

NEPA Alliance Powers a Community-Wide CEDS Process with 577 Participants

577

Community Participants
Surveyed

130

Pages of Textual
Responses Generated

100

Community Leaders in
Planning Committee

THE CHALLENGE

A Five-Year Plan with Limited Budget for Outside Help

Every five years, the NEPA Alliance must develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The process demands extensive community engagement across multiple economic sectors. But with funding flatlined for over 30 years, Kurt Bauman, Vice President of Economic Development, had limited budget to hire a consultant and limited staff to manage the effort.

Kurt had an unexpected fear going in: what if the process worked too well? What if engaging the community at scale generated so much input that his small team couldn't synthesize it into a focused plan?

THE SOLUTION

AI-Powered Community Listening at Scale

NEPA Alliance used StratSimple's Virtual Interview Survey to run their community outreach. Unlike a traditional survey that collects surface-level answers, StratSimple's AI-driven approach prompted respondents with follow-up questions, drawing out deeper perceptions, observations, and ideas that a standard questionnaire would miss.

The tool then synthesized all 577 responses and automatically generated a presentation that launched the first in-person CEDS meeting. What would have taken weeks of manual review was ready before the committee even convened.

AT A GLANCE

PROJECT

CEDS for the EDA (2025)

REGION POPULATION

1,038,822

CEDS COMMITTEE SIZE

100 community leaders



I was worried that using an AI tool would give us more input than we could handle, but it did the opposite- StratSimple synthesized everything and gave us a clear starting point. What used to take weeks of staff time was ready before our first meeting.

- Kurt Bauman, VP of Economic Development, NEPA Alliance



HOW IT WORKED

From Community Outreach to Actionable Strategy

STEP 1

Targeted Stakeholder Recruitment

NEPA Alliance identified thought leaders across 8 economic sectors and personally invited them to serve as facilitators. They paired internal experts with outside voices to avoid bias and built in redundancy with 3 facilitators per sector.

STEP 2

AI-Powered Community Survey

StratSimple's Virtual Interview Survey went beyond standard questionnaires. AI follow-up prompts drew out richer, more detailed responses, capturing nuances that short answers miss. 577 community members participated.

STEP 3

Automated Synthesis

StratSimple synthesized 130 pages of textual responses and auto-generated a presentation that kicked off the first CEDS committee meeting. The team walked in with a data-backed starting point, not a blank whiteboard

STEP 4

Sector-Led In-Person Sessions

Thought leaders facilitated focused sessions exploring challenges, opportunities, and threats in each sector. Public solicitation through their newsletter brought in unexpected, diverse voices that enriched the final strategy.

The Results

577

Community members engaged through AI-powered survey

130

Pages of rich, qualitative data synthesized automatically

8

Economic sectors covered with community leader facilitators

NEPA Alliance completed their 2025 CEDS with a plan that reflected genuine community priorities. StratSimple's AI-powered survey and synthesis tools removed the barriers that made past cycles labor-intensive, transforming raw community input into actionable insights. What started as a fear of being overwhelmed became a faster, more inclusive, and more insightful process.



Our biggest frustration with surveys was always getting short answers that didn't tell us enough. StratSimple's AI follow-ups pulled out the real insights. And then the tool synthesized it all into a presentation we could act on immediately.

-Kurt Bauman, VP of Economic Development, NEPA Alliance

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