

PILLAR BRIEF

HUMAN CAPITAL¹



The **Eastern Region² Strategic Vision** is a framework for transformation and a living roadmap for a thriving future rooted in sustainability, resilience and shared prosperity. It unites data, design, and collaboration to ensure that growth benefits the residents while sustainably leveraging its natural and cultural assets. Developed through rigorous research, extensive stakeholder engagement, and alignment with global best practices, it is grounded in enduring principles that give direction and meaning to the region's development. At its core are values of **shared stewardship, inclusive community engagement, collective responsibility and governance**, recognizing that prosperity must be co-created by the people who live, work, and visit here. It calls for **asset-based development** that empowers communities, **sustainable destination management** that promotes economic vitality while safeguarding the ecosystems on which life and livelihoods depend. Above all, it embraces **innovation**, not only through adoption of technology, but through new ways of connecting, collaborating, solving problems, and sustaining the places we cherish.

These principles form the moral and operational compass of the Eastern Region Strategic Vision, expressed through four interdependent pillars: ***Transportation and Mobility, Attractions, Human Capital***, and ***Governance***. These pillars will guide how the region will move visitors and residents, attract and distribute visitation, empower its communities, and provide cohesive, shared governance for regionwide strategic initiatives in the decades ahead. Together, we can elevate regional economic development as a multisectoral model that benefits communities, visitors, and future generations alike. Central to this effort is empowering the **Eastern Region's people as its most important assets**, by equipping them with the tools, mindsets, and capabilities needed to shape their own future.

Vision for Transformational Human Capital in Puerto Rico's Eastern Region

The Eastern Region will be positioned to become a hub of talent, innovation, and opportunity, where every resident, regardless of age, location, or background, can actively contribute to and benefit from inclusive, sustainable economic growth. This transformation is propelled by two key forces: the rapid expansion of the visitor economy and the disruptive emergence of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation, and immersive digital tools.

¹ A pillar of FPR's Eastern Region Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development.

² The Eastern Region comprises the 15 municipalities of: Canóvanas, Ceiba, Culebra, Fajardo, Juncos, Humacao, Las Piedras, Loíza, Luquillo, Maunabo, Naguabo, Río Grande, San Lorenzo, Vieques, and Yabucoa.



Objective: Empower residents with the education, skills, mindset, and digital tools necessary to thrive in a tech-enabled growing economy through strategic investments in workforce development, entrepreneurship, and regional ecosystem building.

Approach: A systems approach to human capital development views the region's talent, education, entrepreneurship, innovation, and employment ecosystems as interconnected and adaptive components of a single whole. It emphasizes continuously learning that adapts to social, economic, and technological change. This will enable the formation of a dynamic, integrated regional network, where policies, institutions, and people reinforce one another to generate long-term prosperity. This approach integrates:

- **Technology and innovation** as enablers of competitiveness rather than replacements for human labor.
- **Cross-sector collaboration** among local workforce (WIOA) boards, universities, technical institutes, anchor firms, and municipalities to align skills with regional economic priorities.
- **Place-based infrastructure**, such as innovation and co-working hubs in revitalized town centers and other strategic sites, to provide accessible spaces for learning, technology, and entrepreneurship.
- **Institutional capacity building** through the Regional Council to coordinate policy, financing, and data systems for labor market intelligence.

Expected Impact: Ensure long-term, people-centered economic development that benefits all generations and communities across the region. This will be evident in:

- Increased labor participation and youth retention.
- Growth in household income through higher-quality jobs and entrepreneurship.
- Reduced outmigration and greater inclusion of women, seniors, and rural residents
- A resilient, innovation-driven economy supported by a globally connected, locally rooted workforce.

Catalysts of Change: The Visitor Economy and Technological Transformation

Two forces are redefining the Eastern Region's human capital landscape: the rapid expansion of the visitor economy and the accelerating pace of technological change. Tourism is now the region's most dynamic sector, with over 2 million visitors generating \$1.2 billion in spending in 2024, projected to more than double to \$2.3 billion by 2030. This growth is expected to create over 12,000 new direct jobs, raising total visitor-linked employment to roughly 27,000 positions by the end of the decade. At the same time, advances in artificial intelligence, automation, and immersive digital tools are reshaping how tourism and related industries operate, demanding a workforce fluent in technology, management, and sustainability. Together, these catalysts call for a regional strategy that integrates skills development, entrepreneurship, and innovation to ensure that the region's people capture the full value of growth.



Regional Initiatives to Build a Human Capital Ecosystem

This Human Capital strategy outlines a bold yet practical roadmap to prepare the region’s most valuable asset—its people—to lead, adapt, and thrive amid transformative economic and technological change through the following initiatives:

❖ Regional Talent Commons

Strategy: Create an integrated digital-physical platform that treats human capital as a form of public infrastructure.

Initiative: Establish a Regional Talent Commons to link residents to training, credentials, and employment in high-demand sectors in the region including hospitality, smart mobility, digital services, and advanced manufacturing.

Outcomes: Streamlined recruitment and training pipelines, improved employer–education alignment, and measurable increases in workforce participation and productivity to meet demand for 12,000 new tourism-related jobs by 2030 with a bilingual, sustainability-oriented workforce equipped with immersive technologies. This will enable increased overnight visitation, reduce economic leakage, and multiply economic impacts.

❖ Career and Training Pipelines Aligned to Economic Development Opportunities

Strategy: Develop career pathways aligned with fast-growing sectors—sustainable tourism, smart mobility, renewable energy, and digital services—with targeted support for youth, older workers, and women.

Initiative: Implement internship, apprenticeship, and fellowship programs coordinated by the Eastern Region Economic Development Council to align technical education with industry needs and ensure programs are community-informed and results-driven.

Outcomes: Increased labor force participation, enhanced regional innovation capacity, integration of AI-powered learning, and retention of STEM graduates and skilled professionals.

❖ Regional Talent Fund

Strategy: Treat human capital as an investable asset by financing training stipends, wraparound services, and employer incentives.

Initiative: Create a Regional Talent Fund, as a reserved fund managed by the Regional Economic Development Council, designed to be a purpose-specific financial instrument (“ring-fenced fund”) dedicated exclusively to human capital development in the Eastern Region. It will operate as a revolving and self-sustaining mechanism, where business co-investments,



performance-based returns, and revenues from the “Talent Commons” activities are recycled into new training, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Outcomes: Expanded access to training for underemployed populations, sustainable investment in workforce development, employer co-investment, increased youth retention, and improved household income and competitiveness.

❖ Innovation and Co-working Hubs and Sites

Strategy: Position the Eastern Region as a networked innovation ecosystem by transforming underused municipal and community assets into multifunctional hubs that combine digital infrastructure, entrepreneurship support, and collaborative learning spaces. These hubs will anchor the region’s transition toward a knowledge-based and remote-work economy while revitalizing historic urban centers.

Initiative: Launch a regional network of Innovation and Co-Working Hubs in key municipalities, such as Canóvanas, Fajardo, Río Grande, Ceiba, Humacao, Juncos, Culebra and Vieques, by linking existing incubators, learning sites, and community centers to provide better access to high-speed internet, shared workspaces, lifelong learning, maker labs, creative industries and business incubation services. Popup and satellite sites can be set up to provide needed access in remote areas with population clusters. As hubs and sites mature, they can focus on local strengths, such as: blue economy ventures in Culebra and Vieques, aerospace and mobility in Ceiba, digital fabrication in Humacao, and cultural entrepreneurship in Río Grande, San Lorenzo, and Yabucoa. Programs will include coding bootcamps, digital marketing certifications, and startup mentorship linked to universities and diaspora partners.

Outcomes: By 2030, the innovation network will support hundreds of new small businesses and remote professionals, retaining local talent and generating high-value employment opportunities. It will strengthen local supply chains, stimulate town-center revitalization, and integrate the Eastern Region into the global digital economy, converting it from a labor exporter into a creator of innovation, culture, and enterprise.

❖ Regional Workforce and Innovation Observatory

Strategy: Establish a centralized intelligence system that integrates workforce, education, and business data to drive evidence-based decision-making and regional competitiveness. The Observatory will embed human capital indicators into the region’s broader sustainable development and destination management frameworks.

Initiative: Create a Regional Workforce & Innovation Observatory that collects and analyzes real-time data on labor trends, skills demand, and training outcomes. It will link to the Talent Commons and other data systems (e.g., Visitor Economy and Social Capital Maps), providing public dashboards and analytical tools for policymakers, educators, and employers.



Outcomes: Enhanced coordination between training supply and employer demand; improved policy alignment and curriculum development; increased accountability through open data; and stronger regional integration supported by measurable, data-driven insights that guide investment, workforce planning, and innovation.

Socioeconomic and Environmental Benefits

Economic Growth: Double visitor spending to \$2.3 billion by 2030; boost local business revenues and thousands of jobs available for local residents whose skills and abilities are aligned to employer needs.

Accessibility: Expand and connect training hubs and community centers with popups sites, and digital platforms to reach isolated rural and island communities; create inclusive pathways for youth, women, and older adults.

Environmental Sustainability: Train workforce in conservation, mobility, sustainable tourism, and destination management; embed ecological stewardship in infrastructure and tourism projects.

Implementation Pathways

Phased Projects: Launch the Regional Talent Commons by connecting and making visible existing career and technical training opportunities in the region to facilitate local access and recruitment; launch a pilot cohort of the Regional Fellows to serve as a quick win and scalable model, where Fellows are placed in an array of regional economic development projects; activate an Economic Development Learning Network by convening career and workforce development providers located in and serving the region to ideate and implement immediate solutions to barriers of access and alignment with regional job opportunities. Incorporate employers in growing sectors as well as small businesses to identify and define skills gaps.

Coordination Across Jurisdictions: Foster partnerships among WIOA boards, universities, municipalities, federal agencies, and employers.

Governance and Funding: Establish the Council for coordination and oversight of investments through the Regional Talent Fund.

Metrics & Monitoring: Create a Regional Workforce & Innovation Observatory to track talent development, youth retention, training outcomes, and economic impact.

Conclusion: The Path to a Human-Centered Thriving Regional Economy

To transform human capital into the region's most renewable resource, residents of all ages and backgrounds, from students and artisans to returning professionals, must be equipped to lead and participate in economic growth. A connected network of learning and innovation spaces



will turn town centers into places buzzing with opportunity, where creativity, technology, and entrepreneurship converge.

Employers will benefit from a skilled, adaptable workforce, while young people find compelling reasons to build their futures locally. By placing people at the heart of development, the Eastern Region will evolve into a vibrant talent ecosystem that sustains innovation, competitiveness, and shared prosperity.

Human capital is the keystone of the Strategic Vision—enabling success across transportation, governance, and tourism. Investing in talent today will reverse outmigration, anchor innovation locally, and position the Eastern Region as a global model for inclusive, tech-enabled, and tourism-powered development.