

A TEN YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

OUR FUTURE



WALKER AREA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

“THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE BEAUTY OF THEIR DREAMS.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

This plan will provide opportunities for all children and adults to succeed in work and life.

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As a visioning and grantmaking organization, Walker Area Community Foundation strives to move our community forward in all areas of life. We wish to proactively identify the root causes of Walker County’s most significant challenges and create solutions that improve the quality of life for all residents.

To do so, in 2023, we engaged Clarus Consulting to conduct a Community Needs Assessment to understand what the people in our community want and need for the next decade. The assessment involved listening to the voices of those who live, work, and play here daily. Clarus gathered information from 1,269 individuals through interviews, focus groups, and online surveys. During the assessment, they focused on several key areas, including what people envision for our community’s future, strengths and challenges, and top priorities. Clarus also asked how our Foundation can help achieve these goals.

Additionally, they reviewed data from 16 studies and reports on Walker County covering topics like families, jobs, schools, health, and more. This helped create a clear understanding of our community’s current state.

From all the information gathered, a clear vision for our community was evident: *“Walker County seeks to be a place where all community members can have good jobs with excellent education, affordability, and a high quality of life.”*

This vision is lofty. It will keep us focused on where we collectively think we should go by creating solid objectives to achieve the desired outcomes. These are the priorities identified in our interviews as the greatest needs in our community.

- Collaborative planning for economic growth
- Lifelong learning and success
- Health, wellbeing, and quality of life
- Next generation leadership

By following this process and listening to the community’s ideas and concerns, we can better plan for a future that meets everyone’s needs and aspirations. This Community Needs Assessment, or Strategic Plan will guide our Foundation in making decisions that will positively impact our community now and in the years to come.

The median household income for **Walker County** is

\$52,987

 **\$7,501** below Alabama

 **\$21,579** below the United States.



From **2016 to 2020**
23%
of children in
Walker County
lived in poverty

(U.S. Census Bureau)

41%
of survey
participants cited
career advancement
and higher wages
as key to improving
Walker County.

• **COLLABORATIVE PLANNING FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH**

STRATEGIC GOAL

Work together as one community to build a vibrant economy that supports growth, development, and quality of life for all

KEY DATA POINTS

According to the U.S. Census, Walker County’s median household income in 2024 is \$52,987. This is below the median for Alabama and the nation.

Between 2016 and 2020, approximately 23% of children in Walker County were living in poverty. 28% of that number are children under the age of 5. (Voices for Alabama’s Children, 2024).

In an online survey of our community’s nonprofit leaders, 41% named career advancement opportunities and increases in job wages as the needs that would most help Walker County be a better place for all to live, work, and play.

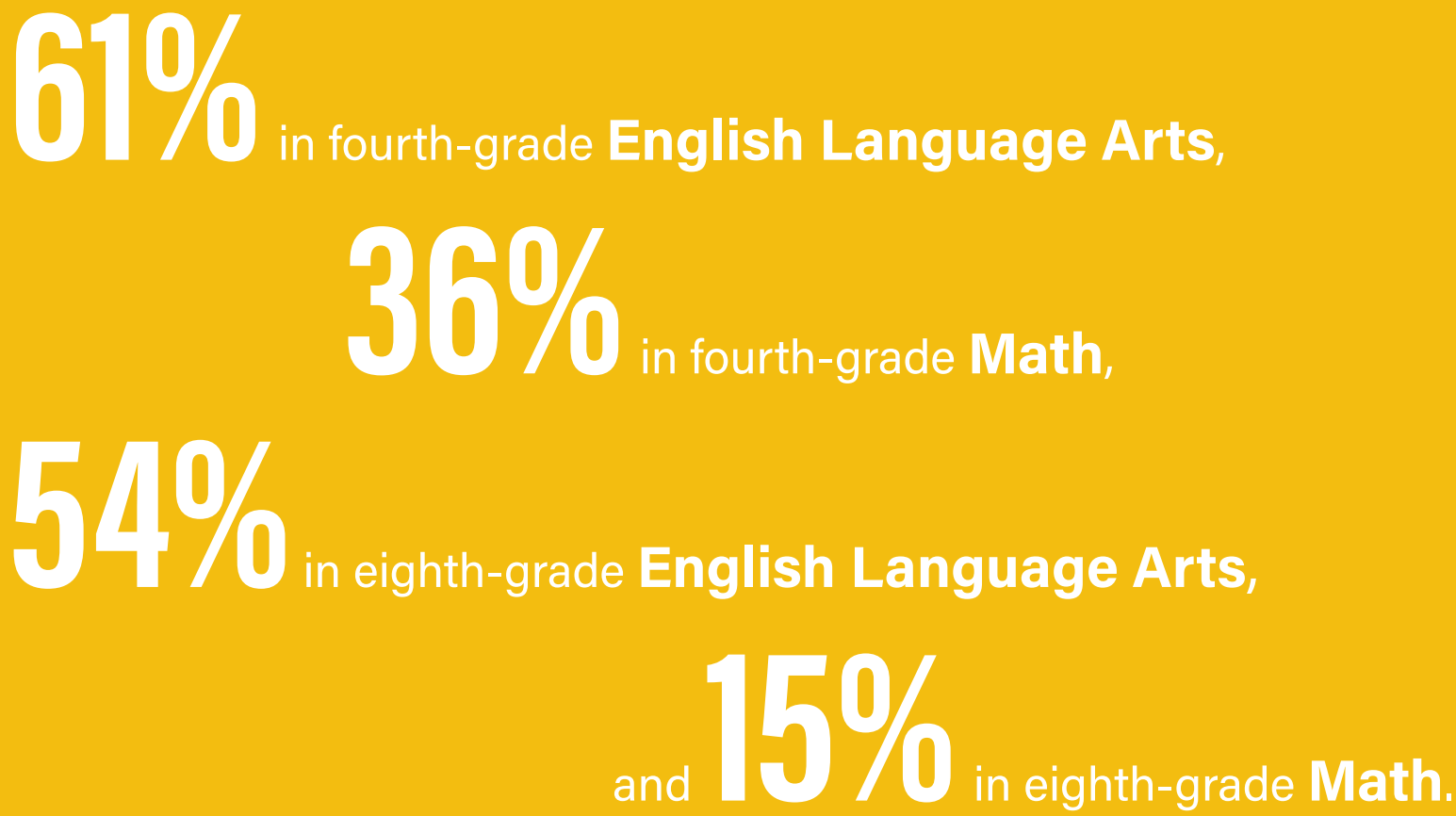
COMMUNITY VISION

Our community recognizes that establishing a more robust economy will require solid partnerships from leaders and organizations across the county and beyond. Leadership must work together to benefit all communities and partners, develop strategies, and secure funding from local, state, federal, and charitable sources.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

Our foundation will serve as an information resource and convener of partners to support economic growth. We will work with municipalities in Walker County to develop a community-wide asset map that showcases exciting economic growth initiatives and opportunities.

Percentage of **Walker County** students proficient in English and Math:



52%
identified
employment
and **workforce**
development
as one of the most
pressing issues

28%
job training and
skills development
as needs that would
help Walker County

■ **LIFELONG LEARNING AND SUCCESS**

STRATEGIC GOAL
Partner with education leaders to build and sustain pathways for learning and development that will provide state-of-the-art space, tools, and programming to meet the needs of today’s learners, workforce, and industry.

KEY DATA POINTS
The 2022 Kids Count Data Book reports the following ACAP proficiency rates for Walker County students: 61% in fourth-grade English Language Arts, 36% in fourth-grade Math, 54% in eighth-grade English Language Arts, and 15% in eighth-grade Math. ACAP stands for Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Plan, or standardized testing beginning in second grade.

In our online survey, 28% of respondents named job training and skills development as needs that would help Walker County be a better place for all to live, work, and play.

In our nonprofit leader’s survey, 52% identified employment and workforce development as one of the most pressing issues for their clients in the next 12 months.

COMMUNITY VISION
Supporting lifelong learning and education are critical investments for Walker County. A sound education system has long been a strength of our community and continues to be an asset today. However, more focus and community effort are needed to strengthen education programming from birth to the workforce.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY STRATEGIES
The Walker County Center of Technology, housed in a 50+ year-old building, wins multiple state and national awards each year. Our Foundation will serve as a convener, facilitator, and funder to help build a new center for our students. This Center will be a cornerstone for educational outcomes, job growth, and economic growth for the community.



▲ HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

STRATEGIC GOAL

Support a community where all individuals can grow and thrive with recreational opportunities and access to physical and mental health support

KEY DATA POINTS

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ranks Walker County 58th out of 67 counties for overall health outcomes, with heart disease, infant mortality, and substance use being major contributing factors.

The Healing Network of Walker County was created in 2019 and has more than 50 partner agencies. It includes a 24/7 helpline and a crisis intake and assessment hub.

In 2018, Walker County had only one Certified Recovery Support Specialist. Currently, we have 12 specialists who use their lived experience to support individuals and families through substance use recovery.

In our online survey, the highest-ranked need that would make Walker County a better place for all to live, work, and play was after-school and weekend activities for children, youth, and families.

COMMUNITY VISION

Health, well-being, and quality of life were all top themes named by stakeholders in the community needs assessment. These broad themes help individuals and families thrive while attracting visitors and new residents to the community by 1.) establishing solid infrastructure, amenities, and recreational opportunities for all communities and 2.) ensuring all citizens have access to physical and mental health services, including counseling, substance use treatment, and community health education.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

For over 15 years, the Foundation has been thinking and acting on these issues. Our community has made some progress, yet more is to be done around:

- the recruitment of resident medical professionals to Walker County
- expanding the reach of the Healing Network
- creating more access to counselors, especially those serving youth
- promoting the development of safe, fun, and productive activities for youth and families

90%

of respondents
said they would like
to be **more involved**
in making Walker
County a better
place for all.

81%

of survey
respondents said
they believe **Walker**
County can have a
better future if the
community works
together.

85%

of respondents
agreed that
collaboration and
partnership with
other nonprofits
is essential to their
organization.

◆ NEXT GENERATION LEADERSHIP

STRATEGIC GOAL

Cultivate future generations of informed, engaged leaders who share a vision, knowledge, and passion for continued community growth, collaboration, and philanthropy

KEY DATA POINTS

In our online survey, nearly 90% of respondents said they would like to be more involved in making Walker County a better place for all. Examples of ways residents would like to be involved include learning more about community events and issues, volunteering time, attending educational events on key community topics, participating in leadership programs, and mentoring youth.

Also, 81% of survey respondents said they believe Walker County can have a better future if the community works together.

In an online survey of nonprofit leaders, 85% of respondents agreed that collaboration and partnership with other nonprofits is essential to their organization.

COMMUNITY VISION

The community needs assessment consistently highlighted the importance of growing leadership and visionary figures across all subject areas. Stakeholders agree that robust leadership is crucial for community improvement. They emphasized the need for diverse leaders, including formal and elected officials, business leaders, community agency heads, and nonprofit leaders. There was also a focus on developing future leaders, including students, young professionals, and emerging talents.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

The Foundation has built a network of engaged leaders and community members because we desire to strengthen our community. We will continue developing highly effective leadership programs that provide participants with networks, skills, and perspectives. Through The Collective, the Foundation trains the next generation of public and civic leaders while teaching them the importance of serving their community.

WACF has awarded
3,957 GRANTS
totaling more than
\$50 MILLION
to more than **300**
nonprofit organizations, improving the lives of more than
75,000 INDIVIDUALS

► FOUNDATION GROWTH AND STEWARDSHIP

STRATEGIC GOAL

Inspire and enable the community to achieve a bold vision for the future through research, collaboration, sustainable growth, effective grantmaking, and responsible stewardship of resources

KEY DATA POINTS

Over the last 28 years, the Foundation has awarded 3,957 grants totaling more than \$50 million to more than 300 nonprofit organizations, improving the lives of more than 75,000 individuals.

The Foundation has experienced remarkable growth from \$6 million in 1995 to \$130 million in 2024, enabling us to continue expanding our grant capacity.

The Foundation's current initiatives on growth and stewardship include the Nonprofit Academy, Nonprofit Council Meetings, and the Mayors' Meetings.

COMMUNITY VISION

Achieving the community's bold vision and ambitious goals will require the Foundation to focus on its own growth and stewardship. Stakeholders suggest that the Foundation should act as a trusted, neutral convener to enhance education and awareness of community needs. This collaborative approach will ensure that resources are not just used to address immediate problems but are leveraged for the transformative changes the community seeks.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

To fulfill our mission effectively, we will continue to lead and enhance our grantmaking process for nonprofits, ensuring it remains supportive and efficient. Additionally, we will serve as a convener and facilitator to address community priorities, fostering collaboration and collective action. Your foundation is committed to attracting and cultivating funding sources that enable us to make meaningful investments in our community and its nonprofits, supporting sustainable growth and positive impact.



The people of Walker County and its Foundation recognize that it is a pivotal time for our area. Community members are proud to live and work here and recognize the significant advances made over the last decade. At the same time, we realize tough challenges remain.

The Foundation stands ready to support our community in realizing its collective vision of “Walker County seeks to be a place where all community members can have good jobs with excellent education, affordability, and a high quality of life” by:

- **Continuing to listen to community needs, fostering partnerships, and investing in strategic initiatives**
- **Committing to effective grantmaking, collaborating with stakeholders, and leveraging data to inform decision-making.**
- **Attracting and managing funding that fosters sustainable growth and positive impact in Walker County.**

This commitment reflects our belief in a brighter future for Walker County—where economic prosperity, educational excellence, health and well-being, and strong leadership converge to create a thriving community for future generations.

With your help, we are confident in our ability to make lasting improvements that benefit all who call Walker County home.

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