

Strategic Revision of the Sumner County Joint Economic and Community Development Board

Strategies for Enhanced Effectiveness and Increased Participation

Capstone Project
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I. Executive Summary

The Joint Economic and Community Development (JECD) Board represents a critical mechanism for coordinating economic growth and community development across Sumner County and its municipalities. Established pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated § 6-58-114, the JECD Board provides a framework for intergovernmental cooperation that is essential in a rapidly growing region of the Nashville metropolitan area. This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the current board structure, identifies key challenges affecting board performance, and provides detailed strategies for enhancing effectiveness and increasing participation among all stakeholders.

Sumner County has experienced remarkable population growth over the past two decades, with current estimates exceeding 215,000 residents (Sumner County, 2026). This growth trajectory, projected to continue for the foreseeable future, creates both opportunities and challenges that require coordinated regional planning. The JECD Board can serve as the primary vehicle for this coordination, yet the board currently faces structural and operational challenges that limit its capacity to fulfill this essential function. There are issues with vacant positions in key sectors, insufficient meeting frequency, limited private sector engagement, and an absence of formal performance metrics collectively undermine the board's potential effectiveness.

This report identifies five strategic priority areas for board improvement. First, governance reforms including revision of the interlocal agreement and enhancement of committee structures will provide a stronger organizational foundation. Second, integration of formal strategic planning processes will enable the board to move from reactive to proactive regional development. Third, strengthened coordination with partner organizations including Forward Sumner Economic Partnership, the Tennessee Department of Economic and

Community Development, TVA Economic Development, Tennessee Central Economic Authority, and municipal economic development authorities will leverage existing resources and expertise. Fourth, expanded participation from both board members and the broader private sector will bring essential perspectives and capabilities to the table. Fifth, implementation of formal performance metrics and accountability mechanisms will enable continuous improvement and demonstrate value to stakeholders.

II. Current Board Structure Analysis

Statutory Framework

Tennessee Code Annotated § 6-58-114 (2024 Tennessee Code, 2026) establishes the legal foundation for Joint Economic and Community Development Boards throughout the state. This statutory framework provides both requirements and flexibility that shape how the Sumner County JECD Board operates. Understanding these legal parameters is essential for any revision strategy, as proposed changes must remain within statutory boundaries while maximizing opportunities for local adaptation.

Interlocal Agreement Requirements

The statute requires that JECD Boards be established through an interlocal agreement between the county government and participating municipalities. This agreement must specify the board's composition, powers, duties, and operational procedures. The interlocal agreement serves as the board's governing document and can only be modified through the formal approval of all participating governmental entities. Sumner County's current interlocal agreement was established when the board was created and has not been substantially revised to address evolving regional needs. The revision process provides an opportunity for comprehensive reform, allowing participating governments to address multiple structural issues simultaneously.

Minimum Membership Requirements

State law establishes minimum membership requirements to ensure appropriate representation across governmental and community stakeholder groups. The board must include representatives from county government, participating municipal governments, education, economic development, business, and tourism sectors (2024 Tennessee Code, 2026). These requirements ensure that the board maintains a multi-sector perspective essential for effective regional planning, while the statute provides flexibility in how these requirements are implemented.

The statute also requires JECD Boards to meet, at a minimum, on a quarterly basis. This requirement establishes a floor for board activity but does not preclude more frequent meetings. The Sumner County JECD Board has historically met at the minimum frequency, which limits the board's capacity to address emerging issues in a timely manner and reduces opportunities for substantive engagement. Increasing meeting frequency beyond the statutory minimum represents a straightforward mechanism for enhancing board effectiveness (2024 Tennessee Code, 2026).

Joint Funding Formula

Tennessee law requires that JECD Boards operate under a joint funding formula that distributes financial responsibility among participating governmental entities. The specific formula is determined by the interlocal agreement and typically reflects factors such as population, assessed property values, or other equitable measures. The current funding formula should be evaluated as part of any comprehensive interlocal agreement revision to ensure resources are sufficient for the board's expanded mandate. In Sumner County, the JECD Board does not operate under a joint funding formula (2024 Tennessee Code, 2026).

Current Membership Composition

County Government Representation

County government representation on the board includes the County Mayor, who serves as a key leadership figure in regional economic development efforts. The County Mayor's office provides staff support for board operations and serves as the primary liaison between the JECD Board and county government. Additional county representation includes members of the County Commission as specified in the interlocal agreement.

Municipal Government Mayors/Managers

Municipal representation includes mayors or city managers from participating municipalities throughout Sumner County. These members bring essential local perspectives to regional planning discussions and serve as liaisons between the JECD Board and their respective municipal governments. Municipal participation is particularly important for ensuring that regional strategies accommodate local land use decisions, infrastructure capacities, and community preferences. The municipalities of Gallatin, Hendersonville, Portland, Westmoreland, White House, and Goodlettsville have varying levels of engagement with the JECD Board.

Education, Economic Development, Business, and Tourism

Beyond governmental representatives, the board includes members representing education (Sumner County Schools, TCAT, and/or Volunteer State Community College), economic development professionals, local business owners and executives, and tourism interests connected to Sumner County's history and natural resources.

Identified Challenges

Vacant Positions

The board currently has vacant positions in several key categories, including Tourism, Greenbelt, and Gallatin Business representation. These vacancies reduce the diversity of perspectives available to inform board deliberations and limit capacity to address sector-specific issues. Prolonged vacancies can signal to potential participants that board service is not valued, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of disengagement. Filling these vacancies should be an immediate priority.

Limited Advisory Authority

The JECD Board operates primarily in an advisory capacity, with limited direct authority to implement programs or allocate resources. The JECD Board authority varies by county. For example, Wilson County has a robust JECD Board with paid staff and economic development authority. Strengthening the board's advisory influence while respecting elected officials' decision-making authority represents an important reform opportunity.

Insufficient Meeting Frequency

Meeting at the statutory minimum of quarterly intervals limits the board's capacity to maintain momentum on strategic initiatives and respond to emerging opportunities or challenges. Quarterly meetings often focus primarily on routine business, leaving insufficient time for substantive strategic discussions. Moving to monthly or bi-monthly meetings would provide greater opportunity for engagement while remaining manageable for volunteer members.

Limited Private Sector Engagement

While the board includes positions for business sector representation, private sector engagement has been limited in both board membership and broader participation. The business community represents a vast reservoir of expertise, resources, and implementation capacity that remains largely untapped. Expanding private sector participation through formal membership and informal engagement mechanisms represents a significant opportunity.

Absence of Performance Metrics

The board currently operates without formal performance metrics or systematic evaluation processes. This absence makes it difficult to assess effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, or demonstrate value to stakeholders. Implementing a comprehensive performance measurement framework will enable evidence-based board management and provide accountability.

III Strategies for Increasing Board Effectiveness

Governance Structure Reforms

Interlocal Agreement Revision

The existing interlocal agreement should be comprehensively reviewed and revised. Key areas include expanded membership categories for private sector representation, clarified roles and responsibilities, enhanced committee structures, updated funding formula, and strengthened mechanisms for implementing recommendations. The revised agreement should establish clear attendance expectations, vacancy processes, periodic review mechanisms, and clarify the JECD Board's relationship with other regional organizations.

Committee Structure Enhancement

Standing committees focused on workforce development, infrastructure coordination, business retention and expansion, and strategic planning can expand board capacity. Each committee should operate under a clear charter specifying scope, membership, meeting expectations, and reporting requirements. Committee chairs should be appointed from board members, with staff support coordinated through the County Mayor's office.

Strategic Planning Integration

Vision and Goal Setting

The board should develop a clear vision statement articulating the desired future state for Sumner County's economic and community development. This vision should be accompanied by specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals addressing job creation and retention, wage and income growth, infrastructure development, quality of life enhancement, and sustainable growth management. The goal-setting process should involve extensive stakeholder input to ensure broad ownership.

Each strategic goal should be translated into specific action plans identifying activities, responsibilities, timelines, and resources required for implementation. Action plans provide the bridge between strategic intentions and operational execution and should be assigned to specific committees or individuals for implementation with clear accountability for progress and results.

Annual Review Process

An annual strategic review should assess progress toward goals, evaluate continued relevance of strategic priorities, identify emerging opportunities or challenges, and update action plans for the coming year. The annual review also provides an opportunity to celebrate successes, recognize contributions, and renew commitment to the shared vision.

Coordination with Partner Organizations

Forward Sumner Economic Partnership

Forward Sumner serves as the primary economic development organization for Sumner County, leading business recruitment and coordinating workforce development (Choose Sumner, 2026). The JECD Board's relationship with Forward Sumner should be clearly defined to ensure complementary activities. The board provides strategic direction and intergovernmental coordination, while Forward Sumner provides professional economic development capacity the board cannot replicate (Choose Sumner, 2026).

Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD)

The JECD Board should maintain an active relationship with TNECD to ensure awareness of available programs and to advocate for Sumner County's interests at the state level. TNECD staff can provide valuable input to board strategic planning and connect the board with best practices from other regions. The board should designate a liaison responsible for maintaining this relationship and reporting relevant developments to the full board.

TVA Economic Development

The Tennessee Valley Authority's economic development team provides site certification programs, prospect research services, and other resources that can enhance Sumner County's competitiveness for business investment (Economic Development, 2026). The JECD Board should ensure that local economic development activities coordinate with TVA programs and that Sumner County maintains visibility with TVA's economic development staff

Tennessee Central Economic Authority (TCEA).

The TCEA provides grant opportunities for economic development and can serve as an active participant in providing insight and guidance from a regional perspective. The TCEA is a

regional economic development organization committed to excellence in the manufacturing industry. Their mission is to recruit, retain, and expand advanced manufacturing job opportunities for the five-county region we serve in Middle Tennessee (About Us, 2026). The mayor of Sumner County currently serves on the board for TCEA and could provide a line of communication for involvement.

Municipal EDAs and Chambers

Municipal economic development authorities and local chambers of commerce conduct activities at the local level that should be coordinated with regional efforts. The JECD Board can serve as a forum for sharing information, identifying collaboration opportunities, and ensuring local activities align with regional strategic priorities.

ThreeStar Program Optimization

The Governor's ThreeStar Program, administered by TNECD, provides funding and recognition for communities demonstrating commitment to economic and community development best practices. ThreeStar requirements include maintaining an active JECD Board, developing and implementing economic development strategies, and demonstrating progress toward defined goals (Tennessee Economic and Community Development, 2026). These requirements align well with the board enhancement strategies recommended in this report. The board should view ThreeStar compliance not as a bureaucratic burden but as a framework for organizing and focusing its activities, with the annual reporting process serving as a component of the broader performance measurement system.

IV. Strategies for Increasing Participation

Board Member Engagement

Onboarding and Orientation

New board members should receive comprehensive onboarding that prepares them for effective participation from their first meeting. Onboarding should include review of the board's statutory basis and interlocal agreement, introduction to current strategic priorities and ongoing initiatives, orientation to board procedures and expectations, and connection with experienced board members who can provide mentorship. Written materials should be provided for reference, and follow-up sessions should address questions arising during initial service. This is currently not an administrative function for the board.

Role Alignment and Skills Utilization

Board members bring diverse skills and expertise that should be leveraged through intentional role alignment. This approach begins with assessment of each member's background, interests, and available capacity, followed by assignment to committees or initiatives that match capabilities. Regular check-ins with members can identify emerging interests or changing circumstances that warrant role adjustments, increasing both board productivity and member satisfaction. Again, there has not been attention given to the skillsets of board members.

Expanding Private Sector Participation

Business Community Representation Expansion

The interlocal agreement revision should expand formal business community representation on the board. Additional positions should represent the diversity of Sumner County's economy including manufacturing, healthcare, retail, professional services, and emerging sectors. Recruitment should be conducted strategically to identify business leaders with

both capability and commitment. Term limits and rotation mechanisms can ensure fresh perspectives while maintaining institutional knowledge.

Business Retention and Expansion Program

While business retention and expansion is primarily a municipal EDA function, the JECD can serve to provide a collective voice for projects throughout the county. A formal business retention and expansion program provides a mechanism for ongoing private sector engagement beyond formal board membership. Through this program, board members and staff conduct regular visits with existing businesses to understand needs, challenges, and growth plans. Information gathered informs strategic planning and identifies opportunities for intervention to retain or expand local businesses, while building relationships that can lead to increased participation in board activities.

Community Engagement Initiatives

Public Input Mechanisms

The board should establish formal mechanisms for public input including comment periods at meetings, community forums throughout the county, online surveys and feedback tools, and partnerships with community organizations. Public input should be systematically collected, analyzed, and incorporated into board deliberations.

Filling Vacant Positions

An immediate focus should be given to filling current board vacancies in Tourism, Greenbelt, and Gallatin Business positions. Recruitment should be conducted through multiple channels including direct outreach to qualified individuals, announcements through partner organizations, and public notice of open positions. The process should clearly communicate expectations and benefits of board service to attract high-quality candidates.

V. Performance Metrics and Accountability

Evaluation Framework

Board Performance Metrics

Board performance metrics should assess how effectively the board operates as an organization. Key metrics include meeting attendance rates, vacancy duration and fill rates, completion of action items, committee activity levels, stakeholder satisfaction with board performance, and timeliness of required reports and filings. These metrics provide leading indicators of board health and enable early intervention when performance trends are concerning. Regular review should be incorporated into meeting agendas to maintain visibility and accountability.

Economic Development Outcome Metrics

Outcome metrics assess the impact of economic and community development activities on the regional economy and quality of life. These metrics should align with strategic goals and may include job creation and retention numbers, private capital investment, wage growth, unemployment rates, new business formation, infrastructure improvements completed, and quality of life indicators. While the board cannot take sole credit for regional performance, tracking these metrics enables assessment of whether strategies are producing desired results and provides evidence for communicating value.

Reporting and Transparency

Quarterly and Annual Reports

The board should produce formal quarterly and annual reports documenting activities, achievements, and progress toward strategic goals. The quarterly reports provide regular updates suitable for board meetings and participating government sessions. The annual report provides a

comprehensive assessment along with strategic priorities for the coming year. Reports should be professionally produced and widely distributed to stakeholders.

ThreeStar Compliance Documentation

The board should maintain comprehensive documentation throughout the year to facilitate accurate ThreeStar reporting, integrating with the broader performance measurement framework to avoid duplication. Currently, this function is being completed by Forward Sumner.

VI. Conclusion and Key Recommendations

The Sumner County JECD Board has the potential to serve as a powerful mechanism for coordinating regional economic and community development efforts across the county and its municipalities. Realizing this potential requires addressing current structural and operational challenges through the comprehensive strategies outlined in this report.

Governance: Revise Interlocal Agreement

It is important to initiate a comprehensive review and revision of the interlocal agreements governing the JECD Board. The revised agreements should address expanded membership categories, enhanced committee structures, updated funding formulas, and strengthened implementation mechanisms. This revision process should engage all participating governmental entities and incorporate input from current board members and community stakeholders. The target date for completion of the revised agreement is within twelve months.

Structure: Create Specialized Standing Committees

The board should develop clear charters for each committee that specify scope, membership, meeting expectations, and reporting requirements. Committee chairs should be appointed from board members with relevant expertise, and membership should be expanded to include additional community members. The full committee structure should be implemented

within six months, with all committees operational and reporting to the full board within nine months.

Engagement: Comprehensive Onboarding, Expand Private Sector

The board will develop and implement a comprehensive onboarding program to ensure new members are fully prepared to contribute from the outset. Private sector representation will be expanded by adding business positions in the revised interlocal agreement and recruiting high-quality business leaders to fill those roles. A formal business retention and expansion program will be established to maintain ongoing, meaningful engagement with the broader business community. Additionally, meeting structure will be strengthened through the advance distribution of agendas and the deliberate allocation of time for strategic discussion.

Accountability: Formal Performance Metrics and Reporting

A comprehensive performance measurement framework will be implemented encompassing both board operational metrics and economic development outcome metrics. Quarterly and annual reporting processes will be established, with reports distributed to all stakeholders on a consistent basis. ThreeStar compliance documentation will be integrated into the broader measurement system to create a unified and cohesive approach to accountability. Metric tracking will begin within three months, with the first annual report completed and released within eighteen months.

Community: Public Input Opportunities, Fill Vacancies

Formal mechanisms for public input should be established, encompassing structured comment periods at meetings, community forums, and accessible online feedback tools, with all input systematically collected, analyzed, and meaningfully incorporated into board deliberations. Current vacancies in the Tourism, Greenbelt, and Gallatin Business positions must be treated as

an immediate priority, addressed through active and targeted recruitment efforts. Looking beyond the present gaps, the board should adopt ongoing vacancy prevention measures such as term tracking, succession planning, and early recruitment initiatives before terms expire.

Successful implementation of these recommendations will require sustained commitment from county and municipal leadership, active engagement from board members and the broader community, and consistent attention to measuring and communicating results. The time and resources invested in board revitalization will yield significant returns through expanded economic opportunities, stronger community development, and more efficient coordination of regional growth. Sumner County's continued prosperity depends on effective regional leadership, and a revitalized JECD Board is well-positioned to provide that leadership for years to come.

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