

Tonto Apache Tribal Nation Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Prepared by aLocal & WBK Engineering





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I. Introduction

The Tonto Apache Tribe, located adjacent to the town of Payson in northwestern Gila County, Arizona, is a resilient and culturally rich community with a profound historical connection to the land. Situated on a modest 85-acre reservation, the smallest in Arizona, the Tonto Apache are direct descendants of the Tonto people who lived in the region long before the arrival of Anglo settlers. Though forcibly relocated to the San Carlos Apache Reservation in 1875, many Tonto Apache returned to Payson after two decades of exile, only to find much of their ancestral land claimed by settlers. According to the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, the tribe is working to secure a trust title to the land they now occupy, a step toward restoring their sovereignty. Known nationally for their exquisite beadwork and basketry, the Tonto Apache are committed to preserving their cultural heritage while seeking new economic opportunities to ensure a sustainable future for their people. (Tonto Apache Tribe | Inter Tribal Council of Arizona)

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is intended to serve as a comprehensive blueprint for the Tonto Apache Tribe’s economic future. The purpose of the CEDS is to create a forward-thinking, data-driven plan that supports sustainable economic development while respecting and preserving the tribe’s cultural values and heritage. This plan is informed by public engagement and lays out a strategic vision for economic growth, providing a roadmap for addressing the current challenges and leveraging the opportunities that exist within the community. By focusing on a holistic approach that considers social, environmental, and cultural factors, the CEDS aims to create an economic foundation that fosters prosperity, equity, and resilience.

The Tonto Apache Tribe’s CEDS is centered around the Apache Corners Development, a multi-year project that seeks to diversify the local economy and enhance community well-being. Managed by aLocal Solutions and WBK Engineering, Apache Corners is a testament to the tribe's forward-thinking approach to economic planning. The development aims to bring new amenities and businesses to the reservation, including entertainment facilities, healthcare centers, and community infrastructure upgrades, all designed to provide both immediate economic benefits and long-term opportunities for growth.

Each component of the Apache Corners project is designed to strengthen the tribe’s economic self-sufficiency while also serving the greater region, positioning the Tonto Apache Tribe as a pivotal player in the economic landscape of Gila County. Furthermore, the project seeks to enhance the quality of life for tribal members, create jobs, improve infrastructure, and contribute to the overall sustainability of the region.

The strategic initiatives outlined in this CEDS aim to address several key areas: capturing revenue that currently flows outside the community, attracting new businesses, supporting local enterprises, expanding the tourism industry, improving technological and digital



infrastructure, enhancing healthcare, and developing real estate. These initiatives align with the tribe's broader goal of creating a prosperous community that remains culturally connected and embraces creativity and innovation. Through partnerships with local stakeholders, the Tonto Apache Tribe is committed to implementing the CEDS effectively. Together, these entities will work with the Tonto Apache Tribal Council to ensure that every aspect of the plan is carried out in a way that maximizes both economic impact and community benefits, ensuring a sustainable, thriving future for the Tonto Apache people.

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy represents not only a plan for economic growth but also a vision for a sustainable and culturally vibrant community. It is a commitment to creating opportunities for current and future generations of the community. The journey ahead is one of resilience, hope, and empowerment, as the Tonto Apache Tribe works to build an economy that is reflective of their values, heritage, and aspirations.

II. Organization and Staffing

The Planning Organization

In collaboration with the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation and Apache Investments Incorporated®, the two entities serving as the planning organization for the Apache Corners CEDS are aLocal Development® and WBK Engineering®. Working together, these planning organizations drive forward the economic vision of the Apache Corners Development for the next 5 years, and staff ensures there is a clear process to follow for the CEDS development, which aligns with the community's vision and is compliant with the funding agency. The planning organizations are responsible for the following:

- Working with the Tonto Apache Tribal Council to Appoint a CEDS Strategy Committee
- Developing and submitting a complaint CEDS
- Drafting a new or updated CEDS available for public review and comment for a period of at least 30 days prior to submittal to the EDA
- Obtaining EDA approval of the CEDS
- Submittal of Annual Performance Reports
- Submittal of a CEDS to all regional commissions geographically covered by that commission
- Submittal of a new CEDS every 5 years unless the EDA or planning organization determines an earlier date

aLocal Development®

aLocal is a provider of high-end AI econometric analytics used to drive economic decisions of communities, government, and business. A leader in providing AI market and economic demand solutions, aLocal is moving into additional analytical forecasting; using economic, community, and financial intelligence. Focused on equity, aLocal uses netEI solutions using the dynamic output of business intelligence, economic impact, and community data. aLocal Development® uses proven algorithms focused on macroeconomic impacts and understanding how multiple systems in the community and the surrounding areas help predict economic demand in your community. Instead of only reading descriptive summaries of the number of employees compared to state averages, aLocal analyzes these variables and helps predict demand levels.

aLocal Role in CEDS Creation: aLocal Development played a crucial role in the creation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation. aLocal Development is the main managing entity leading the creation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Specializing in AI-driven econometric analytics, aLocal provided detailed economic projections and analyses that formed the

foundation of the CEDS. Their expertise in economic demand forecasting and market analysis was instrumental in identifying key growth areas and potential revenue streams for the Apache Corners project. Through continuous collaboration with the Tonto Apache Tribal Council and other stakeholders, aLocal ensured that the CEDS was data-driven, strategically sound, and aligned with the community's long-term economic goals. Their work included conducting thorough research, facilitating stakeholder meetings, and integrating community feedback into the final strategy. Their leadership ensures that the CEDS process is methodical, inclusive, and strategically sound, guiding the project from initial concept through to implementation.

WBK Engineering©

WBK Engineering is a team of civil, water resources, transportation, and structural engineers, infrastructure specialists, land planners and urban designers, environmental scientists, and ecologists. The firm is a Tribally Owned, 8(a), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Indian Small Business Economic Enterprise (ISBEE) company, offering sustainable solutions to complex design, engineering, restoration, and maintenance challenges. WBK is part of the Bodwé Professional Services Group of Mno-Bmadsen, the investment enterprise and a wholly owned instrumentality of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi. WBK has been providing civil and transportation engineering services and related environmental consulting to public and private sector clients for more than 25 years.

WBK Engineering's Role in CEDS Creation: WBK Engineering collaborates with aLocal Development in the creation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation. Their primary role involves providing technical expertise in site analysis, infrastructure planning, and environmental assessments. WBK Engineering's contributions ensure that the physical and environmental aspects of the development are thoroughly evaluated and integrated into the strategic plan. They assist in identifying site opportunities and constraints, designing infrastructure improvements, and ensuring the project complies with environmental regulations, thereby supporting the sustainable development goals of the CEDS. WBK's contributions ensure the CEDS integrates sustainable solutions to complex design, engineering, and environmental challenges, supporting the project's long-term viability and compliance with regulatory standards.

CEDS Planning Process & Community Engagement



Image 1: Captured at Apache Corners Groundbreaking Ceremony

Research

aLocal researched data and updated statistics on the current conditions of the Tonto Apache Tribe before the development. Using aLocal’s Net Economic Impact AI software, economic projections were made detailing the estimated impact the Apache Corners Development would have on jobs, wages, tax revenue, net economic impact, and more. The Apache Corners Draft Comprehensive Plan, created by aLocal, was also utilized to help form some of the content and develop a general outline of the CEDS.

Stakeholder Meetings

Since the beginning stages of the Apache Corners Development, aLocal has held weekly meetings for the Apache Corners stakeholders, partners, and the Chairman of the tribe. In these meetings, goals, progress, and the vision of the development have been discussed extensively. Since the beginning of the CEDS process, the CEDS has also been a regular discussion in these meetings. In addition to the Apache Corners partners meetings, our CEDS strategy committee, composed of aLocal and WBK Engineering team members, held biweekly meetings throughout the planning process and creation of the CEDS. The Tonto Apache Tribal Council also held a “Tri-cities” meeting, where they hosted the Mayors and councils from the Town of Payson and the Town of Star Valley, which fostered a space for region-wide communication and collaboration.

Public Participation

Public participation has been a critical part of the CEDS process, with community feedback shaping the goals and objectives outlined in this strategy and guiding the Apache Corner’s Development. Beginning in the early stages of the planning process, Tonto Apache Tribal Council and Apache Corners Stakeholders hosted numerous public meetings to gather community feedback and ensure the project accurately reflects the needs, concerns, and desires of Tribal residents and local community members. At various events such as the annual Tribal Recognition Golf Tournament, hosted by the Tonto Apache Tribe, Apache Corners Partners displayed the design plans and talked with community members about the development. The Tribe also hosted a groundbreaking event on October 15, 2023, where they hosted the public and local jurisdiction officials and formally broke ground on the Apache Corners Development. Each of these events were hosted with the intention of keeping the public informed throughout each stage of the development, and gaining feedback throughout the entirety of the development process.

On May 8th, 2024, the Tribe held a CEDS-specific meeting open to the public to update the community on the CEDS and current progress on economic development initiatives. Following presentations from Tribal Chairman, aLocal Development, WBK Engineering, American Resorts Management, and heritage distilling company, the community was asked what they would like to see represented in the CEDS. Following the presentations, an anonymous survey was given out, both digitally and on paper, to provide an opportunity for tribal members to express their feelings on the proposed projects and provide more detailed feedback. This survey was then left open for 23 days following the meeting, and it gathered a total of 49 responses. This survey was vital in shaping the CEDS, with public comments informing every section of the strategy, particularly the “Vision for the Future.” The survey results are displayed in the section below.



Image 2: Apache Corners Informational posters at groundbreaking



Image 3: Apache Corners booth at RES conference 2024

Demographics of Respondents

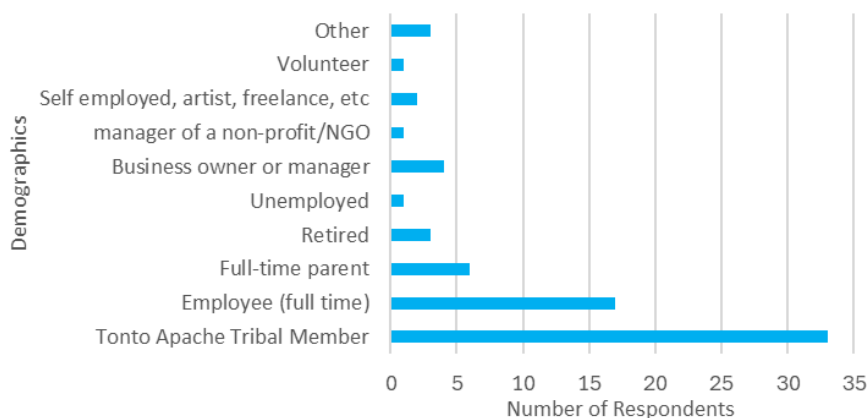


Figure 1: Tonto Apache CEDS Survey Results -Demographics of Respondents

Age of respondents

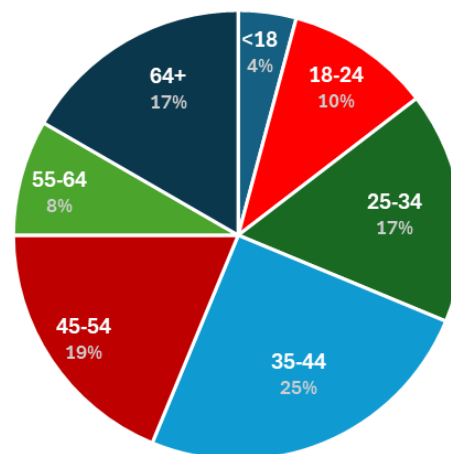


Figure 2: Tonto Apache CEDS Survey Results - Age of Respondents

Survey Results

Demographics

As showcased in the figures above, the survey had a diverse pool of respondents, with a wide variety of age groups participating, including the youth. 33 out of the 43 respondents were Tonto Apache Tribal Members, with other respondents consisting of spouses of Tribal members, community members, business owners, and others.

General Perceptions

When asked “How would you rank the current economy, for the Tonto Apache Tribe, in our region?” 56% of survey respondents classified the economy as “fair,” 30% classified it as “good,” 9% as “poor” and 5% as “excellent. This showcases that while many believe the economy is currently in good standing, there is also believed to be a lot of room for improvement and growth.

General Perceptions of Tribal Economy

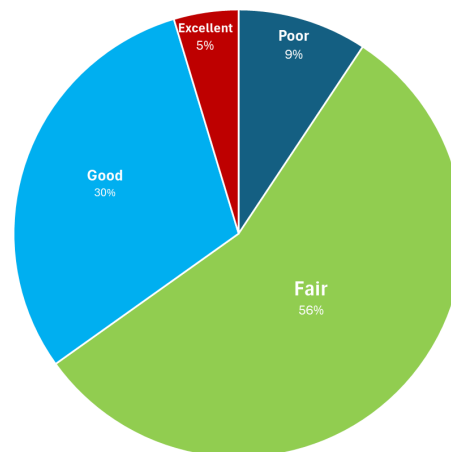
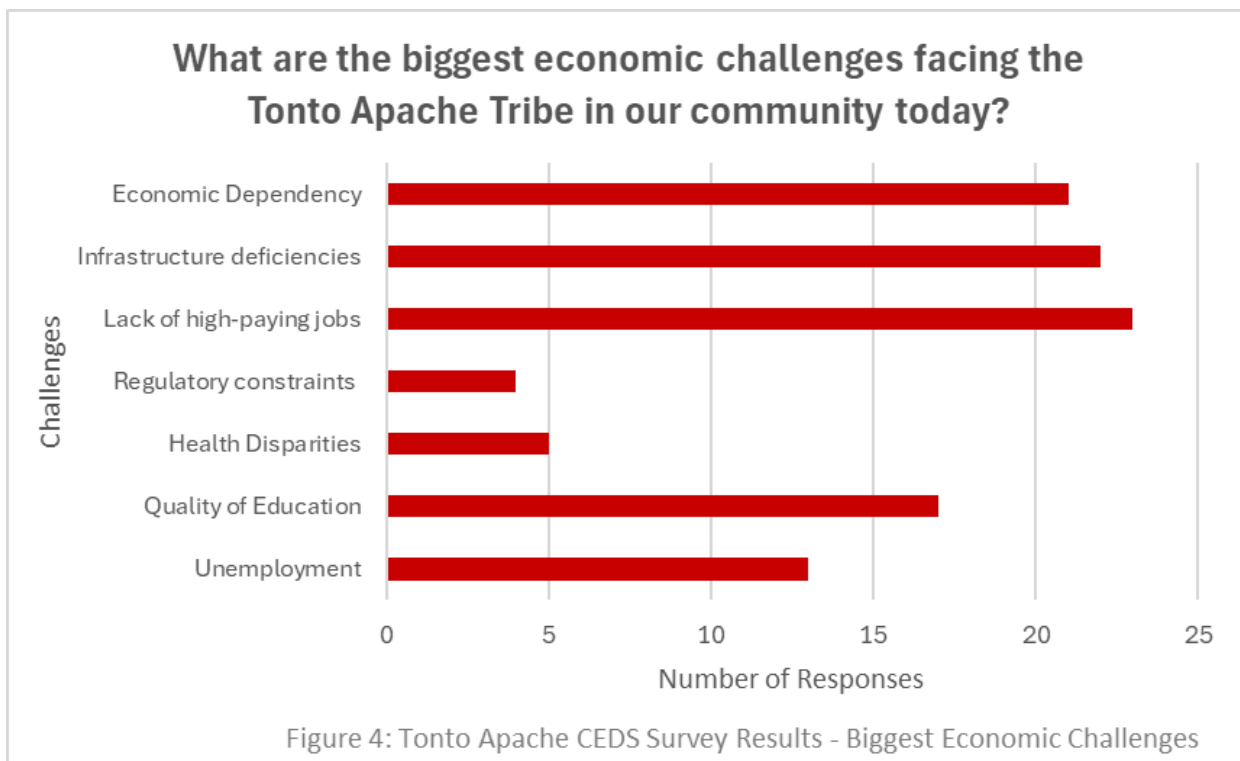


Figure 3: Tonto Apache CEDS Survey Results General Perceptions of Tribal Economy

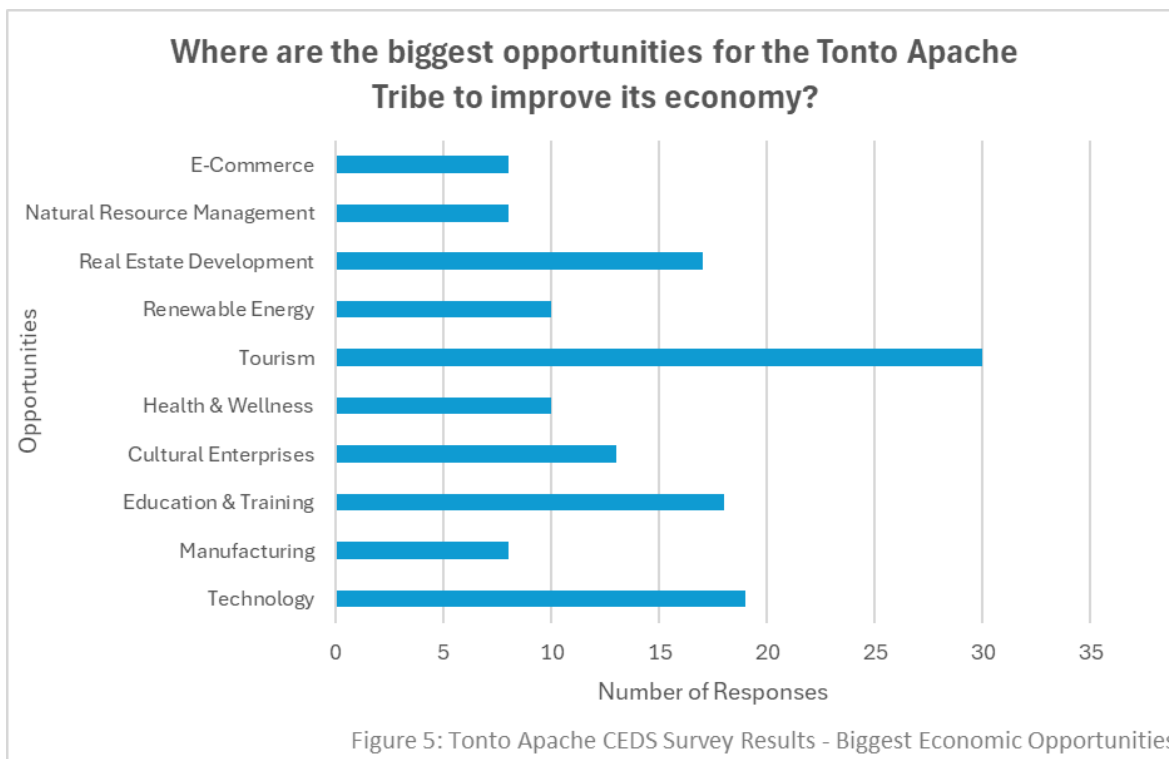
Challenges and Opportunities

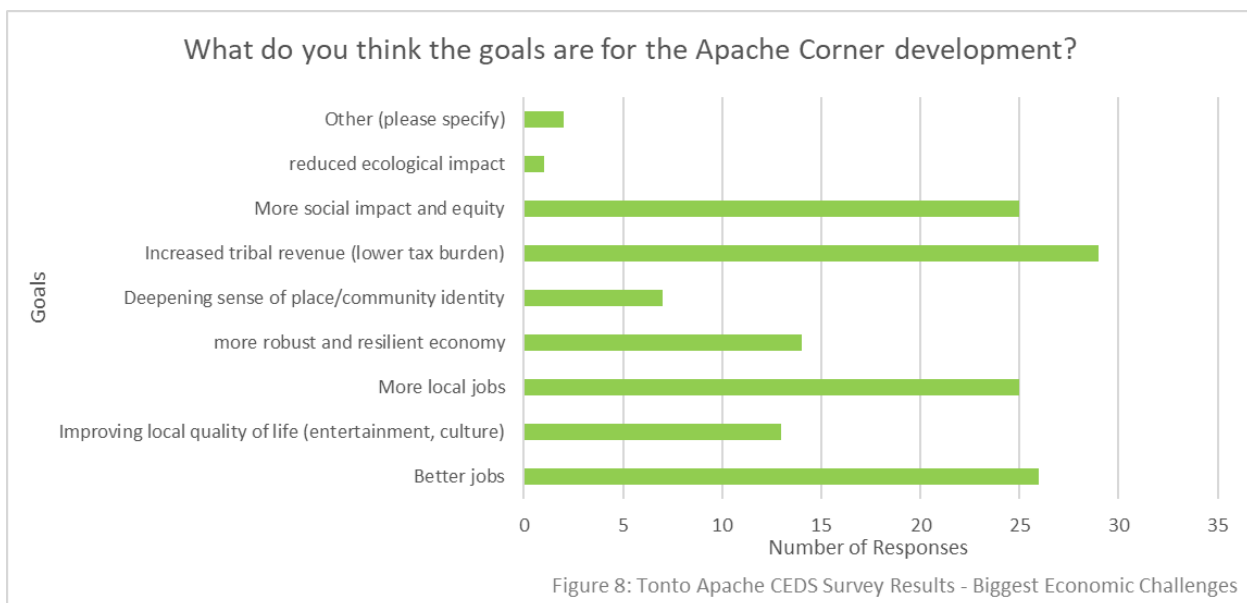
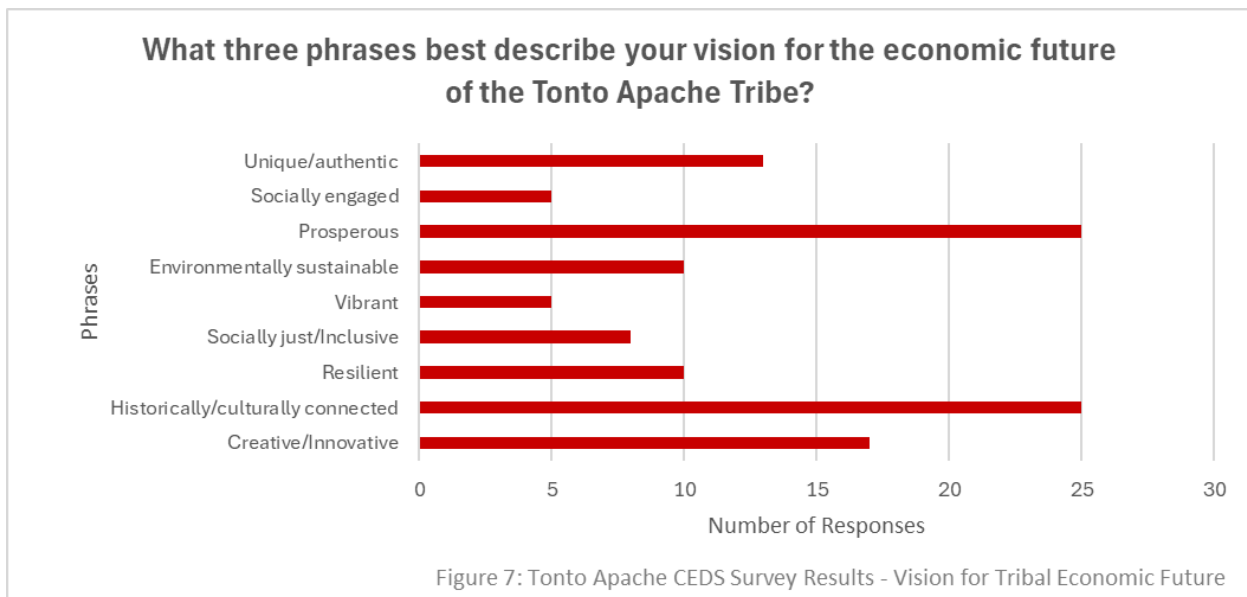
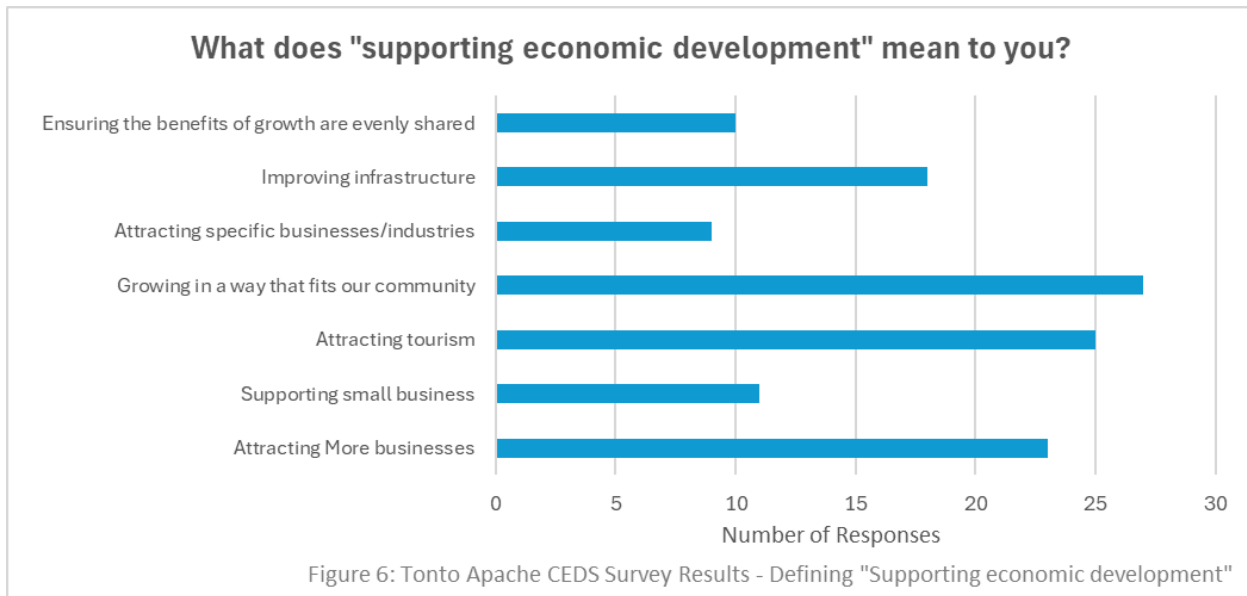
Following their perceptions of the economy, respondents were asked questions aimed at understanding the biggest economic challenges facing the community and opportunities for economic improvement. The results are displayed in the graphics below. The three biggest economic challenges were identified as: a lack of high-paying jobs, infrastructure deficiencies, and economic dependency. The three biggest economic opportunities were identified as: tourism, technology, and education & training, with real estate development also having a significant number of selections.



Goals and Priorities

Respondents were then asked three questions relating to the goals and priorities of the Tonto Apache Tribe, with the objective of understanding the community’s vision of the Tribe’s economic future, as well as the community’s perception of the current Apache Corners Development project.

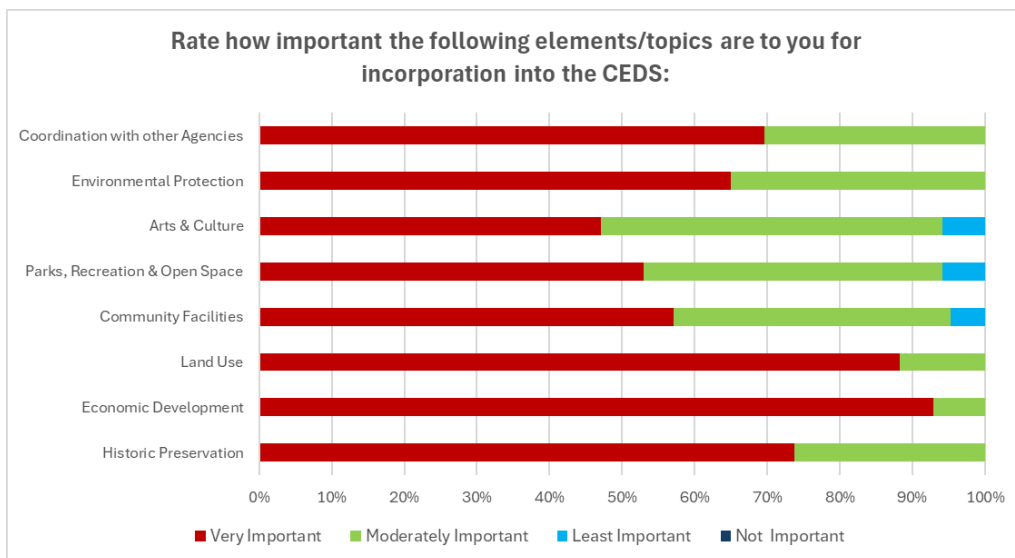
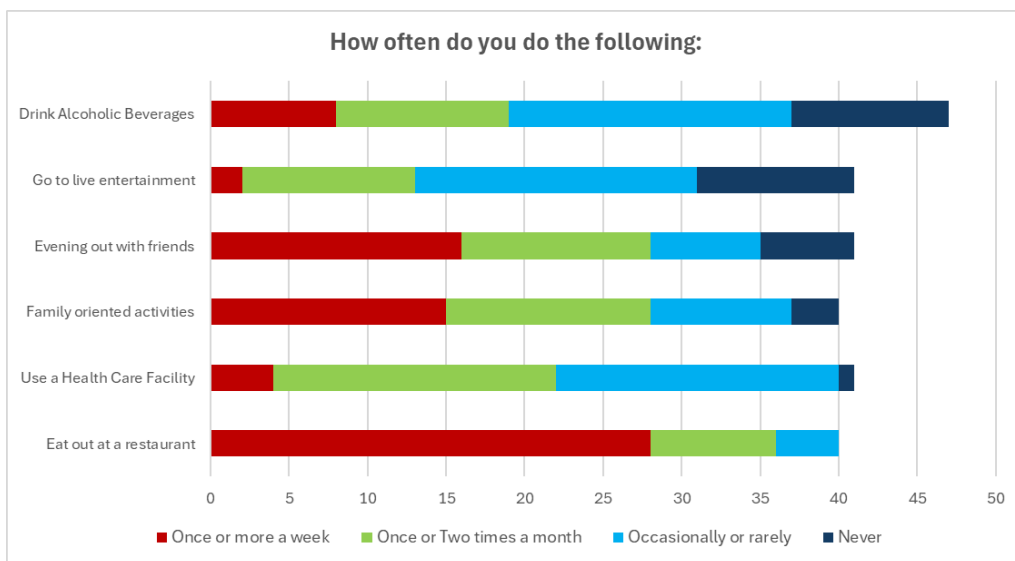




The graphics above indicate that the survey respondents most commonly define “supporting economic development” as: growing in a way that fits our community, attracting tourism, and attracting more businesses. Respondents most commonly describe the vision for the Tonto Apache Tribe as: prosperous, historically/culturally connected, and creative/innovative. Lastly, when asked what they think the goals are for the Apache Corners Development, respondents most often responded: increased tribal revenue (lower tax burden), better jobs, more local jobs, and more social impact and equity.

Feedback on Proposed Projects

The final part of the survey was created with the intention of understanding the public’s alignment with the goals of current and future developments. 44% of respondents reported being generally aware of the current projects proposed at Apache Corners, while 37% reported being aware, and 19% not aware. Respondents were then asked to describe how often they do certain activities, and then rate how important certain elements are to incorporate into the CEDS. The results from these questions are displayed in the figures below.



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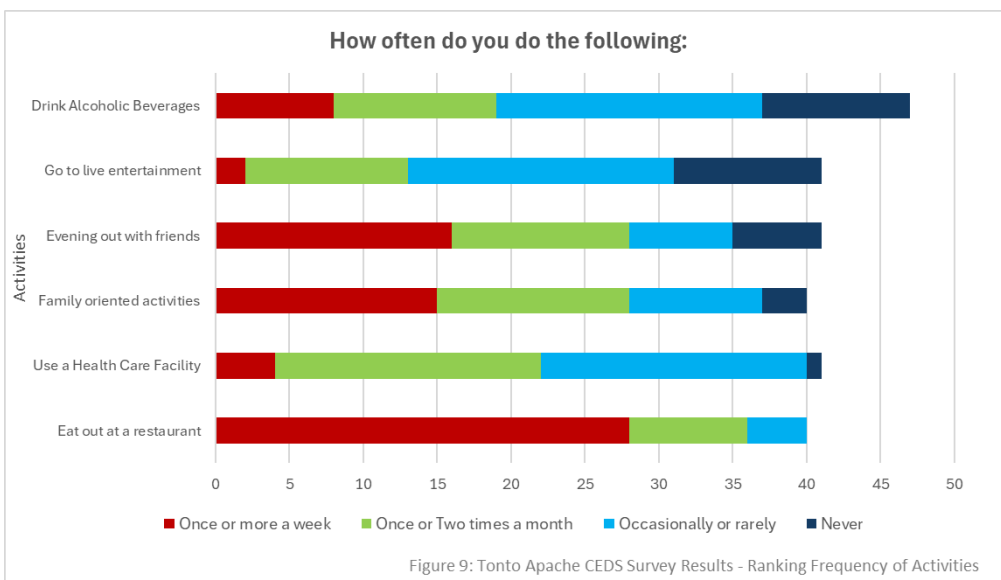


Figure 9: Tonto Apache CEDS Survey Results - Ranking Frequency of Activities

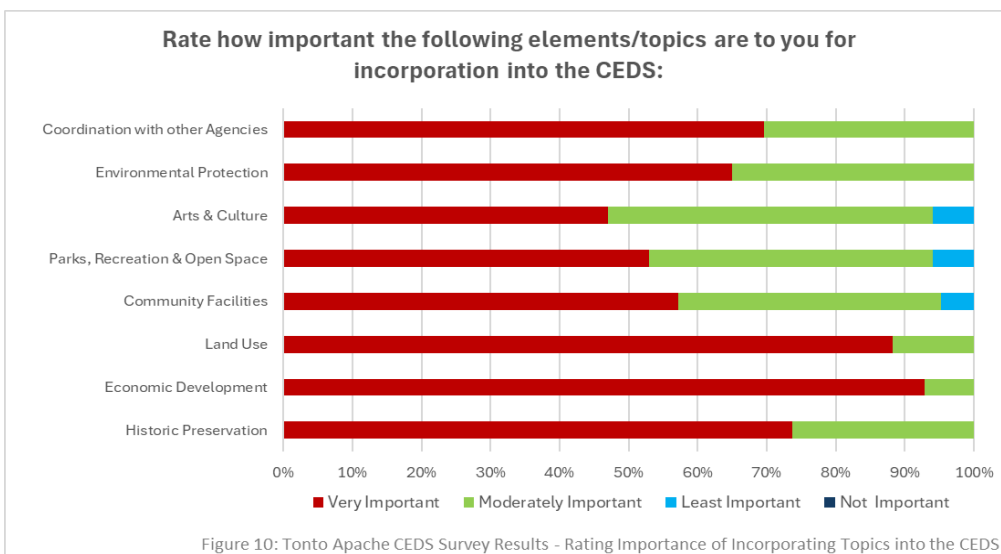


Figure 10: Tonto Apache CEDS Survey Results - Rating Importance of Incorporating Topics into the CEDS

As displayed in the Figure 10 above, when asked to rate how often respondents participate in various activities, the most frequent activities included *eat out in a restaurant*, *evening with friends*, and *family oriented activities*. These activities are all directly represented in the Apache Corners Development, with several restaurants proposed in the development, as well as a Family Fun center including daytime and nighttime activities for people of all ages. Tribal residents and community members would most like to see a prosperous, historically and culturally connected, and creative and innovative economic future for the Tribe. Respondents ranked economic development, land use, and historic preservation as the three most important topics to incorporate into the CEDS.

The final question in the survey asked respondents if there are any other elements that would help improve the economy of the Tonto Apache Tribe that were included in the list in the previous question. Some of the comments included:

- *“Locations to bring the town of Payson and the tribe together for events and business.”*
- *“Grocery store on this side of town”*
- *“Flea market for local vendors - crafts, food, art & merchandise...etc.”*

Organizational Chart

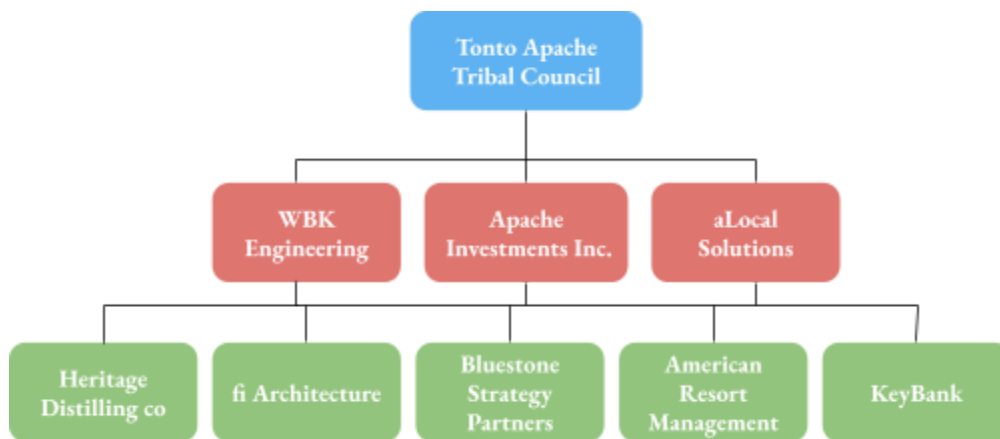


Figure 11: CEDS Organizational Chart

CEDS Strategy Committee

The Tonto Apache Tribal Nation has designated professionals from aLocal and WBK Engineering to serve as the CEDS strategy committee. The committee held meetings twice a month during the planning and CEDS creation process, as well as on an as-needed basis. The



CEDS Strategy Committee is responsible for planning, developing, revising, and updating the CEDS. The CEDS Strategy Committee represents the economic, social, and cultural interests of the region. The committee is required to include a majority of members from the private sector, and these committees typically include public officials, workforce representatives, community leaders, educational representatives, and probate individuals. This being said, the makeup of the CEDS Strategy Committee that is best suited to the tribe is not required to exactly meet these standards.

The current Members of the CEDS Strategy Committee are listed in the table below:

CEDS Strategy Committee		
Member	Occupation	Title (member, chair, etc.)
Eric Trevan	President of aLocal	Co-Chair
Chuck Hanlon	Vice President of Operations	Co-Chair
Cate Hudson	Manager of aLocal Geospatial	Member
Adam Rak	Senior Urban Planner	Member
Breanna Fulton	Planning, Community & Economic Development Associate at aLocal Solutions	Member
Komal Macwan	Planning, Community & Economic Development Associate at aLocal Solutions	Member

Table 1: CEDS Strategy Committee Descriptions

CEDS Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee for the Tonto Apache CEDS process is made up of members from the Apache Investments board. This advisory body offers high-level guidance and strategic insight throughout the CEDS planning and implementation phases, ensuring alignment with tribal economic goals and cultural values.

The Apache Investments board includes:

- Calvin Johnson - Chairman, Tonto Apache Tribe
- Madisyn Ranft - Councilwoman, Tonto Apache Tribe
- Junior Tinnin - Citizen, Tonto Apache Nation



The Advisory Committee complements the CEDS Strategy Committee by providing oversight, fostering collaboration with tribal governance, and ensuring long-term alignment with the Nation's economic and cultural interests. Their involvement is instrumental in the review and strategic refinement of CEDS initiatives.

CEDS Region

The Tonto Apache Tribal Nation has designated the Tonto Apache Reservation, and Tribal members as the reason whose economic interests are being served by the CEDS.

Compliance with Regulations

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Tonto Apache Tribe is developed in full adherence to the requirements set forth by the Economic Development Administration (EDA). The CEDS Strategy Committee ensures compliance by incorporating EDA's guidelines on strategic planning, community involvement, and transparency. This includes maintaining a public review period of at least 30 days before submission, which helps integrate community feedback and ensures accountability. By following these regulatory standards, the CEDS not only aligns with federal criteria but also positions the tribe to access funding and support, fostering sustainable economic growth.

Private/ Partner Sector Participation

The Apache Corners project partners were involved in many of the CEDS meetings. These partners were updated on CEDS progress, content, timelines and provided feedback. As primary contributors to the Apache Corners Development, their work was extremely influential in the creation of the CEDS. Our project partners and their descriptions are as follows:



aLocal© uses proven algorithms focused not only on macro-economic impacts but understanding how multiple systems in the community and the surrounding areas help predict economic demand in your community. Instead of only reading descriptive summaries of the number of employees compared to state averages, aLocal actually analyzes these variables and helps predict demand levels.



Blue Stone is a Native owned and managed firm that began when we saw a great need in Indian Country - to protect sovereignty, to protect culture, and protect the future of Tribes. Since it began in 2007, Bluestone has helped hundreds of Tribes create stronger economies, communities, and cultures.



WBK engineering are problem solvers with sustainable solutions to complex challenges. They are civil, structural, water resource, and transportation engineers, land planners and urban designers, and environmental and ecology specialists, impacting how people live and move in relationship with built and natural environments.



fi architecture is the premier architectural company in Gig Harbor, Washington. It provides a full range of design services for commercial, industrial, education, residential, adaptive reuse, remodels, and master planning project types. They are a team of experienced licensed architects and design professionals who are fervently dedicated to working together with our clients to provide valued solutions.



Heritage Distilling Company (HDC) is the most awarded craft distillery in North America from the American Distilling Institute (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). HDC makes vodkas, gins and whiskeys and is proud to operate distillery tasting rooms in Washington and Oregon including Gig Harbor, Roslyn and Tumwater in Washington and Eugene-Madison and Eugene-5th Street in Oregon.



HOSPITALITY, RESORT AND WATERPARK MANAGEMENT.

American Resort Management is a nationally recognized, full-service hospitality management company located in Erie, Pennsylvania that has been offering consulting expertise in development, operation and long-term management for a diverse range of hospitality projects of all sizes since 2006.



KeyBank is one of the nation's largest, bank-based financial services companies, making it easy for you to bank where you live. Our roots trace back 190 years to Albany, NY. Today, KeyCorp is based in Cleveland, OH, and we're one of the nation's largest bank-based financial services companies, with assets of approximately \$195 billion.



MEDNET - Hospital Information Management System, a complete 360 degree solution including EMR, PACS, LIS, and device integration. A solution which helps improve and standardize processes, making patient care predictable, quick and accurate. A revolutionary healthcare system to solve deep domain issues tailored to suit all the needs of patients and healthcare providers.



III. Our History

Location, Topography, Climate, and Forest Area

Location

According to the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, “The Tonto Apache Tribe is located adjacent to the town of Payson (originally named Te-go-suk, Place of the Yellow Water), in northwestern Gila County approximately 95 miles northeast of Phoenix and 100 miles southeast of Flagstaff, Arizona. Consisting of 85 acres, it's the smallest land base reservation in the state of Arizona (Inter Tribal Council of Arizona).”

Topography

As explained by the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, “due to the reservation’s modest size, it lacks notable geographic characteristics and has a very small amount of natural resources, including timber and minerals. Elevations vary from 4,975 and 5,115 feet. However, a variety of significant terrain features surround the reservation. The Sierra Ancha Mountains are to the south, the Mogollon Rim is to the north, and the Mazatzal Mountains are to the west. In close proximity to the reserve, the Mogollon Rim provides breathtaking pine forests, lakes, streams, camping, and hunting opportunities. The winter snow offers countless opportunities for cross-country snowshoe racing, skiing, and snowmobiling (Inter Tribal Council of Arizona).”

Climate

The Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona also explains “The Tonto Apache reservation is located in Arizona at an elevation of 5,000 feet and has a moderate climate of four seasons. The average high temperature in the summer is around 90 °F (Fahrenheit) and winter temperatures get down to a high of 25°F. Tonto Apache reservation has an average of two to six inches of snowfall with an annual rainfall of 22 inches. This allows for a reprieve from the extreme heat of the deserts of Arizona (Inter Tribal Council of Arizona).”

Forest Area

Also according to the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, “The Tonto Apache reservation is next to the Tonto National Forest. This forest is approximately 450,000 acres. The forest consists of Chaparral, Pinyon-Juniper, and Ponderosa Pines. The Verde River and several trout streams go through the Tonto National Forest. The Payson Ranger District located near the Tonto Apache Reservation has campgrounds, hiking trails, horseback riding, picnicking, bicycling, and fishing (Inter Tribal Council of Arizona).”

Map of Reservation



Image 4: Map of Tonto Apache Reservation, courtesy of WBK Engineering

Our History

Pre-Settlers

The Tonto Apache are the direct descendants of the Tontos who lived in the Payson vicinity long before the advent of the Anglo. The large Rio Verde Reserve, near Camp Verde, was established in 1871 for the Tonto and Yavapai Indians. The Reserve was dissolved in 1875 when they were forcibly moved to the San Carlos Apache Reservation. Some Tontos gradually returned to Payson after 20 years of exile to find white settlers had taken much of their land. (Tonto Apache Tribe | Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, n.d.)

Struggle for Land and Sovereignty

In 1972, the Tonto Apache Tribe was officially recognized by a congressional act, a significant milestone in their ongoing struggle for sovereignty. However, their land base remained one of the smallest in Arizona, totaling just 85 acres. Efforts to expand their land holdings have continued to this day, as the tribe seeks to gain trust title to the land they currently occupy, allowing them greater self-determination and control over their resources.



This recognition has been crucial for the tribe's efforts to govern themselves, pursue economic opportunities, and improve the quality of life for their members.(Yavapai and Tonto Apaches - Tonto National Monument (U.S. National Park Service), n.d.)

Cultural Heritage and Recognition

The Tonto Apache people have managed to preserve and celebrate their cultural heritage despite the numerous challenges they have faced. They are particularly well-known for their exquisite beadwork and basketry, which have gained national recognition. These traditional crafts are not only an artistic expression but also a source of economic support, with many tribal members producing beadwork and baskets for sale. These artistic endeavors are a testament to the tribe's resilience and commitment to preserving their cultural practices for future generations.(Yavapai and Tonto Apaches - Tonto National Monument (U.S. National Park Service), n.d.)

Economic Development Milestones

The Tonto Apache Tribe has made significant strides in economic development since the establishment of their reservation. One of the most notable achievements is the opening of the Mazatzal Hotel and Casino, which has become one of the largest employers in Payson. The casino not only provides jobs for tribal members but also generates essential revenue that supports tribal services, infrastructure, and community programs. Additionally, the tribe's beadwork and basketry continue to be important sources of income and cultural pride, contributing to the local economy and attracting visitors interested in Native American art.

Challenges and Opportunities Today

Today, the Tonto Apache Tribe continues to face challenges related to land ownership, economic opportunities, and social welfare. The small size of their reservation limits their ability to expand infrastructure and attract larger-scale economic investments. However, the tribe is actively working to overcome these challenges through strategic initiatives, such as the Apache Corners Development project. This multi-year initiative aims to diversify the local economy by creating new businesses, improving infrastructure, and enhancing the quality of life for tribal members.

The tribe's efforts to secure a trust title to their land and expand their reservation are ongoing, representing a critical step toward achieving greater sovereignty and economic stability. By leveraging partnerships with local stakeholders, utilizing their unique cultural heritage, and focusing on sustainable development, the Tonto Apache Tribe is paving the way for a prosperous future.



Tonto Apache Governance

The Tonto Apache Tribe exercises governance through a formally established Tribal Council, which was constituted following federal recognition in 1972 and the adoption of the tribal constitution in 1979. The Tribal Council comprises a Chairperson, Vice Chair, and several council members who are elected by tribal members to lead the community. The council oversees various aspects of governance, including economic development, social services, and cultural preservation initiatives. By managing programs and resources in a way that aligns with the community's values, the Tribal Council plays a central role in fostering self-sufficiency, promoting sustainable growth, and preserving the cultural heritage of the Tonto Apache people. (Tonto Apache Tribe | Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, n.d.)

Tribal Council Members, 2024:

- Calvin Johnson, Chairman
- Charles Lopez, Vice Chairman
- Lucinda Flores, Council Member
- Joe Morgan, Council Member
- Steven Johnson, Council Member

Connecting History to Economic Strategy

The history of the Tonto Apache Tribe is deeply interconnected with their current economic strategies. Their experiences of forced relocation, land loss, and resilience have shaped their desire for self-sufficiency and economic independence. This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) builds on that history, focusing on initiatives that will restore economic sovereignty, create new opportunities, and ensure that the tribe's cultural heritage is preserved for future generations. The tribe's past informs their present efforts to build a diversified and resilient economy that benefits not only the Tonto Apache people but also the surrounding communities in Gila County.

Timeline of Key Historical Events

Pre-Colonial Era: Tonto Apache people live in harmony with the land, practicing traditional hunting, gathering, and crafting.

1871: Establishment of the Rio Verde Reservation for the Tonto Apache and Yavapai people.

1875: Dissolution of the Rio Verde Reservation and forced relocation to the San Carlos Apache Reservation.

1890s: Gradual return to Payson by Tonto Apache families to reclaim ancestral lands.

1972: Federal recognition of the Tonto Apache Tribe and establishment of an 85-acre reservation.

1979: Adoption of the tribal constitution and establishment of formal governance.



1990s-Present: Establishment and operation of the Mazatzal Hotel and Casino, providing economic growth and employment opportunities.

2020-Present: Apache Corners Development project initiated to diversify economic opportunities and support sustainable growth.

IV. Current Conditions

The Tonto Apache Tribe was recognized in 1972 by a congressional act. It is governed by a Chairwoman, Vice Chairman, and three council members. Council members serve two-year terms, and the Chair and Vice Chair serve four-year terms. Elections are held annually on the second Saturday of June. Annual meetings are held on the second Saturday in October. The Tonto Apache Tribe is in Congressional District 4; and Legislative District 6. The tribe has its own constitution adopted in 1979. The 2018-2022 census registered approximately 102 individuals living in Gila County. (Tonto Apache Tribe of Arizona, n.d.)

The Economic Climate

The United States Economy

The condition of the United States economy affects the Tonto Apache Nation, illustrated by a significant decrease in new housing developments. The Indian Housing Block Grant (HBG) has not kept up with inflation or the growing need for housing (Joint Economic Committee, n.d.). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase of unemployment for Native Americans went up to 28.6% as well as impacted tribal government revenue which led to reduced revenue from tribal businesses, particularly the Mazatzal Hotel and Casino, and strained the tribal government's capacity to fund essential services. In Arizona tribal lands receive less than one cent for each dollar loaned to small businesses compared to non-tribal tracts. Economic stimulus measures or cuts at the federal level influence the tribe's ability to support housing, education, healthcare, and workforce development initiatives. (Parsons & Parsons, 2023)

Arizona State Economy

Arizona State's economy has impacted on tribal lands and housing. This includes 0.004% of small business loans that went to borrowers on tribal lands and receive less than one cent for each dollar loaned to small businesses compared to non-tribal tracts (Arizona Launches Microbusiness Loan Program to Facilitate Economic Development and Job Creation Throughout State, 2024). The average unemployment rate for the Nineteen Tribal Nations is 13.2% significantly higher than the overall rate of 5.4% for the entire state (MAG, 2021). There is a need for employment opportunities in the Arizona State for tribal nations. Arizona's tourism sector, worth over \$23 billion annually, offers the tribe an opportunity to expand beyond gaming by developing attractions like Apache Corneers. Rising housing costs across Arizona have also increased construction expenses, making it difficult for the tribe to address the affordable housing shortage on the reservation. Infrastructure development remains inconsistent, as state funding for Native American programs fluctuates (MAG, 2021).

Tonto Apache Tribal Economy

The Tonto Apache Tribe's economy is primarily driven by the Mazatzal Hotel and Casino, which is the main source of revenue and employment for the community. This revenue supports essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. However, reliance on gaming makes the economy vulnerable to disruptions, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this, the tribe is focusing on economic diversification through the Apache Corners Development, which aims to expand into retail, healthcare, and entertainment, thereby reducing dependency on gaming. Additionally, the tribe seeks to leverage its location near the Mogollon Rim and Tonto National Forest to boost tourism, while traditional crafts such as beadwork and basketry contribute to cultural preservation and economic sustainability. Challenges remain, including limited land and access to capital, but strategic partnerships are being pursued to support sustainable growth.

Tribal Economy Network

The Tonto Apache Tribe is part of a broader tribal economy network that includes collaboration with other Native American tribes through initiatives such as the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA), tribal enterprises, and partnerships with state and federal agencies. This network allows the tribe to share resources, best practices, and economic opportunities that benefit all involved. (Tonto Apache Tribe | Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, n.d.) One significant aspect of the tribal economy network is the ability to operate tribally-owned enterprises. Unlike non-tribal governments (State and Federal governments), tribes like the Tonto Apache are empowered to own and operate their own businesses—such as casinos, hotels, and retail stores—which generate revenue used directly for community services and development projects. This structure has allowed the Tonto Apache Tribe to maintain greater autonomy in decision-making and invest in community needs more efficiently. Access to programs like the Native American Business Incubator Network further supports tribal members in developing new business ventures that contribute to economic growth and sustainability.

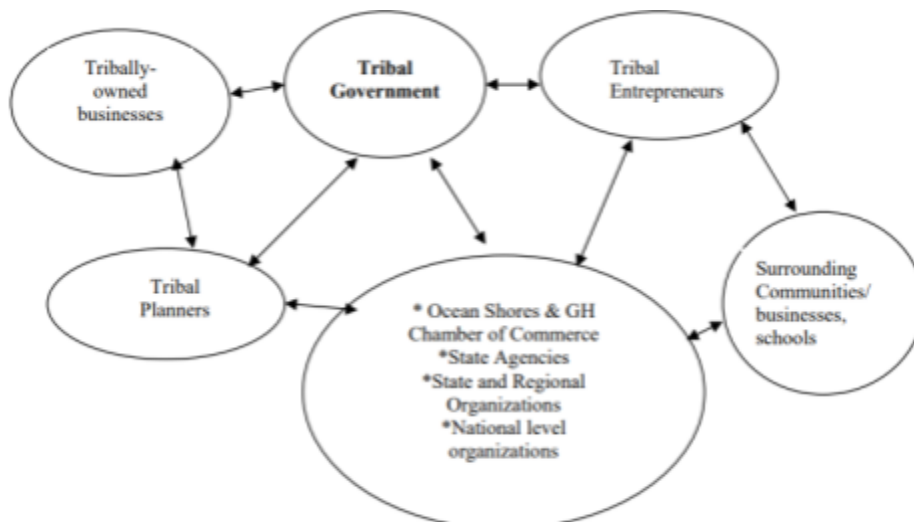


Figure 12: Tribal Economy Network Graphic

Tonto Apache Economic Clusters

Industry clusters are groups of related companies located in a specific geographic region that share similar markets, technologies, and workforce requirements. These firms are often interconnected through buyer-supplier relationships. Businesses and employees within an industry cluster benefit from their close proximity to competitors, access to a skilled labor pool, specialized suppliers, and a collective base of advanced industry knowledge, which together create a competitive advantage.

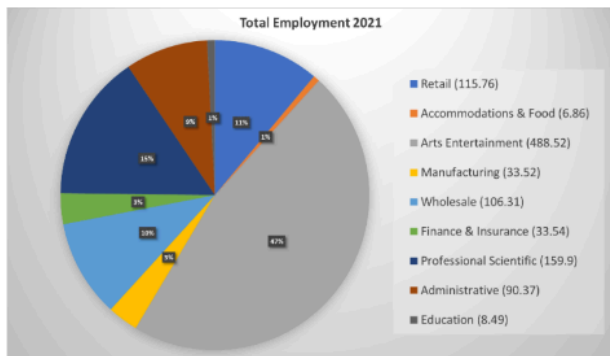
Tonto Apaches economic clusters evaluation revealed the to include already established industries as well as industries that would complement the existing industries. An economic evaluation was done using the three zip codes the reservation is located on or near, 855541, 85544, and 85554. The economic study focused on the local convenience store, gas station, family fun center, and overall market opportunities.

Tonto Apache Tribe Economic & Market Analysis Summary

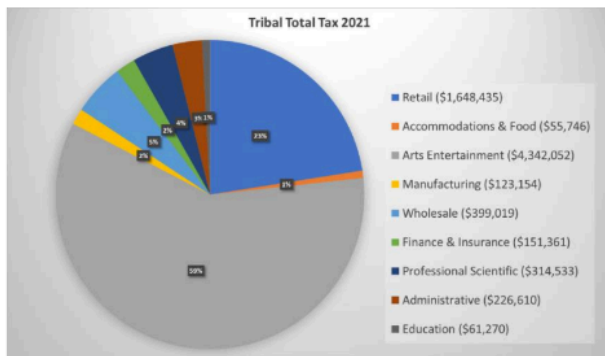
\$89,261,112
Economic Impact

\$30,475,836
Total Wages

571
Rental Demand



Employment - By meeting demand with certain industry sectors, overall direct employment increases throughout the reservation. These new jobs will lead to increased economic activity and wages creating additional jobs and economic ...



Tax Capture - With new businesses on the reservation there is an opportunity to capture taxes providing resources for future economic development or funding for government programs.

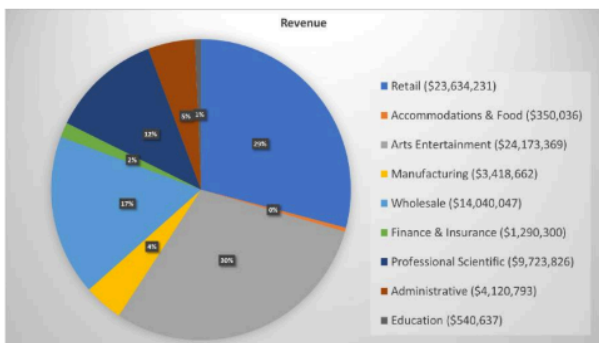
Figure 13: Tonto Apache Tribe Economic and Market Analysis Summary

The already existing and successful established industry is the Mazatzal Hotel and Casino. To complement the casino other industries in the tourist and hospitality cluster and industrial park with manufacturing and other professional industries were found to be in demand.

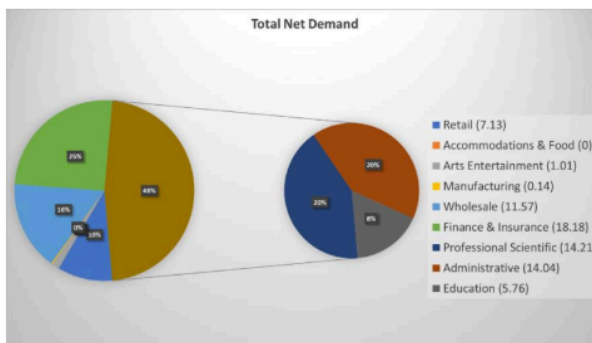
Category	Total Economic Impact 2021	Total Employment 2021	Total Wages 2021	Tribal Total Tax 2021	Total Net Demand
Retail	\$10,989,611.59	115.76	\$4,080,156.13	\$1,648,435.76	7.13
Accommodations & Food	\$480,823.82	6.86	\$204,630.64	\$55,746.75	0
Arts Entertainment	\$33,162,248.94	488.52	\$14,810,555.63	\$4,342,052.29	1.01
Manufacturing	\$4,173,924.86	33.52	\$947,033.63	\$123,154.82	0.14
Wholesale	\$13,337,227.01	106.31	\$3,124,369.53	\$399,019.63	11.57
Finance & Insurance	\$5,802,718.57	33.54	\$906,069.08	\$151,361.06	18.18
Professional Scientific	\$13,779,774.58	159.90	\$4,057,248.15	\$314,533.05	14.21
Administrative	\$6,777,226.04	90.37	\$2,063,880.36	\$226,610.14	14.04
Education	\$757,557.31	8.49	\$281,893.24	\$61,270.46	5.73
Totals	\$89,261,112.72	1043.27	\$30,475,836.39	\$7,322,183.96	72.01

Table 2: Summary by Industry - Tonto Tribe Economic & Market Analysis

The industrial professional park and tourist and hospitality clusters are centered around the already established and successful Mazatzal Hotel and Casino. With the construction and opening of the Mazatzal Hotel & Casino, the Tonto Apaches have found themselves in a position to greatly improve their quality of life, school, health, and business opportunities in Payson and the surrounding Arizona Rim Country area. They want to expand on this success not only for their own community but also those around their community.



Revenue - There is increased demand for a variety of new businesses. Currently people are spending money elsewhere and dollars are leaking outside the Tribal economy. By meeting current demand, we have the opportunity to create



Business Demand - Currently, there is demand for a variety of businesses. Once these businesses are developed, recruited and/or expanded the additional economic activity will spin off to new housing, employment and economic opportunities.

Figure 14: Revenue and Total Net Demand Graphics

Tourist and Hospitality Cluster

The tourist and hospitality clusters are the first addition to the community. This would be for those visiting the Tonto Apache community and those in the community. Some of the industries are an expansion and some are new. The majority of this cluster would be centered around the casino and hotel.



Image 5: Conceptual rendering of proposed gas station and travel center (fi Architecture)

Convenience store gas station

Tonto Apache is the gateway into the Arizona Rim Country area. The convenience store and gas station are the first establishments seen coming north. This is a place for travelers to refresh and get gas on the northeast side of the highway. The current establishment requires expansion and upgrades. As well as a new facility on the northwest side of the highway. Historically this establishment has been successful at generating cash and employment for the tribe. The estimated revenue for these establishments is \$5 to \$20 million while generating jobs of 21 to 75 employees.

Family fun Center

The addition of a family fun center for the community and guests. To expand the casino to include the entire family can enjoy. This would include bowling, an arcade, and a movie theater. This would be the first family fun center established in the area. Estimated revenue \$15-\$25M. Jobs projection of 100-175 employees.

Restaurants /Bar

There is a demand in the area for family restaurants and bars. This would allow the tribe to explore joint ventures with existing and new operators. These would incorporate both family and adult themes.



Image 6: Conceptual Rendering of Apache Corners Restaurants (fi Architecture)

Industrial Professional Park Cluster

Supermarket

Currently, there are no supermarkets available to travelers and the tribe in this area. In addition to filling a demand, this would bring in approximately \$20 million in revenue and 52 jobs to the tribal community. There is an indication of the need for baked goods and other food items.

Healthcare Facility

There is a current healthcare facility that caters to both the tribal members and surrounding communities. There is a demand for an expansion of this to include doctor's offices and other healthcare needs. This would increase professionals coming into the community as well as more employment locally.

Professional/Scientific Services Offices

There is a demand for legal, computer, engineering, financial institutions, and advertising services in the region. There is a demand for the addition of offices to the industrial professional park to encourage professionals to locate within the Tonto Apache reservation. The estimated revenue is \$9 million and 70 additional jobs to the community.

Manufacturing/Distribution

Manufacturing and distribution would geographically concentrate like business in the area. This would include businesses, suppliers, and other institutions in a specific industry that interact and collaborate. This would help identify new needs, strengthen supply chains, improve competitiveness, reorganize supply chains, and adopt shared value strategies within the community.

Economic Growth Areas - Apache Corners Development

What is Apache Corners?

Apache Corners is a multi-year community and economic planning effort by the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation. Beginning in 2020, Tonto Apache focused on what economic opportunities existed that would benefit their Nations economy and benefit the region.

Approximately 75 acres on the reservation will be used to build the future Tonto Apache economy. This includes trust land on the east and west sides of A-87, and this development aims to capture outside revenue to stimulate not only the Tonto Apache economy but also the entire region. The total development is slated for a mixed-use approach focused on building an economy from their initial businesses with the Tonto Apache government, Mazatlán Casino and Hotel, Convenience Store, and Tire Shop. Future developments in the first phase will include an entertainment district with a distillery and additional restaurants, two convenience stores, a family entertainment center, and infrastructure improvements. Additional developments will focus on a

health center, training and educational partnership, grocery store, cannabis dispensary, warehousing, and light manufacturing. The plan is to connect parcels on the east and west sides of A-87 through finding ways for pedestrian safety, traffic calming, and efficiency improvements.

Development Will Include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ New gas station with attached convenience store ❖ The refurbishment of the current gas station ❖ Heritage Distilling Co. distillery and storefront ❖ New grocery store ❖ New office buildings and manufacturing/distribution center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A new community health center open to all ❖ A restaurant serving Heritage products ❖ A Family Entertainment Center ❖ A Cannabis Dispensary ❖ Cultural area
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The rendering below, courtesy of WBK Engineering, showcases the current draft concept for development, which is subject to change. The proposal also includes changing the current intersection on AZ Route 87 to a roundabout, to improve traffic flow and increase connectivity of the tribal land.



Image 7: conceptual rendering of proposed Apache Corners Development

Image 8 displays an aerial view of the proposed site, outlining the location of each part of the development. This conceptual plan is subject to change. The proposed roundabout on the intersection is subject to review and coordination by local jurisdictional authorities.

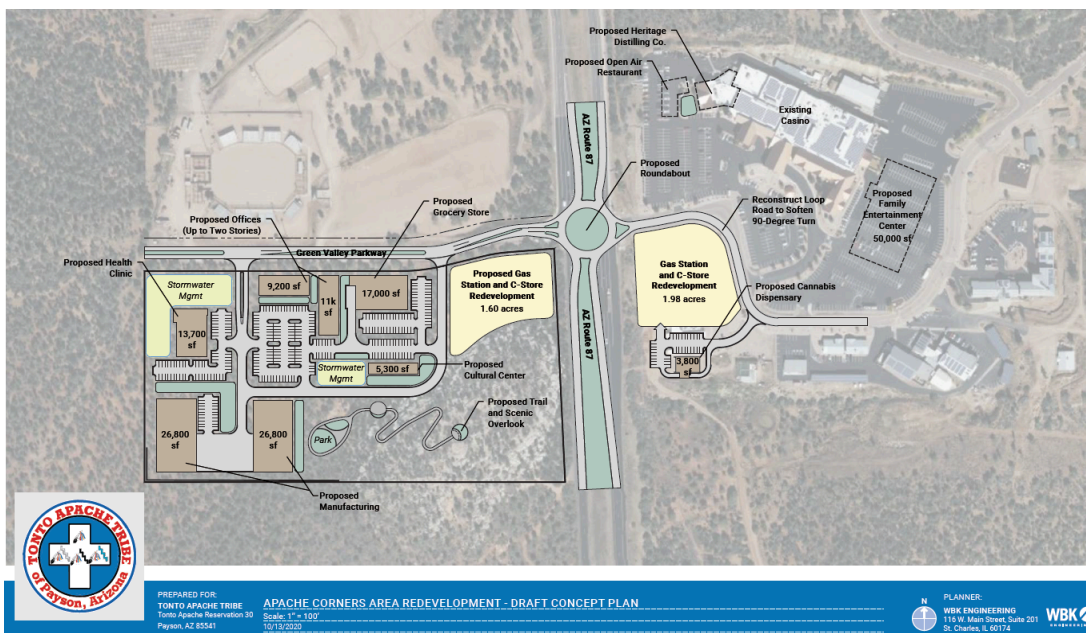


Image 8: Draft Concept Plan of Apache Corners Area Development, by WBK Engineering

The rendering below illustrates the conceptual design of the open-air restaurant and heritage distilling company, showcasing what the development will likely look like when completed.



Image 9: Rendering Courtesy of Heritage Distilling Co. in collaboration with fi architecture

Economic Potential/ Plans for Future Development

The Apache Corners development is structured in a phased approach to systematically build the economic foundation of the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation. **Phase 1**, commencing in the second quarter (Q2) of 2024 and concluding by the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2025, focuses on establishing key infrastructure and initial enterprises. This includes two convenience stores with gas stations, a heritage distillery, an RV park, a family entertainment center, and essential infrastructure improvements, amounting to a total investment of \$60 million.



Image 10: Rendering of proposed family entertainment center

Future phases, spanning from the first quarter (Q1) of 2026 to the first quarter (Q1) of 2027 and beyond, will expand to include a grocery store, healthcare facilities, training, and workforce development centers, manufacturing and warehousing, additional RV park space, office spaces, and arts facilities. This phased strategy ensures a gradual and sustainable

economic growth trajectory, positively impacting both the Tonto Apache community and the surrounding region.

Family Fun Center

In collaboration with American Resorts Management LLC, Apache Corner’s design plan includes the addition of a “Family Fun Center” which will be a recreational space for all ages. Activities will include but not be limited to miniature golf, escape rooms, bowling, arcade games, sports simulators, and vertical climbing walls. This center will serve as a great place for the community and families to gather and engage in fun activities while simultaneously contributing to the local economy. Since the center will host activities unique to the area, it is expected to draw in tourism, making Apache Corners an even more attractive location.

Distillery and Restaurants



Image 11: Additional rendering of proposed distillery, (Heritage Distilling Co. & fi architecture)

In the development proposal, there is an inclusion of restaurants that will be diverse and cater to various tastes and preferences. To create a vibrant and dynamic culinary scene, an outdoor open-air restaurant with scenic views will be present, and will serve Heritage Distillery products. Heritage will also have its own storefront and production center. The distillery will offer guided tours and tastings, allowing visitors to explore.

Gas Station/ Convenience Store

The Gas station within Apache Corners will offer a range of fuel options as well as electric vehicle charging stations to accommodate various vehicles, conceptually displayed in the rendering on the left. The convenience center will offer a wide range of services and products, creating a one-stop shop that serves the community's needs.



Image 12: Additional rendering of gas station & travel center (fi Architecture)

Attached to this will be a travel center, there to address any travel needs for visitors. Additionally, there will be a conveniently located cannabis dispensary that will bring in revenue and likely be a popular destination for visitors. This new gas station and convenience store will make Apache Corners a high-volume destination for travelers and community members alike, being the first fuel/charging station visible driving north into Payson on State Route 87.

Grocery Store

Incorporating a well-designed grocery store into the Apache Corners development not only fulfills a fundamental need but also contributes to the vibrancy and sustainability of the community. While the specific grocer is still being determined, the goal is to have an affordable grocery option providing quality food to help support the health of the tribe and surrounding community.

Office Space and Distribution/Manufacturing

The office space within Apache Corners will cater to various businesses fostering a dynamic and entrepreneurial atmosphere. Distribution and manufacturing facilities support local employment opportunities. Incorporating these spaces into the development stimulates economic growth but also creates a well-rounded community with diverse opportunities for residents and businesses alike.

New Health Center

The Healthcare center will serve as a comprehensive medical facility, offering a wide range of healthcare services to residents and surrounding communities. It will feature a modern and welcoming architectural design with provisions for classroom spaces as well as training facilities. The introduction of a healthcare center in Apache Corners not only addresses the essential needs of the community but also contributes to the overall quality of life and the long-term well-being of residents. Additionally, the facility will include spaces for wellness



programs focused on health education, nutrition, and lifestyle management, further enhancing the well-being of tribal members and residents in the surrounding region.

Infrastructure

The reservation’s infrastructure development focuses on improving roads, utilities, housing, telecommunications, and public safety services. State Route 87 serves as the primary transportation link, and planned upgrades, including a roundabout, aim to enhance traffic flow and connectivity. Utility infrastructure, such as water and electricity systems, requires expansion to support the growing demands of Apache Corners development. The Tonto-Apache Tribe in Payson, AZ is negotiating a comprehensive water rights settlement to secure its future water needs. The Tribe is planning key infrastructure upgrades for reliable water delivery and modernizing its water reclamation system. A utility maintenance division is also being established for long-term operation and maintenance of the new infrastructure. These initiatives, vital for the Tribe’s growth, are part of a larger effort to ensure long-term access to water for basic needs, cultural practices, agricultural activities, and economic development. The report detailing these plans involves collaboration with tribal leaders and experts, assessing water availability, existing infrastructure capacity, and the financial and technical requirements for a sustainable water distribution system.

Demographic and Socioeconomic Statistics

Population

The total population of the Tonto Apache Reservation is about 140, of which 110 are enrolled tribal members. 102 members live on the reservation (Tonto Apache Tribe, 1994). One-third of the tribal members are under the age of 16 (BIA, Indians of Arizona, 1994).

	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
Total population (2020 Decennial Census)	130		7,151,502	331,449,281
Total population (2018-2022 American Community Survey)	102	±56.0	7,172,282	331,097,593
<i>source for all remaining data: 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year</i>				
RACE AND ETHNICITY				
One race	98.0%	±5.0	86.6%	91.2%
White	15.7%	±14.1	66.7%	65.9%
Black or African American	0.0%	±32.7	4.6%	12.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native	78.4%	±16.8	4.1%	0.8%
Asian	0.0%	±32.7	3.4%	5.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	±32.7	0.2%	0.2%
Some other race	3.9%	±6.0	7.7%	6.0%
Two or more races	2.0%	±5.0	13.4%	8.8%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	3.9%	±6.0	32.0%	18.7%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	15.7%	±14.1	53.0%	58.9%

Table 3: Population, Race & Ethnicity: (United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Demographics

The median age of the population is 34 years, with 24.5% of residents being under the age of 18, indicating a relatively young community. The gender distribution shows that males make up 59.8% of the population, while females constitute 40.2%. A significant portion of the community identifies as American Indian (78.4%), reflecting the tribal composition. 38.5% speak a language other than English at home, reflecting cultural diversity within the community.

	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
AGE				
Under 5 years	10.8%	±11.8	5.6%	5.7%
Under 18 years	24.5%	±17.4	22.2%	22.1%
18 to 24 years	10.8%	±12.8	9.8%	9.4%
25 to 44 years	21.6%	±12.2	26.2%	26.6%
45 to 54 years	14.7%	±15.3	11.7%	12.4%
55 to 64 years	9.8%	±11.6	12.0%	12.9%
65 years and over	18.6%	±14.2	18.1%	17.3%
75 years and over	4.9%	±5.9	7.7%	7.2%
Median age (years)	34	±19.9	38.4	39.0
Age dependency ratio	75.9	±55.3	67.5	64.1
Old-age dependency ratio	32.8	±31.1	30.3	28.5
Child dependency ratio	43.1	±40.1	37.2	35.6
SEX				
Male	59.8%	±13.3	50.0%	49.6%
Female	40.2%	±13.3	50.0%	50.4%
LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME				
Speak language other than English	38.5%	±19.1	26.4%	21.7%
VETERAN STATUS				
Civilian Population 18 Years and Over	77	±43.0	5,556,036	256,649,167
Percent Veteran	9.1%	±13.5	8.4%	6.6%

Table 4: Demographics (United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Families and Households

The Tonto Apache Tribe has a total of 45 households, with an average household size of 2.27 members, which is slightly smaller compared to the national average of 2.57. The community structure reflects unique family dynamics and housing conditions. There are 19 families residing on the reservation, with an average family size of 3.47, which is larger compared to the average household size, indicating that family households often include children or extended relatives. A notable 20.0% of households have one or more people under the age of 18, while almost half of the households (48.9%) have one or more members aged 60 years or older. This indicates an aging population, with a significant proportion of older adults living within households. These family and household characteristics suggest a community with a mix of young families, single-parent households, and a significant number of elderly residents, which requires tailored community support and services to address the varying needs of its members.



	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS				
MARITAL STATUS				
Population 15 years and over	84	±46.0	5,861,418	270,721,372
Never married	35.7%	±15.4	33.6%	34.1%
Now married, except separated	25.0%	±17.4	47.6%	47.8%
Divorced or separated	25.0%	±18.5	13.4%	12.4%
Widowed	14.3%	±13.9	5.4%	5.6%
HOUSEHOLDS				
Total households	45	±28.0	2,739,136	125,736,353
Average household size	2.27	±0.9	2.56	2.57
FAMILIES				
Total families	19	±16.0	1,780,293	81,432,908
Average family size	3.47	±1.6	3.13	3.18
Married Couple Family Households	22.2%	±21.2	47.2%	47.5%
Male householder, no spouse present, family HH	8.9%	±11.8	5.8%	5.0%
Female householder, no spouse present, family HH	11.1%	±16.7	12.1%	12.2%
Nonfamily Households	57.8%	±27.6	35.0%	35.2%
SELECTED HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE				
Households with one or more people under 18 years	20.0%	±21.9	30.1%	30.2%
Households with one or more people 60 years and over	48.9%	±32.3	42.8%	41.0%
Householder living alone	46.7%	±30.8	27.1%	28.3%
65 years and over	17.8%	±22.6	11.6%	11.5%

Table 5: Family and Households (United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Health and Education

Access to healthcare remains a major concern, with 24.5% of the population lacking health insurance coverage. This lack of coverage impacts not only individual health outcomes but also the overall well-being of the community, as residents may face barriers to accessing essential healthcare services.

	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
HEALTH				
Percent without Health Care Coverage	24.5%	±17.0	10.8%	8.7%
Percent Population with a Disability	18.6%	±11.3	13.4%	12.9%
EDUCATION				
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT				
Population 25 years and over	66	±40.0	4,878,959	226,600,992
Less than high school graduate	21.2%	±12.2	11.3%	10.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	33.3%	±20.1	23.6%	26.4%
Some college or associate's degree	43.9%	±22.5	33.3%	28.5%
Bachelor's degree	1.5%	±3.7	19.6%	20.9%
Graduate or professional degree	0.0%	±41.7	12.2%	13.4%

Table 6: Health and Education (United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Educational attainment is limited, with only 1.5% of the population holding a bachelor's degree, and no individuals reported as holding a graduate degree. Most of the population has



either completed high school or attended some college, which suggests a need for increased educational opportunities to support further growth and development in the community.

Income Trends

The income distribution and poverty status of the Tonto Apache Tribe reveal significant economic challenges. Among individuals aged 15 years and older, 11.9% earn \$9,999 or less annually, which aligns closely with state and national averages. However, 33.3% of individuals earn between \$25,000 and \$34,999, a considerably higher percentage compared to Arizona (11.2%) and the United States (10.4%). Only 1.2% of individuals earn \$75,000 or more, much lower than the national rate of 19.8%. The median per capita income for the community is \$27,917, which is notably lower than both the state median of \$37,209 and the national median of \$37,585. Median earnings for full-time, year-round workers are also lower at \$31,442, compared to \$53,613 in Arizona.

Poverty Status

Poverty is a significant concern for the Tonto Apache Tribe, with 20.6% of the population living below the poverty level, which is higher than the state rate of 13.1% and the national rate of 12.8%. Additionally, 26.5% of residents fall between 100% and 149% of the poverty level, while 52.9% are at or above 150% of the poverty level. About 4.4% of households receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, which is lower compared to the state (10.1%) and national rates (11.5%), indicating limited utilization of available support programs.

Household and Family Income

The median household income on the Tonto Apache Reservation is \$31,771, significantly below the state median of \$72,581 and the national median of \$75,149. Families, however, have a higher median income of \$63,125, suggesting that families with multiple earners are faring relatively better than single households. For families with two earners, the median income is \$62,500, indicating a direct link between household income levels and the number of earners.

	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
INCOME AND POVERTY				
INDIVIDUALS' INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2021 INFLATION-ADJUSTED)				
Population 15 years and over	84	±46.0	5,861,418	270,721,372
\$1 to \$9,999 or less	11.9%	±12.2	11.2%	12.0%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	13.1%	±13.2	6.9%	7.5%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	16.7%	±15.4	11.4%	11.3%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	33.3%	±16.2	11.2%	10.4%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	10.7%	±13.9	13.4%	12.3%
\$50,000 to \$64,999	2.4%	±3.9	9.5%	9.2%
\$65,000 to \$74,999	2.4%	±4.3	4.4%	4.6%
\$75,000 or more	1.2%	±4.0	17.6%	19.8%
Median per capita income (dollars)	\$27,917	±8591.0	\$37,209	\$37,585
Median earnings full-time, year-round workers	\$31,442	±3118.0	\$53,613	\$57,377
POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS				
Population for whom poverty status is determined	102	±56.0	7,017,776	323,275,448
Below 100 percent of the poverty level	20.6%	±14.8	13.1%	12.5%
100 to 149 percent of the poverty level	26.5%	±24.6	8.5%	8.0%
At or above 150 percent of the poverty level	52.9%	±24.1	78.4%	79.5%
Percent Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	4.4%	±10.0	10.1%	11.5%
HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
Households	45	±28.0	2,739,136	125,736,353
Median Household Income	\$31,771	±25179.0	\$72,581	\$75,149
FAMILIES				
Families	19	±16.0	1,780,293	81,432,908
Median Family Income	\$63,125	±12416.0	\$86,737	\$92,646
MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME BY NUMBER OF EARNERS				
No earners	-	**	\$56,107	\$49,345
1 earner	-	**	\$62,811	\$63,969
2 earners	\$62,500	±19164.0	\$110,093	\$117,657
3 or more earners	-	**	\$135,208	\$145,016

Table 7: Income and Poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Housing Availability and Needs

There are a total of 45 occupied housing units on the reservation. Of these, 66.7% are 1-unit structures, there are no 2-or-more-unit structures on the reservation. Instead, a significant proportion of the housing units—33.3%—are mobile homes or other types of structures, which is considerably higher than both the state (8.7%) and national (5.3%) figures.

The majority of homes on the Tonto Apache Reservation are owner-occupied, with 82.2% of households owning their homes, which is significantly higher than the state average of 66.3% and the national average of 64.8%. Only 17.8% of housing units are renter-occupied, far lower than the state rate of 33.7% and the national rate of 35.2%. This high rate of homeownership suggests a stable and settled population, although the reliance on mobile homes could indicate economic limitations in accessing conventional housing.

	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
HOUSING				
OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS	45	±28.0	2,739,136	125,736,353
UNITS IN STRUCTURE				
1-unit structures	66.7%	±23.3	70.6%	68.8%
2-or-more-unit structures	0.0%	±50.6	20.7%	25.9%
Mobile homes and all other types of units	33.3%	±23.3	8.7%	5.3%
HOUSING TENURE				
Owner-occupied housing units	82.2%	±19.3	66.3%	64.8%
Renter-occupied housing units	17.8%	±19.3	33.7%	35.2%

Table 8: Housing Availability and needs (United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Employment, Unemployment Rates, and Labor Force Estimates

The employment situation for the Tonto Apache Tribe presents unique challenges and opportunities. Among individuals aged 16 years and older, 83 are of working age. The labor force participation rate is 49.4%, which is notably lower than the state (60.5%) and national averages (63.5%). The unemployment rate for the community is 12.2%, more than double the rates for both Arizona (5.4%) and the United States (5.3%), highlighting a critical need for expanded job opportunities.

Occupations for enrolled residents of Tonto Apache Tribal Nation

Of the full-time, year-round civilian employed population aged 16 and over, which includes 23 individuals, a significant portion (21.7%) are employed in management, business, and financial occupations. This aligns closely with state and national trends. However, there is a complete absence of workers in occupations such as computer science, engineering, healthcare practitioners, legal, and community services, suggesting limited diversity in job sectors and a potential need for workforce training programs that focus on these fields.

The largest occupational category is natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations, which employ 47.8% of the working population, far exceeding the state average of 3.8%. This reliance on manual labor highlights a potential vulnerability, as the economy is primarily based on physically demanding work. Employment in service occupations is also significant, with 8.7% of the population employed in healthcare support roles and building and grounds maintenance, which is notably higher than state and national averages. In terms of administrative and sales roles, sales and office occupations account for 13.0% of the workforce, aligning with state figures but below the national average. Overall, the Tonto Apache workforce is characterized by a heavy emphasis on manual and service-based roles, with limited representation in professional and technical occupations.

	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
EMPLOYMENT				
Population Age 16 years and over	83	±47.0	5,764,417	266,411,973
Labor Force Participation Rate	49.4%	±18.2	60.5%	63.5%
Unemployment Rate	12.2%	±14.5	5.4%	5.3%
Full-time, year-round civilian employed population 16 years and over:	23	±21.0	3,210,791	112,968,013
Management, business, science, and arts occupations:	21.7%		43.1%	45.2%
Management, business, and financial occupations:	21.7%		19.9%	20.2%
Management occupations	0.0%		13.0%	13.4%
Business and financial operations occupations	21.7%		7.0%	6.8%
Computer, engineering, and science occupations:	0.0%		8.1%	8.2%
Computer and mathematical occupations	0.0%		4.3%	4.3%
Architecture and engineering occupations	0.0%		2.9%	2.6%
Life, physical, and social science occupations	0.0%		0.9%	1.2%
Education, legal, community service, arts, and media occupations:	0.0%		9.1%	10.4%
Community and social service occupations	0.0%		1.8%	1.9%
Legal occupations	0.0%		1.1%	1.4%
Educational instruction, and library occupations	0.0%		4.6%	5.4%
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations	0.0%		1.5%	1.7%
Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations:	0.0%		6.0%	6.4%
Health diagnosing and treating practitioners and other technical occupations	0.0%		4.0%	4.4%
Health technologists and technicians	0.0%		2.0%	2.0%
Service occupations:	17.4%		14.0%	12.7%
Healthcare support occupations	8.7%		2.6%	2.7%
Protective service occupations:	0.0%		2.9%	2.4%
Firefighting and prevention, and other protective service workers including	0.0%		1.4%	1.2%
Law enforcement workers including supervisors	0.0%		1.5%	1.3%
Food preparation and serving related occupations	0.0%		3.3%	3.0%
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	8.7%		3.6%	2.9%
Personal care and service occupations	0.0%		1.6%	1.6%
Sales and office occupations:	13.0%		22.1%	19.4%
Sales and related occupations	0.0%		9.5%	8.6%
Office and administrative support occupations	13.0%		12.6%	10.8%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations:	47.8%		10.0%	9.4%
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	0.0%		0.4%	0.5%
Construction and extraction occupations	0.0%		5.7%	5.3%
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations	47.8%		3.8%	3.6%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations:	0.0%		10.9%	13.3%
Production occupations	0.0%		4.3%	6.2%
Transportation occupations	0.0%		3.5%	3.8%
Material moving occupations	0.0%		3.0%	3.4%

Table 9: Employment, Unemployment Rates, Labor Force Estimates, and Occupations for enrolled residents (United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Means of Transportation to Work

Transportation plays a significant role in shaping the employment opportunities and daily routines of the Tonto Apache community. The majority of employed individuals (94.4%) use a car, truck, or van to commute to work, which is significantly higher compared to the state average of 80.5% and the national average of 80.2%. Of those using personal vehicles, 61.1% drive alone, which is below both the Arizona average (70.5%) and the national average (71.7%).



Carpooling is notably common in the Tonto Apache community, with 33.3% of workers sharing rides, compared to just 10.0% in Arizona and 8.5% nationally. This suggests a strong community-oriented approach to transportation, possibly driven by economic considerations or limited access to personal vehicles.

Public transportation use, walking, bicycling, and other means of travel are completely absent in the Tonto Apache community, which contrasts with the availability and usage rates found in other parts of Arizona and the United States. The lack of public transit options could indicate limited transportation infrastructure, making it challenging for residents without private vehicles to access employment opportunities or essential services.

	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION TO WORK				
Car, truck, or van	94.4%	±13.8	80.5%	80.2%
Drove alone	61.1%	±24.6	70.5%	71.7%
Carpooled	33.3%	±24.2	10.0%	8.5%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	0.0%	±56.5	1.2%	3.8%
Walked	0.0%	±56.5	1.7%	2.4%
Bicycle	0.0%	±56.5	0.6%	0.5%
Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means	0.0%	±56.5	1.8%	1.4%
Worked from home	5.6%	±13.8	14.3%	11.7%
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	8.8	±7.2	25.5	26.7

Table 10: Means of Transportation to work (US Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Additionally, only 5.6% of individuals report working from home, which is lower than the state average of 14.3% and the national average of 11.7%. This limited adoption of remote work may be influenced by the types of available employment, which are often in sectors that require physical presence, such as construction, maintenance, and service-related fields. The mean travel time to work for residents of the Tonto Apache community is 8.8 minutes, significantly lower than the Arizona average of 25.5 minutes and the national average of 26.7 minutes. This shorter commute may reflect the close proximity of available employment opportunities within or near the reservation, reducing the burden of travel time. Overall, the transportation data highlights the reliance on personal vehicles, limited public transportation, and the prevalence of carpooling within the Tonto Apache community.

Digital Connectivity

	Tonto Apache Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ		Arizona	United States
	Estimate	Margin of	Estimate	Estimate
COMPUTERS/INTERNET				
Total households	45	±28.0	2,739,136	125,736,353
TYPES OF COMPUTER				
Population without an Internet subscription	35.6%	±23.3	10.6%	11.5%
Has one or more types of computing devices:				
Desktop or laptop	55.6%	±24.1	82.0%	79.3%
Desktop or laptop with no other type of computing device	8.9%	±13.2	3.2%	3.3%
Smartphone	73.3%	±20.1	89.7%	88.2%
Smartphone with no other type of computing device	17.8%	±22.5	8.2%	9.1%
Tablet or other portable wireless computer	51.1%	±25.8	64.6%	63.4%
Tablet or other portable wireless computer with no other type of computing device	0.0%	±50.6	0.7%	0.8%
Other computer	6.7%	±11.2	2.7%	2.6%
Other computer with no other type of computing device	0.0%	±50.6	0.0%	0.0%
No computer	17.8%	±16.7	4.8%	6.0%
TYPE OF INTERNET SUBSCRIPTIONS				
With an Internet subscription:				
Dial-up with no other type of Internet subscription	8.9%	±13.2	0.2%	0.2%
Broadband of any type	55.6%	±24.9	89.2%	88.3%
Cellular data plan	55.6%	±24.9	81.3%	81.1%
Cellular data plan with no other type of Internet subscription	20.0%	±28.4	10.7%	11.2%
Broadband such as cable, fiber optic or DSL	31.1%	±25.4	74.0%	73.3%
Satellite Internet service	8.9%	±12.7	8.3%	6.7%
Without an Internet subscription	35.6%	±23.3	10.6%	11.5%

Table 11: Computer and Internet Access (US Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates)

Computer and internet access are important indicators of digital connectivity in the Tonto Apache community. Of the 45 households, 82.2% have at least one computing device, which is below both the state (95.2%) and national (94.0%) averages. Among these households, 55.6% have a desktop or laptop, and 73.3% have a smartphone, highlighting a preference for mobile devices over traditional computing equipment. However, 17.8% of households report having only a smartphone, with no other computing devices, which suggests potential limitations in conducting tasks that require larger screens or more computing power. Notably, 17.8% of households have no computer access at all, significantly higher compared to the state (4.8%) and national (6.0%) averages.

In terms of internet access, 64.4% of households have an internet subscription, which is considerably lower than the state (89.4%) and national (88.5%) averages. Of those with internet access, 55.6% have broadband, while 20.0% rely on cellular data only. Around 35.6% of households have no internet subscription, limiting their ability to participate in online education, employment, and healthcare services. This digital gap indicates a need for improved infrastructure and access to ensure that community members can fully engage with digital services and opportunities.



V. Our Accomplishments

Three-Year Economic Development Accomplishments

Based on the Tribe's economic development goals, the following accomplishments are described below:

1. Completed the Draft of a Comprehensive Plan. The Tonto Apache Tribal Nation completed their first ever comprehensive plan, with the help of aLocal Geospatial, to outline the vision, plan, and objectives for the Apache Corners Development.
2. Performed economic impact analysis to understand market demand through aLocal software Utilizing aLocal software, the tribe conducted a thorough assessment of potential economic opportunities, focusing on sectors like tourism, retail, and housing. This analysis provided key insights into current market needs and demand trends, helping shape future development projects, such as the Apache Corners initiative.
3. Completed a Site Analysis. WBK Engineering assembled a site analysis of relevant information to identify existing site opportunities and constraints for future development of the Apache Corners property. The analysis includes a review of existing site conditions, current environmental factors and constraints, a review of existing available plans, and existing utility infrastructure.
4. Broke Ground on Apache Corners Development. On October 14, 2023, the tribe held a groundbreaking ceremony for the Apache Corners Development where they invited their tribal members, nearby community members, local politicians, and Apache Corners Partners. This marked the beginning of construction for the development.
5. Received Award from Arizona Association of Economic Development. aLocal, Tonto Apache Nation, and Apache Corners won the AAED Golden Prospector Award of Merit at the Fall 2023 Conference in Flagstaff, Arizona. This award recognized projects that significantly contribute to the overall economic well-being of Arizona.
6. Received the Donald E. Hunter Excellence in Economic Development Planning Award for Apache Corners. The Apache Corners Development was honored with the Donald E. Hunter Excellence Award at the 2024 American Planning Association's National Planning Conference.
7. Received the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) 'Multi-Year Collaborative Economic Development Award, 2024' This prestigious recognition was awarded for the successful integration of planning and economic development



strategies, which were pivotal in guiding the phased growth of the Apache Corners initiative. The award highlights the effective collaboration between aLocal Solutions and the Tonto Apache Tribe, emphasizing the value of strategic partnerships in achieving sustainable community development.

8. Traffic Impact Study. A traffic impact study is being conducted by the Tonto-Apache Tribe and the Town of Payson, primarily considering impacts regarding the Apache Corners property and adjacent rodeo grounds to the northwest. This study is closely tied to the site’s water rights settlement, which is examining a potential expansion of the reservation’s footprint. With a focus on future development to the south along SR-87, the study will consider current traffic counts during peak times and projected traffic counts generated by future development. The study also includes an examination of access improvements to existing infrastructure and the design of access to future development. Ongoing discussions are underway to complete this comprehensive study, with an estimated timeline of 12-15 months until completion. This study is a crucial step in planning for the tribe’s sustainable growth, as well as in determining the scope of necessary improvements and ensuring that both the Tribe’s development and the town's infrastructure needs are met.

9. Tri-cities Meeting. Tonto Apache Tribal Council held a “Tri-Cities” meeting, open to the public, on March 28, 2024. The Mayors and councils from the Town of Payson and the Town of Star Valley gathered to discuss the regional collaboration and future goals. The meeting began with aLocal, WBK Engineering, and Tonto Apache Chairman Johnson all presented Apache Corners Development updates as well as the Tribe’s goals and objectives for the region’s future. The Mayor from Star Valley and Payson also had the opportunity to present, ask questions, and discuss regional collaboration. The meeting successfully fostered an environment for collaboration and communication, and the Tribe received very positive feedback from the nearby Town officials.

VII. Vision for the Future

Vision Statement

The primary goal of the Apache Corners Development is to introduce new developments that stimulate both the tribal and regional economies. This development will not only create new jobs and economic opportunities for local residents, but it will also bring the community together through the businesses being introduced.

Goals and Objectives

Preferred Future Conditions

The preferred future conditions, informed by public feedback, include:

- An educated and trained workforce
- A robust, diversified, and growing economy, consisting of both private and tribally-owned businesses
- Accessible, affordable housing on the Reservation for Tribal members
- Strong, accessible, and affordable healthcare services on the Reservation
- Increased collaboration and strengthened relationships with other jurisdictions
- An enhanced quality of life for tribal residents
- A sustainable economy, resilient to future shocks
- A supportive environment for local businesses
- Enhanced technology and digital infrastructure available to Tribal members
- More development on the reservation, with increased services offered to residents such as restaurants, grocery stores, and recreational facilities

Economic Development Goals and Objectives

The Tonto Apache Tribe's economic development goals are designed to ensure a sustainable, diversified, and resilient economy that benefits all members of the community. These goals are structured around five core areas:

Goal 1: Economic Diversification

- **Objective 1.1:** Expand beyond the gaming sector by developing retail, healthcare, tourism, and small-scale manufacturing projects.
- **Objective 1.2:** Launch the Apache Corners development to establish new revenue streams through retail, entertainment, and healthcare facilities.
- **Objective 1.3:** Attract outside investments to support business expansion and reduce economic reliance on casino revenues.

Goal 2: Infrastructure Enhancement

- **Objective 2.1:** Improve road safety and accessibility, especially around Apache Corners, to facilitate better connectivity and boost tourism.
- **Objective 2.2:** Expand and improve housing infrastructure to accommodate community growth, focusing on affordable housing solutions.
- **Objective 2.3:** Develop digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet access, to ensure all residents can participate in education, remote work, and digital business opportunities.

Goal 3: Workforce Development and Training

- **Objective 3.1:** Establish partnerships with educational institutions to provide vocational training programs aligned with local industry needs.
- **Objective 3.2:** Focus on training for emerging sectors such as healthcare, hospitality, and technical services to prepare community members for the evolving economy.
- **Objective 3.3:** Reduce unemployment by creating pathways to employment and increasing access to skill-building opportunities within the community.

Goal 4: Collaboration and Partnerships

- **Objective 4.1:** Foster strategic partnerships with public, private, and tribal entities to leverage funding, technical support, and expertise for economic initiatives.
- **Objective 4.2:** Utilize the success of collaborative projects like Apache Corners as a model for future partnerships to encourage regional economic growth.
- **Objective 4.3:** Engage local stakeholders, neighboring tribes, and state and federal agencies to support the development of shared initiatives and resource pooling.

Goal 5: Sustainable Development

- **Objective 5.1:** Integrate sustainable practices into all development projects, including renewable energy adoption and green building standards.
- **Objective 5.2:** Prioritize water conservation and resource management to ensure that economic growth aligns with environmental stewardship.
- **Objective 5.3:** Develop policies and initiatives that balance economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability for future generations.

VIII. From Vision to Action

Apache Corners

History of Apache Corners

The history of this endeavor started in discussions approximately 5 years ago to address the reuse of the restaurant with the expiring Sonic lease. That expanded into other areas of brainstorming with the community, other stakeholders, and Tonto Apache citizens. In 2020 during the global pandemic, the Tribal Council experienced economic hardships for their nation that shares a border with the City of Payson and Gila County. With labor and economic challenges, the existing economic entities experienced shortfalls and due to the reduced revenues impacted the bottom line on services for Tribal citizens. That was when they reached out to find a specialized company that provided services beyond a feasibility study and that was Native-Owned.

Planning Process

After analyzing the existing investments, Chairman Johnson and the Council requested that the entire reservation area be reviewed to determine:

- What dollars were leaking outside the economy
- What industries are in demand
- What would the benefits be to Tonto Apache and the surrounding area

Through an in-depth analysis using aLocal, Tonto Apache saw an opportunity to stimulate the regional economy and begin exploring what industries would be feasible. They began to analyze the possible business ventures, potential revenue, and the net economic impact on the tribe and region. This planning exercise included multiple stakeholders with the Nation as well as other community stakeholders. Using feedback from the community conversations, Tonto Apache determined what was best for their nation. This included some intuitive opportunities, such as retail, food and beverage as well as other opportunities that included, but were not limited to, warehousing, light industrial, and storage.

The Tribe worked on the development of a business plan to meet the financial obligations of what industries would help support financial gains as well as positive impacts in the region. Using sophisticated financial modeling as well as analyzing the current economic conditions, they developed a plan to introduce Apache Corners in phases. The future of this development will change the Tonto Apache Nation as well as provide a positive economic impact for the City of Payson, surrounding areas, and Gila County.

Economic Development Assumptions

The estimated total economic impact of the master development plan is as follows:

- ★ **Economic Impact:** **\$89.2MM**
- ★ **Employment:** **1,043 persons**
- ★ **New Wages:** **30.5MM**
- ★ **Tax Impact:** **9.1MM**

This information was estimated using aLocal’s AI Economic Development Data Analytics software. As you can see, the projected economic impact of the Apache Corners Development is extremely significant, with approximately 89.2 Million Dollars being generated, and over

1,000 new jobs being generated. This development will not only help the Tonto Apache Tribe but will also bring revenue and employment to the surrounding community and city of Payson.

Action Plan and Implementation Schedule

Detailed Phases and Timeline

The Apache Corners development project is meticulously designed to foster sustainable economic growth and significantly impact the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation and the surrounding region. The project is divided into distinct phases, each focusing on specific objectives and investments to systematically build and diversify the economic base.

	Q2 2024	Q3 2024	Q4 2024	Q1 2025	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	Q2 2026	Q3 2026	Q4 2026	Q1 2027
Distillery	X	X	X									
RV Park	X	X	X									
Convenience Store w Gas-West				X	X	X	X					
Infrastructure				X	X	X	X					
Convenience Store w Gas-East							X	X	X	X		
Family Entertainment Center									X	X	X	X

Figure 15: Timeline Gantt Chart for phases of Apache Corners Development

Phase 1 (Q2 2024 - Q4 2025):

This initial phase focuses on establishing core infrastructure and foundational enterprises to set the stage for future development.

- **Convenience Stores with Gas Stations:**
 - **West Convenience Store:** A \$6 million investment in a convenience store with gas facilities on the western side of the development.

- **East Convenience Store:** Another \$6 million investment for a similar store on the eastern side. These stores are expected to generate substantial revenue and provide essential services to residents and visitors.
- **Heritage Distillery:** A \$6 million project to build a distillery that will produce local spirits. The distillery will offer guided tours and tastings, enhancing the tourism appeal of Apache Corners.
- **RV Park:** A \$2 million investment in an RV park designed to attract tourists and provide convenient accommodation options, boosting local tourism revenue.
- **Family Entertainment Center:** A significant \$29 million investment in a state-of-the-art family entertainment center. This facility will include miniature golf, escape rooms, bowling alleys, arcade games, sports simulators, and climbing walls, providing a comprehensive recreational experience for families and drawing visitors from the region.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** An \$11 million allocation for essential infrastructure to support the above projects, including roads, utilities, and other necessary services.

Timeline:

1. **Q2 2024 - Q4 2024:** Begin construction of convenience stores, distillery, and RV park; initiate infrastructure improvements.
2. **Q1 2025 - Q2 2025:** Continue construction of convenience stores and distillery; complete RV park and start on the family entertainment center.
3. **Q3 2025 - Q4 2025:** Complete convenience stores, distillery, and infrastructure; finalize and open the family entertainment center.

Phase 2 (Q1 2026 - Q4 2026):

This phase expands on the initial developments by introducing additional essential services and economic opportunities.

- **Grocery Store:** Establishment of a grocery store to provide quality, affordable food options, enhancing local health and supporting the community's daily needs.
- **Healthcare Facilities:** Development of healthcare centers to improve local healthcare access and services, catering to the growing population.
- **Training and Workforce Development Centers:** Implementation of training and workforce development centers aimed at enhancing local skills, increasing employability, and supporting economic growth.
- **Manufacturing and Warehousing:** Introduction of light manufacturing and warehousing facilities to diversify economic activities and provide employment opportunities.



Timeline:

1. **Q1 2026:** Planning and design of the grocery store, healthcare facilities, and training centers.
2. **Q2 2026 - Q3 2026:** Begin construction of the grocery store and healthcare facilities; initiate setup of training centers and manufacturing units.
3. **Q4 2026:** Complete and operationalize the grocery store, healthcare facilities, and training centers; continue developing manufacturing and warehousing facilities.

Phase 3 (Q1 2027 - Q4 2027):

The final phase focuses on expanding recreational and cultural facilities, further enhancing the community's quality of life and attractiveness to visitors.

- **Expanded RV Park:** Additional investment to expand the RV park, accommodating more visitors and boosting tourism.
- **Office Spaces:** Creation of office spaces to attract businesses, providing professional working environments and stimulating economic activities.
- **Arts Facilities:** Establishment of arts facilities to foster cultural activities, attract visitors, and contribute to cultural preservation and tourism.

Timeline:

1. **Q1 2027:** Planning and design of expanded RV park, office spaces, and arts facilities.
2. **Q2 2027 - Q3 2027:** Begin construction of office spaces and arts facilities; continue expansion of the RV park.
3. **Q4 2027:** Complete and operationalize the expanded RV park, office spaces, and arts facilities.

Financial Overview:

- Initial Investment for Phase 1: \$60 million.
- Total Project Estimate: \$200 million over 5 years.
- Annual EBITDA (5-Year Average): \$7,170,200, with significant contributions from convenience stores, the family entertainment center, the distillery, and the RV park.

Total Phase 1 Investment:	\$60 million
○ Convenience Store w Gas-West	\$6,000,000
○ Convenience Store w Gas-East	\$6,000,000
○ Distillery	\$6,000,000

- RV Park \$2,000,000
- Family Entertainment Center \$29,000,000
- Infrastructure \$11,000,000

Annual EBITDA (5-Year Average):

- Convenience Store East: \$1,116,600
- Convenience Store West: \$1,993,200
- Family Entertainment Center: \$2,241,500
- Distillery: \$1,710,900
- RV Park: \$108,000
- Total: \$7,170,200

Economic Impact:

- **Phase 1 Economic Impact:** \$89.2 million
- **Employment Created:** 1,043 jobs
- **New Wages:** \$30.5 million
- **Tax Impact:** \$9.1 million

Loan Details:

- **Total Loan:** \$60 million
- **Invest/Down Payment:** \$10 million
 - \$6 million in cash
 - \$4 million in grants
 - \$1 million from various sources
 - \$3 million from the Economic Development Administration (EDA)

Coverage:

- **Annual EBITDA:** \$16 million
 - \$9 million from gaming revenues to the government
 - \$7 million from Apache Corners revenue

The Apache Corners development is a transformative project with a total estimated investment of \$200 million over five years. The phased approach ensures a gradual and sustainable economic growth trajectory, focusing on developing an economy that will significantly impact the Tonto Apache community and the surrounding region. The first three phases are expected to be completed in approximately 3.5 years, setting a strong foundation.

Comprehensive Plan for Apache Corners Development

The creation of the Comprehensive Plan for Apache Corners was the foundational step in the strategic development of the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation's economic future. This plan was meticulously crafted to address the tribe's needs and opportunities, laying the groundwork for the subsequent Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Planning Process

The planning process began with a thorough analysis of the Tonto Apache Reservation and its surrounding areas. This analysis aimed to identify the current economic conditions, potential revenue streams, and the overall feasibility of various development projects. Key steps in the planning process included:

- 1. Assessment of Current Investments:** Chairman Johnson and the Tonto Apache Tribal Council initiated a review of the entire reservation area to determine the flow of money, identify economic leakages, and pinpoint industries in demand.
- 2. Stakeholder Engagement:** Extensive engagement with multiple stakeholders, including tribal members, community leaders, and business partners, was a critical component. Feedback from these conversations helped shape the vision and direction of the development plan.
- 3. Economic Analysis:** Utilizing advanced AI Economic Development Data Analytics from aLocal, the tribe conducted an in-depth analysis to predict economic impacts, potential job creation, and revenue generation. This analysis provided a data-driven foundation for the plan.

Site Analysis Results

The site analysis was a crucial step in understanding the physical and logistical challenges and opportunities presented by the reservation's geography. This included:

- **Geographical Challenges:** Addressing issues such as steep terrain and the need for connectivity across the reservation, split by A-87.
- **Transportation Solutions:** Exploring traffic calming and management techniques, potential roundabout installations, and pedestrian safety improvements.

Design Plan

The design plan for Apache Corners outlines the development's functional zones and key elements, including:

- **Family Fun Center:** A recreational space with activities such as miniature golf, escape rooms, bowling, arcade games, sports simulators, and climbing walls, aimed at boosting tourism and local engagement.
- **Restaurants and Distillery:** Featuring an outdoor open-air restaurant and a Heritage distillery offering guided tours and tastings, contributing to a vibrant culinary scene.
- **Convenience Stores and Gas Stations:** New convenience stores with gas stations, including electric vehicle charging stations and a travel center, strategically placed to serve both locals and travelers.
- **Grocery Store:** A well-designed grocery store to provide quality, affordable food options, supporting community health and sustainability.
- **Office Space and Manufacturing:** Office spaces to foster business growth and manufacturing facilities to create local employment opportunities.
- **Healthcare Center:** A comprehensive medical facility offering a range of healthcare services, enhancing the quality of life for residents.

Implementation Strategy

The implementation strategy includes detailed planning relationships, timelines, and maintenance plans:

- **Planning Relationships:** Collaboration with the City of Payson and ADOT to address transportation and connectivity issues, including the proposed roundabout.
- **Timeline:** Clear phases of development with projected timelines for each project component, ensuring methodical progress.
- **Maintenance:** Strategies for maintaining the development, with identified funding sources for each phase to ensure sustainability.

Future Considerations

Looking ahead, the comprehensive plan outlines future expansions and developments if the initial phases prove successful. This includes potential hotel extensions and other amenities to further enhance the economic and social fabric of the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation. The creation of this comprehensive plan was a critical first step in the journey towards economic revitalization for the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation. It provided a clear, data-driven roadmap that guided the subsequent development of the CEDS, ensuring a cohesive and strategic approach to sustainable growth.

IX. Evaluating Performance

Evaluating the performance of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Apache Corners is essential to ensure the project meets its objectives and contributes positively to the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation and the surrounding region. This section outlines the performance measures and the economic development evaluation process, incorporating guidelines from the Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Performance Measures

Performance measures are essential tools used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Apache Corners. These measures help ensure that the project stays on track, achieves its objectives, and delivers the intended economic benefits to the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation and the surrounding region. The performance measures are divided into four main categories: CEDS Goals & Objectives Measures, Project Priority Measures, CEDS Strategy Committee Performance Measures, and Staff Performance Measures. Each category focuses on different aspects of the project's progress and impact, providing a comprehensive evaluation framework.

CEDS Goals & Objectives Measures:

These measures are designed to evaluate the overall success of CEDS in achieving its long-term goals and objectives. They focus on economic growth, income levels, community well-being, and environmental sustainability, ensuring that the project contributes to the holistic development of the region.

- **Economic Growth:** Monitor increases in local GDP, job creation, and the establishment of new businesses within the Tonto Apache Reservation.
- **Income Levels:** Track changes in average household income and reductions in poverty levels among tribal members.
- **Community Well-being:** Assess improvements in healthcare, education, and overall quality of life indicators for the community.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Evaluate the progress on infrastructure improvements, such as roads, utility upgrades, and digital infrastructure expansion.
- **Tourism and Visitor Spending:** Measure increases in visitor traffic and revenue from tourism-related activities, particularly after the development of Apache Corners.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Evaluate adherence to environmental regulations and the project's impact on local natural resources.

Project Priority Measures:

Project priority measures are used to track the progress and effectiveness of individual project components. These measures focus on timeliness, budget adherence, stakeholder satisfaction, and the economic impact of each project phase, ensuring that all elements of the development are completed efficiently and effectively.

- **Timeliness:** Ensure each phase of the project is completed within the designated timeline.
- **Budget Adherence:** Monitor expenditures to ensure they remain within the allocated budget.
- **Stakeholder Satisfaction:** Collect feedback from stakeholders, including tribal members, local businesses, and partners, to gauge satisfaction with the project's progress and outcomes.
- **Economic Impact:** Measure the economic impact of each project phase in terms of job creation, local business growth, and overall economic stimulation.
- **Community Benefits:** Evaluate the direct benefits to the community, such as increased employment opportunities, improved public services, and enhanced quality of life.

CEDS Strategy Committee Performance Measures:

The CEDS Strategy Committee will play a key role in overseeing the implementation of the CEDS and ensuring that projects align with the tribe's long-term vision. The committee will meet regularly to review performance data, provide guidance on project priorities, and make recommendations for adjustments to ongoing initiatives. Committee Functions include:

- **Attendance at CEDS meetings and strategy sessions**
- **Completion of the CEDS strategy and annual reports**
- **Regular Monitoring:** The committee will review quarterly and annual reports to monitor progress and address any challenges or barriers to success.
- **Strategic Adjustments:** Based on performance data, the committee will recommend adjustments to project timelines, resource allocation, and strategic goals.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The committee will ensure that community members, business leaders, and government partners are engaged in the evaluation process, providing feedback and input on economic development initiatives.

Staff Performance Measures:

Staff performance measures evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, and professional development of the project team. These measures ensure that the project staff is equipped to

meet deadlines, resolve issues, and continuously improve their skills and knowledge to support the project's success.

- **Efficiency:** Assess the efficiency of project staff in executing their duties and meeting project deadlines.
- **Effectiveness:** Evaluate staff effectiveness in achieving project objectives and resolving issues.
- **Professional Development:** Monitor ongoing training and development opportunities for staff to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to support the project.

Economic Development Evaluation Process

- I. **Introduction:** The economic development evaluation process is a structured approach to continuously assess and improve the CEDS implementation. It involves regular reviews, data collection, and reporting to ensure alignment with the strategic goals and objectives, enabling timely adjustments and improvements.
- II. **Evaluation Tasks and Schedule:** The evaluation tasks are scheduled at regular intervals, including quarterly reviews, annual reports, mid-term evaluations, and a final evaluation. These tasks ensure continuous monitoring and provide opportunities for strategic adjustments.
 - A. **Quarterly Reviews:** Conduct quarterly reviews of project progress, focusing on key performance indicators (KPIs) such as economic growth, job creation, and budget adherence.
 - B. **Annual Reports:** Prepare annual performance reports summarizing the project's achievements, challenges, and areas for improvement. These reports will be submitted to the EDA and other relevant stakeholders.
 - C. **Annual Project Priority List Evaluation:** Any changes to the project priority list will be presented to the CEDS Strategy Committee, including justifications. These will be reviewed and recommendations will be made before submitting to the tribal council for final approval.
 - D. **Annual CEDS Evaluation:** The Grants and Contracts office will conduct an internal evaluation of the CEDS every year to ensure that projects are on track and meeting their performance metrics.
 - E. **Community Meetings:** At least one community meeting will be held each year to assess quality of life, satisfaction, expectations, and feedback on economic projects.



- F. Mid-Term Evaluation:** Conduct a comprehensive evaluation at the halfway point of the project to assess overall progress, re-evaluate project priorities, and make necessary adjustments to the implementation strategy.
- G. Final Evaluation:** Upon project completion, conduct a final evaluation to measure the overall success of the project against the initial goals and objectives, and to document lessons learned.
- III. A Living Plan:** The evaluation process for the CEDS is dynamic and adaptable. This "living plan" approach allows for ongoing adjustments based on real-time data and stakeholder feedback. Continuous engagement with stakeholders, regular performance monitoring, and the flexibility to make necessary changes will ensure that the Apache Corners project remains on track and delivers sustainable economic benefits.

This comprehensive evaluation framework will provide the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation with the tools and insights needed to ensure the success of the Apache Corners development, fostering long-term economic growth and community well-being.



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