



**Clients:**

Southwestern Commission  
Appalachian Regional  
Commission  
NCDOT

**Project Status:**

Completed in 2014

**Project Overview:**

- Regional Vision for seven-county area
- County-level plans for two counties to address specific issues, including a controversial highway
- Learn more at [www.optinswnc.org](http://www.optinswnc.org)

## OPT-IN

### The Opportunity Initiative of Southwestern North Carolina

North Carolina's seven westernmost counties are united by a common heritage and the beauty of some of the most rugged terrain in the Eastern U.S., but they lack an urban center and a guiding vision. TSW led the year-long Opt-In effort, which explores how to unify this mountainous area to create jobs, improve transportation, and protect the natural environment.

Dividing mountain ranges and an independent-minded culture were two significant challenges for thinking regionally and gathering public input. For this reason, TSW's innovative outreach strategy incorporated:

- More than 300 one-on-one interviews and small group gatherings to gauge initial public response, share draft plans, and reach those who might not have attended a traditional public meeting.
- A series of 18 Community Workshops in three rounds to be sure that each county, as well as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, was able to give input.
- A final Regional Summit to showcase the Regional Vision and kickoff the implementation process.



The Opt-In process was federally funded because of a controversial and unfinished highway project in the region. TSW worked with the region to broaden the conversation from transportation to related issues such as the economy and development, in order to craft final plans that will allow counties to work together to achieve a common vision for the future.

