

UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
 Annual Report to the Board Members Representing Saluda County
 For the Fiscal Year Ending 2024

Financial Review - Upper Savannah COG Revenue Highlights

Local Government Funding	\$151,524
State Aid to COGs	110,533
Federal & State	2,619,368
General, In-kind & Miscellaneous	94,500
Contractual & Direct Services	<u>5,570,111</u>
TOTAL	\$8,546,036

Return on Investment – Saluda County – Fiscal Year 2024

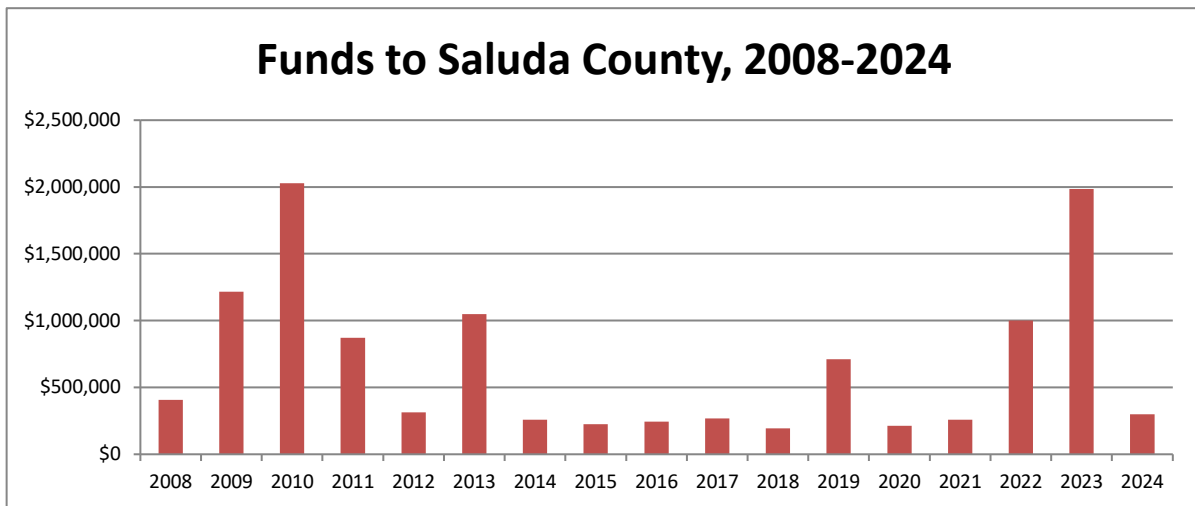
Local Government Investment	\$13,175
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Funds to Saluda County

Aging Direct Services	\$185,194
Workforce Development Direct Services	39,006
Grant by USCOG Initiation – FY 2024 (see page 2)	<u>74,512</u>

TOTAL	298,712
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Return on Investment: 23:1



Direct Services funding consists of federal and state dollars for Workforce Development and Aging program services provided to the counties in the Upper Savannah region based on performance, need and eligibility. The COG administers these two programs under contract for direct service delivery and is responsible for the allocation and fiscal administration of these dollars. The funds assist in delivering services that provide for the health, welfare and employment of certain segments of a county’s population, thus easing the financial and administrative burden on local governments.

Direct grants awarded in Fiscal Year 2024:

- **CDBG-CV Cares Act - \$70,712** – Home Delivered Meals
- **SC BEST - \$3,800** – Riverside School Brownfields environmental testing

Saluda County Highlights

Town of Ridge Spring Sewer Rehab - Town received \$1,700,000 in CDBG funds in August 2022 to rehabilitate three major sections of the Town’s main sewer trunkline. A study completed in 2005 indicated excessive inflow and infiltration within the Town’s system. Recent inspections indicated conditions significantly worsened. Project includes approximately 2,541 linear feet (LF) of 8” gravity sewer, 2,151 LF of 10” gravity sewer, 200 LF of 16” steel encased pipe (bore), 3,361 LF of CIPP and installation of approximately 42 manholes. Project costs estimated to be \$2,086,090, including \$386,090 from Town. Upper Savannah and the Town are in the process of acquiring the right of way. Project will go out to bid once acquisition is complete.

Town of Saluda Streetscape - The Town received \$721,212 in CDBG funding in November 2021 for streetscape at North Main and West Church streets. The project focuses on beautification throughout downtown in hopes of providing a welcoming atmosphere for economic development, while improving and providing accessibility for all. Improvements would encourage foot traffic, potentially stimulating business opportunities within the available storefronts. The project includes a \$102,562 local match for total cost of \$823,774. Construction began in May 2024.

Home-Delivered Meals - CDBG-CV (Coronavirus) funds were used to provide home-delivered meals to qualifying seniors in the County. These seniors included those on waiting lists for meals funded by State Unit on Aging dollars and some congregate diners. A total of 10,554 meals were served in Saluda County from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024. Cost of the meals was \$70,711.80.

Riverside School Brownfields Testing – Town of Saluda received \$3,800 in SC BEST (Brownfields Environmental Site Testing) funding for environmental testing of the old school. This site at 404 N. Bouknight Ferry Rd. is a former school that is being developed as new transitional housing with associated services.

Revolving Loan Fund Programs - Staff are currently servicing three loans in Saluda County. The original loan amount on all these loans totals \$96,000.

SC Works Centers – SC Works Centers are the focal point of the workforce development system and are located in all seven counties in the Upper Savannah Workforce Area. Abbeville County added 62 available jobs during FY ‘24 within the SC Works system. Throughout the year, 188 individuals entered the Abbeville SC Works Center to receive services with assistance for more than 600 job searches. A total of 21 employer services were logged in the Abbeville Center.

Regional Job Fairs – Helped hundreds of job seekers and 70+ employers at Upper Savannah SC Works/Piedmont Technical College Regional Job Fairs in March 2024 and October 2023 at

Piedmont Technical College in Greenwood. Also assisted with several other smaller job fairs in Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, Laurens, Newberry and Saluda counties. Many of these smaller job fairs are also predated by resume and interviewing workshops to give the public a chance to prepare with staff prior to each hiring event.

H1B Rural Healthcare Training Grant – Upper Savannah partnered with the Pee Dee Council of Governments on a \$2.2 million grant to provide training assistance for in-demand health care occupations. Upper Savannah identified an immediate need for Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics to fill severely understaffed stations in all our Region’s counties. Upper Savannah partnered with Piedmont Technical College to provide these trainings to interested students or incumbent EMT workers looking to advance their EMT training to Advanced EMT or Paramedic. Through 2024, 102 trainings were completed in our Region. More than 50 percent of students who earned credentials went to work in Emergency Medicine for our Region’s county agencies. Most county EMS stations did see a drastic decrease in vacancies. The grant will end in January 2025.

High School Seniors – Distributed “Your Next Step” booklet to the more than 2,000 high school seniors across the Upper Savannah Region before graduation; includes list of employers who hire recent graduates as well as job search tips and information regarding pursuing higher education locally. Students from Abbeville, Calhoun Falls and Dixie high schools were among those receiving booklets.

Giving Middle and High School Students a Glimpse of Future – Held career exploration activities day for 1,500 middle school and high school students from throughout the Region, featuring hands-on demonstrations and computer simulations from several area employers. This included the ambulance simulator that was purchased by the COG for Piedmont Technical College via the H1B Rural Healthcare Training Grant Funding.

Partners – Our vital network of partners continue to help across the Workforce Area’s seven counties to provide and utilize all resources in our Region to reach individuals and offer career assistance, training opportunities, and overall barrier-breaking services to empower clients. This system allows for a referral process from partner to partner, ensuring that clients are being met with particular services that encompass their total need.

Economic Development Administration (EDA) – Updated the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to keep the Upper Savannah Region eligible for EDA funding. Assisted in the development of project applications for the Town of Gray Court and Piedmont Technical College and continued administering two funded projects in Laurens County. The PTC Health Sciences building grant application for \$11.27 million will be awarded in FY ’25.

South Carolina Infrastructure Improvement Program (SCIIP) - Assisted local governments and utilities in administering South Carolina Infrastructure Improvement Act (SCIIP) funds for water, sewer, and stormwater projects through the South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) awarded in April 2023. These funds were originally American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars directed to the state. USCOG will continue to assist in the implementation of nine awarded projects in the region totaling \$26,598,719, including projects for City of Abbeville, Town of Due West, Town of Edgefield, Ninety Six CPW, Town of Ware Shoals, City of Clinton, Laurens CPW, McCormick CPW and Town of Ridge Spring. Saluda County SCIIP projects include Town of Ridge

Spring Water System & Storm Drainage Evaluation, \$500,000; and Saluda County Water & Sewer Authority Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade, \$2,918,750 SCIIP.

The Ridge Spring Water System and Storm Drainage Evaluation project involves the development of a plan to consider asset conditions, capacity, financial conditions and rates. This project helps a very small system comprehensively assess and prioritize system needs as well as evaluate various options for achieving long-term viability. It is expected to directly serve approximately 502 households and 92 businesses.

The Saluda County Water & Sewer Authority Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades project involves the installation of sludge components at the new wastewater treatment plant, which will also serve the Saluda Commission of Public Works. The project also includes installation of bypass pumps at five pump stations. This project implements a regional solution that will strengthen multiple utilities, leading to greater reliability of critical services. It is expected to directly serve a total of approximately 127 households and six businesses.

Transportation Planning – Completed work on a regional plan to reduce and eliminate roadway departure vehicle crashes. These types of crashes, where a vehicle leaves its designated lane and crashes into an object, land feature or another vehicle, are the number one type of accident in the Upper Savannah COG region. Speeding, driver distraction, driver impairment, and not wearing seat belts contribute to the high number of deaths and serious injuries from these types of crashes. Counter measures include more lighted or reflective signage and various pavement treatments.

Transit – Received, reviewed, and ranked transit grants from regional providers and forwarded them on to SC Department of Transportation. Continuing to pursue grants and partnerships to expand transit in all counties and throughout the region.

Planning Commissioner Training – Hosted numerous workshops to provide planning commissioners, zoning appeals board members, and staff with state-mandated training. Across the region, 78 people received the required training, including 18 from Saluda County.

Community Development Block Grants – Began close-out on grant awards for CDBG-CV1 (Coronavirus) Public Services funding. The food service portion of the program continued through the end of the past fiscal year (June 30, 2024).

Americans with Disabilities Act – Continued updating ADA plans for local governments as needed by the Community Development program.

Environmental Reviews – Completed environmental reviews for Community Development Block Grant projects.

Upper Savannah Land Trust – Continued providing technical assistance to the Upper Savannah Land Trust, which has preserved 57,753 acres in an eight-county area that includes the USCOG region. Saluda County has 17 easements covering a total of 3,069 acres.

HOME – Continued monitoring completed projects with the HOME Investment Partnership Program. HOME is a HUD-funded program that provides rehab or new construction funding for

homes of low-income individuals and rental units. Monitoring tenant income and rent levels will continue for the next 14 years. There is no more local funding in this program.

Planning – Continued assisting various municipal and county planning commissions with development or zoning questions as needed.

Grant writing – Assisted with grant writing for local governments as requested.

Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) Services – The Upper Savannah Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) provides, coordinates and contracts for services to the Upper Savannah Region’s senior population. In addition to the regional services through the ADRC described below, Upper Savannah contracts with the Region’s senior centers and other providers to meet the needs of senior adults. Contracted services include transportation, home-delivered meals, congregate dining with activities, home care, and health and wellness promotion.

Aging Services in Saluda County – Seniors in Saluda County were served 5,257 congregate meals and 9,879 home-delivered meals during FY ’24, an average of 15 seniors per month received transportation and there were 520 hours of home care spent in the County.

State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) – The SHIP program helps seniors and individuals with disabilities research and understand Medicare coverage options with their Medicare prescription drug plans and Medicare Advantage plans. This Program also counsels and assists beneficiaries with Medicare Part A & B issues and Medigap coverage, and alerts seniors to fraudulent Medicare and Medicaid practices through the Senior Medicare Patrol Program. The Upper Savannah SHIP Program made 1,841 contacts and attended 32 outreach events in FY ’24.

Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP) – Program provided funding to 277 caregivers during FY ’24 as well as information, assistance, education, support, and referrals to many more throughout the Region. The program provides respite, which is a temporary break from daily caregiving that is important in helping reduce caregiver burnout so they can provide better care for their loved one. The program also helps caregivers with supplemental services, such as incontinence supplies and assistive technology. The FCSP also continues to be available for seniors ages 55 and older caring for children 18 and younger through the Seniors Raising Children (SRC) Program. Many seniors take on the parental role to keep the child(ren) out of the overburdened foster care system due to parents being unable to do so themselves for various reasons including death, incarceration, drug problems, etc. The program provides children with a chance to be a part of after-school care and activities such as sports and camps. The program provides them with clothing vouchers twice a year to help with the cost of clothes. The Family Caregiver Advocate attended 19 outreach events in FY ’24 to share our services with the Region.

Information, Referral and Assistance (IR&A) – The IR&A program is designed to provide seniors and people with disabilities access to helpful resources. Upper Savannah staff includes one certified IR&A specialist. Staff have made 3,306 contacts with seniors throughout the Region concerning services in FY ’24.

Assessments – Assessment specialists provided holistic, person-centered assessments to identify seniors’ needs and to determine service eligibility for aging programs. The assessment team completed 1,531 Assessments in FY ’24.

Home Safety Program – The program has helped many individuals throughout the Region with projects that improve unsafe areas in the home, including the building of handicap accessible ramps and installation of handrails, grab bars, etc. Partnerships with area churches have maximized the funding potential. The AAA helped 95 people in the Home Safety Program throughout the Region during FY '24.

Assistive Technology (lifelines) – The program assisted approximately 27 seniors throughout the Region with lifelines in FY '24.

Legal Services Program – Program served 61 seniors with various legal concerns such as Power of Attorney, will preparation, and grandparent custody issues in FY '24. Attorneys throughout the Region have agreed to work with the ADRC at reasonable rates to better serve the senior population.

Home Care Program – Upper Savannah AAA provides a Home Care Program that helps seniors who need services such as light housekeeping and some personal care. The program provides consumer choice for the seniors and their families and adds support to allow seniors to stay in their homes as long as possible. The program served 106 people in FY '24.

Advocate for Senior Citizens – Continued to serve as an advocate for 2,078 seniors in the Region's nursing homes and residential care facilities through the continued administration of the Regional Ombudsman Program. The Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman investigates and works to resolve problems or complaints affecting residents in nursing homes and residential care facilities. The Ombudsman also educates residents and family members about long-term care and related issues while advocating for the protection of the resident's rights.

Advocate for Individuals with Disabilities and Special Needs, and Mental Health – The DDSN/DMH Long-Term Care Ombudsman has continued to serve as an advocate for 620 residents in 113 residential, home shares, and intermediate care facilities operated or contracted for operation under the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs and the Department of Mental Health through the continued administration of the Regional Ombudsman Program. The Ombudsman visits 5-day programs with a total of 1,377 consumers who attend during the day to receive skills training. The Ombudsman investigates and works to resolve problems or complaints affecting consumers in DDSN and DMH facilities. The Ombudsman also educates residents, family members, and staff about long-term care and related issues while advocating for the protection of the resident's rights. The Ombudsman has continued to increase in-person staff training on topics such as resident rights; abuse, neglect and endangerment, and reporting to improve quality of care and life for all consumers who reside in these facilities.