



Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Office of Economic Development

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2018- 2022

Historical Context

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is a Federally-recognized American Indian tribe that has resided in present-day Mississippi, western Alabama, and eastern Louisiana for many centuries, predating recorded history.

In order to make room for growing numbers of European settlers moving westward, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830; in September 1830 the Choctaws signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, which was the last in a series of nine treaties with the federal government, ceding the remainder of the Choctaw homeland, over 1,000,000 acres, to the U.S. During the 1830s, all Indian tribes, including the Choctaws, were forcibly removed to Indian Territory; from that point through the beginning of the 20th century, the Choctaws who had remained secretly in Mississippi by hiding and resisting forced removal were ignored by the U.S. Government.

In the winter of 1919, a great number of Choctaw Indians died in the state as a result of the Spanish influenza epidemic that had just occurred. A Congressional committee convened in Union, Mississippi, and information gathered there resulted in the construction of the Choctaw Indian Hospital in Philadelphia, Mississippi, in 1923, and the establishment of the Choctaw Agency and appointment of the first Agency Superintendent for the benefit of the Choctaw people. Small, community-based schools were also built in Choctaw communities.

1945 – Federal Recognition of MBCI

The federal government began to change its policies toward American Indians, and in 1934, Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act. The Act placed lands in trust for Indians and allowed tribes to reorganize themselves and petition for federal recognition. In 1945, the Mississippi Choctaws voted to adopt a proposed Constitution and By-laws, and the Constitution and By-laws were approved by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

However, life was still difficult for the members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians before and after the ratification of the Tribal Constitution in 1945. Lack of formal education and training, overwhelming unemployment, persistent health crises, racial discrimination, marginalization of society, and absence of opportunity to improve daily life would continue to plague the Choctaw people for the next quarter century.

During the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, the Mississippi Choctaws established a stable government and laid the foundation for its community and economic development efforts.

Modern Day Snapshot

Today, the Choctaw population in Mississippi numbers 10,955 members, all of whom have at least a 50% Choctaw Indian blood quantum, and 60% of whom still speak Choctaw language. The Choctaw Indian Reservation has a land base of 33,949 acres, and the Tribal lands are situated in ten different counties in rural Mississippi, along with about 170 acres in Lauderdale County, Tennessee.

With an annual payroll of more than \$100 million, the Tribe is among the state's ten largest private employers with 15 business enterprises providing permanent, full-time jobs for Tribal members and area residents, while also generating tax-equivalent Tribal revenues to fund basic Tribal governmental services. Currently the Tribe maintains an unemployment rate of less than 14%.

CEDS Planning Overview

The *Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians – Office of Economic Development (“OED”)* conducted research and hosted community input meetings in 2017 in order to create a new 5-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This new CEDS will provide guidance and direction for the OED’s activities for 2018-2022.

The OED Staff that coordinated this effort are:

- John Hendrix, Director
- Jason Grisham, Economic Development Specialist
- Sarah Medlock, Operations Manager

Community Input Meetings

MEETING DATES

Jan. 31, 2017: Bogue Chitto

Feb. 1, 2017: Pearl River

Feb. 1, 2017: Red Water

Feb. 3, 2017: Standing Pine

Feb. 7, 2017: Crystal Ridge

Feb. 14, 2017: Conehatta

Feb. 27, 2017: Tucker

Mar. 2, 2017: Bogue Homa

MEETING AGENDA

Introductions

CEDS Project Overview

Review Existing Community Statistical Profile

Discuss Community Needs

Workforce

Infrastructure

Retail or Services

Other?

Discuss Community Opportunities

Tourism

Industry

Retail

Restaurants

Medical

Other?

Q&A with Open Discussion

S.W.O.T. Analysis Summary

STRENGTHS

- Available Industrial Facilities
- Existing Workforce Training Resources
- Access to Federal Incentives
- Low-Cost Energy Sources
- Significant Timber Resources
- Existing Tourism Assets
- MBCI's Positive Business Reputation
- Access to Low-Cost Financing
- Tribal Scholarship Program

WEAKNESSES

- Limited Transportation Infrastructure: interstates, rivers/ports, rail, airports
- Lack of quality housing in the region
- Limited access to broadband services
- Unemployed workers have very limited skills
- Limited economic diversification
- Limited lands for retail development

S.W.O.T. Analysis Summary

OPPORTUNITIES

- Federal Contracting
- Pre-fab Housing Industry
- Expand Tourism assets
- Marketing / Industrial Recruiting Campaign
- High-Tech Workforce Development
- Biomass to Energy Facility

THREATS

- Declining population in the region
- General increasing demand for more skilled workers
- Trends for increasing investments in the use of more automated equipment and less workers; but equipment requires more skilled workers to operate and maintain

Goals	5-Year Objectives
Create new jobs that are appropriate for the tribal workforce	250 new jobs
Diversify the Tribe’s economic base	Open or recruit 2 new businesses in industry sectors that are not in the Tribe’s current economic base
Improve workforce training activities for technology-based jobs	<p>Help 50 existing tribal employees to earn advanced training certifications (e.g., HVAC Tech, IT Network Admin, Fiber Optic Repair)</p> <p>Host at least 5 technology-focused events (e.g., computer camps, hackathons) with at least 250 participants</p>
Improve the health of the tribal workforce	Design & Implement a Workplace Wellness Program that is made available to at least 50% of the Tribe’s workforce
Improve strength and resilience of key tribal infrastructure	<p>Provide Natural Gas Service to 75% of the Tribe’s governmental and commercial facilities</p> <p>Provide Public WiFi Access in 1 Public Space in all 8 Tribal Communities</p> <p>Provide Broadband Service to 100% of the Tribe’s educational, governmental, and commercial facilities</p>
Acquire more quality land for housing and commercial development	Purchase >1,000 acres of quality land for future development needs

5-Year Goals and Objectives

	IMPACT METRICS					
Selected Projects	New Jobs	Diversify Economy	Improve Tech Training	Improve Health	Resilient Infrastructure	Land for Growth
Update Labor Force & Targeted Industry Study	X	X				
Develop & Launch a Digital Marketing/Branding Campaign for Industrial Recruitment	X	X				
Fill Vacancies at Choctaw Town Center	X	X				
Pearl River Community Natural Gas Infrastructure					X	
Organic Farming Expansion	X	X		X	X	
Engage a Real Estate Broker to Buy Quality Land					X	X
Community Broadband & Public WiFi Infrastructure					X	
Biomass-to-Energy Facility	X	X			X	
Provide NCCER HVAC and Electrical Certification classes to existing employers for existing workers			X			
Host Student Coding Camps & Hackathons			X			
Lake Pushmataha Tourism Asset Expansion	X	X				
Design & Implement a Workplace Wellness Program				X		

Program of Work and Targeted Impacts

PROJECTS	Bogue Homa	Bogue Chitto	Conehatta	Crystal Ridge	Pearl River	Red Water	Standing Pine	Tucker
Update Labor Force & Targeted Industry Study		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop & Launch a Digital Marketing/Branding Campaign for Industrial Recruitment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fill Vacancies at Choctaw Town Center					X			
Pearl River Community Natural Gas Infrastructure					X			
Organic Farming Expansion		X	X		X	X		X
Engage a Real Estate Broker to Buy Quality Land	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Broadband/Public Wifi Infrastructure	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Biomass-to-Energy Facility		X		X				
Provide NCCER HVAC and Electrical Certification classes to existing employers for existing workers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Host Student Coding Camps & Hackathons	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lake Pushmataha Tourism Expansion					X			
Design & Implement a Workplace Wellness Program	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Program of Work for Each Tribal Community

Update Labor Force & Targeted Industry Study

Impact Metric: New Jobs + Diversify Economy

Expectation: Conduct a comprehensive Workforce Study for the Tribe's Labor Shed

Project Highlights:

- Workforce is the key to successful industrial recruiting and economic development
- The Tribe partnered with 3 other counties to conduct an comprehensive Labor Study & Targeted Industry Analysis in 2017
- The draft report will be ready in Q2 2018.

Next steps: Present the draft report to the Tribal Council and prepare a marketing and industrial recruiting campaign to promote the findings (2018) and recruit the targeted industries (2019).

Develop & Launch a Digital Marketing/Branding Campaign for Industrial Recruitment

Impact Metric: New Jobs + Diversify Economy

Expectation: Launch an aggressive digital marketing campaign that will achieve 100% occupancy among all tribal industrial facilities and create at least 100 new jobs

Project Highlights:

- The Tribe manages 800,000 square feet of commercial property on tribal land
- Approximately 20% of this space is vacant or underutilized
- We have created an online digital marketing presence that includes a website, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter
- MBCI is working with an experienced economic development marketing firm to design and implement a digital marketing campaign focused on industrial recruiting

Next steps: Launch a 90-day trail campaign May – July 2018 focused on 4 targeted industries; measure and monitor results; design and implement Phase 2 in August – December 2018.

Fill Vacancies at Choctaw Town Center

Impact Metric: New Jobs + Diversify Economy

Expectation: Lease 20,000 square feet of available property + 20 new jobs

Project Highlights:

- The Tribe has 25,000 square feet of vacant rental property
- We hired a full-time person to focus on tenant recruitment and facility management
- We have met with TVA to update Retail Leakage Report
- We have made plans to attend the ICSC Annual Meeting to increase professional network
- Install Leasing Signage on Vacant Facilities

Next steps: Select a Real Estate Consultant to Plan and Implement Retail Recruiting Campaign 2018-2019

Pearl River Community Natural Gas Infrastructure

Impact Metric: Strengthen Tribal Infrastructure

Expectation: Install +/-5 miles of natural gas service lines and convert 46 commercial facilities to natural gas & save \$1 million per year

Project Highlights:

- The Tribe has been pursuing natural gas service for the Pearl River Community for 20+ years
- Center Point Energy signed an agreement to install natural gas service to all of the Tribe's commercial and government facilities in the Pearl River Community
- This project broke ground in 2017 and is expected to be completed in 2019

Next steps: Complete installation of natural gas main service lines in summer 2018, then convert 46 facilities from propane to natural gas in 2019.

Organic Farming Expansion

Impact Metric: New Jobs + Diversify Economy + Improve Health + Resilient Infrastructure

Expectation: Expand farms to improve 10 acres of unused tribal land + retain 6 full time jobs

Project Highlights:

- The Tribe started Choctaw Fresh Produce in 2012 to rebuild the local food system
- This project now includes 5 certified organic farms that grow and sell fresh produce
- The demand for this product is increasing and there is an opportunity to expand the farms

Next steps: Install new permanent beds at the Pearl River, Conehatta, Tucker, and Bogue Chitto Farms in spring 2018, and launch an agro-tourism program in Pearl River in fall 2018.

Engage a Real Estate Broker to Buy Quality Land

Impact Metric: Resilient Infrastructure + Land for Growth

Expectation: Acquire +/-1000 acres of quality land

Project Highlights:

- The Tribe has 6 communities in remote areas with low traffic counts and no 4-lane highways
- This limits the economic development opportunities in these communities
- The Tribe is also in need of quality land in each community for housing development
- The Tribe has established a land acquisition fund to acquire developable property near these communities to create development opportunities.

Next step: Select a real estate broker in summer 2018 to identify and negotiate the purchase of commercial lands.

Community Broadband & Public WiFi Infrastructure

Impact Metric: Resilient Infrastructure

Expectation: 100% coverage to all educational, governmental, and commercial facilities and provide Public WiFi access point in all 8 Tribal Communities

Project Highlights:

- Create a map of existing broadband infrastructure
- Develop a plan for Public Access WiFi locations
- Design and Engineering to fill any “gaps” in service
- Develop a prioritized list of coverage needs
- Pursue funding to cover the “gaps” based on priorities

Next steps: Engage a planning and design group to develop plans and specifications to cover gaps in the Pearl River Community.

Biomass-to-Energy Facility

Impact Metric: Diversify Economy + Job Creation

Expectation: \$21 million investment in energy + 14 full-time jobs

Project Highlights:

- Winston Plywood & Veneer opened a new \$100 million facility in Louisville, MS in 2017
- They have excess 'wood residuals' of 53,000 tons per year
- The Tribe has 17-acres of industrial property adjacent to Winston Plywood
- The Tribe has conducted engineering and feasibility for a biomass-to-energy (B2E) facility that would use this excess wood as a fuel source to generate steam for Winston's plywood mill.

Next steps: Complete the engineering & design in Q2 2018; attempt to negotiate an agreement with Winston-Plywood in Q3-Q4 2018; if approved, pursue development in 2019

Provide NCCER HVAC and Electrical Certification classes to existing employers for existing workers

Impact Metric: Improve Technical Training

Expectation: 50 employees will upgrade their skills by achieving advanced technical certifications

Project Highlights:

- The reservation includes >3 million square feet of buildings and facilities that need maintenance
- 100% of facility managers reported a shortage of workers in HVAC, electrical, and other technical trade areas
- East Central Community College offers NCCER technical certification classes on the reservation

Next steps: Begin HVAC NCCER Certificate program in Q2 2018, and Electrical Certificate Program in Q4 2018

Host Student Coding Camps and Hackathons

Impact Metric: Improve Technical Training

Expectation: Host at least 5 technology-focused events (e.g., computer camps, hackathons) with at least 250 participants

Project Highlights:

- There is a shortage of workers with computer skills including IT networking and programming
- MBCI is partnering with Choctaw Central High School and Mississippi State University to host Computer Coding Camps during summer breaks
- MBCI is partnering with East Mississippi Community College to plan and host Hackathons focused on core industries in the Region

Next steps: Host 1st Student Coding Camp in Q2 2018, Host 1st Hackathon in Q3 2018

Lake Pushmataha Tourism Asset Expansion

Impact Metric: Diversify Economy + Job Creation

Expectation: \$10 million investment in tourism + 50 full-time jobs

Project Highlights:

- The Tribe built Lake Pushmataha (300-acre recreational lake) in 2003
- The lake has 1,000 acres of land surrounding the lake
- We have created a master development plan for the site to include tournament sports complex, RV-park/campground, and walking trails.
- The tournament sports complex will include 6 softball fields and 2 soccer fields at an investment of \$5 million.

Next step: The tournament softball complex will be constructed in 2018; a Feasibility Study for an RV-Park will be conducted in Q4 2018; If positive, pursue development in 2019

Design & Implement a Workplace Wellness Program

Impact Metric: Improve Workforce Health

Expectation: Design & Implement a Workplace Wellness Program that is available to at least 50% of the Tribe's workforce within 5 years

Project Highlights:

- The health situation of the tribal workforce is declining, with rising rates of diabetes, hypertension, and obesity
- Health conditions are a significant contributor to workforce performance
- MBCI is seeking to pilot a Workplace Wellness Program that will test various methods of improving the health of existing workers

Next steps: Design and Conduct a Workplace Wellness Pilot Project in 2018-2019 to assess the potential impact for this program; measure and monitor results; based on the results, refine the approach and expand the program in future years.

2018: PROJECT MILESTONE TIMELINE	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Complete Labor Force & Targeted Industry Study	X			
Launch Digital Marketing Campaign: Phase 1		X		
Launch Digital Marketing Campaign: Phase 2			X	
Recruit at least 1 new tenant to Town Center		X		
Complete Pearl River Natural Gas System		X		
Go- or No-Go Decision on B2E				X
Hire a Broker to Buy Land		X		
Buy at least 200 new acres				X
Complete Design & Engineering for Broadband and Public WiFi System				X
Complete NCCER HVAC Module 1		X		
Launch NCCER Electrical Module 1				X
Host 1st High School Coding Camp		X		
Host 1st Hackathon			X	
Open Sports Complex at Lake Pushmataha			X	
Complete Feasibility Study for RV-Park at Lake Pushmataha				X
Launch Pilot Project for Workplace Wellness Program			X	

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