

PARTNERSHIP  
**GRAND  
STRAND**



**2024-25**  
**BENCHMARK REPORT**

**ACCELERATING  
THE PROSPERITY  
OF THE GRAND STRAND**



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# INTRODUCTION

The 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.

# OUR MISSION

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**ACCELERATE THE ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS ACROSS THE GRAND STRAND.**

## WHO WE ARE

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**PARTNERSHIP GRAND STRAND** IS A 501(C)(3) NONPROFIT OF MYRTLE BEACH AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SERVING ALL OF **HORRY AND GEORGETOWN COUNTIES**. THE FOUNDATION WAS **FORMED IN 2022** AND ACTIVATED IN JANUARY 2023.

# 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

# OUR STRATEGY



## Educate/Inform

Both ourselves and others.

Draw conclusions.

Identify opportunities.



## Convene

Facilitate bringing experts together.



## Advocate

Identify priorities to promote and support.

Partnership Grand Strand was created to support all entities that are currently driving economic prosperity in the Grand Strand. We recognize that our communities must work together if we are to successfully achieve our mutual goals.

# PROSPERITY HIGHLIGHTS

# BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION



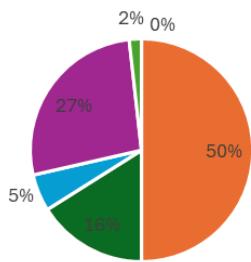
PGS set out to assess the overall climate, environment, and morale of local entrepreneurs. Our goal was to identify key challenges, current needs, growth plans, and areas of opportunity. To gather this insight, PGS facilitated focus groups and actively participated in local, small business networking 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.

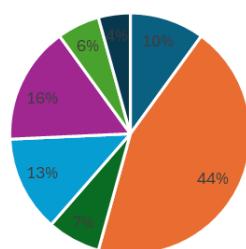
## Profits



## Considering



## Areas of Concern



- Closing
- Expanding
- Merging
- Moving
- None of the Above
- Selling
- 
- Childcare
- Cost of Living
- Crime
- Education
- Healthcare
- Transportation
- Other

## SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES



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.

## NETWORK OPPORTUNITIES



The BIG Mixer is a FREE, structured business-to-business networking event that regularly brings together about 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.

## CONSULTING SERVICES TO LOCAL BUSINESSES



PGS has an agreement with the Community and Business Engagement Institute (CoBE) at Coastal Carolina University that helps partner local businesses with a student team at the university to assist with specific projects that improve business operations. These high-achieving students apply their academic knowledge to real-world challenges by developing tools such as standard operating procedures, employee handbooks, marketing plans, financial strategies and more. This collaboration not only supports the growth and efficiency of local businesses but also provides valuable experiential learning opportunities for future business leaders.

## EDUCATION TO RECHARGE 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, 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.

## 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 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 one-on-one feedback and suggestions. Another example of how partnership can drive prosperity.



# WORKFORCE HIGHLIGHTS

## CAREER READINESS SHOWCASE

### CAREER READINESS SHOWCASE

PGS connects Horry County high school classrooms to careers through the execution of this showcase initiative. Every Horry County high school has a specific Career Technology Curriculum (CTE) which features courses to prepare students for technical careers. 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.

**“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.



## RISE INTERNSHIPS

Coastal Carolina University's Resilience, Innovation, and Sustainability through Education (RISE) Internship Program is designed to strengthen local businesses by connecting them with highly qualified internship candidates for summer employment.



Fully managed by the RISE Center team, the program offers local employers the opportunity to create customized job descriptions tailored to their unique needs. University staff then identify and vet top student candidates, presenting the employer with the best two to three 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 internal, 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 twelve internships and more than 50% of the students received job offers at the close of their internship.



# AMAZING CAREER DISCOVERY PROGRAMS



## START SOMETHING AMAZING

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

**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

**Build Something Amazing** is our skilled trade exploration. Students are **exposed to the numerous trade jobs** that exist and are given the opportunity to understand their options.

The Amazing series allows businesses to have meaningful, curated conversations with future talent, sharing insights about career pathways, company culture and the benefits of working in their industry. These events go beyond basic introductions; they encourage ongoing dialogue and open the door to internships, part-time jobs and long-term hiring opportunities.

# 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.

# YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP



Investing in the development of tomorrow's leaders is critical to the area's long-term prosperity. In May 2025, 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!

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

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 CCU 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 local workforce.

## 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.

# INSIDERS EVENTS



In partnership with the Grand Strand Young Professionals (GSYP) 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 get to 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.

## PLACE INITIATIVES



PGS plays a truly supporting role regarding the MBDA. 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.

## 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.

# TOWN HALL MEETINGS

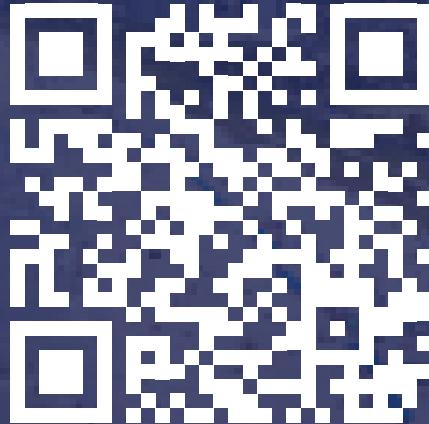
Partnership Grand Strand facilitates Town Hall Meetings twice each year. These are truly Town Hall type meetings where we invite multiple local leadership organizations to provide updates on their various initiatives and take questions.

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.



# CONNECT WITH PGS

**SCAN TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
& SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER**



PARTNERSHIP

# GRAND STRAND



**ACCELERATING THE PACE OF PROSPERITY**



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