

NW ARKANSAS INTERREGIONAL VISIT 2022 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Northwest Arkansas Region

Bentonville, Arkansas

November 13-16, 2022



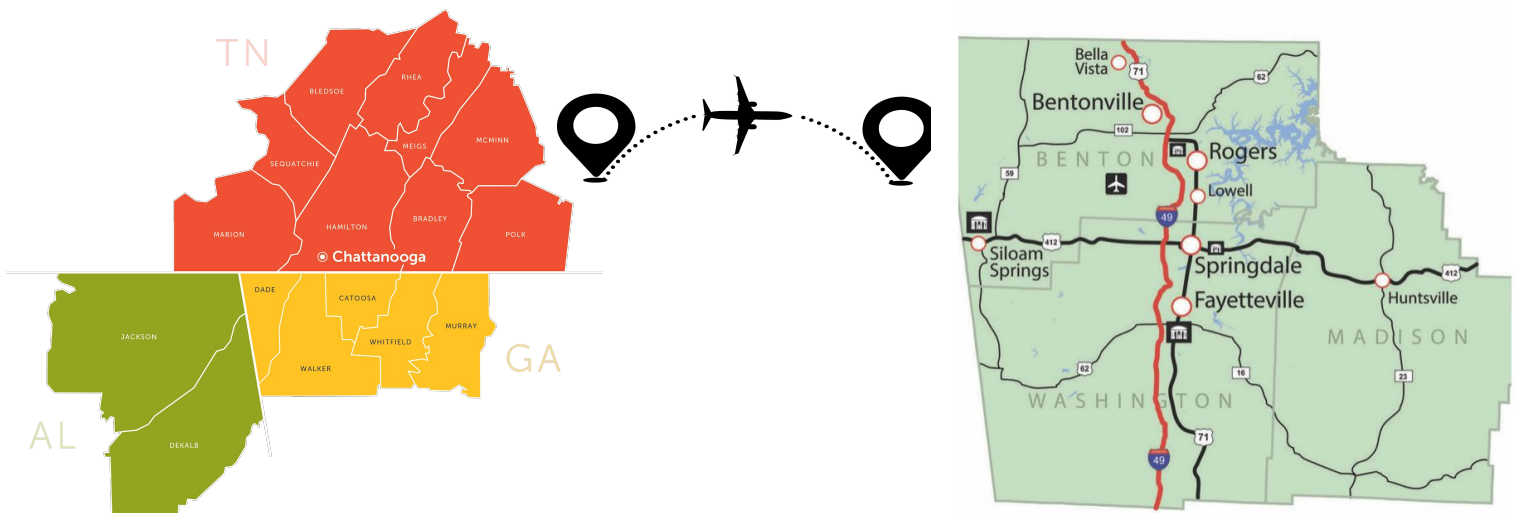
THRIVE
Regional Partnership



Pictured above: A group photo of the Thrive region leaders in Bentonville, Arkansas at a reception hosted by Arkansas State Representative Delia Haak.

A First Interregional Visit for Thrive:

From the cradle of the Southern Appalachia Mountains in southeast Tennessee, northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama, to the middle of the Ozark Mountains in northwest Arkansas, a group of 30 leaders from the Thrive region embarked on a 3-day journey to a peer southern region. Their goal was to gain insights and lessons learned from working collaboratively as a region to catalyze and inspire responsible growth back home, and preserve the quality of life that makes this region so special. Additionally, the visit met a desire to deepen regional relationships for improved communication, connection and future collaboration.



The Purpose & People



Thrive Regional Partnership's (Thrive's) mission is to inspire responsible growth across the greater Chattanooga tri-state region through conversation, connection, and collaboration. Thrive seeks to unite people across the region to preserve community and natural character for generations to come. In this region, Thrive leads by building real conversations across industries, county lines, and state lines. This inaugural interregional visit was designed to expand those conversations to a peer region in order to build inspiration and the knowledge base of our region's leaders to bring back home.

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION

The following leaders from government, business, and nonprofit entities throughout the urban, suburban and rural landscapes of our tri-state region attended this inaugural interregional visit:

Barry Allen, Tower Community Bank,
Jasper, Tennessee

Boyd Austin, Northwest Georgia Regional
Commission, Rome, Georgia

John Bamber, Rhea Economic & Tourism
Council, Dayton, Tennessee

Lindsey Bamber, Dayton Thriving
Communities Team, Dayton, Tennessee

Gail Loveland Barille, City of Chattanooga,
Chattanooga, Tennessee

David Barto, Collegedale Tomorrow
Foundation, Collegedale, Tennessee

Mike Costa, Costa Media Advisors,
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Mike Griffin, Cleveland/Bradley Chamber of
Commerce, Cleveland, Tennessee

Amanda Groves, Lodge Cast Iron,
South Pittsburg, Tennessee

Joel Houser, Open Space Institute,
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Molly Huhn, City Council of Fort
Oglethorpe, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia

Amy Jackson, Catoosa County Chamber
of Commerce, Ringgold, Georgia

David Jackson, County Mayor, Marion
County, Tennessee

Tangela Johnson, North GA Corporate
Consulting, Dalton, Georgia

Sammy Lowdermilk, Tech Goes Home,,
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Cheryl Millsaps, Chattanooga Area
Chamber of Commerce, Chattanooga,
Tennessee

The Purpose & People



REGIONAL REPRESENTATION CONTINUED

Jason Mock, Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, Dalton, Georgia

Angie Shugart, Little River Waterkeeper, Fort Payne, Alabama

John Squires, Cleveland State Community College, Cleveland, Tennessee

Rhonda Swaney, City Council, City of Ringgold, Georgia

Jason Turner, Mayor, Town of Jasper, Tennessee

Connie Vaughan, McKee Foods, Collegedale, Tennessee

Greg Vital, Tennessee State Representative, Georgetown, Tennessee

Nate Wilson, Mountain Goat Trail Alliance, Monteagle, Tennessee

Allison Wolfe, Chattanooga Tourism Company, Chattanooga, Tennessee

Dan Wright, Catoosa County Government, Ringgold, Georgia

Pictured below: Thrive representatives from Cleveland, Tennessee, and northwest Georgia with Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson at the opening reception of the trip.



The Purpose & People



A REGIONAL APPROACH

An uncompromising approach to listening and learning from a regional perspective.

This interregional learning opportunity with the Northwest Arkansas Council (NWAC) began through a conversation with leaders in Marion County seeking an opportunity to visit another region to learn about jurisdictions working together for the betterment of their residents quality of life.

When approached by Marion County leaders to assist, Thrive responded by indicating that in order to support and facilitate the trip, the opportunity must be offered to the entire tri-state region.

As a result of Thrive's uncompromising mission to be inclusive to all 16-counties, the region resoundingly responded and all three-states were represented in this inaugural peer-to-peer learning opportunity.

A PEER REGION

Learning from a peer organization in Northwest Arkansas

The Northwest Arkansas Council (NWAC) was formed more than 30 years ago by Sam Walton (Walmart), Don Tyson (Tyson Foods), J.B. Hunt (J.B. Hunt



Transportation Services) and other business and community leaders from the region. NWAC is a nonprofit organization working to advance job opportunities, talent recruitment, the region's physical infrastructure, health care, and quality of life.

McKee Foods Corporation, headquartered in the Thrive region in Collegedale, Tennessee with a large bakery facility also located in northwest Arkansas, was also

A PEER REGION CONTINUED



an early investor in the Northwest Arkansas Council and remains active with their work across the region. Similarly, McKee Foods is a founding investor of Thrive Regional Partnership and an active participant in the work across the tri-state region.

Connie Vaughan, Chair of Thrive and Government Relations for McKee Foods observed, “Northwest Arkansas

is the most dynamic area of the state for the way it balances the needs of the business community while connecting people to the arts and the outdoors and improving the quality of life that helps attract new people to the region. In the Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia footprint of Thrive, we have many of the same challenges and opportunities to address.”

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS BY THE NUMBERS

2020 Population: 546,400 residents

People added per day: 28.05 per day since April 2010.

2025 Projected Population: 600,000 residents

Rate of Growth: Faster rate of growth between 2010 and 2019 than 96 of the nation’s 100 largest MSAs

Outdoor Economy: Economic impact of the region’s natural-surface trails and shared-use paved paths: \$137 million in 2017. 27% of residents reported riding bikes on the trails at least six times in 2017, 11% higher than the national avg.



The Agenda and Topics



Over the course of 2.5 days, Thrive representatives from the tri-state region were immersed in the following topics and speakers from Northwest Arkansas:

OPENING NIGHT RECEPTION

Upon arrival to Bentonville, Arkansas, an opening reception was held at the 21C Museum Hotel.

Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson

welcomed attendees and spoke about the foundational growth of northwest Arkansas and the commitments underway by entrepreneurial investments and community-driven approaches to growth. The Governor spoke to the work of the third generation of the Walton Family making



a commitment to entrepreneurial investments and investing in quality of life, recognizing business and growth will follow talent. The community wanted to create a place that talent wanted to come, then business and investment would follow. The Governor acknowledged that people from all over the country are now coming to northwest Arkansas to visit, and to call home.

DAY 1

The following panel topics and speakers presented on the first full day in Bentonville.

Regional Collaboration Panel:

Bill Rogers, Springdale Chamber of Commerce; Arthur Hulbert, Siloam Springs Chamber of Commerce; Ashley Wardlow, Greater Bentonville Area Chamber of Commerce; moderated by Nelson Peacock, Northwest Arkansas Council

Infrastructure & Policy Panel:

Rob Smith, Policy Director at Northwest Arkansas Council; Dr. Heather Nachtmann, Engineering Chair at University of Arkansas; moderated by Connie Vaughan, Chair of Thrive Regional Partnership

The Agenda and Topics



Over the course of 2.5 days, Thrive representatives from the tri-state region were immersed in the following topics and speakers from Northwest Arkansas:

DAY 1 CONTINUED

Housing & Workforce Development

Panel:

Jeannette Balleza Collins, Entrepreneurial Development Director, Northwest Arkansas Council (NAC); Duke McClarty, Executive Director Workforce Housing Center at NAC; Joe Rollins, Workforce Development at NAC; moderated by Jason Mock, Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce

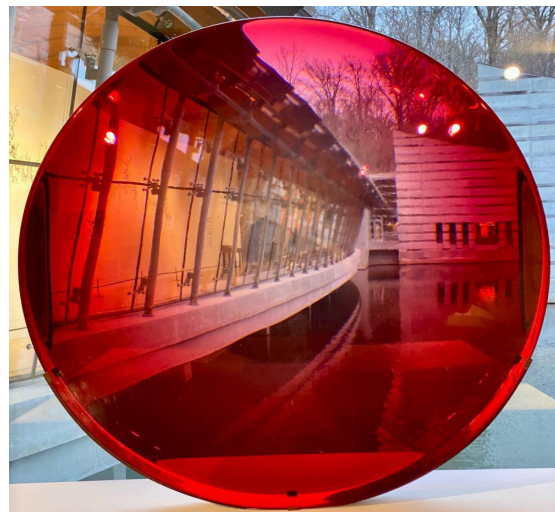
Bridging the Digital Divide

Fireside Chat:

Angie Cooper, Chief Program Officer at Heartland Forward and Sammy Lowdermilk, Tech Goes Home Tennessee Program Director at The Enterprise Center

Afternoon Excursion:

Crystal Bridges Museum Tour: Walkable accessibility from downtown Bentonville, the museum featured American art and exhibitions with stunning architecture on 120 acres of Ozark nature. Additionally, Thrive attendees were able to view a rare, original print of the US Constitution (one of only eleven known in the world) on display in the traveling exhibit, *We the People: The Radical Notion of Democracy*.



Evening Reception & Dinner:

Hosted by Arkansas State Representative Delia Haak at Compton Gardens in downtown Bentonville.



The Agenda and Topics



Over the course of 2.5 days, Thrive representatives from the tri-state region were immersed in the following topics and speakers from Northwest Arkansas:

DAY 2

Panel topics and speakers presented on the second full day in Bentonville

Peer to Peer Coffee Talk with NWA Council:

Nelson Peacock, President & CEO of Northwest Arkansas Council; Mike Malone, Vice Chancellor for Economic Development at University of Arkansas (former President & CEO of NWAC); Bridgett Massengill, President & CEO of Thrive; Connie Vaughan, Chairman of Thrive Regional Partnership

Outdoor Economy Panel:

Beatrix Apple, Bike POC; Danny Collins, 37 North Expeditions; Brent Robinson, Greenway Bike Company; Phil Shelhammer, Greenhouse Outdoor Recreation Program Director; moderated by Barry Allen, Tower Community Bank

Resilient Natural Environment Panel:

Dr. Sarah Lewis, Sustainability Leadership Coach; Dan Holtmeyer, Recycling Director of Northwest Arkansas Council; moderated by Joel Houser, Open Space Institute and Trustee of Thrive

Creative Economy Panel:

Amber Perrodin, CACHE; Robin Atkinson, Interform; Joel Gordon, Nation of Makers; Chris Seawood, TheatreSquared; moderated by Bridgett Massengill, Thrive Regional Partnership



Afternoon Excursion: Walmart Museum Heritage Lab.

Attendees walked to the nearby Lab showcasing new technologies, new exhibits, and new ways to share Walmart's deep rural and entrepreneurial heritage. A life size Hologram of Sam Walton spoke to the group.

CLOSING RECEPTION



An opportunity for the attendees to debrief and share greatest takeaways before returning home

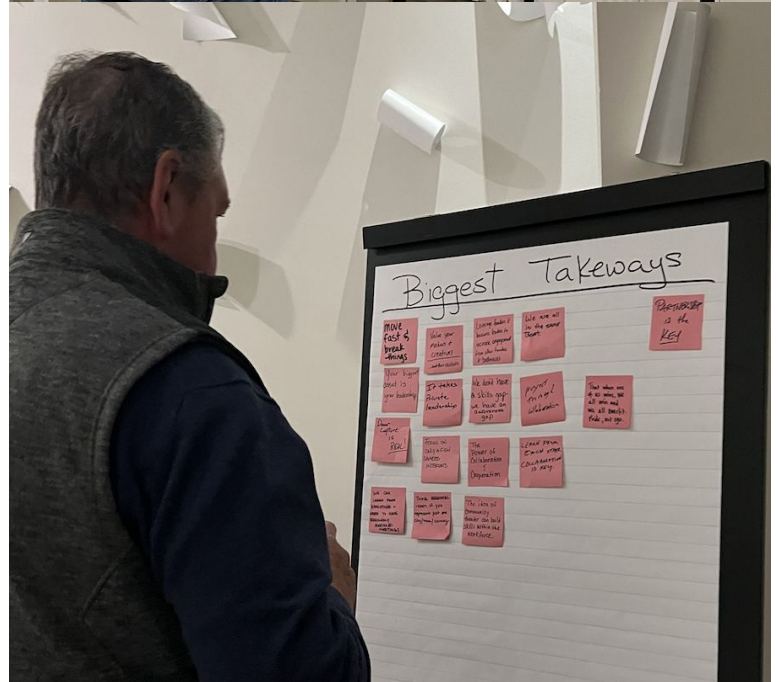
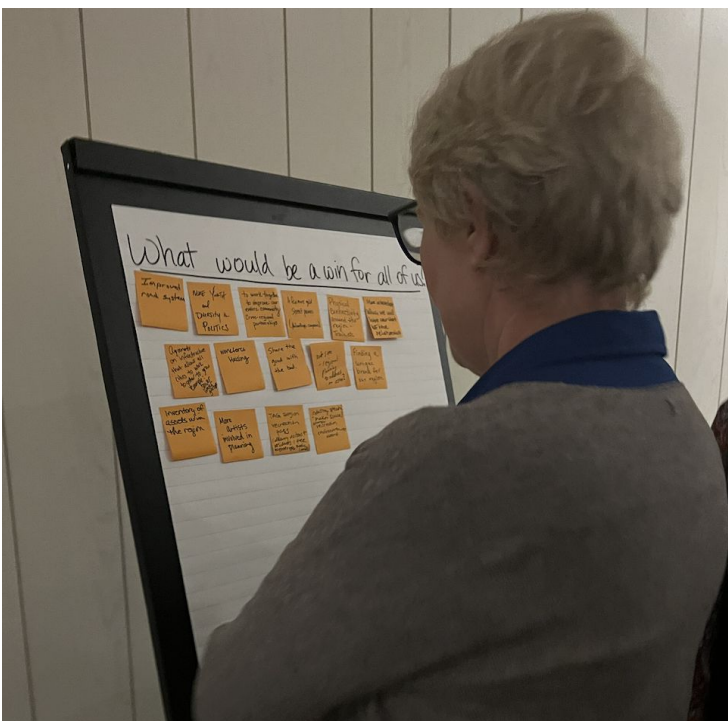
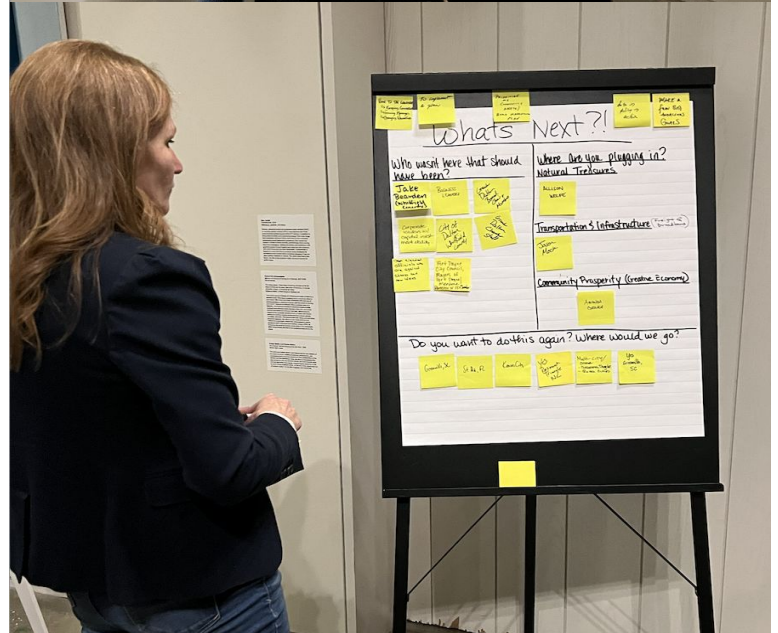
Before departing from Northwest Arkansas the following morning, Thrive staff reconvened the group for an evening reception to capture everyone's biggest takeaways, lessons learned, and aspirations sparked by their experiences over the past two and half days. Questions for the attendees included:

What are your biggest takeaways?

What assets would you be willing to share? **What's Next?**

Where will you be plugging in to Thrive's work?

Who do you wish had been here with us on this trip? What would be a big win for the entire region? **Do you want to do this again?**



TAKEAWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED



Through the insights gained from each of the panelists, speakers, and interactions with the residents and leaders from northwest Arkansas, the following takeaways were learned throughout the 2.5 days in Bentonville.

INTENTIONAL REGIONALISM

“Regionalism doesn’t just happen,” stated Ashley Wardlaw from the Greater Bentonville Area Chamber of Commerce. The intentionality of the region working together was evident by the cross-jurisdictional collaboration occurring by the various Chambers of Commerce represented and speaking to the Thrive group of leaders. Part of their success lies in one phrase that was heard and rang true throughout the interactions from the Governor to the founders and CEO’s of companies that came to speak to Thrive. That sentiment was summed up by Wardlaw as stating, “There is a lot of pride [in the Northwest Arkansas region], but not a lot of ego.”



QUOTABLE TAKEAWAYS

“Having the opportunity to join players from multiple counties and regions had multiple benefits to the City of Ringgold. I was able to make connection for future projects, discuss ideas, and make connections that could potentially help with future infrastructure issues that we are all facing.”

- Rhonda Swaney, City Councilmember of Ringgold, Georgia

“Learning from our peer communities is so important. To see firsthand the growth and success of Bentonville, Fayetteville and Springdale that the Northwest Arkansas Council helped coordinate proves cooperation works. It’s a message I will share with my fellow elected leaders -- regardless of county or state borders -- we grow purposely and smartly as a region when we work together.” - Greg Vital, State Representative, Tennessee

TAKEAWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED CONT'D



WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD TRUST



A common theme that resonated throughout the speakers that presented was our need to continue to build trust. The common basics between the Thrive region and the NW Arkansas region remained the same: Meet together. Talk together. Listen together. In doing so, you will build trust. Advice given to the Thrive group was loud and clear: From the largest

cities in the region to the smallest, the burden falls on all to ensure that a rising tide to all good things must rise all ships. **In order to build trust, the region must regularly come and sit across the table to break bread and talk.** The Thrive region must begin to build a culture, similar to Northwest Arkansas, that this is a region that works together.

QUOTABLE TAKEAWAYS

“The Thrive Interregional Visit to Bentonville, Arkansas began conversations that hopefully will lead to additional relationship-building meetings with key decision makers that will help our communities work together to continue to improve the quality of life for our citizens.”

- Amy Jackson, President/CEO, Catoosa County Chamber of Commerce

“Seeing the results of NWA’s focus on cooperation should motivate us all to work as a region so we and future generations will benefit through smart growth.”

-Mike Costa, Costa Media Advisors

“Regionalism for the win!”

Nate Wilson, Mountain Goat Trail & Alderman, Town of Monteagle, TN

TAKEAWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED CONT'D



ELEMENTS OF WORKING TOGETHER

Notable elements of working together that are helping Northwest Arkansas thrive as a region include:

- **Build Collaborative Awareness** - The communities throughout Northwest Arkansas ensure that each community is aware of each other's programs and opportunities available to the region.
- **Set the Table for Conversation** - Early on, the NW Arkansas region experienced friction between the communities of not wanting to play in the same sandbox. The Northwest Arkansas Council helped provide a place for that interaction to happen. Key players that are at the table include representation from all of the local chambers of commerce, rotating on the NWA Council to provide a unified place to interact and work together. The chambers all understand that they are focused on their specific communities, while the NWA Council focuses on regional needs across all of their jurisdictions. There is power in this table of representation for all of the chambers.
- **Identify Regional Priorities** - The Northwest Arkansas Council sets large priorities that are region-wide in scope around focused regional priorities. By elevating the most important priorities of the regional planning commissions and the collective issues from through the individual chambers, the Northwest Arkansas Council identifies the things they can advocate for on behalf of the region. For example, when the NWA Council comes to Washington D.C., their delegation understands the issue to be a big deal for Northwest Arkansas as it represents the entire multi-county region.



TAKEAWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED



ELEMENTS OF WORKING TOGETHER

- **Create a Regional Agenda** - The Northwest Arkansas Council develops a state policy agenda with only a handful of priorities, based on a collective of priorities that have regional implications benefiting one of their key impact areas.
- **Find the Big Win** - As the region has learned to cooperate together to compete outside of the region for economic growth, they continually march towards one “Big Win” after the other. An example of this was most recently seen in the I-49 Bella Vista Bypass project. The NWA Council was able to help convince Arkansas to accept a federal grant and hand it over to a neighboring state, Missouri, to complete part of an important road project. This freed up additional funding on their side, and leveraged federal dollars to finalize the multi-state project, the I-49 Bella Vista Bypass.
- **Define the Body** - The speakers from Northwest Arkansas encouraged Thrive participants to define our region’s body. The region is one body, with different parts all unique yet working together. Those parts are the different communities and their unique assets within each of them. The advice given was to define the body, then recognize each of those individual communities as encompassing different parts that don’t compete with each other, but instead work together.
- **Engage the Private Sector** - In Northwest Arkansas, they recognized that governments don’t always think, “we need to work together.” The regional council was driven by the private sector due to a need for the region’s infrastructure to keep up with the growth. The private sector must be an active participant in the work of bringing the region’s multiple governments together.



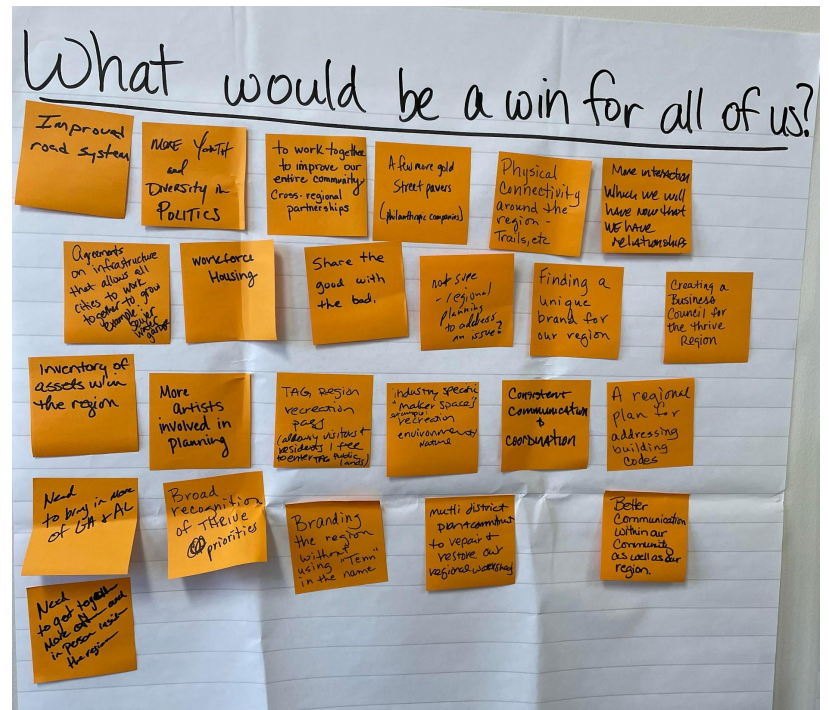
WHAT'S NEXT?



In the words of the attendees, the following is a culmination of all of the “What’s Next?” comments gathered at the conclusion of our interregional summit and experiential immersion in Northwest Arkansas..

A Win for All

- Improved road system
- More youth and diversity in politics
- To work together to improve our entire community.
- Cross-regional partnerships
- A few more “gold street pavers” (Philanthropy)
- Physical connectivity around the region - trails, etc.
- Finding a unique brand for our region
- Regional planning to address an issue
- Share the good with the bad
- Workforce housing
- Agreements on infrastructure that allow all cities to work together to grow. Example: Sewer, water, garbage
- Inventory of assets within the region
- More artists involved in planning
- TAG Region Recreation Pass (allow visitors & residents 1 free to enter TAG public lands)



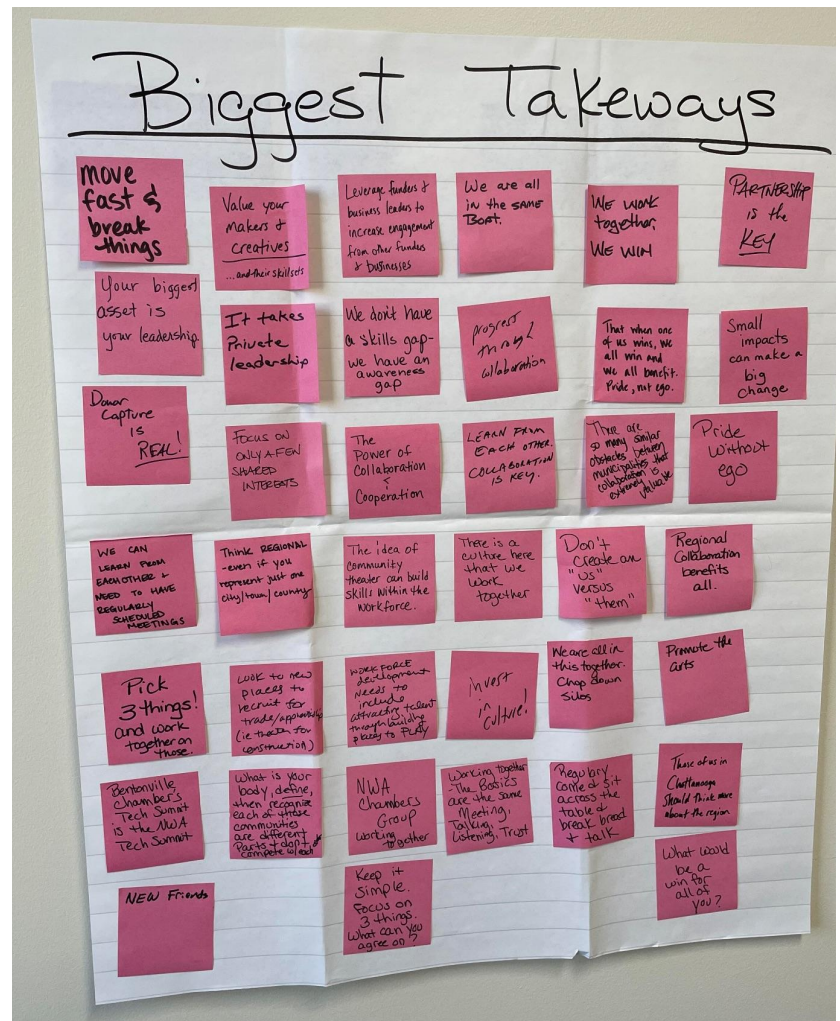
- Industry specific “maker spaces.” Example: Recreation, environment/nature
- Consistent communication and coordination
- A regional plan for addressing building codes
- Better communication within our community as well as our region
- Multi-district plan & commitment to repair and restore our regional watersheds
- Branding the region without using “Tenn” in the name
- Broad recognition of Thrive priorities
- Need to bring in more of Georgia & Alabama
- Need to get together more often and in person inside the region

WHAT'S NEXT?



Biggest Takeaways

- Move fast & break things
- Value your makers & creatives...and their skill sets
- Leverage funders and business leaders to increase engagement from other funders and businesses
- We are all in the same boat
- Progress through collaboration
- We don't have a skills gap - we have an awareness gap
- It takes private leadership
- Your biggest asset is your leadership
- Donor capture is real!
- Focus on only a few shared interests
- The power of collaboration & cooperation
- Learn from each other. Collaboration is key.
- There are so many similar obstacles between municipalities that collaboration is extremely valuable
- Pride without ego
- Regional collaboration benefits all
- Don't create an "us" versus "them"



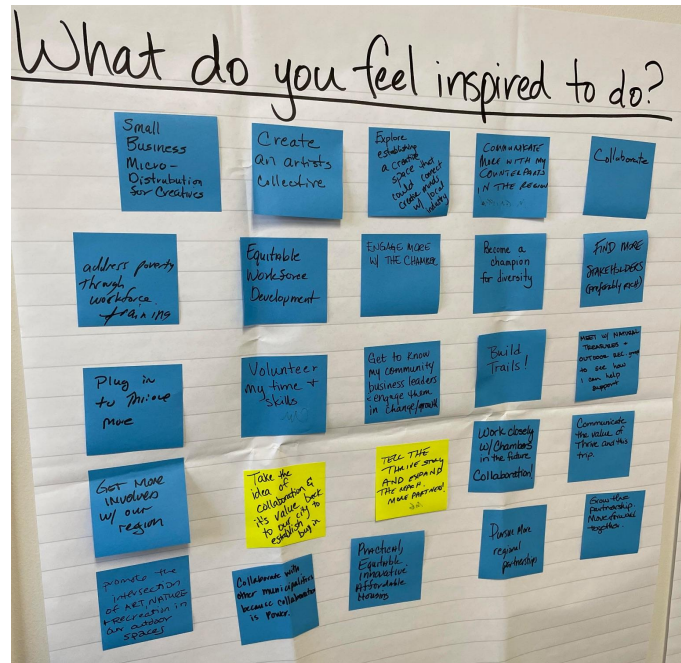
- A culture that we work together
- Community theater can build skills within the workforce
- Think regional - even if you represent just one city/town/county
- We can learn from each other and need to have regularly scheduled meetings
- Pick 3 things and work together on those
- Bentonville Chamber's Tech Summit is the Northwest Arkansas Tech Summit - for all
- Define the body, recognize each community, and don't compete with each other

WHAT'S NEXT?



Biggest Takeaways Cont'd

- Look to new places to recruit for trade/apprenticeships (ie Theater for construction)
- Workforce development needs to include attracting talent through building places to PLAY
- Invest in culture
- We are all in this together. Chop down silos
- Promote the arts
- Those of us in Chattanooga should think more about the region
- Regularly come & sit across the table & break bread & talk
- Meeting, Talking, Listening, Trust
- NWA Chambers are working together
- Keep it simple. Focus on 3 things: What can you agree on?
- Made NEW friends
- “What would be a win for all of you?”



- Explore establishing a creative space that could connective creative minds with local industry
- Communicate more with my counterparts in the region
- Collaborate
- Find more stakeholders (preferably rich)
- Engage more with the Chamber
- Equitable workforce development
- Address poverty through workforce training
- Plug into Thrive more
- Volunteer my time & skills
- Get to know my community business leaders and engage them in change/growth
- Build trails!
- Meet w/ natural treasures & outdoor rec groups to see how I can help support

What do you feel Inspired to do?

- Small business micro-distribution for creatives
- Create an artists collective
- Become a champion for diversity

WHAT'S NEXT?



What do you feel inspired to do? (Cont'd)

- Communicate the value of Thrive and this trip
- Work closely with Chambers in the future. Collaboration!
- Tell the Thrive story and expand the reach. More partners!
- Take the idea of collaboration & its value back to our city to establish buy-in
- Get more involved with our region
- Promote the intersection of art, nature & recreation in our outdoor spaces
- Collaborate with other municipalities because collaboration is power.
- Practical, equitable, innovative, affordable housing
- Pursue more regional partnerships
- Grow the partnership. Move forward together

A CLOSING NOTE FROM THRIVE'S PRESIDENT & CEO, BRIDGETT MASSENGILL

So, what IS next? How might an organization of 5 full-time staff carry alone the weight and depth of the day in and day out work needed across this tri-state, 16-county region? Thrive Regional Partnership needs the funding capacity and additional staff resources to take the resounding messages we heard in Northwest Arkansas back to our region, to the residents, governments, businesses and industries who will benefit the most from this important work. The table is built. Convening is happening. Trust is growing. Communities are and will benefit from the platforms being built and tested through Thrive, one impactful effort at a time. With 76 towns throughout our 3 states, more communities are rightfully asking for the same support given to others throughout our region. Each time we work in one, we strengthen our model and deepen the cause. The critical takeaways gathered from this visit have the potential to take this organization to the next level. Our challenge? Truthfully, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

As we flew back and crossed over the mountain tops of the Cradle of Southern Appalachia, the enormity of the task ahead was strong. The weight and significance of the opportunities we have as a region to collaborate toward a prosperous future, while preserving the innumerable unique attributes of each community and the awe-inspiring, significantly biodiverse landscapes of our region nearly knocked the breath out of me.

We live in a beautiful place. We are working together. Collaboration is in us. We must work together to enable these opportunities to happen through time, talent, and treasure from the people, organizations and companies that know this place matters. The convening table is built: Thrive Regional Partnership exists. It's time to invest in its future - this region's future - far beyond today. Join us!

<https://www.thriveregionalpartnership.org/members>



THANK YOU TO OUR INTERREGIONAL SUMMIT VISIT: NORTHWEST ARKANSAS TRIP INVESTORS & SUPPORTERS

SPONSORS



**LYNDHURST
FOUNDATION**



SUPPORTERS

- Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce
- Chattanooga Tourism Company
- City of Chattanooga
- City of Fort Oglethorpe
- City of Ringgold
- Cleveland/Bradley Chamber Foundation
- Cleveland State Community College
- Collegedale Tomorrow Foundation
- Greater Dalton Chamber
- Greg Vital
- Joel Houser
- Lodge Cast Iron
- McKee Foods Corporation
- NWGA Regional Commission
- Tangela Johnson
- University of the South-Sewanee

PEER PARTNER



Especially, to Nelson Peacock, President & CEO, and Jeannette Balleza Collins, Entrepreneurship, for organizing the Speakers in Northwest Arkansas!

A final, special thank you to the staff of Thrive Regional Partnership for organizing this inaugural interregional trip in the Fall of 2022 through unexpected staff transitions, while maintaining the quality of Thrive's products and services in the face of challenges and adversity. Thank you, team. - Bridgett Massengill, President/CEO



www.ThriveRegionalPartnership.org

Connect with us:

[@ThriveRegionalPartnership](https://www.instagram.com/ThriveRegionalPartnership)

[Facebook.com/ThriveRegionalPartnership](https://www.facebook.com/ThriveRegionalPartnership)

[LinkedIn.com/company/ThriveRegionalPartnership](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ThriveRegionalPartnership)

[Twitter.com/Thriving-Region](https://twitter.com/Thriving-Region)



832 Georgia Avenue Ste 420 | Chattanooga, TN 37402 | 423-541-3888