CEDS committee. A comprehensive list of Community and Private Sector Participants is provided with the CEDS (Section IV).

## Section I – Background

### INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS, is a locally based, regionally driven economic development planning process and document that helps the USET region identify its strengths and weaknesses. It brings together a wide range of partners to create good jobs, diversify the economy, and promote economic growth. The planning for the region’s future should involve a diverse set of collaborators, encompassing Economic Development Districts (EDDs), community leaders, residents, Tribal organizations, private sector entities, educational institutions, and various other stakeholders. A well-executed CEDS enables a region to optimize its economic development capabilities and establish connections with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and other federal agencies to secure grants for infrastructure and technical assistance. A successful CEDS planning process identifies locally developed strategies that will steer regional economic development, foster partnerships, and cooperation, and enhance economic results and the overall quality of life within the USET region.

An effective CEDS has five sections:

1. Summary Background—Highlights the economic development conditions of the region.
2. SWOT Analysis—A strategic planning tool used by organizations and individuals to assess their current situation or a specific project. The acronym “SWOT” stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.
3. Strategic Direction/Action Plan—This plan flows from the SWOT analysis and should be consistent with other relevant state/regional/local plans.
4. Evaluation Framework—A structured approach for assessing the effectiveness and impact of the CEDS over time. It helps stakeholders, such as economic development agencies, government entities, and community organizations, monitor progress, make informed decisions, and adjust strategies as needed to achieve economic development goals.
5. Economic Resilience—A region’s ability to withstand and recover from economic shocks, disruptions, and challenges while maintaining or even improving its overall economic well-being. It involves building and strengthening the capacity of a community or region to adapt and thrive in the face of adverse conditions.

In April 2023, the EDA announced an update to its CEDS Content Guidelines. There are four new topics for inclusion in future CEDS: Climate Resilience, Equity, Workforce Development, and Broadband. Climate resilience is important because of the increase in frequency and severity of climate and weather disruptions that are related to climate change. Through proactive climate change planning and the cultivation of resilience, communities and regions can safeguard their investments and simultaneously harness emerging economic development prospects fueled by environmental sustainability. Equity is important within the CEDS because it enhances both the process’s quality and the document’s credibility, thereby bolstering the economic competitiveness of regions. Workforce development refers to the goal for CEDS to emphasize the importance of employer-driven, place-based workforce development as a fundamental component of the overall economic development strategy. Lastly, broadband emphasizes the importance and availability of high-speed internet to provide for effective economic development. However, millions of Americans do not have access to broadband infrastructure. A well-crafted CEDS will pay close attention to deficiencies in the digital infrastructure capacity within their regions.

The funding sources and methods for a CEDS may differ based on the region’s unique circumstances, priorities, and available resources. Frequently, a combination of funding sources is utilized to sustain the comprehensive planning and execution process. Successful acquisition of the essential funding and resources for a CEDS often relies on cooperation across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Common sources of funding include federal grants, state and local government funds, private sector contributions and non-profit organizations.

## **USET OVERVIEW**

Established in 1969, USET is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization serving thirty-three (33) federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico. USET is dedicated to enhancing the development of Tribal Nations, improving the capabilities of Tribal governments, and improving the quality of life for Indian people through a variety of technical and supportive programmatic services.

On October 4, 1968, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida met in Cherokee, North Carolina, with the shared idea that some form of unity between the Tribes would facilitate their dealings with the federal government. Today, USET is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization that collectively represents its member Tribal Nations at the regional and national level. USET has grown to include 33 federally recognized Tribal Nations, operating through various workgroups and committees, and providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and information amongst Tribal Nations, agencies, and governments.

Established in 2014, USET Sovereignty Protection Fund (SPF) is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization advocating on behalf of thirty-three (33) federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico. USET SPF is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advancing the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of Tribal Nations and in assisting its membership in dealing effectively with public policy issues.

As a regional Economic Development District (EDD), USET created its first ever Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in 2016, the first of its kind for Indian Country. The USET Office of Economic Development saw the importance of engaging with the Economic Development Agency (EDA) and developing a CEDS to further economic development initiatives that will benefit USET's 33-member Tribal Nations. The CEDS was last updated in late 2016 and today a new CEDS is presented to reflect USET Office of Economic Development's vision, opportunities, and challenges.

### ***USET'S MISSION STATEMENT***

United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc., is dedicated to enhancing the development of federally recognized Tribal Nations, to improving the capabilities of Tribal governments, and to assist USET's membership and their governments in dealing effectively with public policy issues and in serving the broad needs of Indian people.

### ***USET STATEMENT OF UNITY***

We, the [collective Tribal Nations of USET/ USET SPF] being numbered among the Nations People of the South and Eastern United States, desiring to establish an organization to represent our united interest and promote our common welfare and benefit, do of our own free will in Council assembly, affirm our membership in the organization to be known as United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.

## Section II – Economic Development Analysis

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

USET member Tribal Nations reflect the diversity of Indian Country with members located in remote, isolated regions of the Northeast, to near the urban centers of the Southeast. The economic disparity among USET member Tribal Nations is driven, in part, by economic opportunities often differentiated by gaming and non-gaming economies and proximity to urban areas. The demographic data outlined below (US Census Bureau's My Tribal Area) illustrates this diversity, as there are USET members experiencing extreme poverty, as well as member Nations that have built successful gaming operations that provide for their citizens.

	Range	Median
<b>Population</b>	~150 to 15,700	1,300
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$16,340 to \$158,750	\$42,083
<b>Poverty</b>	0.0% to 66.7%	27.3%
<b>Unemployment</b>	0.0% to 32.8%	8.2%
<b>Adult Education Attainment</b>	59.8% to 100%	87.7%

When examining the data from the USET Office of Economic Development's (OECD) service delivery perspective, the major differences in various Tribal economic development and technical assistance needs mean USET staff have greater difficulties identifying economic strategies for the USET region. One member Nation may be located in a rural area with little opportunity for growth due to the lack of resources, skilled labor, and distance to market. Another may be located in or near a populated area with a strong workforce and major highways, opening the door for increased and more diverse commerce. Each of these Tribal Nations will likely warrant economic development services that are vastly different.

Outreach was conducted with member Tribal Nations over a six-month period to better understand the economic climate and training/technical assistance (TTA) needs of the Tribal Nations. Sessions included presentations at USET OECD meetings, Zoom sessions and individual interviews. The ultimate goals were to determine how USET OECD can best serve the USET member Tribal Nations given their diverse landscapes and resources. Within the sessions, enough information was extracted to craft a SWOT analysis.



### USET MEMBER NATION STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS (SWOT) ANALYSIS

To deliver high quality programs and services, OECD operates in the context of the environment of the member Tribal Nations; economic development does not exist within a vacuum. The SWOT Analysis outlined below considers the internal and external dynamics of USET and its member Tribal Nations. An "Appreciative Inquiry" process was used in virtual sessions with several Tribal Nations to identify internal strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats.

USET's organizational capacity informs the actions outlined in the CEDS. Over the last five years USET's OECD has demonstrated a growing capacity to serve the needs of its member Nations. The CEDS development process was intentional in defining USET's current capacity so to scale proposed actions accordingly to realize success. The SWOT Analysis below highlights the organizational assessment.

## USET ORGANIZATION AND OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (OECD)

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Respected voice</li> <li>• Unity of Tribal Nations</li> <li>• Longevity</li> <li>• Political capital</li> <li>• Recognition</li> <li>• Momentum for economic development</li> <li>• Tribal Nation support</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide economic diversity</li> <li>• Perception of economic development not a priority</li> <li>• Limited staff</li> <li>• Lack of access to capital or technical assistance for access</li> <li>• Technical assistance capacity</li> <li>• Unclear on policy and processes</li> <li>• Focus on federal resources</li> <li>• Lack of organization culture</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase political influence</li> <li>• Creation of business clearinghouse</li> <li>• Increase partnerships and collaborations</li> <li>• Market research and data availability</li> <li>• Funding diversification</li> <li>• Expanded technical assistance</li> <li>• Expanded federal funding partners</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complacency</li> <li>• Siloed programmatic activities</li> <li>• Competing interests</li> <li>• Relevancy</li> <li>• Sustainable funding</li> <li>• Grant dependency</li> <li>• Member relations</li> </ul>

## USET MEMBER TRIBAL NATIONS

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land</li> <li>• Successful Tribal venture best practices</li> <li>• Multiple enterprises</li> <li>• Certified companies</li> <li>• Strong political relationships</li> <li>• Several regional economies to build upon</li> <li>• Private sector experience</li> <li>• Access to federal programs and funding</li> <li>• Tourism and gaming</li> <li>• Natural resources</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Healthcare infrastructure</li> <li>• Intertribal businesses</li> <li>• Unity</li> <li>• Strong program management</li> <li>• Vocal at federal level</li> <li>• Innovations</li> <li>• Entry to new markets</li> <li>• Exercising sovereignty</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Internal politics</li> <li>• Slow and expensive land into trust process</li> <li>• Rebuilding Tribal Nations</li> <li>• Limited due diligence processes</li> <li>• Risk averse</li> <li>• Remote/overlooked locations</li> <li>• Lack of access to broadband</li> <li>• Competing leadership initiatives</li> <li>• Skilled labor</li> <li>• Land</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Lack of community wealth</li> <li>• Lack of tax compacts</li> <li>• Insufficient economic diversity</li> <li>• Unfavorable state relations</li> <li>• Reliance on federal funds</li> <li>• Lack of prioritization of economic development</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More local partnerships</li> <li>• Strengthening regional economies</li> <li>• Expanding government contracting</li> <li>• Partnerships with private foundations</li> <li>• Strong economic clusters</li> <li>• Emerging economic clusters</li> <li>• Increase public perception of economic impact</li> <li>• Land acquisitions</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Access to education</li> <li>• Expanding private sector experience</li> <li>• New and expanding networks</li> <li>• Increased government funding</li> <li>• Improved domestic and federal economies</li> <li>• Tribal to Tribal partnerships</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsustainable funding</li> <li>• Unpredictable credit markets</li> <li>• Lack of access to capital</li> <li>• Negotiating gaming compacts</li> <li>• Changing federal and state agency relations</li> <li>• Increased government regulation</li> <li>• Negative public perceptions</li> <li>• Macroeconomic forces</li> <li>• Increased competition</li> <li>• Changing technologies</li> <li>• Lack of infrastructure</li> <li>• Complacency</li> <li>• Policy/rule changes</li> <li>• Lack of planning</li> <li>• Lack of evaluation benchmarks</li> <li>• Weak performance standards</li> <li>• Competing interests</li> <li>• “Not in my backyard” mindset</li> </ul>



## **USET MEMBERSHIP AND DIVERSE CAPACITY**

Since the last CEDS for the organization, six (6) new Tribal Nations have joined the USET membership. USET now has thirty-three (33) member Tribal Nations, some of which have well established, mature governments that operate sophisticated economic development programs, and others are emerging governments that have recently been federally recognized. This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for USET as it designs and delivers its programs and services outlined in the CEDS. Within the CEDS the differences among mature, established, and developing economic development programs are illustrated. Various levels of maturity reflect differences in USET services provided to Tribal Nations in each of these categories.

## **EDA REGIONS**

USET member Tribal Nations span three Economic Development Administration (EDA) regional offices: Atlanta, Austin, and Philadelphia. Each of these regional offices maintains its own funding allocation and project development staff. Given USET's broad geographic reach, this can create challenges in funding region-wide initiatives. Below outlines the three EDA regions where USET operates:

### ***Atlanta Region***

The Atlanta region office serves six member Tribal Nations: Catawba Indian Nation, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, and Seminole Tribe of Florida.

### ***Austin Region***

The Austin region office serves five USET member Tribal Nations: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana, Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, and the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana.

### ***Philadelphia Region***

The Philadelphia region serves 22 member Tribal Nations: Cayuga Nation, Oneida Indian Nation, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, Seneca Nation of Indians, Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, The Mohegan Tribe, Narragansett Indian Tribe, Shinnecock Indian Nation, Chickahominy Indian Tribe, Chickahominy Indian Tribe – Eastern Division, Monacan Indian Nation, Nansemond Indian Nation, Pamunkey Indian Tribe, Rappahannock Tribe, Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe, Houlton Band of Maliseet, Mi'kmaq Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point, Penobscot Indian Nation, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, and Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah).

## **ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES HIGHLIGHTS**

USET member Tribal Nations operate Tribal enterprises in diverse economies that create employment opportunities, generate revenue to support Tribal programs and services, and enhance the quality of life for Tribal citizens. These enterprises range from small businesses that employ a few Tribal citizens to large corporations with an international footprint. The collective economic activity across the 33 USET member Tribal Nations represents a commitment to building a thriving, resilient economy that promotes Nation rebuilding and advances sovereignty. Below are highlights of economic activities across a series of economic sectors.

## ***Agriculture***

Over the last 10 years, USET member Nations have pursued both agriculture and aquaculture to strengthen food security for their people. The pandemic strengthened Tribal Nations' resolve to achieve food sovereignty. Tribal Nations are reclaiming land for agricultural production, operating vertical hydroponic systems year-round, and establishing aquaculture facilities. Production is generally on a small scale with most of the distribution dedicated to providing Tribal citizens with fresh vegetables, supporting a farm stand, and/or selling to the Tribal Nations' hospitality properties.

USET member Nations have been operating aquaculture facilities and fish hatcheries for decades. Production has largely been dedicated to seeding coastal inlets and ponds to support shellfish harvesting or ensuring rivers and streams are stocked with trout to attract visitors. In recent years member Nations have explored large-scale aquaculture initiatives in partnership with established producers.

Opportunity exists to expand operations that vertically integrate value-added specialty foods into USET member Tribal Nations' agricultural activities, which will result in increased employment and higher product margins. Capacity and scalability remain the two greatest challenges facing Tribal Nations as they continue to invest in agricultural/aquacultural enterprise. Below are some of USET member Tribal Nations' agricultural activities:

- Chickahominy Indian Tribe – Eastern Division: Hatchery
- Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana: Rice-Crawfish Cultivation
- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians: Trout Hatchery
- Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation: Hydroponic/Vertical Agriculture
- Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe: Shellfish
- Pamunkey Indian Tribe: Hatchery
- Passamaquoddy Tribes – Blueberry and Maple
- Seminole Tribe of Florida: Cattle, sugar cane, and orchards
- Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah): Scallops



## ***Artisan Handmade Products***

The work of artisans who create handmade products is flourishing across the USET region and among member Tribal Nations that are building infrastructure to support these Native entrepreneurs. Creating access to markets, positioning, and pricing, securing raw materials, and building financial literacy are essential for artisans to grow their businesses. Nearly all USET member Tribal Nations support Native artisans and entrepreneurs by facilitating the sale of handmade work. Some communities operate museum stores or artist cooperatives dedicated to the handmade work of Tribal citizens. Others offer Native-made products in their casinos and convenience stores. Two Tribal organizations stand out for the support provided to artisans: the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, which is dedicated to the five Wabanaki Tribal Nations, and the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual Coop, operated by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

## ***Broadband/Tribal Utility***

USET member Tribal Nations have been providing broadband services and operating Tribal utilities for more than 20 years. There are seven Tribal Nations that deliver and maintain broadband services on their Homelands and in surrounding communities. In the case of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, the Tribal utility has spun off a Small Business Administration (SBA) 8(a) certified small business building broadband networks.

### ***Convenience Stores***

Fifteen USET member Tribal Nations operate convenience stores on their Homelands. In many locations, these stores are the only gas station on the Tribal Homelands, and they are often the only place for Tribal citizens to purchase household staples such as milk, bread, or eggs until they can reach a grocery store in a nearby non-Tribal town.

### ***Energy***

With increased investment from the Biden Administration's Investing in America, the bipartisan infrastructure bill, more than half of USET member Tribal Nations are pursuing large-scale renewable energy projects in solar, wind, and biomass cogeneration. Initial funding has been announced and Tribal Nations will be building microgrids to power Tribal enterprises so they can reduce operating costs and be more competitive.

### ***Government Contracting***

A growing number of USET member Tribal Nations are establishing Tribal enterprises dedicated to government contracting. Of the 33-member Tribal nations, 19 currently operate an SBA 8(a) certified small business or sell directly to the state or federal government. While a number of Tribal Nations are managing modest government contracts of less than \$1MM, there are significant government contracting operations with contracts in excess of \$100MM, especially in the department of defense sector.

### ***Hospitality and Gaming***

More than three-quarters of USET member Tribal Nations operate a hospitality property, gaming facility, RV park, or campground. Roughly half of USET member Tribal Nations have a gaming compact with their representative state and operate a casino. While several of the Wabanaki Tribal Nations have recently begun investing in online sports betting, properties such as Hard Rock, Foxwoods, Mohegan Sun, and Wind Creek are a few of the large-scale gaming operations among the USET membership. Many of these Tribal Nations, such as The Mohegan Tribe, offer gaming management services to other USET members.

### ***Tourism and Museums***

Nearly all USET member Tribal Nations have a museum or cultural center that celebrates their Nation's cultural heritage and plays an integral part in tourism development. These facilities are supported through revenue from admission fees, whereas a number of them are free and subsidized by Tribal government funds. These museums and cultural centers provide an outlet for Tribal artisans to sell their work. The museums often serve as the cultural center that offers language, dance, and craft classes to Tribal citizens.

### ***Natural Resource-Based Economies***

Two-thirds of USET member Tribal Nations operate natural resource-based enterprises ranging from forest products to oil and gas leases. Of the nearly one million acres of land held in trust by USET member Tribal Nations, over 500,000 acres support natural resource-based businesses. A number of Tribal Nations have leveraged their natural resources and have established manufacturing/value-added production to create greater employment and increase the return to the Tribal community.

## **Other**

USET member Tribal Nations are engaged in a wide range of other businesses such as financial services/lending to precision manufacturing. Tribal Nations have leveraged critical assets and carved out a niche in key sectors that have created economic vitality. Sectors such as aviation, digital media and film, and information technology and high-performance computing have positioned Tribal Nations for the 21st century economy.

### **KEY ECONOMIC ACTIVITY CLUSTERS: COLLABORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES**

Following numerous one-on-one interviews with Tribal Nations, as well as discussions with USET staff and drawing from Tribal knowledge, clusters of economic activity across USET member Tribal Nations have been identified. The results of the economic clusters present opportunities for Tribal Nations to collaborate in ways that encourage and strengthen innovation, supply chains, workforce and professional development, and economic growth. For USET, the cluster data presents challenges in being able to provide the necessary resources to adequately meet member Tribal Nation needs. These primary economic clusters inform the design and delivery of USET economic development programs, and include:

- Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Fishing
- Artisan – Handmade Products
- Renewable Energy
- Government Contracting
- Tourism, Hospitality Expansion and Gaming
- Wood/Forest Products

Following are details about USET member Tribal Nations' activity in each of the key economic clusters.

#### ***Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Fishing***

Considerable activity in agriculture, aquaculture, and fishing exists across the USET region. Well established agricultural enterprises, such as the Passamaquoddy Tribe – Indian Township blueberry operation or the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana's hydroponic venture serve as a foundation, while other Tribal Nations are exploring agriculture, aquaculture, and fishing for both commercial purposes and for food security.

An area of opportunity for USET member Tribal Nations is in value-added production. Several Tribal Nations currently produce raw material that is sold to either a broker or value-added producer. In considering the agriculture/aquaculture/fishing value-chain and cross-sector development, USET member Tribal Nations active in this sector have an opportunity to explore Native-to-Native markets through tourism and gaming establishments. Below is a general outline of activity in this sector and Tribal participation.

#### **Agriculture**

- Mi'kmaq Nation: Farm stand
- Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana: Rice
- Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians: Lease agricultural lands
- Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation: Food security initiative
- Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida: Cattle
- Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians: Organic produce
- Passamaquoddy Tribes: Blueberries, maple syrup
- Poarch Band of Creek Indians: Cattle
- Seminole Tribe of Florida: Cattle, sugar cane, and citrus orchards

#### **Aquaculture**

- Mi'kmaq Nation: Trout hatchery infrastructure
- Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana: Crawfish



- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians: Trout hatchery
- Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe: Oysters and other shellfish
- Passamaquoddy Tribe – Indian Township: Elver harvest
- Penobscot Indian Nation: Salmon and eel
- Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah): Oysters and other shellfish

### **Fishing**

- Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe: Commercial fishing
- Passamaquoddy Tribe – Pleasant Point: Lobster, elver harvest, and commercial fishing
- Shinnecock Indian Nation: Commercial fishing
- Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah): Commercial fishing

### ***Artisan Handmade Products***

Artisan handmade activities are flourishing across USET member Tribal Nations. The rich cultural tradition fosters economic activity by artisans and supports economic growth in this sector. However, access to markets remains a significant barrier to sustained economic growth. In addition, building capacity in business acumen, specifically financial literacy, product pricing, affordable accounting, and social media marketing is essential for increasing household income for many of the artisans. USET can offer a range of activities to strengthen the artisan handmade sector, from business training and technical assistance to establishing an artisan cooperative that represents artists across the USET membership.



### ***Renewable Energy***

A number of Tribal Nations are exploring various forms of alternative energy generation and distribution. Significant potential exists in solar, wind, biomass, and waste to energy conversion. Federal funds have supported project feasibility in alternative energy and development is being advanced, albeit slowly. Native organizations have applied for a grant that could infuse over a billion dollars into Tribal communities and result in many Tribal homes with solar rooftops, and thereby strengthening energy sovereignty.

### ***Broadband***

Many Tribal lands lack adequate broadband that most communities take for granted. The obvious benefits of developing broadband on Tribal lands will accelerate the societal and economic benefits of broadband connectivity. Broadband planning can help to address the digital divide by identifying underserved or unserved areas and establishing goals for connecting them. It can also help to promote innovation, stimulate economic growth, and improve public services such as healthcare, education, and emergency response. Additionally, it addresses issues related to cybersecurity, data privacy, and net neutrality.

Recently, the federal government released a government program called the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, which allocates \$42.5 billion to create broadband access programs at the state level, particularly for unserved communities and individuals. Unfortunately, the initial assessment of Tribal Nations' broadband needs misrepresented Indian Country by incorrectly labeling the areas as "served" or simply omitting data points for Tribal lands. Opportunity exists for USET to partner with other Tribal organizations such as COLT (Coalition of Large Tribes) and Tribal broadband companies for the advocacy efforts needed to adequately capture the correct data on Tribal lands combined with the call for equality of financial resources dedicated to Tribal lands. Additionally, USET could offer member Tribal Nations access to a virtual Tribal broadband office to ensure access to financial resources while assisting in gathering data to close the gaps in existing broadband mapping while facilitating collaboration among Tribal Nations. Currently, the

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe owns and operates a broadband network company that serves their community. The Tribal enterprise just recently became an SBA certified 8(a) company who expanded their business services to the federal government. A partnership between the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe and USET could provide more technical assistance to other member Tribal Nations in meeting their broadband needs.

Strengthening Tribal data sovereignty is essential to ensure that Tribal Nations have control over Tribal data and have access to the resources needed to protect sovereignty and self-determination. Critical infrastructure development and connectivity is vital for Tribal governments to continue to provide emergency response, educational resources, business support systems (online sales, marketing, website access) and health care services. Offering technical assistance and policy updates on data sovereignty is a key role that USET could provide its membership.

### ***Federal Contracting***

Many USET member Tribal Nations are entering into government certification programs such as Small Business Administration (SBA) 8(a) small business certification program and Historically Under-Utilized Zone (HUBZone) to gain entry into the federal marketplace. USET could offer regional based best practices training among member Tribal enterprises, combined with increasing awareness of the various businesses that member Tribal enterprises are engaged in. Communicating business endeavors among Tribal Nations could lead to increased collaboration and business partnership. Some of the new industries that member Tribal Nations have entered are:

- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians: Technology and research and development
- Seminole Tribe of Florida: USDA school lunch program (beef), ethnographic studies, and cultural monitoring
- Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas: US Park Service natural resource maintenance
- Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation: Technology
- Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe: Broadband and professional services (Management)
- Poarch Band of Creek Indians: Light machine manufacturing

The Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians are among the USET member Tribal Nations that have already created Nation-to-Nation partnerships to increase government contracting opportunities. These types of partnerships help build capacity among Tribal Nations while increasing job opportunities in new markets.

From a regional perspective, one USET member is the first Tribal Nation to run a Department of Defense APEX Technical Assistance Center. This Center could serve USET Tribal Nations with critical technical assistance in government contracting and a partnership with USET could provide free resources for all member Nations. Tribal Nations can also serve as subcontractors to those prime contractors who have already been awarded contracts to build their business capacity in this space before taking on a prime role. This trend is growing among Tribal Nations and lowers their risk of fully taking on a government contract by themselves. USET could be the catalyst to communicate among Tribal businesses for potential Native-to-Native partnerships.

Other opportunities that do not require SBA certification include the Buy Indian Act, a law authorizing the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service to set aside government contracting opportunities for qualified Native American businesses. The Act has the potential to be spread to other federal departments such as USDA and all the Department of Interior. A simple registration of the Tribal business is needed to be added to the Buy Indian vendor list. USET could provide technical assistance and webinars highlighting policy trends, pricing, and other strategies to enter this market.

## **Tourism**

All USET member Tribal Nations have some economic interest in tourism. For many Tribal Nations, tourism is an integral economic engine that accounts for significant revenue for the Tribal Nation and its citizens, as well as job creation for the region. Tribal tourism creates destination locations that attract visitors for a variety of reasons from, in the case of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, gaming to fishing and the arts. Tourism has been a consistent economic sector in Indian Country and, as a result, there are Tribal Nations that have a long-standing economic tradition creating ways visitors can experience the Tribal Nation and its community without sacrificing their cultural integrity. Because of the breadth of the tourism sector, USET and its member Tribal Nations must consider strategic product development and diversification. There is an opportunity to create vertical integration of tourism products and assess gaps in the value chain that can be filled. For instance, the class of hotels available on or around Tribal lands may present opportunity. The Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana recently purchased a motel near their jurisdictional boundaries to offer their gaming customers a variety of lodging options. Another tourism strategy being employed is wedding venues like the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana does to draw more groups to their Tribal lands combined with hosting large PGA golfing events at their golf course with celebrity figures. A variety of business opportunities should be explored to expand the resources that member Tribal Nations could access.

## **Gaming**

Tribal gaming is an example of a place-based economic development strategy. Place-based policies are designed to shift economic activity toward economically lagging areas. Pursuant to the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), Tribal gaming enterprises must locate their facilities on Tribal trust lands and must invest revenues in ways that benefit the Tribal Nation (Gaming Workforce Fed Reserve, March 2023).

In 2019, 522 Tribal gaming facilities employed approximately 200,000 people and generated almost \$35 billion in annual gross revenue (National Indian Gaming Commission, 2020b). Since then, the amount of annual gross revenue continues to increase, especially when other hospitality services are included. Over 70% of USET member Tribal Nations operate some form of gaming, which contributes significantly to the Tribal Nations' economic development efforts. The gaming cluster plays an essential role in economic development, including employment, development of ancillary businesses, and revenue generation to support a wide range of Tribal services. The gaming cluster presents great opportunity to support Native-to-Native business development, workforce development, broader tourism development, and expansion of needed infrastructure. Tribal Nations near large populations tend to be more successful financially, while the other gaming operations serve as job centers to the Tribal Nation. This market also provides member Tribal Nations expanded hospitality businesses such as hotels, water parks and RV parks. New technology like automatic-in gaming is one tactic member Tribal Nations are resorting to in order to address the workforce shortages in the hospitality industry. Educational opportunities are immense in the gaming sector for member Tribal Nations to learn the various job functions of the industry which builds internal capacity.

## **Wood/Forest Products**

Given the forestland holdings of several Tribal Nations, coupled with the expansion of biomass energy production, opportunities are emerging for Tribal Nations to diversify their economic activities and pursue sustainable economic development through a renewable resource. Several Tribal Nations are managing and harvesting forestland, employing Tribal citizens as foresters, loggers, and truckers. A number of Tribal Nations are actively engaged in producing wood pellets or are in the process of developing manufacturing operations. Other value-added products, such as cabinetry and furniture production, have been pursued or explored in recent years.

- Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana: Value-added production



- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians: Timber management, harvest, and value-added production
- Passamaquoddy Tribe – Pleasant Point: Timber management, harvest, and value-added production
- Penobscot Indian Nation: Timber management, harvest, and value-added production

Collaboration among Tribal Nations could increase economy of scale when producing and selling finished forest products. Little collaboration is currently occurring among USET member Tribal Nations and an organization to help facilitate awareness and communication of opportunities would be well placed. Fire management and other natural resource management types of business development with a strong tie to emergency management services are emerging in the USET region and could be future opportunities for member Tribal Nations.

### *Emerging Economic Clusters*

Four emerging economic clusters have been identified that have increased potential for growth. With capital investment, secure contracts, and markets, and increased capacity, Tribal Nations can establish viable economic interests in these sectors. As with the established economic clusters described above, USET’s role could include activities such as training and technical assistance, facilitating partnerships, and creating regional resources. The emerging sectors include:

**Niche Manufacturing:** Niche manufacturing has been an integral part of Tribal economies over time. The number of Tribal Nations working in manufacturing has ebbed and flowed. Currently, there is a decline in Tribal enterprises operating manufacturing facilities. However, there appears to be a shift towards piecemeal and niche manufacturing that may take hold. Currently, several member Tribal Nations are in the initial stages of starting manufacturing businesses with a large tie to state and federal markets that have a strong sustainable business strategy.

**Business Services:** A few Tribal Nations operate business service enterprises that support office systems from furniture to technology to facility management support.

**Healthcare:** Tribal Nations have developed significant healthcare capacity and infrastructure through health clinics and hospitals. Reducing overhead costs to provide health care services for Tribal citizens is an ongoing challenge for Tribal Nations. Partnerships with other non-profit organizations such as Self-Governance Communication and Education Tribal Consortium would be beneficial in offering technical assistance.

**Taxation:** While some Tribal Nations have long established this arena, many Tribal Nations, for several reasons (state/Tribal relations, laws, etc.) have not taken advantage of the ability to tax. Several of the USET member Tribal Nations have entered tax compacts with their represented states on gasoline, alcohol, and cigarettes.

The economic clusters provide USET focused areas for technical assistance and capacity building. Establishing sector-specific working groups will provide the necessary technical assistance and peer-to-peer mentoring that will advance multiple Tribal Nations efforts in economic growth and diversification. The areas that focused working groups can impact most are:

- Product development
- Value/Supply-chain enhancement
- Market development
- Distribution channels
- Cooperative marketing program
- Capital formation
- Education, training, and workforce development
- Shared staffing
- Technology/systems development
- Policy and legislation influence



## Section III – Strategic Themes, Goals, and Objectives

The planning process embraced an Appreciative Inquiry approach and revealed a series of core themes for which goals and objectives have been defined. The core themes serve to define goals and objectives, organize activities, and effectively evaluate impact. A fully developed matrix of each theme and associated goals, objectives, actions, and estimated cost is provided in the appendix. The following table summarizes the matrix:

THEME	GOAL	PRIORITY ACTIONS
Thriving Economic Climate	Provide targeted technical assistance to USET member Tribal Nations to support rebuilding diverse and thriving Tribal economies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tribal Enterprise and Native Entrepreneur Technical Assistance Program</li> <li>• Economic Cluster/Sector Specific Working Groups Program</li> </ul>
Nation Rebuilding – Sovereignty	Advance Tribal sovereignty and self-determination by leveraging various incentives afforded Tribal Nations and their enterprises, and putting in place infrastructure and governance systems that lead to economic security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Self-Determination Program</li> <li>• Advocacy and Policy Agenda</li> </ul>
Capacity Building	Increase capacity of USET member Nations and the Office of Economic Development (OECD) by providing education, training, and professional development to staff, establishing organization systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USET Website Portal</li> <li>• Professional Development – IEDC certification and other quality education and training</li> </ul>
Partnership and Collaboration	Foster inter-Tribal partnership and collaboration that supports and advances nation rebuilding, economic growth, capital investment, and an improved quality of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder Analysis and Partnership/ Collaboration Development and Action Plan</li> <li>• Business/Enterprise Matchmaker Project</li> </ul>
Quality of Life and Place	Enhance the quality of life and sense of place within Tribal communities by celebrating and protecting Native culture, developing quality housing, conducting sound community planning, and increasing economic resiliency, enhancing the way of life in Indian Country.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USET Tribal Placemaking Initiative</li> <li>• Community Planning, Technical Assistance, and Education program</li> </ul>
Education and Workforce Development	Strengthen education and workforce development within USET member Tribal Nations to meet the needs of an emerging 21st century economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Entrepreneurial Development Initiative</li> <li>• Dedicated Workforce Development Program</li> </ul>

## Section IV – Community and Private Sector Participation

### TRIBAL PARTICIPATION

Recognizing the importance of equitable input, USET collaborated with a consultant to conduct outreach to member Tribal Nations in the following ways:

- Two convenings in early 2023 at a USET meeting during an economic development committee session.
- Three virtual outreach sessions with participating Tribal Nations (all USET Tribal Nations were invited to the meetings).
- In-person and phone interviews with Tribal Leaders.

### PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

USET has developed various strategic alliance partnerships to facilitate its work to reach its goals and objectives, which support its service mission. These partnerships are developed and employed with organizations, federal agencies, academic research institutions, and governments through written covenants, contracts, and expressed actions of their authority to support economic development and other complementing actions that support the rebuilding of healthy Tribal Nations.

USET recognizes collaboration and partnerships as an essential, if not critical, component to ensuring successful projects and initiatives, especially when utilizing scarce resources, and to making meaningful impact throughout Indian Country. These partnerships work locally, regionally, and nationally. USET strives to create strategic alliance partnerships that will promote its service mission. Recognizing its strength with government and non-government partnerships, a goal for USET is to build private sector partnerships to promote economic activity and development with its member Tribal Nations.

## Section V – Plan of Action

To effectively implement the key strategies outlined in USET’s 2024–2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), a detailed “Plan of Action” table has been developed. This table serves as a vital tool designed to guide stakeholders in systematically achieving the specific goals and objectives set forth in the CEDS. The following pages delineate actionable steps, assigns responsibilities, and establishes outcomes to ensure that each strategy is addressed comprehensively. This Plan of Action will facilitate collaboration among various partners, enhances accountability, and allows for ongoing evaluation and adjustment as needed. This structured approach aims to foster sustainable economic growth and development within the USET region, aligning resources and efforts toward shared priorities and measurable outcomes.

## Plan of Action Matrix

### Theme: Thriving Economic Climate

**Goal:** Provide targeted technical assistance to USET member Tribal Nations to support rebuilding diverse and thriving Tribal economies

**Results:** Secure strategic partners, attract capital investment, create quality jobs, increase household income, and realize self-sufficiency.

#### Objective: Training and Technical Assistance

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Tribal Enterprise and Native Entrepreneur Technical Assistance Program	Establish a technical assistance program for Tribal enterprise and Native entrepreneurs that includes business development, business counseling, and referrals to available resources.	USET, Federal Partners	Eight Tribal Nations receive technical assistance. Three Tribal Nations start an economic development project.	\$10,000
Economic Diversification Training and Assistance	Conduct diversification training and assess Tribal assets/partners to encourage moving beyond traditional economic sectors.	USET and Member Tribal Nations	Training is provided to a minimum of six member Tribal Nations each year.	\$10,000

#### Objective: Sector Development

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Economic Cluster/Sector Specific Working Groups Program	Establish working groups for key economic clusters or target sectors to develop access to markets, support innovation, and provide technical assistance. Key sectors include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism</li> <li>• Forest/Wood Products</li> <li>• Agriculture/Fishing/Food Sovereignty</li> <li>• Renewable Energy</li> <li>• New Investments/Markets</li> <li>• Native Artisan/Handmade Products</li> <li>• Government Contracting</li> <li>• Emergency Management/Disaster Recovery</li> </ul>	USET, Member Tribal Nations, Federal Programs/Partners	At least five working groups established and meet quarterly with a minimum participation of three member Tribal Nations per working group. Twenty percent (20%) increase in access to markets.	\$30,000
New sector development	Implement project to explore Tribal economic development in sectors that are largely untapped by Tribal Nations and Tribal Enterprises.	USET, Member Tribal Nations, Tribal Enterprises, federal/business partners.	Increase in number of Tribal Nations engaged in new sector development.	TBD

Items identified with an asterisk (\*) represent priority activities for USET CEDS Plan of Action.



PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Business Attraction	Implement project to support Tribal Nations' business attraction efforts through technical assistance and support services.	USET	At least five (5) member Tribal Nations receive TA and/or support services.	\$25,000

**Objective: Access to Capital/Access to Markets**

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Native CDFI/SSBCI TA Support/Intermediary	Implement project to assess SSBCI TA development needs and provide technical assistance and support in an intermediary role.	USET, Tribal Nations	At least twenty-four (24) Tribal enterprises and Native small businesses receive technical assistance and support.	\$250,000
Capital Access and Resource Project	Serve as an information clearinghouse and connector of access to diverse capital streams for Tribal Nations, Tribal enterprises, and Native businesses.	USET, financial institutions, credit unions, Native CDFI's, angel investors.	Ten (10) Tribal Nations receive at least \$2.5 million dollars in additional capital.	TBD
Philanthropy and Social Impact Investment Project	Strengthen Tribal financial and technical resources from the philanthropic community through education of foundations, technical assistance, and connections with philanthropic representatives.	USET, Tribal Nations, foundations.	Fifteen Tribal Nations receive assistance in preparing for and meeting philanthropic representatives.	\$15,000

*Items identified with an asterisk (\*) represent priority activities for USET CEDS Plan of Action.*

**Theme: Nation Building – Advancing Tribal Sovereignty**

**Goal:** Advance Tribal sovereignty and self-determination by leveraging various incentives afforded Tribal Nations and their enterprises and putting in place infrastructure and governance systems.

**Results:** Economic security.

**Objective: Self-Determination**

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Economic Self-Determination Program*	Implement technical assistance program to advance sovereignty and nation rebuilding by providing best practice support for legal/tax codes, organization structures, new program development (third party billing,) and tax incentive policies.	USET, Member Tribal Nations	Materials are developed to provide technical assistance. A minimum of five Tribal Nations are supported by year 5.	\$50,000
Economic Sovereignty	Conduct three to four Enterprise Roundtable sessions per year through newly created economic cluster workgroups (and support professional development opportunities).	USET, Member Tribal Nations	Workgroup roundtable minutes are produced and shared. At least 10 Tribal Nations have received professional development training or TA.	TBD
Economic and Business Incentives Technical Assistance*	Training and technical assistance provided highlighting business incentives available to Tribal Nations including special economic zones (i.e., free trade and HUB zones) to various tax incentives.	USET, federal & state partners	Materials are developed to provide technical assistance and training. A minimum of five Tribal Nations supported by year 5.	\$50,000

**Objective: Self-Determination**

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Advocacy and Policy Agenda*	Active policy and legislative agenda focused on economic development, taxation, and incentive programs that increase awareness, support, accountability to USET Tribal Nations.	USET SPF	Tribal Nations have an increased understanding of economic policy and legislative affairs. Key policy and advocacy work, including USET resolutions and resolution follow-ups, are communicated at least quarterly to all USET member Tribal Nations.	\$25,000

*Items identified with an asterisk (\*) represent priority activities for USET CEDS Plan of Action.*

**Theme: Capacity Building**

**GOAL:** Increase the capacity of USET member Tribal Nations and the Office of Economic Development (OEcD) by providing education, training, and professional development to staff, establishing organization systems.

**RESULTS:** Stronger service delivery, and targeted technical assistance.

**Objective: Member Development (External)**

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Due Diligence Program – Feasibility Study*	Conduct a feasibility study for Tribal Nations’ due diligence related to business and economic development projects, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vetting potential partnerships.</li> <li>• assessing the viability of investments.</li> <li>• conducting market research for specific ventures.</li> <li>• running background checks on potential partners.</li> </ul>	USET, Four Directions, Sequoyah Fund	One feasibility study is completed.	\$50,000
USET Website Portal*	Launch a website portal that supports economic and professional development, and the dissemination of data. The portal will include secured access for member Tribal Nations, the ability to serve leadership development through distance learning, and the ability to effectively share time-bound and sensitive information to the Tribal Nations.	USET	Website draws increased traffic from throughout USET’s membership and is considered a valuable resource	\$100,000
Data Collection/ Repository and Research Service*	Adopt a community survey process that is available to all USET member Tribal Nations that provides accurate and reliable sociodemographic data that is cost effective	USET, member Tribal Nations, USET committees	Sociodemographic data and repository available for analysis and dissemination.	\$500,000
Grant Sources/Funding Opportunities Technical Assistance	Serve as a clearinghouse for information about federal funding opportunities related to community and economic development and the core economic sectors.	USET Staff	USET Tribal Nations have increased knowledge of grant resources and are able to secure grants.	TBD
IEDC and Other Quality Professional Development	Curate a series of professional development opportunities best suited for Indian Country and the topics of greatest need and impact.	USET Staff	At least two project development trainings and related opportunities per year are conducted for USET Tribal Nations.	TBD
Project Management Training	Develop and offer project management training that is adapted to Tribal economic development.	USET staff	At least two project development trainings will be completed serving at least 10 Tribal Nations.	TBD

*Items identified with an asterisk (\*) represent priority activities for USET CEDS Plan of Action.*

**Objective: USET Development (Internal)**

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Staff Development	Routinely assess USET EDC/department capacity: Staffing, funding level, resources, and tools to accomplish the 5-year CEDS and develop a plan to grow with the new CEDS.	USET Staff, consultant, assessor	At least one assessment per year is completed and an action plan is created for staff development.	TBD
Communication	Create a strong Marketing/ Communications Strategy that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group calendar</li> <li>• Social Media platforms that highlight success stories, events, trainings, webinars, meetings, and share policies, legislative changes, Tribal codes, best practices, etc.; and</li> </ul>	USET staff Input from Tribal Nations	One strategy is created. Strategy is implemented by the end of year 2.	TBD
Policy development	Develop stronger policies and processes for resolution submittal, tracking, approval and follow up, with access by USET Tribal Nations. Incorporate USET advocacy efforts and strategies for member Tribal Nations to access and participate.	USET USET EDC	Increased Tribal awareness of resolutions and status.	TBD

*Items identified with an asterisk (\*) represent priority activities for USET CEDS Plan of Action.*



**Theme: Partnership and Collaboration**

**Goal:** Foster Inter-Tribal partnership and collaboration that supports and advances nation rebuilding, economic growth, capital investment, and improved quality of life.

**Results:** Increase in partnerships and projects, increase in project development capital.

**Objective:** Cultivate and Increase Partnerships and Collaborations

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Agriculture Cooperative Services Feasibility	Explore the feasibility of establishing an agriculture cooperative or brokerage program that connects Native/Tribal agriculture enterprise with casinos and other institutional buyers across Indian Country.	USET staff, Consultant	One feasibility study is created.	\$25,000
Stakeholder Analysis and Partnership/ Collaboration Development and Action Plan	Conduct a comprehensive stakeholder analysis of organizations that have impacts with the economic development of USET Tribal Nations. The analysis should consider power, influence, resource availability, and other dynamics that can either advance or stand in the way of sound economic development.	USET Staff, Consultant	One comprehensive analysis is completed. An action plan is created.	\$10,000
Business/Enterprise Matchmaker Project	Facilitate partnership and collaboration across USET member Tribal Nations to strengthen business/enterprise development.	USET Staff	At least two Nation-to-Nation partnerships are formed over 5 years.	TBD
Native APEX*	Increase the outreach and impact of the Native APEX across USET member Tribal Nations.	Native APEX	Introduce all USET member Tribal Nations to Native APEX and encourage utilization of the system for business development activities.	TBD
Nation-to-Native Business Development Program*	Development of a Nation-to-Nation business development network to facilitate the exchange of goods and services across Indian Country and decrease economic leakage to non-Native firms and businesses	USET, Native APEX	A Nation-to-Nation business network is created. Increased economic exchange across USET member Tribal Nations.	TBD
Tribal Capital Financing Strategies and Practices Project	Conduct training on creative capital and the basics of financing a project, how to build a strong business plan, and how to pursue creative financing to get the project done.	USET staff, contracted trainers	At least one training occurs per year resulting in an increase in Tribal financing.	TBD

*Items identified with an asterisk (\*) represent priority activities for USET CEDS Plan of Action.*

**Theme: Quality of Life and Place**

**Goal:** Enhance the quality of life and sense of place within Tribal communities by celebrating and protecting Native culture, developing quality housing, and conducting sound community planning that enhances the way of life in Indian Country.

**Results:** Increase in thriving Tribal economies, improve the long-term quality of life, and increase economic resiliency.

**Objective:** Develop and provide technical assistance, planning and educational programs to foster a sense of place and a high quality of life.

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
USET Tribal Placemaking Initiative	Establish a Tribal placemaking initiative that provides technical assistance with placemaking efforts tied to tourism and cultural development.	USET, Culture and Tourism organizations	TTA provided to at least five Tribal Nations.	\$100,000
Community Planning, Technical Assistance, and Education Program	Develop a community planning, technical assistance, and education program to support sound economic development, housing development, community planning, and placemaking activities.	USET, THPS, OERM, Economic Development	Built capacity in community planning at USET and with member Tribal Nations.	\$150,000
Economic Resiliency Technical Assistance	Establish an economic resilience program to support Tribal response and recover to increased occurrences of weather events that create economic disruptions. The program can address food scarcity and related emergency services by coordinating intertribal businesses, enterprises, Tribal leaders, communities, and other organizations, including FEMA, to provide needed goods and services during major economic disruptions.	USET, Tribal Emergency Services, FEMA, Red Cross	One plan is approved. Improved response to emergencies, increased Tribal communications and networking, and increased federal assistance to support relief efforts.	\$250,000

*Items identified with an asterisk (\*) represent priority activities for USET CEDS Plan of Action.*

**Theme: Education and Workforce Development**

**Goal:** Strengthen education and workforce development within USET member Tribal Nations to meet the needs of an emerging 21st century economy.

**Results:** Increase in youth entrepreneurship knowledge, more education and prepared workforce, increase in Native economic professionals.

**Objective:** Develop programs to strengthen the USET native workforce for the next seven generations.

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TOTAL COST
Youth Entrepreneurial Development*	Foster entrepreneurial development amongst young Tribal citizens and provide the technical assistance, mentorship and support bring innovative business concepts to reality	USET, Sequoyah Fund	Adopted youth entrepreneurial development program, supporting ten young Tribal citizens through a pilot.	\$75,000
Economic Development Professional Development Program*	Professional economic development program for professionals and community planners that provides a foundation in general theory and gives participants the tools to employ at the Tribal level.	USET	Five Tribal Nations participate in professional development.	\$25,000
Workforce Development Program*	Establish a comprehensive workforce development program that Tribal Nations can leverage, incorporating culturally relevant work ready and skill development initiatives.	USET, Regional Workforce Investment Boards, TERO	A workforce training program is created.	\$75,000
Sector Specific Workforce Development*	Create a sector-specific workforce development program that aligns with high potential sectors tied to Tribal assets and existing enterprises.	USET and area Workforce Investment Boards	Sector workforce program for three target sectors.	\$100,000

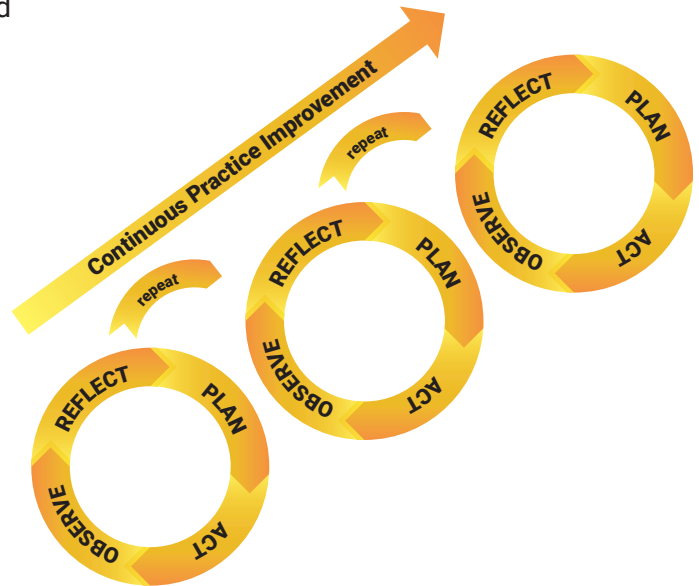
*Items identified with an asterisk (\*) represent priority activities for USET CEDS Plan of Action.*

## Section VI – Evaluation

Evaluating the effectiveness of the CEDS, assessing its execution, and measuring its impact are critical to USET realizing its goals of asserting Tribal sovereignty and achieving Nation rebuilding. To foster an organizational culture that embraces continuous improvement, a formal process based on a traditional action research cycle outlined below will be designed and applied to all aspects of the CEDS. Specific metrics and key performance indicators will be defined, and a process of measuring impact established.

Two distinct areas will be evaluated to assess the CEDS' effectiveness and measure impacts on desired goals and objectives: economic development programs and services, and organizational infrastructure and capacity. Examples of some of the OUTPUT metrics include:

- Number of jobs created or retained.
- Number of Tribal enterprises and small businesses created or retained.
- Number and hours of technical assistance, by type, provided to Tribal Nations, Tribal Enterprises, and Native businesses.
- Number of site visits to Tribal Nations.



Over the life cycle of the CEDS, the metrics of change over time should be implemented. Some key measures of evaluation in the OUTCOME category are:

- Percentage increase in Tribal Nations' economic development capacity, as determined by a survey or other outreach method.
- Percentage increase in USET communications to Tribal Nation (survey or other outreach method).

To ensure the CEDS remains active:

- During monthly staff meetings USET staff will review the CEDS workplan and metrics report-out to assess progress. The staff will then determine what their next steps are to fulfill the CEDS goals and objectives according to the workplan timeline. Notes from these meetings will ensure that USET can provide a comprehensive report to EDA per their grant agreement.
- A complete CEDS report will be compiled and sent to EDA yearly.
- USET staff will provide periodic reports to the USET Tribal Nations and the CEDS Committee.
- USET staff will provide a CEDS update at USET Board meetings.

## Section VII – Resilience Plan

Economic resilience is crucial today due to the fast-paced changes in the world. The pandemic taught us that Tribal Nations and society are not fully prepared for major disruptions in our economy. Resilience planning will ensure that Tribal Nations are prepared to withstand, get through, or avoid altogether any future disruptions in the economy.

The difficulty in supporting vast community diversity and demands, especially during challenging times, is an ongoing reality. Key questions arise such as: How will Tribal Nations organize to ensure their communities are adequately taken care of? How will they receive the food, clothing, and shelter they may need during a disruptive event? How will Tribal economies continue, and businesses survive through an economic crisis?

To address these questions, formal resiliency planning is necessary so contingencies can be defined to minimize disruption. While the resilience section provides some information from the outreach sessions and interviews, more planning is essential for a strong resilience plan. Key strategies for USET are:

- Engage in a resilience plan that outlines multiple scenarios that can cause disruption and provides contingency models for action that minimizes that disruption.
- Diversify economic interests.
- Invest and maintain infrastructure.
- Cultivate strategic partnerships.
- Increase training and professional development.

To be prepared for future major catastrophes, Tribal Nations have already implemented some great solutions and strategies. For example, one USET member Tribal Nation bought a farm, and thus, created a localized food source. Another Tribal Nation bought a processing plant to prepare meat from their farm. Still another Tribal Nation grew a community garden. All these efforts were centered around ensuring the Tribal community had ample food during challenging times. The scarcity of food aligns with Tribal need for food sovereignty. Locally and culturally relevant sourced foods are critical to surviving a major crisis.

There is also potential for USET member Tribal Nations to develop an inter-Tribal trade program for goods and services. During the COVID pandemic, inter-Tribal collaboration increased due to the sheer necessity to share knowledge and resources. Federal funding may be available during future economic and health crises, but these funds are not guaranteed to be available or to adequately provide resources for Tribal communities to sustain themselves over extended periods of time. Inter-Tribal purchases can keep small businesses afloat and create new ones that address community needs.

To facilitate inter-Tribal trade, Tribal Nations need to know their inventory of goods and services, and the inventory of other Tribal Nations. It is helpful to know, for example, who has refrigerated trucks to haul seafood or beef, and who can provide warehousing services. USET has published a Tribal Enterprise Directory to bring awareness to the type of inventory member Tribal Nations have and also may spark new business partnerships.

Key Resilience areas are:

**Climate Resilience:** USET's Office of Environmental Resource Management (OERM) supports Tribal climate action and with greater integration across OERM and OECD improved contingency planning strengthens climate resilience. As outlined above this is a critical area for most Tribal Nations. Many member Tribal Nations operate sophisticated emergency response programs and USET's Homeland Security and Emergency Services Committee supports this work. The OECD could collaborate with this committee routinely to explore business opportunities.



**Equity:** Equity in the CEDS context is a set of strategies and targeted approaches to serve populations that may have been underserved by traditional methods to economic development. Strength in unity fosters equity across USET member Tribal Nations as there is a long history of Nation-to-Nation support in times of crises. In this resilience section, inter-Tribal collaboration is encouraged more than ever. The recent pandemic taught us that collaboration is vital to successfully getting through a crisis.

**Workforce Development:** As Tribal Nations achieve greater economic diversity and invest in renewable energy and other advanced technologies, a growing need for workforce development will emerge. USET will work across its membership to cultivate shared education and training opportunities that yield 21st century employment opportunities. Automatization and new technologies are being employed to address the workforce shortage needs. Many Tribal Nations have well-established partnerships with local universities and colleges to meet the growing educational demands of their community and business needs.

**Broadband Connectivity:** Investment in broadband infrastructure by the federal government has improved last-mile broadband service across Indian Country. To address the gaps in service that remain in the region, USET can provide focused technical assistance, facilitate partnerships, and conduct advocacy to eliminate the disparity.

**Resiliency Maintenance:** The following are action steps that the USET Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee can employ to strengthen the region's economic resilience during future economic disruptions:

*Step 1: Facilitate the formation of an economic resilience workgroup.*

An economic resilience workgroup will be comprised of a Tribal leader or representative of each USET Tribal Nation. The workgroup shall meet with the USET OECD staff at least four (4) times a year during the first two years until the resiliency strategy is largely formulated and/or improved. If needed, other entities, organizations, and agencies will be invited to contribute to the plan.

- The workgroup will review and approve via consensus all USET Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee plans and action on resiliency.
- The workgroup will ensure that the key resilience tasks within the CEDS are completed.
- The workgroup will diligently assist USET OECD to follow up on information needed from the Tribal Nation.

*Step 2: Establish partnerships.*

At the beginning of Resiliency Plan development, USET Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee should identify and invite key partners to the table. Each partner should bring their skills to share in the development of the plan. For example, Native food sovereignty organizations have already been working on local food sources, combined with the USDA offering grant resources to support culturally based sustainable food initiatives. Their work will add value to the planning effort where it involves food security.

*Step 3: Conduct an inventory of Tribal assets among the USET Tribal membership and update yearly.*

The inventory should include, at minimum:

- Tribal enterprise contacts and their goods and services provided.
- Tribal government-run contacts and business goods and services provided.
- Small business contacts and goods and services provided.
- Natural resources available on Tribal lands.
- Foods gathered and harvested on Tribal lands.
- Processing facilities with links to how to purchase finished products.
- Warehouses that are available for storage and excess space.
- Gardens; community, and wholesale.

- Rolling stock (hauling, refrigerated and freezer trucks).
- Other items the economic resiliency workgroup and/or USET Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee determine are important to the project.
- Emergency response team list, pandemic relief team list, health care resources and other vital directory of resources provided and maintained by USET.

*Step 4: Conduct a survey of Tribal enterprises and businesses to further understand their needs in times of economic disruption.*

- Develop and deploy a survey instrument within the first year.
- Update the CEDS resilience section and workplan to incorporate survey results.

*Step 5: Conduct online training and technical assistance.*

The USET Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee can assist Tribal enterprises and small businesses in developing resources for locally sourced foods and supplies. Additionally, the committee can provide training on surviving economic disruptions and retooling to meet changing demands during an economic crises.

*Step 6: Create an ongoing Long-Term USET Resilience Plan.*

The USET Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee will utilize the economic resilience workgroup to formulate a long-term plan for economic resilience. The plan should scope out major scenarios and should be built for the long term.

*Step 7: Report to the EDC Committee.*

Reporting on progress will ensure the Resilience Plan is on the forefront of USET Tribal Nation awareness.

*Step 8: Provide support during emergencies.*

Finally, should any major economic disruption occur, the USET staff will immediately convene the economic resilience workgroup to address urgent matters at hand, identify the Tribal Nation needs, and implement the Economic Resilience Plan. When economic disruptions occur, the workgroup will engage with other entities maneuvering the crisis. Tribal Nations should interact with other Tribal Nations AND their local communities to coordinate services.

USET member Tribal Nations and the Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee are in this together. Together, they must strengthen our economies and businesses, plan for disruptions, and create/ implement a plan of action to ensure our communities will get through the disruptions and thrive. Keeping in the USET spirit of strength in unity, the resiliency actions by the organization and member Tribal Nations will ensure they survive and thrive.

## Section VIII – Internal Capacity

In terms of organizational capacity, USET Office of Economic Development has the potential to “marshal their human, financial and other resources to effect positive change in the communities and clients they serve” (Valerie F. Leonard). Organizational capacity is impacted by several factors, including leadership, the organization’s stage of development and changes in the environment, to name a few. Organizations engage in capacity building activities to increase their effectiveness in serving their constituencies.

This section explores six major components of organizational capacity: board governance and leadership; financial management; fundraising and resource development; program delivery and impact; human resources and networking; and strategic partnerships.

### BOARD GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Three entities guide USET’s programmatic work:

1. The organization’s Board of Directors and Executive Officers. The Board is comprised of a delegate and alternate delegate from each of the member Tribal Nations, usually an elected official, and the Executive Officers are elected from the general membership.
2. USET Committees. The Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee is one of 12 subject matter committees that report to the organization’s Board of Directors.
3. The Office of Economic Development is one of three programmatic departments that facilitate and enact technical assistance activities. OECD is building capacity to add more staff and increase the range of services offered to USET member Tribal Nations.

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

OECD utilizes USET’s finance department and grants/compliance teams to carry out financial management and grant duties.

**Resilience Goal:** Continue internal collaboration to strengthen relations and establish program goals to focus on meeting OECD’s program needs.

### HUMAN RESOURCES AND NETWORKING

OECD’s limited staff are charged with a range of duties, including implementing the CEDS action plan, conducting site visits, assisting with technical assistance needs, providing economic and leadership development training, alerting membership to urgent economic development matters, and coordinating the USET Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Committee meetings.

**Resilience Goal:** Plan sustainable development and growth of USET OECD to better conduct technical assistance. USET can diminish financial burden by partnering with key individuals and organizations that offer free resources and partnerships.

### REVENUE AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

USET OECD is dependent on federal grants for its largest source of revenue. In partnership with USET’s grants management team, USET is working to secure private foundation support for diverse financial resources. With a limited budget, OECD is not as effective as it should be.

**Resilience Goal:** Create an internal capitalization plan for OECD that will prompt a more organized effort to meet OECD’s growing budgetary needs.

## **PROGRAM DELIVERY AND IMPACT**

Staff limitations prevent robust assistance and visits to member Tribal Nations. For projects that USET can implement, sometimes the delivery is stymied by the uncertainty of the Tribal Nations' capacity to implement the project on their end. Staff limitations also limit OECD's ability to collect data and analyze impacts. Impact data is important for funders, partners, the USET Board of Directors, and for reporting back to Tribal Nations.

### **Resilience Goals:**

1. Develop a capitalization plan to secure funds to adequately support programmatic activities.
2. Hold capacity-building training webinars for the USET Tribal Nations.
3. Utilize the cluster groups recommended in this CEDS to conduct focus groups on improving program delivery and impact in their industry/cluster.

## **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS**

While USET has strategic partnerships with national and regional organizations, OECD can strengthen and extend new partnerships in this area.

**Resilience Goal:** Create a collaborative process to monitor and establish partnerships and designate a position to research potential partnerships under each of OECD's projects.

## **KEY INTERNAL STRATEGIES**

The key strategies outlined below are based on interviews, outreach sessions, in-person meetings, and observation. They represent the most urgent and/or most effective actions that USET can take to improve programs and services provided to USET member Tribal Nations:

- Increased and more targeted communications with and among Tribal Nations:
  - Increase communications with Tribal Nations on key legislation, events, and funding opportunities (the cluster groups recommended in the CEDS should improve the process).
  - Improve marketing of USET OECD's services to Tribal Nations.
- Continually assess the OECD's internal capacity, including staffing, training needs, funding, and related needs to continue to meet the needs of the USET membership.
- Continue to build USET member Tribal Nations' resilience through a strong Resilience Plan with OECD as the connector and catalyst.