

**Location:**  
Northern Neck Region  
of Virginia

**Population:**  
50,429

**Estimated median  
household income:**  
\$37,774

**Estimated households  
below poverty level:**  
16.8%



The Northern Neck region of Virginia is characterized by a regional spirit and supported by a love for the region's history and geography. Situated within easy driving distance from major urban centers of Richmond, Norfolk and Northern Virginia, the region has become a mecca for urbanites who seek a quiet retirement community or weekend getaways situated along the region's rivers and inlets.

The Northern Neck region adopted the Stronger Economies Together initiative to create a blueprint for their economic development. The Northern Neck Regional Economic Development Plan serves as the roadmap for continuing economic development efforts. Key stakeholders have embraced a spirit of regionalism and support this initiative to ultimately strengthen the ability of the Northern Neck to secure its economic future and position it as a competitive region.

## Vision

The Northern Neck is a vibrant, skilled and diverse rural community that sustains a well-balanced, growing economy which benefits from and values its heritage and natural resources.

## Strengths

The region's beauty and natural resources are overwhelmingly considered both the greatest strength and present the greatest opportunity. This includes water-based resources and agricultural-based assets, such as viable cropland and forest products.

Another important strength is the historical appeal as the region is the birthplace of several prominent national leaders. This historical significance provides additional opportunities for tourism.

## Goals

The team created four goals as part of their plan.

- To provide infrastructure that facilitates the expansion of existing businesses and attracts new, higher-wage industry sectors through both telecommunications and transportation
- To equip the regional workforce with the skills and flexibility needed to succeed in a technology-based economy
- To establish a business-friendly environment across the Northern Neck region that supports existing businesses while building opportunities for new businesses
- To promote and protect effective and sustainable use of the region's natural beauty, cultural amenities and tourism opportunities.



*"SET played an enormous role in helping this region move forward! The SET process facilitated the region coming together around achievable, universally-accepted goals."*

*—Lisa Hull, Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator, Northern Neck Planning Commission, Virginia*

## Progress Towards Goals:

### Infrastructure

The efforts of the team have expanded and improved the quality of telecommunications. Satellite companies are offering wireless satellite services, and MetroCast has completed a build-out of the system as well as done upgrades throughout the region. Broadband Authority considers the region 100 percent covered.

### Workforce Skills

The identity and economy of the region are historically anchored in the maritime industry. Therefore, the team understood that there should be an emphasis on that industry cluster. In response, Rappahannock Community College (RCC) developed a marine studies program that emphasizes the Chesapeake Bay. This provides an opportunity for local residents to contribute to the region's maritime economy.

Also, RCC now offers a Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Career Studies Certificate to equip students for positions requiring skills in installing,



troubleshooting and repairing HVAC systems.

In addition to the new programs of study, a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Academy was created and is in its second year of operation.

### Business-Friendly Environment

A resource fair was held to provide opportunity for networking and collaboration. It featured 45 exhibitors and 12 workshops and had positive survey feedback.

Also, downtown revitalization efforts are currently underway in Montross, Colonial Beach, White Stone, Warsaw and Callao.

### Tourism

Currently, the team is involved in rebranding the region as the Northern Neck Heritage Area which includes promotion through YouTube, Pinterest and Twitter channels. The installation of gateway signage is underway, and marketing and advertising efforts are being made to promote the new revitalization efforts.

### Grants

The team has received various grants for the project. They received a grant from the Building Collaborative Communities Grant program (\$85,000) which assisted with hosting the resource fair, marketing the region as the Northern Neck Heritage area



and opening the newly-established business enterprise center. Moreover, it provided business scholarships and small business and entrepreneur training. They also received the SET Seed Grant (\$5,000) which allowed for the purchases of equipment for the enterprise center.

### The Role of SET

According to Lisa Hull, the Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator of the Northern Neck Planning District Commission, SET was vital to the continuing economic development of the region. "SET played an enormous role in helping this region move forward! The SET process facilitated the region coming together around achievable, universally-accepted goals. SET continues to play a role by bringing regions together to share achievements and challenges so that we can learn from other areas around the country who are facing similar problems."