



Project Profile: Middle Georgia

Impact Statement

Industry Resilience funds helped the Middle Georgia Regional Commission develop programs and make targeted investments that increase the capabilities of the local defense industrial base. Funds helped develop hard skills training programs for workers and entrepreneurs and enhance key assets, such as the Middle Georgia Regional Airport, providing local suppliers with an increased capacity to support DoD programs and serve commercial markets. Increased local capacity increases DoD resiliency by making local defense suppliers less dependent on DoD procurement and increases DoD readiness through a better-trained workforce able to support a broader range of DoD programs and commercial needs.

Key Project Takeaways

Middle Georgia used OEA funds to develop a series of trainings and investments targeted at increasing the capabilities of the local A&D sector to provide for both commercial and defense sectors. OEA funds in Middle Georgia increased DoD resiliency by providing training in key skills needed by regional A&D suppliers and expanding the local capacity to support the transportation, logistics, and aerospace sectors, yielding a defense industrial base more capable to support further DoD programs and commercial opportunities. Further leadership development programs focused local government officials on addressing the needs of defense suppliers through targeted support for diversification. Programs focused on developing skills profiles for key local sectors and hard skills training for entrepreneurs increase the DoD's readiness by increasing local suppliers' capacity and ability to support DoD programs.

Project Description

Rationale

The Middle Georgia defense economy revolves around Robins Air Force Base, located in Warner Robins, GA. Robins AFB has been a major local employer since 1940s, and the 21st Century Robins AFB Partnership was awarded for being a Great American Defense Community by the Association of Defense Communities. The region, which encompasses eleven counties and twenty cities, is one of the US's most defense dependent regions and has long been a center for important activities for the aerospace and defense sectors. Robins AFB is the largest industrial site in the state of Georgia, and one of the state's largest employers. The facility employs more than 21,000 people, including nearly 6,000 military personnel. The economic impact of Robins AFB is massive—at \$2.75 billion---and ripples across the state and across the southeastern US. Jobs directly or indirectly tied to Robins account for 20 percent of total employment in the region.

Robins AFB is home to numerous units and functions, but its core activities are tied to Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex, the US Air Force's largest depot facility. Because of these depot activities, Robins AFB generates significantly larger economic impacts than a typical Air Force Base. Downsizing at the Robins AFB complex between 2013 and 2015 led to thousands of lost jobs. As the primary economic driver and source of employment in the Middle Georgia region, reduced operations at Robins AFB threatens the economy of the entire region. In response, the Macon-based Middle Georgia Regional Commission



(MGRC) sought assistance from the Office of Economic Adjustment to enhance the region's ability to serve both commercial markets and the DoD through a strong and robust local defense industrial base.

Program Activities

In response to the downsizing of Robins AFB, the MGRC used Industry Resilience funding provided by the OEA to create a series of programs to assist affected workers, suppliers and communities. Phase 1 of these activities - the Middle Georgia ... Growing Strong Program - ran from 2014-2016 and invested in new research and analysis designed to better understand regional assets and the workforce/industry cluster impacts of Robins AFB and its related industries. The initial project work sought to "create lasting changes in the regional labor market system that are positive for workers and employers."

This initial research culminated in three reports/tools that assessed local infrastructure, industrial base assets, and the local talent base. The MGRC also used this initial OEA investment to create a new regional leadership program in cooperation with the University of Georgia's F. W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development. A final Phase 1 component was supported by the Central Georgia Technical College, which developed job profiles of in-demand positions in fields that closely aligned with skill sets found in the aerospace and defense (A&D) sectors. These projects raised local awareness of the size and scope of the defense industrial base and provided training support for local A&D suppliers.

Phase 2 - the Middle Georgia Asset Advancement Program - began in 2017 with the intention of moving from planning to action. MGAAP seeks to further enhance the region's capacity to support a strong and robust regional defense industrial base. Work on Phase 2 began in early 2017, providing funds for ten different regional projects in four focus areas: economic analysis, strategic planning, workforce development, and regional leadership capacity. This project is heavily focused on supporting the regional aerospace industry supply chain and will result in a new regional strategic plan focused on new commercial opportunities related to transportation and logistics.

Resiliency Impacts

Enhancing Force Multipliers to Support the Defense Industrial Base

The Middle Georgia community closely follows issues related to the defense sector because of Warner Robins' critical role as an economic driver. While local awareness of the DoD's presence in Middle Georgia has been and remains strong, this project reinforced the importance of veterans as a source of skilled talent for employers in the region. Middle Georgia employers can utilize service members transitioning from Robins AFB as a pipeline of talent for the region's defense industrial base.

Additionally, the use of IR funds helped formally institutionalize regional awareness of the importance of Robins AFB into local economic development and workforce development programs.

Central Georgia Technical College (CGTC) helped introduce the ACT WorkKeys program to the region, which provides tools that help CGTC students receive work readiness training and earn certifications. CGTC has also pioneered statewide efforts to develop Prior Learning Assessments (PLAs) that offer college credit to veterans and others with applicable work experience who are considering returning to pursue higher education. In recent years, 103 students have obtained PLA credits from CGTC, allowing



students to complete an advanced education at a reduced cost and in less time. OEA funds also led to the completion of 151 certificates of credit, diplomas or degrees from CGTC students who received training on programmable logic controllers. MGRC officials identified programming logic controllers as a regional skills deficiency using job profiles developed using ACT WorkKeys and data from 500 workers who took the National Career Readiness Assessment. By positioning regional workforce programs to support transitioning service members and the defense industrial base, Middle Georgia can create a talent pipeline of veterans that in turn serve the defense industrial base. This pipeline increases the resiliency of DoD operations by providing a stable source of talent to defense suppliers in the Middle Georgia region.

In addition, the regional leadership academy has been a major success, receiving strong recommendations and approval from all participants. More than 100 employees across 85 organizations have engaged in the leadership program across at least four cohorts. The program focuses on strengthening and maintaining regional resiliency by teaching how local defense suppliers can diversify into commercial markets and new government contracts. This effort has engaged leaders in more rural parts of Middle Georgia, who previously had little experience in working with defense suppliers on a regional basis. Regional leaders aware of their local defense industrial base and its vulnerabilities can help defense suppliers at risk due to changes in defense spending adapt to new markets and focus government services in support of these businesses. The training of these regional leaders focuses local support on the defense industrial base, increasing DoD readiness through targeted government support and increasing DoD resiliency through awareness of challenges faced by defense suppliers.

Commercial Diversification of Defense Companies to Sustain the Industrial Base

OEA funds were used to develop strategic plans addressing the region's transportation, logistics, and aerospace sectors and a plan to diversify the regional economy into logistics and commercial aviation sectors complimenting the region's A&D cluster. These studies resulted in the use of additional OEA funds to help the Middle Georgia Regional Airport assume a more important role in supporting maintenance, repair and overhaul work in Warner Robins. New facilities for Boeing and Embraer are now under construction and the airport now offers non-stop flight service to Baltimore-Washington International Airport, reducing the travel time for local military personnel and contractors. Increasing the capabilities of Middle Georgia A&D assets creates new opportunities to support both commercial and defense aerospace programs in the region. By increasing their capabilities, Middle Georgia A&D suppliers can reduce their dependency on DoD expenditures by accessing new commercial markets, while also enhancing their ability to support DoD programs through new and improved capabilities.

Readiness Impacts

Training and People Support

While the Middle Georgia community has long been aware of the importance of the defense sector to regional prosperity, the OEA program has helped catalyze support for the local defense industrial base, military installations, and veteran community. IR funds were used to invest in the Spark Macon program, which specifically targeted its entrepreneurship programs towards veterans and defense suppliers and



its workforce training programs towards veterans and the spouses of service members. Funds were also used to develop twelve training programs targeted at entrepreneurs in Macon and Warner Robins, including subjects such as Raspberry Pi, Python Coding, CNC Machining, and 3D Printing. These training sessions had at least 191 attendees and resulted in seven (7) individuals receiving their FAA Small Unmanned Aerial Systems (sUAS) certification. Entrepreneurs trained in 21st century digital skills can provide new and improved services and products that support DoD programs.

In the area of workforce development, CGTC completed more than 140 job profiles for occupations closely linked to the aerospace and defense sectors using the ACT WorkKeys Job Profiling System. These positions are in industries such as manufacturing, energy, logistics, and health care. Job profiles are considered an important tool in workforce programs. They help employers identify critical skills and inform potential employees about the demands and talents needed for careers in these fields. Work profiles can help the regional defense industrial base fill, retain, and upskill talent more efficiently, benefitting the DoD through a better trained workforce able to support evolving DoD missions.

Improved Capability and/or Production Adjustments

Middle Georgia Regional Commission research has focused on key infrastructure assets that support military needs. The newly expanded role for the regional airport and the MGRC's work to improve local freight and logistics capabilities will play a key role in improving capabilities and mission readiness at Robins AFB.

Other Community Benefits

The programs have increased visibility of Middle Georgia's defense base, especially the lower tier suppliers who are critical and underappreciated parts of the industrial base. MGRC has also been able to deploy OEA funds to build local capacity and plan for new economic development programs and initiatives that not only support the defense industrial base, but also help the region capture new opportunities, such as those related to logistics and distribution. In 2019, the Middle Georgia region was designated as a "Great American Defense Community" by the Association for Defense Communities.

Lessons Learned

Most Important Lessons Learned

Think Beyond the Base: The Middle Georgia region has always focused heavily on Robins AFB as a major employer, but local leaders and economic development professionals did not place as much emphasis on support for defense suppliers and contractors. Today, community leaders continue to support the facility but also support the broader regional industrial base as well.

Build Capacity: OEA IR funds helped the region to undertake needed analysis and research that made a strong case for enhanced defense industry support.

Link Regional and Statewide Work: OEA-backed projects in Middle Georgia and with the state government have generated important synergies. CGTC's tech training tools are being used statewide, while state OEA funds have been used to develop new industry support strategies in Middle Georgia.