



# Greater Triangle Regional Council

## Overview

The idea of a multi-sector leadership group in the Triangle Region first sprang from the Triangle’s 1992 World-Class Region Conference. The conference, moderated by Neil Pierce of The Citi-states Group, assembled the region’s top business, academic, government and civic leaders to discuss regional growth. The Greater Triangle Regional Council, a permanent leadership group, formed in 1993. The Council brings together regional leaders to examine issues that affect the Triangle’s future and promotes strategies to tackle regional problems.

The Greater Triangle Regional Council’s influence waned shortly after its formation. Participation by high-level executives decreased. The organization became closely affiliated with the Triangle J Council of Governments, one of 18 regional councils of local elected officials in the state, and lost its big-CEO impact.

In 2004 the Greater Triangle Regional Council is in a rebuilding phase. Today, Council membership consists of 35 executives from business, nonprofits, educational institutions and civic organizations, up from 27 five years ago. The Council became an independent organization in 2003 and shares offices with the Research Triangle Regional Partnership.

As part of its effort to gain influence, the Greater Triangle Regional Council has taken a lead role on regional air quality compliance. It is organizing and sponsoring the fourth World-Class Region Conference in spring 2005, assembling hundreds of citizens and leaders to examine the Triangle’s alternatives for growth and development. The Council’s Board of Directors is also considering adoption of social equity as a new regional priority.

## Regional Priorities

The Greater Triangle Regional Council has chosen air quality as its top regional priority in 2003-2004. In 2003 the Council formed an air quality task force to research the economic impact of the clean air “non-attainment” status that the region earned from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for 2004. The designation requires the region to meet certain air quality standards.

## ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

### Type of Organization

Primarily business-led

### Unit of Membership

Individual

### Number of Members

2003: 35

1998: 27

### Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 43%

Mid-sized Companies: 17%

Large Companies: 40%

### Dues Determined by

Flat fees or dues

### Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$3,000

Smallest Member Companies: \$1,500

### Annual Operating Budget

2003: Less than \$500,000

1998: Less than \$500,000

### Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 1

1998: 1

### Board Members

2003: 35

### Regional Priorities

Air Quality

The Council's air quality task force will recommend a regional course of action and encourage other institutions to change to meet EPA standards. "At present the region has no plan to address air quality with the EPA and does not have an organization designated as the 'regional initiatives clearinghouse,'" said Pam Wall, Executive Director of the Council.

Regional leaders fear non-attainment will diminish residents' quality of life and hurt businesses' bottom-line. "The quality of our air continues to affect the health and quality of life of sensitive populations and the public at large," said Jim Roberson, Chairman of the Air Quality Task Force and President of the Research Triangle Foundation. "Persistent non-attainment may affect our economic bottom line as well."

The Council plans to release a report on the issue in 2004. One problem is the steep learning curve with air quality, which is a very complex issue. The Council plans to release the report on regional air quality just before the EPA designates the region as non-compliant. The Council's actions may spark the creation of an organization to lead regional collaboration on air quality.

In spring 2005 the Greater Triangle Regional Council will sponsor the region's fourth World-Class Region Conference. The Council helped organize the region's second and third World-Class Region Conferences in 1998. The first conference in 1992 led to the Council's creation. At each conference, citizens from across the region consider alternatives for the Triangle's growth.

The Council has also been involved in a regional effort to devise strategies and tools that state, regional and local governments can use to guide growth. The Triangle J Council of Governments launched the project in 1998 and adopted nine principles for growth. The principles, loosely mirroring smart growth issues, were endorsed by the Greater Triangle Regional Council in 1999 and adopted by a special Legislative Commission on Smart Growth in 2001.

### **Structure and Operations**

The Council has seen a drop-off in participation among top-tier CEOs. The chancellors and presidents of the region's four major universities, for example, no longer attend Council meetings but send upper level administrative staff. Part of the reason has been the Council's unclear identity over the past eight years.

This may be changing. After years of affiliation with and being housed in the Triangle J Council of Governments, the Greater Triangle Regional Council became an independent organization in 2003. It is no longer housed in the same building as the council of governments, but shares office space with the Research Triangle Regional Partnership.

Despite the drop-off of big-CEO participation, the Council's membership increased from 27 to 35 between 1998 and 2003. The Council now wants to re-engage big-CEO types, but it also wants to take advantage of the region's strong technology and entrepreneurial

community. “If we do not figure out how to get this segment of the community to the table, then we will fail,” said Pam Wall.

The Council has one staff person and a budget of less than \$500,000. The Council shares offices with the Research Triangle Regional Partnership as an effort to cut down on administrative overhead and align itself with a stronger business presence. The Greater Triangle Regional Council is collaborating closely with the Research Triangle Regional Partnership to promote “Staying on Top,” a five-year, \$5 million strategy to generate 100,000 new jobs in eight industry clusters and increase employment in all 13 counties of the region.