

2024-2025 Benchmark Report

A recap of programming, initiatives and results





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01

Mission



**TO ACCELERATE
PROSPERITY OF
THE GRAND STRAND**

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Who We Are

The Partnership Grand Strand (PGS) Foundation is a 501c3 formed in 2022 and was activated in January 2023. We are an extension of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce to serve all of Horry and Georgetown counties (which includes the entire Grand Strand.)

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Our History

We Were Created
BY
Local Businesses
FOR
Local Businesses..



In 2020, a group of local business leaders from across the Grand Strand recognized the need for a more targeted effort to ensure the long-term growth and prosperity of the region. In response, a comprehensive assessment was commissioned in 2021, led by Power 10 Consulting.

After hundreds of stakeholder interviews and in-depth data analysis, the firm identified four key focus areas: Workforce Development, Small Business & Entrepreneurial Support, Policy Advocacy (including infrastructure and business related legislation), and Downtown Myrtle Beach Redevelopment.

To bring this vision to life, the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce -- under the leadership of former CEO, Karen Riordan -- established the Partnership Grand Strand Foundation and secured its 501c3 status. The balance of that year was focused on fundraising. By Fall of 2022, the team had secured 5-year pledges from local businesses totaling over \$3 million.

In early 2023, the organization's first strategic plan was finalized and approved.

Today, Partnership Grand Strand is a privately funded initiative supported by over 83 investors, united in their commitment to build a stronger more vibrant future for the Grand Strand community.

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Our 4 Strategic Focus Areas



Local Business

Leading efforts to diversify our region's economy & fostering small business growth



Workforce

Attracting talent, developing young leaders & retaining a high-quality workforce



Placemaking

Supporting the economic development and the revitalization of downtown



Public Policy

Advocating for improved infrastructure and other key issues effecting area growth



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How We Get Things Done



Educate /Inform

Both ourselves & others.
Draw conclusion, identify opportunities



Convene

Facilitate bringing the experts together.



Advoc

Identify agreed to priorities. Then promote and support.

Partnership Grand Strand was created to **SERVE** as an organization that can work to **SUPPORT** all entities that are currently driving economic prosperity, thus our name “Partnership” Grand Strand.

We recognize that our communities must work together if we are to successfully achieve our mutual goals.

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Highlights From
2024-25
Prosperity Initiatives

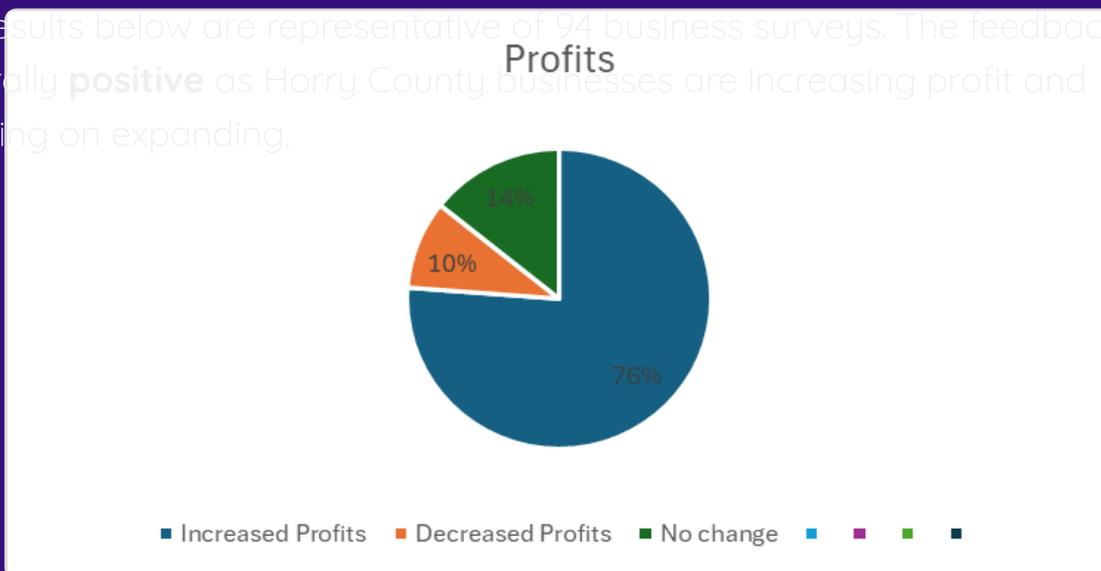
08

Business Retention and Expansion Interviews

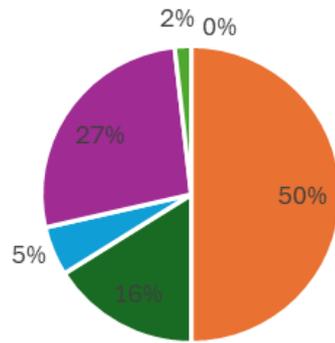


PGS set out to assess the overall climate, environment, and morale of local entrepreneurs. Our goal was to identify key challenges, current needs, growth plans, and areas of opportunity. To gather this insight, PGS facilitated focus groups and actively participated in local small business networking organizations. All responses were compiled into a comprehensive database, which PGS is now using to inform and guide ongoing initiatives.

The results below are representative of 94 business surveys. The feedback is generally **positive** as Horry County businesses are increasing profit and planning on expanding.

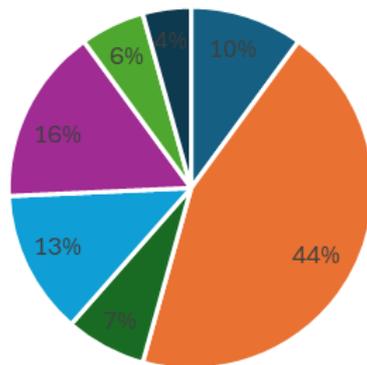


Considering



■ Closing ■ Expanding ■ Merging ■ Moving ■ None of the Above ■ Selling ■

Areas of Concern



■ Childcare ■ Cost of Living ■ Crime ■ Education ■ Healthcare ■ Transportation ■ Other

09

LOCAL Businesses
are a
BIG DEAL

Local businesses are the backbone of the Grand Strand community. They fuel our economy, create jobs, and bring unique character to our region. That's why we launched the Big Deal contest—an initiative designed to let local businesses know they're seen, valued, and truly integral to our area's success.

This contest is more than just recognition—it's our way of celebrating the hard work, creativity, and resilience of the businesses that keep our community thriving. By highlighting and uplifting these businesses, we not only increase their visibility but also foster a sense of pride and connection within the community.



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Components of the
big DEAL initiative:



We believe that local businesses are truly a BIG DEAL. So we launched a simple “selfie” contest to facilitate a way for local businesses to get selected to win “Lunch on Us”.

Local businesses (and customers) were invited to take a “selfie” picture in front of their location, post it to social media and use #bigdealcontest. Every month, we do a random drawing to select the winner. Our team then coordinates a luncheon for their staff as well as recognition on our social platforms.

We also have a display of BIG DEAL Contest winners that is displayed at our networking events.

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Celebrating National Small Business Week

This initiative gave PGS the opportunity to amplify appreciation for the small businesses that serve as the backbone of the Grand Strand economy.

As part of the celebration, PGS treated a different local business to lunch each day during small business week (5 in total). The goal was to ensure these businesses felt proud, valued, and truly recognized for their contributions to the community.

PGS also used its BIG Mixer event to spotlight additional local businesses, honoring the vital role they play in strengthening the region. Through enhanced social media recognition and in-person celebrations, PGS made it clear: when you do business in the Grand Strand, you're not just supported—you're celebrated.



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Networking Events

The **BIG Mixer is a FREE**, structured business-to-business networking event that regularly brings together approximately 150 local professionals and business owners. Designed to foster meaningful connections within the local business community, the event features a passport system that encourages attendees to visit each sponsor table, ensuring active engagement and increased visibility for participating organizations. The BIG Mixer serves as a valuable platform for building relationships, promoting local businesses, and strengthening the regional business ecosystem. Prior to PGS, this marketplace had very few free business networking opportunities.



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Partnership with Coastal
Carolina University (CoBE)
Institute Delivers Consulting
Services to Local Businesses

These high-achieving students apply their academic knowledge to real-world challenges by developing tools such as standard operating procedures (SOPs), employee handbooks, marketing plans, financial strategies, and more. This collaboration not only assist with customized scopes of work aimed at improving business efficiency of local businesses but also provides valuable experiential learning opportunities for future business leaders. This program follows an application process that can be found on our website.



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Education that Recharges Your Business



Our **“Recharge Series”** is a dynamic collection of abbreviated workshops designed to deliver best-in-class training on the topics that matter most to small businesses.

PGS understands that small business owners are busy, strapped for time – so we created these smaller “recharge” events to address this pain point.

Each session is conducted over a light breakfast or lunch and focuses on real-world strategies and expert insights in key areas like: workforce development, operational efficiency, sustainability, strategic session planning, financial management, legal compliance, and marketing.

Whether you’re looking to sharpen your skills or spark new growth, Recharge is your go-to source for practical knowledge and fresh ideas to keep your business moving forward.

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Big Mentor Experience & Big Mentor Moment

This one-of-a-kind, innovative approach to small business growth and retention includes five of the “recharge” sessions (listed above) AND an opportunity for participants to present their newly refined business strategies to a panel of local business mentors.

These mentors are subject matter experts from the Grand Strand. They are coming together to offer an AMAZING mentor experience. Participants will get personalized, one-on-one feedback and suggestions. Another example of partnership that will drive prosperity.



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Workforce and Talent Retention Initiatives

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Career Readiness Showcase

CAREER READINESS SHOWCASE

We are connecting the HC High School classroom to Careers through the execution of this showcase initiative. Every Horry County High School has a specific CTE (Career Technology) curriculum program. These CTE courses prepare students for technical careers, and we believe our business community needs to see what these programs are all about.

Over the course of six months, local employers have the unique opportunity to step inside the classrooms shaping Horry County's future workforce. Through this immersive initiative, business leaders visit every high school in the district, gaining firsthand exposure to the cutting-edge Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs preparing students for real-world careers.

From hands-on demonstrations and student-led projects to one-on-one conversations with passionate educators, employers see the depth of talent and innovation within Horry County Schools. These visits spark meaningful dialogue, uncover partnership opportunities, and reveal how much the district truly invests in student success.

One direct result of this employer involvement was the creation of a brand-new HVAC program launched at the Academy for Technology and Academics—created in response to industry feedback.

“A whole new viewpoint on education in Horry County! It was incredibly eye opening how much HCS cares for its students and their futures. This is what education is supposed to be!”

— Gillian Reinhardt, CLC Worldwide

This is more than a tour - it's an invitation to shape the future workforce, build relationships, and see education in action.

Apply for the next cohort on our website.

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RISE Internships

The RISE Internship Program is designed to strengthen local businesses by connecting them with highly qualified internship candidates for summer employment. Fully managed by the Coastal Carolina University team, the program offers local employers the opportunity to create customized job descriptions tailored to their unique needs. University staff then identifies and vets top student candidates. The employer is given the best 2–3 applicants for final interviews and selection.



All logistical components — including wages, insurance, and administrative coordination—are handled by CCU, allowing businesses to focus solely on providing a meaningful internship experience. Participating companies commit to offering a supportive and educational environment for their intern, ensuring mutual benefit.

Thanks to Partnership Grand Strand, these internships are subsidized, making access to top-tier talent both easy and affordable.

In 2024-25, Partnership Grand Strand is proud to say that we executed 12 internships and over 50% of the students received job offers at the close of their internship.

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Career Discovery
Programs are
“Amazing”

We have created a series of “Amazing” initiatives that allow students to gain meaningful exposure to careers they are interested in. We have partnered with Horry County Schools to help identify each Junior or Senior’s career interest and then expose them to professionals and work environments that match their interest.



START 
SOMETHING
AMAZING

Start Something Amazing is our health sciences exploration. Through our partnerships with local hospitals, students are provided the opportunity to discover careers in healthcare. They learn the education required to pursue these careers as well as an outline of potential career paths and salary.

Build Something Amazing is our skilled trades exploration program. It introduces students to a wide range of trade careers and helps them better understand the many career paths available in the trades.

BUILD 
SOMETHING
AMAZING

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Workforce Forum



This annual forum brings together key stakeholders from across the Grand Strand who are involved in talent development, workforce expansion, human resources, and career placement. Designed to address the most pressing challenges in our regional workforce, the forum provides a platform for collaboration, learning, and strategic discussion.

Local businesses and business owners are encouraged to attend, as their insight and participation are vital to shaping effective workforce solutions. Attendees will gain a comprehensive update on the current state of the local labor market, explore timely topics, and expand their professional networks with fellow career and workforce professionals.

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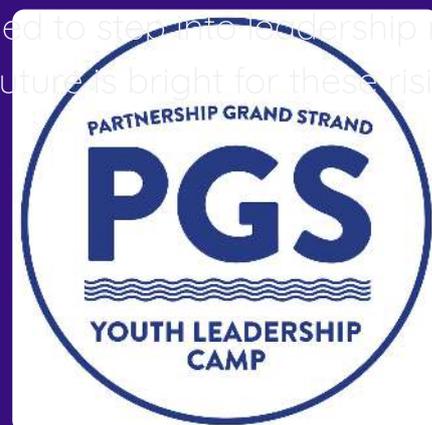
Youth Leadership Camp

Partnership Grand Strand launched our Youth Leadership Camp in May 2025

We believe there is nothing more valuable than investing in the development of tomorrow's leaders. We launched our inaugural Youth Leadership Camp in partnership with Coastal Carolina University. It was a resounding success!

Local high school students came together for a week of growth, connection, and discovery. Hand-selected by school staff for their leadership potential, these students participated in dynamic team-building activities and received practical lessons from local experts in areas like financial literacy, leadership development, and project planning.

One of the highlights of the camp was the creation of student-led social impact projects, which will be implemented at their high schools this fall. The camp not only equipped participants with essential skills but also gave them the confidence boost they needed to step into leadership roles within their schools and communities. The future is bright for these rising changemakers!



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Coastal Carolina
Professional Development
Partnership



PGS is proud to collaborate with Coastal Carolina University to facilitate professional development activities designed to help students grow both personally and professionally. These sessions support students in fulfilling college requirements while enhancing essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and workplace readiness.

This past year we conducted two networking sessions for these coastal students and delivered training on the topics of networking and personal branding.

Through this partnership, PGS is helping prepare the next generation of professionals to thrive in their careers and make meaningful contributions to the workforce.



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Careers at the Coast

Careers at the Coast is a premier hiring event created in collaboration with local workforce development partners. It is the first collaborative effort in the Grand Strand surrounding talent recruitment. This event hosted over 30 businesses and was designed to deliver an exceptional experience for both job seekers and employers.

Careers at the Coast exemplifies a true collaboration between the local educational and workforce experts. As Careers at the Coast grows, many of the smaller independently executed career fairs may not be necessary.



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Insiders Initiative

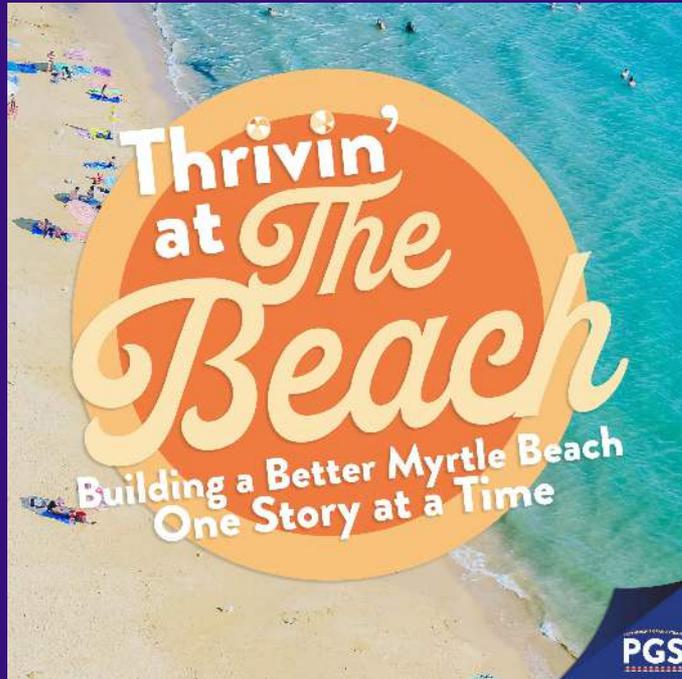


In partnership with the Grand Strand Young Professionals organization, PGS created a proprietary ‘behind the scenes’ experience. This is a talent retention program, intended to expose Coastal Carolina students and our young professionals to the many fascinating businesses in our back yard. Participants observe how things are made and what goes into delivering a finished product or event.

These young adults had an opportunity to attend the Culinary School and see how a commercial kitchen is run, tour DC Blox, get proper dining / etiquette education from a certified professional and observe what goes into the production of a symphony performance from the Long Bay Symphony. Future plans include a behind the scenes look at Ripley’s Aquarium and Brookgreen Gardens’ Nights of 1000 Candles.

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Thrivin' at the Beach Podcast



Created to showcase the numerous leaders in our community. Intended to let them tell their story surrounding the work they are doing to drive a bright future for the Grand Strand. We had guests from the City of Myrtle Beach, The Myrtle Beach Downtown Alliance, Habitat for Humanity, The Myrtle Beach Regional Economic Development Corporation, HGTC, Coastal Carolina University and many more.

You can find Thrivin' at the Beach wherever you get your podcasts.

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Place Initiatives



Partnership Grand Strand plays a purely supportive role as it relates to placemaking in the downtown Myrtle Beach area.



We stay close to their plans and identify mutually beneficial ways that we can support them. This past year we provided financial support for the creation of the residential community plan for downtown Myrtle Beach.

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Public Policy Initiatives

The Fix Horry Roads marketing campaign is an example of a public policy initiative that we were able to support in 2024-25. This is the referendum that was on the November 2024 ballot that extended the penny tax from Ride IV to multiple years. PGS provided marketing support funding to ensure this referendum was fully explained to voters and ultimately approved.

We take our lead from the community regarding these public policy initiatives and work closely with the public policy teams at the chambers to collaborate on their needs.



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Town Hall Meetings

Partnership Grand Strand facilitates Town Hall Meetings twice each year. These are truly Town Hall type meetings where we invite multiple local leadership organizations to provide updates on their various initiatives and take questions.

These are for all our investors and interested local residents. Town Halls are wonderful opportunities to hear from multiple entities regarding the progress happening in our Grand Strand community.



"2024-2025 Benchmark Report" delves into the transformative initiatives led by Partnership Grand Strand, showcasing a robust collaboration between local businesses and educational institutions.

With innovative programs like the Recharge Series and the Career Readiness Showcase, this report highlights how PGS is enhancing business operations while preparing the next generation for success.

Discover how strategic partnerships and hands-on experiences are driving economic growth and workforce development in Horry County.



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