

Community Economic Preparedness:

An Index Designed to Test the Economic Preparedness of Rural Communities

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The Community Economic Preparedness Index measures a county's or parish's economic preparedness level based on fifteen different categories. Each of these variables is then given a numeric value which is used to give each county or parish an overall economic preparedness score representing the current level of economic preparedness.



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Methodology

The CURIS Region includes 20 counties and parishes in four of the five coastal states bordering the Gulf of Mexico: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. These 20 counties were used as the basis for distribution of the Community Economic Preparedness Index (CEPI) Survey. A total of 60 survey forms were mailed to these 20 counties and parishes. Three survey forms were mailed to the Chamber of Commerce, Board of Supervisors, and Economic Development Commission in each county or parish. A copy of the CEPI survey was mailed to each of the aforementioned sectors, along with instructions on how to complete it and a postage paid envelope to return the completed survey. A total of 2 mailings were sent out in May and June 2010. Of the 60 targeted CEPI survey participants, 17 completed surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 28.3%.

Economic Development Plan: This variable determines whether the county/parish has an economic development plan, the strength of the plan, and how current the plan is.

Effective Zoning Ordinance: This variable determines if the county/parish has effective, up-to-date zoning ordinances.

Separate Economic Development Organization: This variable determines if the county/parish utilizes a separate entity for economic development within the county/parish.

Industrial Site Capabilities: This variable determines if the county/parish has industrial site capabilities, and how well suited they are to attract and retain new industry to the area.

Commercial Development Capabilities: This variable determines if the county/parish has the capacity to attract and retain new businesses to the communities.

Small Business Development: This variable determines if the county/parish has the ability to foster new business growth within the community, and how strong these abilities are.

Community Infrastructure: This variable determines whether the county/parish has the ability to handle pedestrian, automobile, and shipping traffic within the county/parish, and how efficient that ability is.

Utilities Capabilities: This variable determines whether the county/parish has the utility capabilities (water, electric, sewage, waste, internet, etc.) to handle current population and industrial demands, as well as, and potential population increase of up to 10%.

Education Access/Quality: This variable assesses the current education system in the county/parish, as well as the access to secondary education, and the ability to absorb a student population increase of 10%.

Financial Support Available: This variable determines the various possible financial venues available to foster growth within the county/parish.

Strength of Community Tourism Boards: This variable determines whether the county/parish has an active tourism community, how strong it is, and to what extent it is current and how much of the county/parish it encompasses.

Abilities/Availability of Population/Labor Force: This variable examines the population and labor force of the county/parish to the extent of availability of labor force, unemployment rate, and job training.

Natural Disaster Susceptibility: This variable determines the susceptibility of the county/parish to natural disasters based on frequency of event, emergency plan, and disaster plan.

Quality of Life: This variable assesses the quality of life in the county/parish by examining everyday factors which will influence decisions, such as where to live or move.

Local Government Structure: This variable determines the structure of the local government, and the extent to which it controls decision making within the county/parish.

Website: <http://www.curis.msstate.edu/economicpreparedness.html>

Communities which are actively engaged in pursuing fundamental steps toward economic resilience and disaster management will possess local economies which are resilient to the effects of natural disaster, and thus experience quick financial and physical recovery.

In 2010, the Mississippi State University, Center for Urban Rural Interface Studies (CURIS) started a research and outreach program on Community Economic Preparedness in the Gulf of Mexico Region. The overall goal of this project was to evaluate the overall community economic preparedness of rural counties and parishes.