State and Local Economic Development Strategies (SLEDS) Database

About the Project

As the nation faces complex economic challenges, strong collaboration between states and Economic and Economic Development Districts (EDDs) is critical for economic recovery and growth. Promoting and implementing enhanced alignment between states and EDDs will result in better regional, state, and national economic outcomes. The SLEDS database is an important tool for states and EDDs as they strive toward strategic alignment.

The Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC), in partnership with the National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation (NADO), the State International Development Organizations (SIDO), and the American Manufacturing Communities Collaborative (AMCC), received funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) to analyze the current alignment of state and EDD[1] strategies, raise awareness of the benefits of strategic alignment, develop a best practices guide, and provide technical assistance to states and EDDs to enhance alignment.

Methodology

As a part of the effort to analyze alignment between states and EDDS, the project reviewed state strategic plans and compared them to the CEDS for the EDDs in the respective state. To allow for project (and public) comparison, the CREC team developed a state and local economic development strategies (SLEDS) database. The database classifies strategies from the 53 available U.S. state and territory economic development strategic plans and 402 CEDS plans organized to serve all or parts of states, territories, and the District of Columbia.
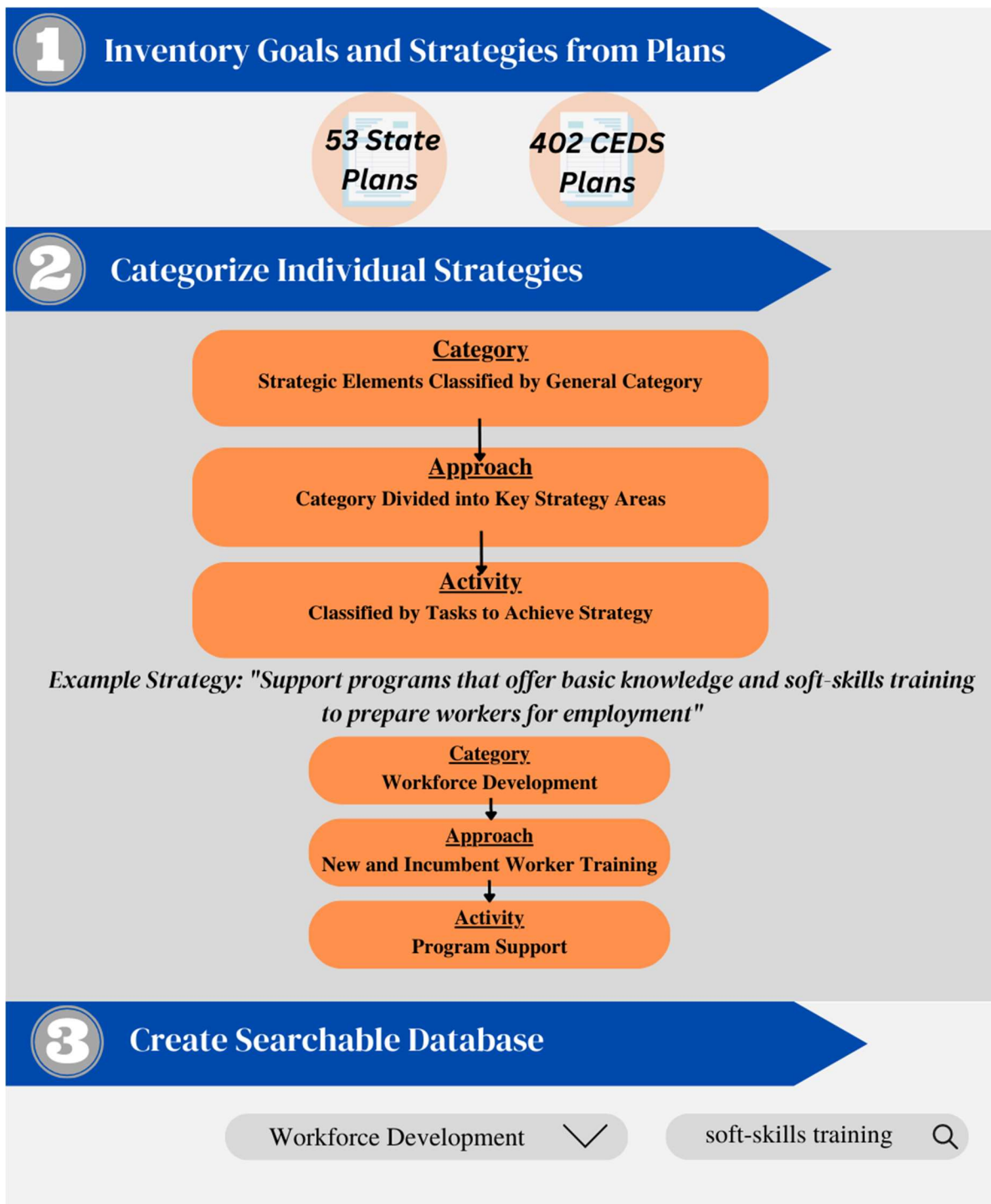
Understanding alignment between state plans and CEDS is an effective first step in creating the foundation for education and technical assistance – i.e., how to foster collaborative efforts in economic development planning and activities. After piloting 3 states and categorizing close to 40 plans, the team created a taxonomy based in part on the State Expenditure Database by the Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER) to fit the overall project needs. Ultimately, the team used a hierarchical set of three levels: Category, Approach, and Activity to facilitate plan comparisons:

1. Category: The general economic development objective targeted by strategies in a CEDS or State Plan. Determines the overarching, general theme of the strategy with each element of the plan placed in at least one category. Examples include transportation infrastructure or entrepreneurial development.
2. Approach: With the category, the approach determines the precise topic area which allows more detail on the category topic. In some cases where the strategy's language is less descriptive, no approach will be identified. However, if the strategy is very descriptive, multiple approaches can be listed. Examples include roads, bridges, and highways or incubator development.

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[1] To be designated by EDA as an Economic Development Districts (EDD), an applicant must have an EDA-approved Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and at least one geographical area within the designated service boundaries that meets EDA's regional distress criteria as set out in 13 CFR § 301.3(a). A portion of the CEDS must be dedicated to the strategic direction/action plan and include an outline of the strategies and actions/tasks needed to accomplish overarching regional goals. The CEDS are typically updated on a 5-year cycle.

3. Activity: Once each of the plan's elements have been placed in a category and an approach potentially identified, specific actions or tasks, including funding, information dissemination, or marketing, to pursue the given strategic element will be identified. Like the "Approach" classification, in some cases where the strategy's language is less descriptive, no activities will be identified. However, if the strategy is very descriptive, multiple activities can be listed.
4. Additional Metrics: If equity, environmental sustainability, rural areas, or target populations were noted in the strategy, they were also captured as separate data elements. Identified as "focuses" in the dataset, they are emphasized priorities in strategies. This field is only applied if the focus is explicitly mentioned, or the language is reasonably indicative of the focus.

The graphic below describes the process by which the research team developed the SLEDS database.

Using the Dataset

The data housed in SLEDS can be utilized for a variety of purposes, including, but not limited to, locating economic development state and EDD plans, identifying best practices, comparing plan components, and conducting qualitative analysis on how states and regions plan for economic development. From a practitioner's point of view, the dataset aims to foster alignment between states and their respective EDDs. An EDD may want to learn how other EDDs in their state, or even outside of their state, are approaching workforce development initiatives. Alternatively, a state may want to keep abreast of local planning efforts to better inform their own statewide planning process. Ultimately, SLEDS provides the data that can establish a foundation for collaboration on economic development between regions and states.

Searching in SLEDS can be done across 6 fields:

- State,
- Plan Type,
- Agency Name,
- Economic Development Category,
- Focus, and
- Keyword.

You can conduct broad searches for strategies across these fields. Conversely, you can also utilize multiple different fields at once to narrow down specifically what you are looking for. For example, you could search for workforce development strategies in Alaska that have a focus on equity. In addition, you can include a keyword search like "Soft Skills" to narrow your search even further. If no strategies fit your search, you will see "no records match the filters selected." Otherwise, each relevant plan's strategies will be displayed in separate sections of the results page for you to view.

FAQ

Is the data historical?

No, SLEDS has only captured the most recent plans that are accessible as of July 2022.

Can I download the data?

Yes, you can either search across different fields and then export your results as a CSV or you can download the full dataset on the landing page.

Can one strategy in a plan be categorized multiple times?

Yes, they can. Here is an example strategy: support **entrepreneurship** and **employment** opportunities through **workforce** and language training. This strategy is categorized in the database as both "Workforce Development" and "Entrepreneurial Development."

Will a strategy ever not be categorized?

Every strategy will have a top-level categorization, but if limited details are provided then the "approach" or other fields may not be utilized.

My EDD has an updated plan! How do I let you know?

Click the "contact us" button on the landing page for all thoughts or questions about the dataset.