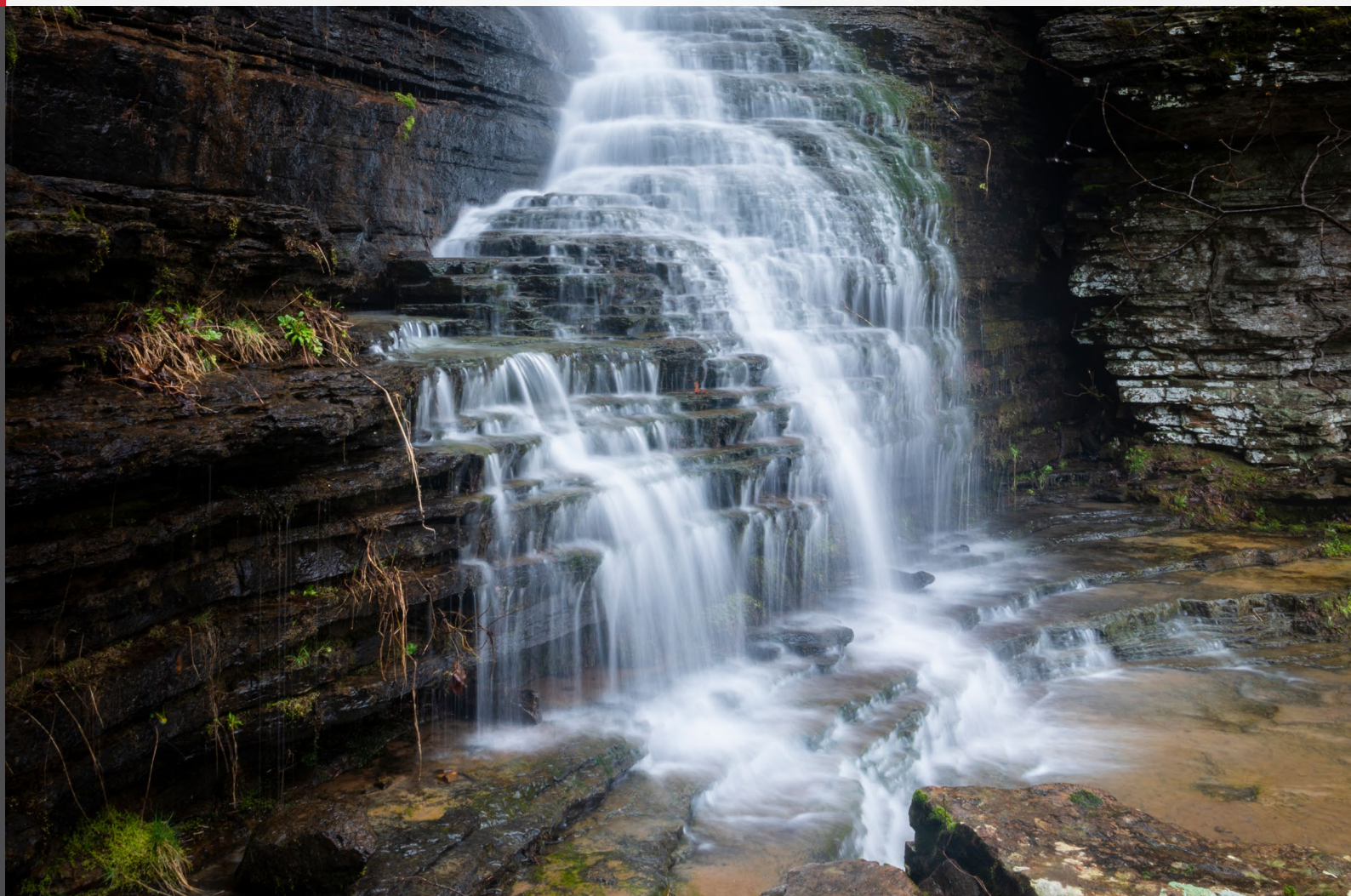


ARKANSAS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



2023 ANNUAL REPORT



At AEDC, we know economic advancement doesn't happen by accident. We work strategically with businesses and communities to create strong economic opportunities, making Arkansas the natural choice for success.





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STATE OF ARKANSAS



GOVERNOR SARAH HUCKABEE SANDERS

Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders was inaugurated as the 47th Governor of the State of Arkansas on January 10, 2023. Under Governor Sanders' leadership, the Arkansas General Assembly reduced tax rates twice in 2023.

Our state is becoming the envy of the nation. More Arkansans are working than ever. Tens of thousands are moving into our state for a new job, a lower cost-of-living, and a strong quality of life.

Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders

SECRETARY HUGH MCDONALD

Hugh McDonald was appointed by Governor Sanders in 2023 to serve as the Secretary of Commerce for the state of Arkansas. In this role, Secretary McDonald has spearheaded efforts to increase efficiencies and stronger working ties within the Department of Commerce. Secretary McDonald also organized the inaugural Arkansas Lithium Innovation Summit and is leading a statewide talent attraction initiative.



With beautiful outdoor amenities, world-class museums, unique foods and a business-friendly environment, Arkansas is an inviting option for businesses.

Hugh McDonald, *Secretary of Commerce*



Dear Fellow Arkansans:

Every day, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission is working to create new economic opportunities in our state by supporting business growth and helping our local communities thrive.

We highlight these efforts every year in an annual report that details each of our divisions' activities. I am proud to introduce the 2023 Annual Report, where you can learn more about the initiatives AEDC has undertaken and the accomplishments that our team has made over the past year.

Beginning in January 2023, AEDC hit the ground running with momentum in our business development efforts. We had projects in our pipeline – representing a wide range of industries, from the technology sector to aerospace and defense to firearms and ammunition to food and beverage. Thirty-five companies announced plans to grow in the Natural State with plans to create a projected 3,939 jobs that will benefit Arkansas. These projects will result in more than \$2.08 billion in capital investment with an average wage of \$27.90 for the jobs created.

In Arkansas, companies can be successful because they are supported by low costs, an experienced workforce that knows how to get the job done, excellent quality of life, and a business-friendly environment. Our reputation as a business-friendly state is enabled by great public policy at the state and local levels that help companies grow. In the first year of Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders' administration, the Arkansas General Assembly cut taxes twice, lowering the state's top end personal and corporate income tax rates, making Arkansas more competitive when it comes to attracting top talent and companies to the state.

It has been an honor serving as executive director of AEDC over the past year, and I am excited to continue working alongside our talented team to push Arkansas to the next level of economic success. As we move forward, we will embrace our agency's strategic vision

and find new ways to maximize opportunities for statewide growth.

Across our agency, we will be focused on providing Arkansans with new opportunities by recruiting new businesses, helping existing companies expand, and supporting the growth of small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures – all with the goal of creating higher-paying jobs and increasing economic prosperity in our great state. To accomplish this, we will work alongside our partners throughout the state to continue our workforce development, talent recruitment, and site development initiatives to make our state the most attractive location for companies looking to grow.

Thank you for your support of economic development in Arkansas. It takes a team to win in our field, and Arkansas' greatest strength is the collaboration and partnerships it has at all levels, from local communities to state government partners and legislators and from utility companies to businesses. We had great successes in 2023, and we are looking forward to keeping this momentum going and making Arkansas the natural choice for success.

Sincerely,

CLINT O'NEAL, CEcD

Executive Director
Arkansas Economic Development Commission



CLINT O'NEAL, CEcD

Executive Director

ABOUT THE ARKANSAS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

ARKANSAS INC

AEDC COMMISSIONERS



JAY BUNYARD
DeQueen



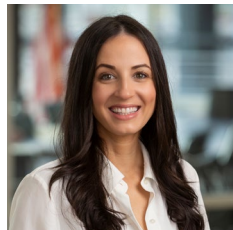
THOMAS DICKINSON
Little Rock



CHRIS GOSNELL
Magnolia



SHASH GOYAL
Little Rock



ANNEMARIE DILLARD JAZIC
Little Rock



GLEN JOHNSON
Little Rock



VANCE LAWSON
Wynne



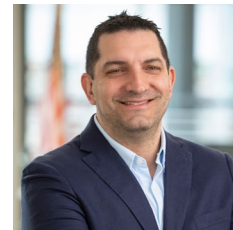
JOHNNY MITCHUM
Maumelle



JOHN NEWCOMB
Osceola



TRACEY RANCIFER
Little Rock



JOHN SCHMELZLE
Rogers



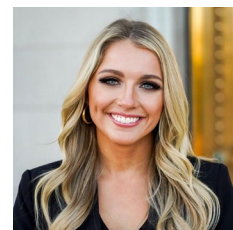
MOLLY SHEPHERD
El Dorado



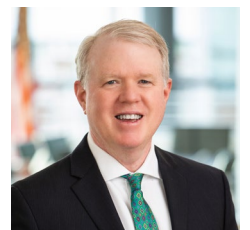
JIM SMITH
Fayetteville



JON WICKLIFFE
Little Rock



LINDSEY WINGO
Rector



LANG ZIMMERMAN
Mountain Home

OUR TEAM

The Arkansas Economic Development Commission is a division of the Arkansas Department of Commerce. The Department of Commerce is the umbrella organization for workforce and economic development drivers in the state of Arkansas.



CLINT O'NEAL, CE&D
Executive Director



JENNIFER EMERSON, EDFP
Deputy Director

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE SHARED SERVICES

BUDGET

Tammy Williams

GENERAL COUNSEL & CHIEF OF STAFF

Allison Hatfield

HUMAN RESOURCES

Grace Rodriguez

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Missy Morehart

LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Jake Windley

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Clark Cogbill

AEDC DIVISIONS

ARKANSAS NSF EPSCoR

Jennifer Fowler

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Olivia Womack

BUSINESS FINANCE

Drew Smith

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Matt Twyford

EXISTING BUSINESS

Justin Majors

FILM

Christopher Crane

GRANTS

Jean Noble

INFORMATICS

Andy Capel

MANUFACTURING SOLUTIONS

Keith Gammill

MILITARY AFFAIRS

Rob Ator

RURAL SERVICES

Becca Caldwell

SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Esperanza Massana Crane

AEDC MILESTONES FOR 2023



Sanders Names Clint O'Neal Executive Director of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission



Irish Company RelateCare to Create 255 New Jobs in Sherwood, Ark.



Ebbing Air National Guard Base in Fort Smith, Arkansas Selected as Home for U.S. Air Force Mission



2023 Matchmaking Event Hosts More Than 400 Business Meetings



Arkansas Named #2 Most Affordable State to Live in U.S.



The Federal Metal Company Chooses North Little Rock for New Manufacturing Facility

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

AEDC Awards \$645,493 to Support Wildlife Education, Improve School Conservation Programs



Cypress Cold Storage Breaks Ground on New State-of-the-Art Cold Storage Facility in Springdale



AEDC's Rural Services Division Awards \$692,435 to 49 Arkansas Communities



Owens Corning Announces Plan to Build Facility in Russellville, Create 50 New Jobs



Arkansas Named #1 in Nation for Opportunity Share for Entrepreneurs



Westrock Coffee's expansion in Conway plans to create 600 new jobs through \$300 million investment



Arkansas Aerospace Industry Takes Flight at Paris Air Show





AEDC Expanding Small Business and Entrepreneurship Development Focus



DriveSmart Announces New Facility in Newport, Arkansas



Bad Boy Mowers Expanding in Batesville, to Create 300 New Jobs



Governor Sanders and State and Local Leaders Welcome ExxonMobil's Investment in Arkansas Lithium



Central States Breaks Ground on State-of-the-Art Plant in Springdale, Arkansas for Continued Innovation and Growth

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

Hybar Begins Construction on Steel Rebar Mill in Northeast Arkansas, to Create 200 High-Paying Jobs



SIG SAUER Expands Ammunition Manufacturing Facility in Arkansas, Creating 625 New Jobs



Elopak Selects Little Rock, Arkansas for its New U.S. Production Plant



Arkansas Ranked #1 for Commercial Drone Readiness in U.S.



FarmaKeio Custom Compounding Enhances Healthcare Services Through Acquisition of State-of-the-Art Compounding Pharmacy



Owens Corning Breaks Ground on New Facility in Russellville, Arkansas



Arkansas Receives 2023 Silver Shovel Award for Continued Economic Growth



RTX Announces \$33M Manufacturing Facility in East Camden for Iron Dome Defense Systems



Dassault Falcon Jet Plans Expansion in Little Rock, Creating 800 New Jobs



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

After taking office in January 2023, Governor Sanders set the stage for a successful year in economic development, and the AEDC Business Development team celebrated the attraction and expansion of a diverse host of companies this year. Companies like Westrock Coffee Company, Owens Corning, Sig Sauer, Central States Manufacturing, Bad Boy Mowers, Raytheon, and Dassault Falcon Jet all decided to renew their commitments to Arkansas this year by announcing expansion projects, creating more jobs for Arkansans. 2023 also saw companies choosing to locate new facilities in the state, including Elopak, FarmaKeio, Hybar, and RelateCare. All of these announcements demonstrate the strong state and local leadership, business-

friendly policies, and a dedicated workforce that allow businesses to thrive and grow.



The AEDC Business Development team is excited to build upon the momentum of 2023, and we look forward to continuing the progress that has been made in diversifying our state's economy and increasing the quality of life for all Arkansans.

ANNOUNCEMENT TOTALS FOR 2023

3,939
PROJECTED JOBS FROM
44 COMPANIES

TOTAL ANNOUNCED INVESTMENT FOR THE YEAR IS
\$2,080,394,715

AVERAGE ANNOUNCED
WAGE FOR THE YEAR
\$27.90

*The numbers above do not include announced jobs. They are strictly incentive agreements signed.

“ This is the greatest place to be an entrepreneur, to be an investor, to be a capital deployer in commercial, for-profit businesses in the world...I hope that before your days are finished you will come to realize that you could have lived in Arkansas all these years too. ”

Scott Ford,
CEO and Co-Founder, Westrock Coffee Company

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS IN 2023



PHOTOS (top to bottom)

- 2/15 Owens Corning
- 3/20 The Federal Metal Company
- 10/26 Raytheon Missile Systems
- 12/05 Elopak
- 12/12 Dassault Aviation

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In 2023, AEDC consolidated the three initiatives below under one division, the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Development Division. Our goal is to be a convenor and a hub for small businesses and entrepreneurs in the state.



This area of focus is dedicated to stimulating innovation and growth among the state's technology businesses.

PROGRAM INVESTMENTS

- \$2,823,912 in Research and Development Incentive Grants
- \$100,000 in Technology Development Program Grants (TDP)
- \$250,000 in Seed Capital Investment Program (SCIP)
- \$100,000 in Small Business Innovation Research Grants

ACCELERATOR GRANTS AWARDED (FY 2023)

- Conductor 10X Accelerator
- Startup Junkie Fuel
- HealthTech Arkansas HeartX
- AR Venture Center – FIS Fintech
- AR Venture Center – Business Driven
- Cartwheel Startup Studio – Bounds Accelerator

Our department will be focused on building a strong foundation for growth in 2024. We will be restructuring our Division and enhancing existing programs to be more efficient and effective. We're particularly excited about the Statewide Technology Commercialization Center, recently rebranded as "ARise", aimed at providing crucial support to entrepreneurs and small business owners in the technology sector to drive innovation and create high-paying jobs, contributing to a more robust economy. Our strategic alignment prioritizes statewide outreach, with a focus on ensuring rural areas are adequately covered. Additionally, we're grateful to have recently welcomed two new team members, Laura Kingrey as Project Coordinator for Science and Technology and Mallory Race as Senior Project Manager, allowing us to fully leverage our resources and expertise.



The mission of this initiative is to facilitate the growth, development and expansion of Minority and Women-Owned Businesses in the state.

- Certified 50 businesses in 2023
- Conducted 8 Certification Trainings around the state with a total of 285 attendees
- Participated in several speaking engagements across the state
- Online Directory has 2,194 businesses from all over the state. In 2023, we grew our Online Directory by 300 entries
- Gated the Online Directory to obtain intelligence about who is accessing the directory



2023 MWOBE Matchmaking Event



A new area dedicated to working strategically and collaboratively with entrepreneurial ecosystem support organizations (ESOs) in the state to support the growth of small businesses and entrepreneurs in the state.

- Working with the Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Arkansas in developing an "EcoMap," which is a much-needed tool designed to map out resources for entrepreneurs in the state.

“The state's investment in research-fueled economic growth is a powerful catalyst for starting up new science- and technology-driven companies and preparing top STEM talent for Arkansas' advanced industry workforce.”

Bryan Barnhouse,
President & CEO,
Arkansas Research Alliance



Networking Hour at the 2023 MWOBE Matchmaking Event

BUSINESS FINANCE

In 2023, the AEDC Council quarterly meetings were held in Batesville, Harrison, Arkadelphia, and El Dorado. These meetings afforded opportunity for the full Council to meet with local business and community leaders at each of these locations.



HARRISON, June 2023

BATESVILLE, April 2023



ARKADELPHIA, August 2023

EL DORADO, October 2023



Business Finance is tasked with servicing economic development loans; disbursing, tracking and auditing grant and incentive agreements; collecting reimbursement of grant funds in the event of underperformance; underwriting various incentive and financing programs; and managing the Bond Guaranty Program portfolio and investments.

- Approved **\$5 million** in new Bond Guaranty projects totaling **over \$47 million in capital expenditures and 85 Arkansas jobs.**

“ We are committed to growing the Arkansas economy while being good stewards of the resources entrusted to us for this purpose. ”

Drew Smith,
Director, Business Finance

As with 2023, there will be several exciting opportunities and changes in Arkansas' economic landscape throughout the year. Business Finance is poised and eager to assist in providing the support needed to make Arkansas the natural choice for success.

INCENTIVE PAYMENTS DISBURSED

\$12,716,450

Supporting the addition of **5,263 jobs**

TRAINING GRANTS DISBURSED

\$132,238

Supporting the upskilling of **443 Arkansans**

GRANTS DISBURSED

\$27,667,376

Supporting the addition and retention of **3,333 jobs** and **over \$1 billion** in capital investment

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

The Marketing team highlighted Arkansas business success stories, economic development wins, and “power stats” in 2023 through a variety of mediums. The Arkansas booth at the Paris Air Show featured striking images of aircraft, including the F-35 and C-130. Digital and print ads showcased Arkansas-based companies and executives, adding Westrock Coffee, AcreTrader, and Delta Dirt to the Executive Voice series. A direct-mail piece sent to site selection consultants included a retro photo viewer with images of economic development wins and beautiful, outdoor images of The Natural State. The Arkansas Inc. Podcast featured executives from RelateCare, AcreTrader, Westrock Coffee, and Arkansas Commerce Secretary Hugh McDonald. For the second consecutive year, the AEDC blog was ranked among the top 10 economic development blogs by FeedSpot.



In the coming year, the marketing team will be focused on taking full advantage of our Commerce-wide, shared services team. We look forward to making additional internal and external resources available to help AEDC reach its goals, including video, public relations, graphic and web design, digital marketing, lead generation and more. Attracting and retaining talent in the state will be a new focus for us in 2024.

“ The Marketing & Communications team is committed to promoting the state of Arkansas as an outstanding destination for businesses to succeed. Focusing on the goals of AEDC, we look for the most optimal mediums to share stories of business success and growth to those inside the state and around the world. ”

Clark Cogbill,
Director of Marketing
& Communications

“Why would you go anywhere else? This is the greatest place to be an entrepreneur, or to be an investor, in the world.”

Scott Ford, CEO - Westrock Coffee, Little Rock

ARKANSAS INC.
Arkansas Economic Development Commission

To learn more about how inspiring businesses are leading the way to a strong economy, visit ArkansasEDC.com #WhyArkansas



- 38 blog posts
- 31 newsletters delivered to 7,631 recipients
- 8 podcasts
- Direct Mail campaign to Site Selection Consultants
- 15.9% increase in social media followers
- 3 Executive Voice videos

Arkansas Economic Development Commission
17,177 followers
1mo · 🌐

Today, Dassault Falcon Jet announced plans to expand in the City of Little Rock to support the development and delivery of its new Dassault Falcon 6X business jet and future Falcon programs.

This expansion represents a significant investment for Dassault Falcon Jet, and it will create 800 new jobs in the region.

Congratulations to Dassault Falcon Jet on its continued success and growth.

Read more: <https://bit.ly/3Rk5Tb9>

Little Rock Regional Chamber

1 comment · 16 reposts

EXISTING BUSINESS



The University of Arkansas – Pulaski Technical College held a graduation ceremony for students who participated in Future Fit training developed in partnership with AEDC.

IMPACTS REPORTED TO NIST MEP BY AMS CLIENTS DURING 2023

2,155

CREATED AND RETAINED JOBS

\$245M

IN NEW AND RETAINED SALES

\$49M

IN NEW INVESTMENT

\$11M

IN COST SAVINGS

2023 was a year of transition for the Existing Business Division. In March, Justin Majors was named Director of Existing Business following the retirement of Steve Sparks. This was followed by the selection of Keith Gammill to serve as the Center Director for Arkansas Manufacturing Solutions. Keith has previously served on the AMS team for nine years under our subrecipient partnership with Arkansas State University before joining AEDC. In addition to these two leadership positions, the Existing Business Division welcomed Jacqueline Carpenter as the team's new Accounting Coordinator.

The team entered a subrecipient partnership with the University of Arkansas system to fund two positions in Northwest Arkansas. One of the team members will be focused on continuous improvement initiatives, and the other on driving our supply chain initiatives. It is anticipated that these positions will be filled in the early part of 2024.

In addition to company outreach and service delivery, Existing Business partnered with the Arkansas State Chamber/Arkansas Institute for Performance Excellence to host a one-day Workforce Best Practices Summit on November 2. We had over 165 attendees, representing manufacturers, educators, and economic development entities from across the state. The agenda consisted of presenters from in-and-out of state as well as Arkansas industry leaders, all showcasing workforce best and distinctive practices.

In many ways, 2023 was a staging year with the changes noted above. Our primary focus for 2024 is to continue to build on the momentum we've started in 2023. Filling these open positions will allow us to serve more companies and offer a wider range of services. We are also excited for the opportunity to collaborate with both internal and external partners as we conduct outreach to industry across the state.

“

We believed Leader Starter Kata would involve consultants coming in and making recommendations on how to improve. Instead, we learned it was a method and framework to organize and implement ideas we were always dreaming up, but never found time to put into practice. The program has enabled us to draft and execute steps to constantly improve and track results. It has given us a completely new way of viewing our company and what we think of as success and has greatly improved our communication, organization, productivity, and morale. We are looking forward to what we will be able to accomplish in the coming years thanks to this program.

”

Doug Vick, Vice President-Alweld Boats

- **38 Graduates** of Future Fit via the Rock City Re-entry Program
- **339 Discovery Calls** to Manufacturers
- **132 Outreach Visits** to local ED partners, education providers and others
- **5 Workplace Resilience Assessments** completed with companies.
- **25 ACT Job Profiles** completed.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



(Left) Members of the Community Development team had the opportunity to tour Standard Lithium’s facility in south Arkansas. (Right) Community Development Manager Dana Poindexter participated in the Standard Lithium facility tour.

In 2023, the Community Development Division focused on meeting with newly elected officials and offering training on resources provided by AEDC and other organizations. The team of Regional Managers Emily Cooper-Yates, Dana Poindexter and Amy Williams, led by Division Director Matt Twyford, organized and hosted a total of six regional training sessions across the state. Additionally, the team continued its mission of helping communities with any of their needs, including identifying and connecting grant opportunities, assisting communities with filling out RFIs to allow them to compete for job creation opportunities, helping communities market their available sites and buildings.

“ The Community Development team is stronger than we have ever been during my tenure at AEDC. Amy, Emily, Dana, and I are all passionate about helping communities and being the ‘go-to’ connection for any needs that they have. ”

Matt Twyford, *Director, Community Development*

In 2024, the Community Development Team is planning additional regional trainings to help elected officials and economic developers increase their knowledge of RFIs, site development, and incentives. Additionally, the division will continue to work with communities on their Competitive Communities Initiative (CCI) efforts and partner with other community development organizations to identify new resources and ways to help strengthen communities and attract business and industry.



INTERACTIONS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS DURING 2023 TOTAL JUST UNDER

1,000

This includes regional trainings, attendance at the Rural Development Conference, Municipal League, County Judges Association Conferences, and other visits and events.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG)

The CDBG program will celebrate 50 years of supporting local community building programs such as infrastructure, economic development, housing, and disaster recovery. Since its establishment, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has helped communities across the nation address the most pressing challenges facing residents. While HUD's programs have evolved over the years, its core functions—providing assisted housing, promoting responsible homeownership, ensuring fair housing, and fostering community development—remain unchanged. Essential to these core functions, CDBG provides annual grants on a formula basis to states, cities, and counties to develop healthy urban communities by providing affordable and accessible housing, a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities.

The CDBG program grows local economies and improves the quality of lives for low- and moderate-income citizens. Over 1,200 jurisdictions receive an annual allocation of CDBG funds. Nationally, over 7,200 rural, suburban, and urban communities have access to CDBG funds. Communities use CDBG to respond to current and emerging community development needs, including job creation, affordable housing development, improvement of existing housing stock, the delivery of services, and the development of infrastructure improvements.

GRANTS

The Community Development Block Grant Program's (CDBG) impact is significant and extends across several key areas of community **and** economic development.

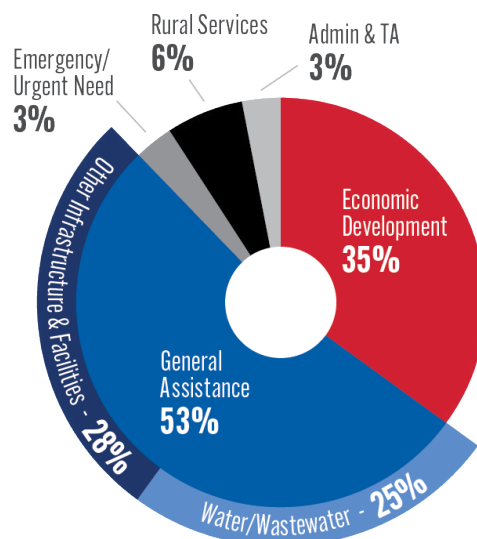
In 2023, the Grants Division awarded just under \$16 million in state CDBG funds, which primarily benefit persons of low- to moderate-income in smaller, non-entitlement cities and communities throughout the state:

- 26 General Assistance projects totaling over \$13.85 million for a variety of public facility and public infrastructure projects, including residential water and wastewater, senior centers, food pantries, centers for disabled persons, child care centers, and homeless shelters, benefitting over 57,000 persons.
- One Rural Services Block Grant totaling \$75,000 through a partnership with the AEDC Division of Rural Services for the renovation of community centers and expanded fire protection in communities under 3,000.
- Four economic development projects totaling \$2 million, which will result in the creation of 288 jobs.



ARKANSAS COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROGRAM (ACEDP) COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG)

State's Program for Small Cities
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024
2023 Allocation: \$17,807,834



CDBG has been appropriated level funding at \$3.3 billion annually in recent years including Program Year 2022-2023; of this amount, the Arkansas Community and Economic Development Program (ACEDP) received over \$17.8 million.

Each year AEDC holds public meetings and hearings to obtain citizen input on community needs. Based on that input, the agency prepares an Action Plan prioritizing the state's needs and accomplishment goals, and a draft of the plan is published and made available for public comment. One result of such input in 2023 resulted in the development of new policies and procedures to address the demolition of blighted areas in rural communities.

RURAL SERVICES

In 2023, the Division of Rural Services funded 49 cities, communities, and counties in the amount of \$692,434 through the Rural Services Block Grant and Rural Community Grant Programs. The division also funded 205 schools and conservation districts in the amount of \$645,492 through the Arkansas Game and Fish Wildlife Grant Program. Funding for all grant programs through the Division of Rural Services totaled \$1,337,926.97 for 2023. In addition to grant funding, the division's annual three-day event, the 2023 Rural Development Conference, was a success – drawing 550 attendees, vendors and sponsors. There were a variety of sessions on topics such as Outdoor Recreation Grants and resources for rural communities, tourism and economic development, workforce development, and resources for economic development in rural Arkansas.



“ It is the mission of the Division of Rural Services to provide our rural communities with adequate resources to thrive. Looking forward to 2024, I hope to assist all of our rural communities to the best of my ability in achieving this goal. ”

Becca Caldwell, *Director, Rural Services*



Development Conference greatly enjoyed the transition back to a three-day event, as it has allowed the division to resume its normally scheduled conference agenda of two luncheons, six sessions and three legislative committee meetings. Looking forward to 2024, we are very excited to continue our work in rural Arkansas and spread the word on our grant programs.

We are looking forward to getting back out into our communities to provide training on our grant programs so we can further help those in rural Arkansas. We are also looking forward to our Rural Development Conference which will be held in Hot Springs in 2024. The attendees of the 2023 Rural

**GRANT FUNDS ALLOCATED BY
THE DIVISION OF RURAL SERVICES
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2023**

**RURAL COMMUNITY
GRANT PROGRAM**

\$617,434

**RURAL SERVICES BLOCK
GRANT PROGRAM**

\$75,000

**ARKANSAS GAME AND FISH
WILDLIFE GRANT PROGRAM**

\$645,492

ARKANSAS NSF EPSCoR



Secretary Hugh McDonald presenting during the IWRC Conference

In 2023, Arkansas NSF EPSCoR hosted the IEEE IWRC event - the first event of its kind. It was very successful and convened more than 100 attendees representing academic research, federal agencies, technology companies, and more. As a result of this effort, Jennifer Fowler received the 2023 IEEE-USA Award for Distinguished Public Service.

A major accomplishment was the execution of the 2+2 transfer agreement between North Arkansas College and University of Arkansas for data science degrees. We also awarded five research seed grants supporting data science research and education projects at Arkansas State University, University of Arkansas, UAMS, and University of Arkansas at Little Rock:

RESEARCH GRANTS AWARDED IN 2023

PROJECT TITLE	INSTITUTION	INVESTIGATOR(S)	TOTAL AWARD
MoDaCoM-TL: Model and Data Compatibility Metric for Transfer Living	A-State	Jason Causey	\$92,686
Smart curation and deep learning-based enhancement of social risk data	UAMS & A-State	Melody Greer & Sudeepa Bhattacharyya	\$118,190
AI-Supported Cyberinfrastructure for Scalable Flood Resilience Assessment	UARK	Xiao Huang	\$95,459
Machine Learning Approaches for Remote Pathological Speech Assessment for Parkinson's Disease	UAMS	Yasir Rahmatallah	\$100,000
Developing Machine Learning Models to Improve the Effectiveness of Automated Data Curation Processes	UALR	Ahmed Abu Halimeh	\$99,414



Panel discussion (left to right): Dr. Hugh Churchill, UARK; April Campbell, EDA; Dr. Craig Scott, Morgan State University; and John Hardin, North Carolina Department of Commerce.

- We supported **81** faculty and staff and **over 100** students at **12** different colleges and universities around the state.
- We awarded over **\$505,000** in seed grants.
- The researchers we support published **66** research papers, submitted an additional **41** proposals for research and education funding, and received an additional **\$30.6** million in grants.



On November 17, 2023, the IEEE-USA Board of Directors approved the recipient of the 2023 IEEE-USA Award for Distinguished Public Service:

JENNIFER FOWLER

“For promoting innovation, technology, and workforce development in Arkansas and the U.S. heartland”

The award is presented annually to honor an individual not currently in the practice of engineering for contributions in furthering the professional goals of IEEE in the United States by such means as (but not limited to) influencing laws or regulations benefiting the profession, industrial environments to foster professionalism curricula, or publications designed to enhance professionalism and other similar activities.

INFORMATICS

The Informatics Division plays a pivotal role in enhancing agency-wide efficiencies at AEDC. By spearheading the strategy for developing, onboarding, adapting, standardizing, and maximizing Salesforce tools and features, significant progress has been made in the past year. Nearly every division within AEDC has successfully onboarded and migrated internal processes to Salesforce. Real-time monitoring and tracking of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are achieved through the development of reports and dashboards. This empowers division and agency directors to closely oversee the success of their team's initiatives. Additionally, it fosters cross-departmental collaboration on various projects and initiatives, contributing to the overall advancement of the organization.

We anticipate notable advancements in 2024 as the Informatics Division focuses on enhancing the Grants Division through the development of a cutting-edge Grant

Manager Portal. This innovative platform will empower field-based Grant Managers by enabling them to digitally submit expenses, supporting documents, and

“ The Informatics Division is pivotal in enhancing agency-wide efficiencies at AEDC. In the upcoming year, expect a wave of innovation that will help AEDC be more agile and efficient. ”

Andy Capel,
Head of Informatics

address other grant-related requirements, eliminating the need for traditional mailing methods. Moreover, several other divisions are slated to undergo a transformative shift, transitioning from manual processes to streamlined, automated digital workflows throughout the upcoming year.



MILITARY AFFAIRS



- Construction at Ebbing ANGB, Fort Smith to exceed **\$765 million**
- The projected economic impact of the Ebbing basing action up to \$1 billion per year and with the expansion requested from the USAF, up to **\$1.3 billion** per year



2023 has proven to be a momentous year for the Military Affairs Division and for Arkansas. A large part of the effort has been to ensure a timely bed down of the new F-35 Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Pilot Training Center (PTC) at Ebbing Air National Guard Base in Fort Smith while continuing to protect and grow the missions of the state’s other military installations and making Arkansas the most military friendly state in the nation.

In March, Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall signed the environmental impact study, paving the way for his signature on the record of decision (ROD) in April. This ensured that the Air Force competition for the mission was complete, and the decision was made to bed the mission down in Fort Smith. Importantly, the ROD opened the funding of the building out of the base to accept our first aircraft in September 2024. With the help of our congressional delegation, we were successful in securing \$120 million of funding this year with half the year passed before we could start spending. Because of the collaborative effort, the Air Force has asked us to expand the program to add up to 44 aircraft and expanding the impact of this basing action. We established an intergovernmental support agreement (IGSA) to procure and install an arresting gear system needed to operate F-35s at Ebbing.

In addition, Little Rock Air Force Base (LRAFB) has a plan for energy assurance that we brokered with Entergy. The project, which was given new life through pressure at the most senior levels with the Air Force, will make LRAFB energy independent and prepared for a natural event of cyber because the base will be able to continue operations if removed from the energy grid. Finally, we strengthened the Spousal Licensure Bill to include military training and certifications, making Arkansas a national leader. Combined, our efforts have Arkansas leading the nation in supporting the Department of Defense, and this leadership is reflected in new military missions and new starts in the aerospace and defense industry in the state.



Thanks to the arrival of our first F-35 aircraft as part of the F-35 FMS PTC and the expansion of new defense industry starts, 2024 promises to be an eventful year with the potential of over 1,000 new defense jobs coming to the state.

“ We have come a long way in a short amount of time and are bringing real economic opportunity to the entire state of Arkansas. At a time of great power competition, Arkansas is emerging as the center of our nation’s defense and global security. With the addition of the most advanced tactical fighter in the F-35 and the training of 18 different allied nations, we are the center of global deterrence. What’s more - we are just getting started! ”

Colonel (Ret.) Rob “Gator” Ator, *Director of Military Affairs*

FILM



In 2023, we began the year with the wonderful comedic production of *Naked*, starring Anna Camp and Justin Bartha. We ended the year with the fantastic detective thriller of *Crescent City*, starring Alec Baldwin, Terrance Howard, Esai Morales, and Nicky Whelen.



Bringing my film to Arkansas was a decision that would prove to be a game-changer for the production. The journey was filled with remarkable experiences thanks to the support of Christopher Crane in the Film Commission, local crew, and the array of vendors available in the state. The locations and local crew were top notch. I will be coming back for many more.



RJ Collins, *Director of Crescent City*



The forecast for 2024 is already tremendously bright and sunny. The name of the game for Arkansas film production is repeat business as past producers are lining up to produce several follow-up productions in Arkansas.

LOOKING AHEAD

Arkansas raised the bar in 2023 for economic development success. Working in partnership, Arkansas' economic development team helped drive job growth and capital investment through dedicated business recruitment and expansion efforts, support of entrepreneurship, and workforce development initiatives.

On behalf of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, we would like to thank our partners for their active support and commitment in advancing economic development in the great state of Arkansas!





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“ Over the past year, the AEDC team has worked on many economic development projects that have made a difference for Arkansans across the state. In 2024, we will work to increase economic opportunities for Arkansans and make our state the natural choice for success. ”

Jennifer Emerson, EDFP, *Deputy Director*



