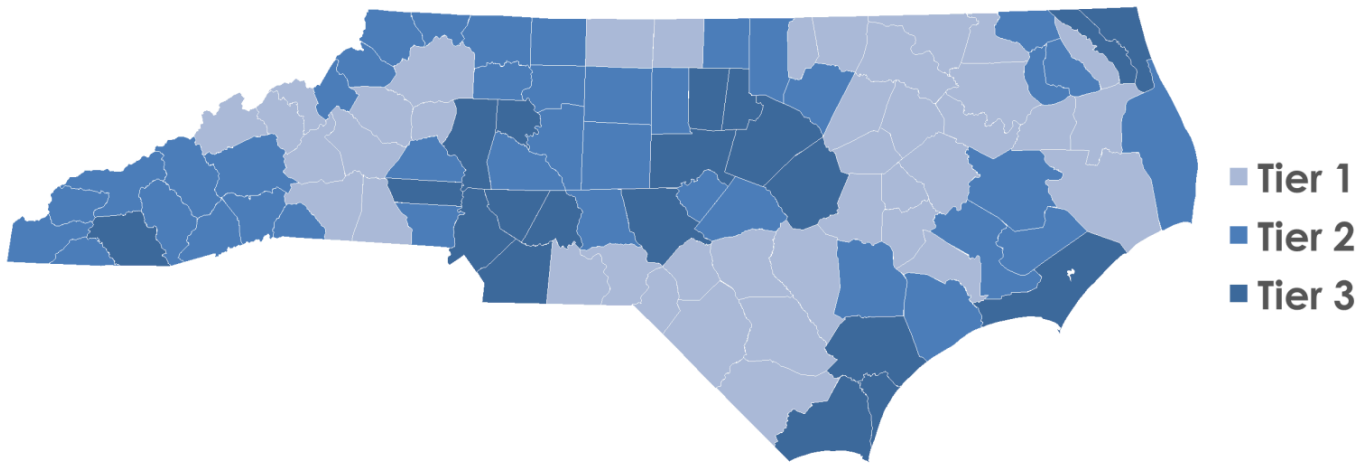


NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



County Distress Rankings (Tiers)



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The North Carolina Department of Commerce annually ranks the state’s 100 counties based on economic well-being and assigns each a Tier designation. This Tier system is incorporated into various state programs to encourage economic activity in the less prosperous areas of the state.

The 40 most distressed counties are designated as Tier 1, the next 40 as Tier 2 and the 20 least distressed as Tier 3.

[2026 County Tier Designations Memo](/report-county-tiers-ranking-memo-current-year/download?attachment) → (/report-county-tiers-ranking-memo-current-year/download?attachment)

(published November 26, 2025)

County Tiers are calculated using four factors:


- Average unemployment rate
- Median household income
- Percentage growth in population
- Adjusted property tax base per capita

You'll find detailed information about the Tiers system and current county rankings below.




2026 County Tier Designations

Tier Ranking by County



25  entries per page

Search:

County  	Development Tier  
Alamance	2
Alexander	1
Alleghany	2
Anson	1
Ashe	2
Avery	2
Beaufort	2
Bertie	1
Bladen	1
Brunswick	3
Buncombe	2
Burke	1
Cabarrus	3
Caldwell	1
Camden	3
Carteret	3

County ^ v	Development Tier ^ v
Caswell	1
Catawba	2
Chatham	3
Cherokee	2
Chowan	2
Clay	2
Cleveland	1
Columbus	1
Craven	2

Showing 1 to 25 of 100 entries

« < 1 2 3 4 > »

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions



We've gathered [answers to the most common questions](/grants-incentives/county-distress-rankings-tiers/faqs-county-distress-rankings-tiers) (/grants-incentives/county-distress-rankings-tiers/faqs-county-distress-rankings-tiers) we're hearing about the state's County Distress Rankings, also known as the County Tiers system.

Additional Reference: County Average Wages



For your convenience, you can download a chart with [North Carolina's County Average Private Sector Wages here](/north-carolina-county-average-wages/download?attachment) (/north-carolina-county-average-wages/download?attachment). Please

note, however, that this wage statistic is not used in the calculation methodology that determines these Tier rankings.

Related Content

- [County Tier Designation Archives \(/grants-incentives/county-distress-rankings-tiers/county-tier-designation-archives\)](/grants-incentives/county-distress-rankings-tiers/county-tier-designation-archives)
- [Explanation of Changes Made in 2019 by the N.C. General Assembly to the Tier Ca... \(/documents/explanation-changes-used-calculating-ncs-economic-development-tiers\)](/documents/explanation-changes-used-calculating-ncs-economic-development-tiers)
- [Map Graphic | County Tiers \(/documents/map-graphic-north-carolinas-economic-development-tier-rankings\)](/documents/map-graphic-north-carolinas-economic-development-tier-rankings)
- [Historical County Tiers \(Excel\) !\[\]\(2824aab9645d9fab95bae27ff6828dab_img.jpg\) \(/tiersedrankingsall/open\)](/tiersedrankingsall/open)

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