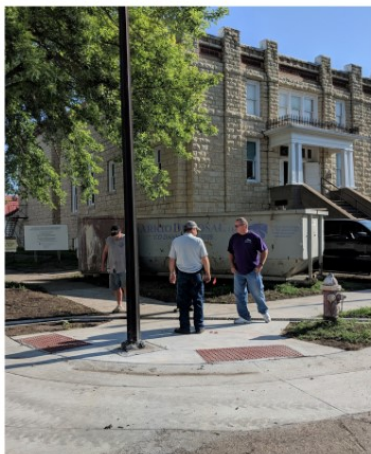
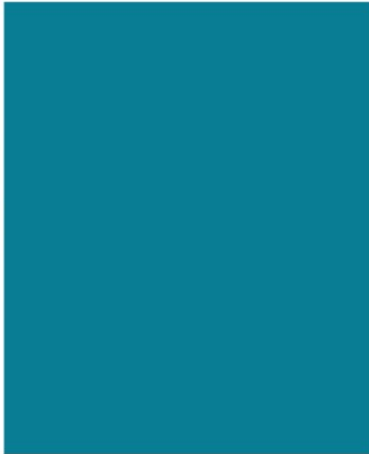


NORTH CENTRAL KANSAS

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



Serving North Central Kansas — including Clay, Cloud, Dickinson, Ellsworth, Jewell, Lincoln, Marshall, Mitchell, Ottawa, Republic, Saline and Washington Counties



**North Central Regional
Planning Commission**

Serving Kansans since 1972

Produced with financial assistance from NCRPC member cities and counties and the United States Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA)



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On the Cover:

Top Left: A ribbon cutting celebrated the completion of a new truck route in the City of Frankfort located in Marshall County.
Photo courtesy of Frankfort Area News

Top Right: The City of Hope located in southern Dickinson County completed a water distribution improvement project to help ensure a safe and dependable water system for the community.

Bottom Left: A drainage improvement project in the City of Waterville included an intersection near the historic Waterville Opera House.

Bottom Right: NCKCN (a NCRPC affiliate) connects rural households and businesses to the Internet.

Executive Summary

The North Central Regional Planning Commission (NCRPC) is designated as an Economic Development District (EDD) for the 12-county region of North Central Kansas by U.S. Department of Commerce/Economic Development Administration (EDA).

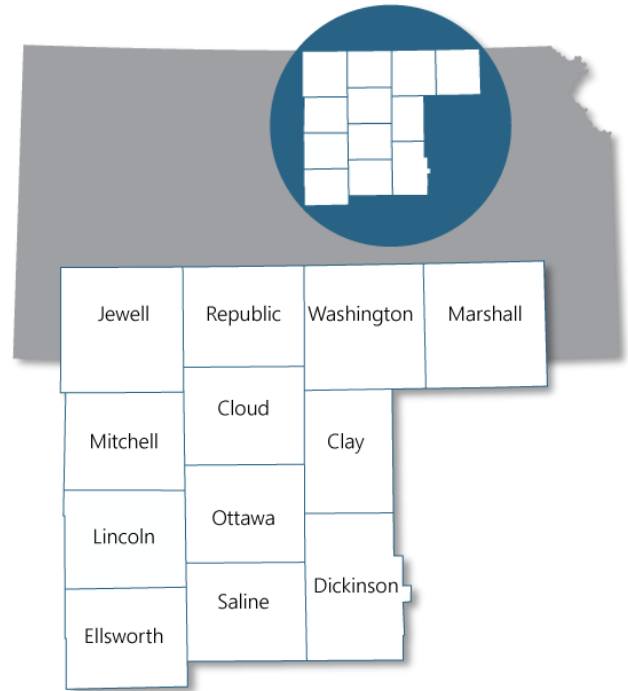
The NCRPC was formed in 1972 as a multi-county planning organization headquartered in Beloit, Kansas with a satellite office in Salina. It was designated an Economic Development District (EDD) in 1980. As the administrative arm of the EDD, the regional planning commission is authorized to receive partnership planning monies from EDA and is an eligible entity for contributing to the development and direct administration of EDA-funded projects in applicable portions of the region.

Organized with eight counties, today NCRPC serves 12 counties and 83 member cities and extends its services to non-profit organizations and businesses. The region includes the following counties in North Central Kansas: Clay, Cloud, Dickinson, Ellsworth, Jewell, Lincoln, Marshall, Mitchell, Ottawa, Republic, Saline and Washington.



Our Mission is advancing rural Kansas through comprehensive planning and development services.

Our Vision is that by 2024, communities in rural Kansas will favor choices that embrace innovation, increase prosperity and demonstrate resilience.



The North Central Regional Planning Commission Economic Development District includes 12 counties in North Central Kansas and 83 member cities.

Who is NCRPC?

For nearly 50 years, the NCRPC has been adapting to meet the continually changing economic and community development needs of the region. Primary services include the following:

- Assisting member cities, counties and area non-profits with a variety of [community initiatives](#) like project development and administration and strategic planning.
- Addressing local [housing needs](#) by administering housing rehabilitation projects and related inspection services.
- Providing [weatherization](#) assistance to low-income households to increase the energy efficiency of their homes, which reduces residents' energy costs and ensures their health and safety.
- Helping customers access funding from a number of specialized [business finance](#) programs to start, expand or purchase a business. The NCRPC offers three business loan programs.

- Working with local health departments through the [North Central Kansas Public Health Initiative](#) to improve and protect the health of their communities.
- Serving as the fiscal agent for six [Regional Homeland Security councils](#) in Kansas. Project investments build community response capabilities and encourage citizen safety and preparedness.
- Connecting rural households and businesses to the Internet through a variety of related services through affiliate [North Central Kansas Community Network](#).

The NCRPC is also a partner in other regional initiatives including the [Rural Business Development Initiative](#).

What is a CEDS?

Every 5 years the NCRPC has the opportunity to update its strategic plan for the region. The [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) (CEDS) is a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process and document that engages community leaders, private sector partners, and other stakeholders in planning for the future.

The CEDS planning process is designed to identify locally-grown strategies that will guide regional economic development, encourage partnerships and collaboration, and improve economic outcomes and overall quality of life in the region.

Included in the plan are a summary of the economic conditions of the region, an analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (commonly known as a “SWOT” analysis), an action plan as well as evaluation framework to monitor performance measures and the impact on the regional economy. Economic resilience — or the ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., ‘shocks’) to the economic base — is also a key component of the CEDS.

The Process

The CEDS is the result of collaboration among partners and key stakeholders from across the region. A major component of the planning process was a series of round table discussions NCRPC hosted in 2021.

Stakeholders represented several sectors throughout North Central Kansas, including: Economic Development, Education, Business, Bankers, Government, Nonprofits, Healthcare, Emergency Management, Public Health and more. These discussions helped create the foundation for the CEDS and were supplemented through additional engagement from a Strategy Team, Executive Board Members, NCRPC staff, and citizen participation in two CEDS Regional Surveys. More information can be found in the SWOT section.

The Action Plan

Through the planning process, NCRPC identified five main visions and related goals critical to the success of North Central Kansas. These are listed below. More information on the Vision, Goals and Objectives can be found in the Strategic Direction section. Successful implementation of the Action Plan will support communities in becoming more innovative, prosperous and resilient.

Regional Collaboration

Connect Stakeholders to Strengthen Regional Resiliency

Economic Prosperity through Innovation

Support Business Development

Enhance Economic Development

Superior Physical Assets

Increase Access to Quality Affordable Housing

Secure and Maintain Basic Infrastructure

Passionate Leadership from Empowered Citizens

Encourage a Culture of Learning, Leading and Teaching

Maintain a Highly Skilled Staff Capable of Addressing the Constant Change in the Region

Exceptional Quality of Place

Attract and Maintain Residents

Leverage Rural Assets

Summary Background

The data provided in the Summary Background helps lay the foundation for understanding the current challenges and opportunities facing the region. This overview — combined with the knowledge and input of many stakeholders and citizens who participated in round table discussions, surveys, and more during the CEDS strategic planning process — helps shape how the region will respond to these challenges and opportunities and prosper.

Based on a 2018 CEDS survey of individuals who live or work in the region, responses indicate there is a strong sense of pride and many positive and unique attributes in North Central Kansas on which to build. The following word cloud represents responses to the following question:



NCRPC served as the project administrator for a grant used to make improvements to the Belleville City Park.

Regional Data Portal

For a quick overview of key indicators for the region, visit the [Kansas Regional Data Portal](#). This tool provides region-specific summaries of the following:

[Demographics](#), [Housing](#), [Business and Industry](#), [Healthcare](#), [Quality of life](#), [Infrastructure](#), and [Natural Resources](#).

Population

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, **133,874 people live within the NCRPC region** that includes 12 counties. Residents of North Central Kansas account for 4.6 percent of the total Kansas population. Between the 2010 and 2020 decennial census enumerations, **the region population decreased by 5,729 persons, a 4.1 percent decrease** in overall population. The decline in population in North Central Kansas has a direct impact on all aspects contributing to quality of life, making it one of the highest priorities for NCRPC to address. The [total population percent change](#) for the decennial census has decreased in all 12 counties.

Age of Population

In the past decade, our 12-county region has continued to see an increase in the overall age of residents. From 2000 to 2019, the [average median age](#) for the region increased 7.1% from 41.9 to 44.9 years. The median age in Kansas increased 2.3% during the same time period from 35.2 to 36.0 years. A comparison of Population by Age Group from 2000 to 2019 is shown below.

Age Group	2000	2019	% Change	
under 18	35,423	30,344	-14.30%	↓
18-24	11,039	10,683	-3.20%	↓
25-44	36,502	30,020	-17.80%	↓
45-64	32,752	34,028	3.90%	↑
65 and over	26,469	27,778	4.90%	↑

Source: [Institute for Policy & Social Research](#) with data from U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Division.

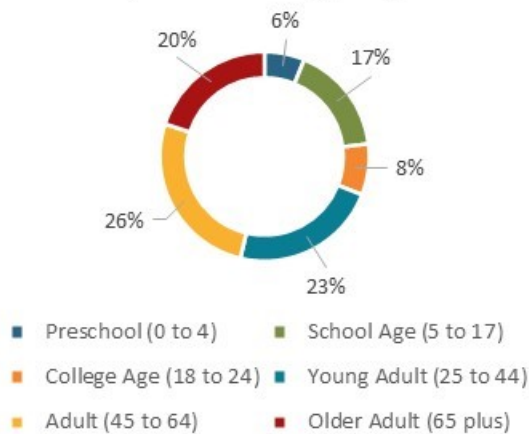
Population by Age, 2019						
	0-4	5-17	18-24	25-44	45-64	65+
NCRPC	6.2%	16.9%	7.9%	22.8%	26.3%	20.0%
Kansas	6.6%	17.9%	10.2%	25.3%	24.6%	15.4%
United States	6.1%	16.5%	9.4%	26.5%	25.8%	15.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates; Data from <http://www.statsamerica.org/anywhere/>

As shown in the table above, the percentage of the population in the region from 0 to age 44 is less than that of Kansas while the percentage of residents age 45 and older is greater. These age group comparisons further reflect the aging population base.

Adults age 45-64 make up the highest percentage of population in the region. Since 2000, the population by age trends show the most growth in older residents (age 65 and over). There has also been growth in adult residents (ages 45-64). The challenge of losing young educated adults to urban areas continues to be an issue the NCRPC seeks to address.

Population Percent by Age, 2019
(NCRPC Region)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, latest 5-Year Estimates; Data from www.statsamerica.org/anywhere/ (In the Type and Select field, enter "North Central Regional Planning Commission")

Race and Ethnicity

The 12-county region has become more diverse with the largest increase occurring among the Hispanic or Latino population. **Since 2000, the Hispanic or Latino population has more than doubled.** According to the 2020 Census, the total Hispanic or Latino population is 9,535 or 7.1% of the region's population.

Net Migration

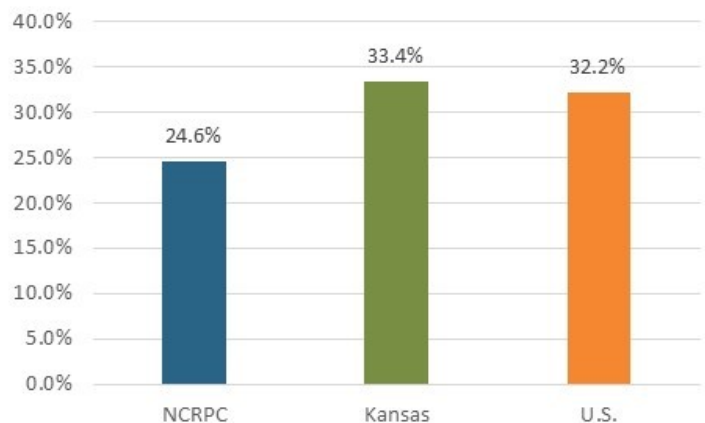
From 1930 to 2010, the region has seen a negative net migration in every decade except 2000-2010.

Net Migration is the difference between the estimated number of individuals who moved to or from the region. Although the region has historically experienced negative net migration, recent data reflects a more optimistic trend, a positive net migration of 49 residents.

Educational Attainment

The region has a high success rate of high school graduates at 92.3%. The percentage of residents who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher is 24.6%, which is below the state and national averages. It is an increase from the 22.6% reported in the 2019 CEDS.

% of Residents with Bachelor's Degree or Higher, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, latest 5-Year Estimates

The NCRPC service area is home to several higher education institutions including two technical colleges, one community college, one university and two state university campuses. In addition, the region also has 28 USD ([Unified School Districts](#)).

Higher Educational Institutions	City
North Central Kansas Technical College	Beloit
Salina Area Technical College	Salina
Cloud County Community College	Concordia
Kansas Wesleyan University	Salina
Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus	Salina
KU School of Medicine & School of Nursing	Salina Campus

Knowing the various local opportunities for higher education is helpful as the region works to connect any gaps in workforce needs for employers.

Geography and Environment

Both the geography and environment of North Central Kansas provide residents and visitors a unique and inspiring experience. The region continues to become more aware of ways to capitalize on the assets offered up by both the manmade and natural environments. NCRPC continues to work with member cities and counties and area non-profits to showcase the unique and beautiful geography in North Central Kansas while maintaining a level of understanding of the environmental impacts of the decisions and projects.

Topography

The North Central Regional Planning Commission spans over 9,000 square miles, approximately 5.9 million acres.

North Central Kansas has a diverse and beautiful landscape offering many opportunities for agritourism in the region. There are four (4) [physiographic provinces](#) present in the region, these being the Glaciated Region found in the northeast corner; the Flint Hills area that runs along the eastern border; the Smoky Hills that dominates the region; and the High Plains in the northwest corner. While many different physical environments make up the region, the [topography](#) consistently ranges from east to west just 1,200 feet to 1,800 feet above sea level.

Water

Six rivers make their way through the region

including: Big Blue, Little Blue, Republican, Solomon, Saline and the Smoky Hill Rivers. Hundreds of small creeks further dissect the landscape as they feed into the larger streams. The following [river basins](#) make up the region: Solomon; Smoky Hill-Saline; Kansas-Lower Republican; Lower Arkansas (minimal SW corner of Ellsworth).

The 12 County region is home to **7 lakes or reservoirs**. These bodies of water make up 44% of all the acre feet of water in reservoirs or lakes in the State. The four largest reservoirs or lakes in the state exist within and just outside North Central Kansas. Milford Lake (reservoir) is the state's largest lake. Tuttle Creek Lake (reservoir) is the state's second largest lake. Wilson Lake is the third largest body of water in Kansas, while the fourth largest is Waconda Lake. Jamestown Wildlife Area is also located in the region. All the lakes and reservoirs in the area are overseen by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism or the Army Corp of Engineers.

Agritourism and Historic Places

Kansas State Parks: Milford State Park, Lovewell State Park, Glen Elder State Park, Wilson State Park

The region is home to many state and national historic structures including houses, train depots and more. Specific buildings can be researched on [National and State Registers of Historic Places](#).

National Historic Landmarks: Hollenberg Pony Express Station, Parker Carousel, Whiteford Site

State Historic Sites: Pawnee Indian Museum

Most Prevalent Native American Tribes in History: Pawnee, Kansa, Kiowa

NCRPC is becoming increasingly involved in projects working to preserve historic structures and places in the region.

Agricultural Landscape

Agriculture is a major aspect of the NCRPC area economy. **In 2012, there were 7,049 farms in the NCRPC region enumerated in the US Census of Agriculture, occupying nearly 5 million acres of land**, according to data produced in a [North Central Kansas Regional Food System Assessment](#). This accounts for approximately 83.7% of the land area in

North Central Kansas. Farming in the region is dominated by grain crops, hay and beef cattle production. Farmland in the region is used primarily for cropland (62 percent) and pastureland (32 percent).

For specific information about crop yields in the region, refer to the Kansas Department of Agriculture’s [“Kansas Farm Facts.”](#)

Water Resources and Quality

The 12 County region accesses surface water and precipitation for agricultural, industrial, recreational, and municipal needs. Only the very southwest corner of Ellsworth County relies on the [High Plains Aquifer](#). Additionally, **approximately 70% of the region utilizes rural water districts as their public water supply source**. Municipal water sources are very few and far between. All other areas rely on well water.

Quality water availability is an ongoing concern to the businesses and residents of North Central Kansas. Both surface and groundwater sources exist; however, **aging 100-year-old water infrastructure throughout the region is starting to cause issues** with water quality and consistency. The region participates in the [Kansas Governor’s 50 Year Water Plan Vision](#) which was introduced in 2014.

Natural Hazards

Natural hazards are becoming more prevalent in North Central Kansas although typically small in scale. While most grass fires in the region tend to be limited to a few acres per incident, nearby regions have had large scale fires in recent years.

North Central Kansas has seen an increase in [seismic activity](#), especially in Jewell and Saline Counties. Before 2014, the last recorded earthquake in the region was in 1989 and was measured at less than 3.0 magnitude. Since 2014, four 3.0 to 3.9 magnitude earthquakes have occurred in NCK. Over 100 2.0+ magnitude earthquakes have occurred since 2016.

NCRPC’s homeland security department continues to oversee programs that help build local and regional response capabilities to natural hazards and more.

Infrastructure

City and County Infrastructure

Within our member cities and counties, there are many issues with critical infrastructure resulting nearly entirely

from age. With many cities being 100 or more years old, typically infrastructure is also very old causing issues in water quality, health and environment and more. While several cities have taken the necessary steps to replace critical infrastructure to ensure the health and safety of residents, many simply do not have the financial backing or population to make drastic improvements. At NCRPC, we work with the region to help tackle seemingly out of reach capital improvements. One example of how we address planning with cities is through our capital improvements program.

Throughout 2017 and 2018, NCRPC invited member cities to complete a survey related to capital improvement planning. The survey provided insight on the current condition of infrastructure throughout the region. The survey gathered responses from 73% of the 83 cities. The results from the survey can be seen in the following table:

	New or Acceptable	Signs of Decay	Failing
Water Distribution	40.77%	42.31%	9.23%
Water Storage	59.23%	30.77%	3.08%
Water Treatment	45.74%	19.38%	8.53%
Sewer Treatment	49.23%	24.62%	10.00%
Sewer Collection	40.77%	42.31%	7.69%
Streets/Bridges	21.71%	58.14%	17.83%
Electric	40.46%	29.01%	2.29%
Parks	55.81%	36.43%	3.88%
Sidewalks/ADA Accessibility	20.77%	40.77%	31.54%
Internet	75.19%	13.18%	2.33%
Recycling	51.18%	19.69%	4.72%

Local and State Transportation Systems

In addition to everyday city and county infrastructure, like streets, water, sewer and more, North Central Kansas is also home to many state and US highway systems, local and regional airports, and railroads. The following links will direct to state-wide maps of current infrastructure systems:

- [Highways](#)
- [Airports](#) -The largest airport in the region is the [Salina Airport Authority](#)
- [Railroads](#)

Renewable Energy

Several renewable energy systems are becoming more prevalent in North Central Kansas. **Kansas ranks 2nd in the nation for potential energy production from wind.** There are [four wind farms located in the NCRPC service area](#) including: Marshall, Meridian, Post Rock, and Smoky Hills. Additionally, the region is becoming more prevalent as being an optimal place for [solar power](#). Cloud County Community College in Concordia City offers a Renewable Energy program that focuses on both wind energy technology and solar energy. NCRPC continually works with the region to find options for new industry and economic development.



Smoky Hills Wind Farm in Lincoln and Ellsworth County

Broadband Internet

[Broadband](#) internet is frequently lacking in many rural communities and North Central Kansas is no exception. While some areas of the region are still without broadband, a detailed [map of Kansas broadband](#) shows how several companies have been working to close the gap in the region. At this time, the region is served primarily by fiber and fixed wireless internet; however, some areas also utilize cable and DSL for broadband. The North Central Kansas Community Network ([NCKCN](#)), an affiliate of NCRPC, offers fixed high-speed wireless internet that is fast, reliable, and affordable for both residential and business needs. Since a decent area of the region is still not served by broadband, NCKCN is working to bring internet to as much of the underserved region as possible.

Business and Industry

Per Capita Personal Income Growth

Income is derived from three (3) sources: Earned Income, a product of one's labor in the form of wages; Transfer Payments from government programs like social security, farm supplements, etc.; and Dividends, Interest and Rents produced from investments. Per capita personal income is one way of breaking down income numbers in a comparable way to measure the amount of money earned per person in a geographic region. [Per capita Personal Income Growth](#), or per person income, of the region at 12.8% has exceeded that of Kansas but lags behind that of the U.S.

	2014	2018	Percent Change	
			2014 - 2018	
NCRPC	\$40,866	\$46,081	12.8%	↑
Kansas	\$46,874	\$51,471	9.8%	↑
United States	\$47,058	\$54,446	15.7%	↑

Source: [U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Information System \(REIS\)](#)

Median Household Income

One indicator of economic health and quality of life in the region is [median household income](#). According to the Census, median household income is the point that divides the household income distribution into halves—one-half with income above the median and the other with income below the median. The median is based on the income distribution of all households, including those with no income. From 2014-2019, **median household income in most counties in the region increased.** While a median figure is not available for the 12-county region as a whole, the average of the median household income for each county is a strong indicator of performance.

Area	2014	2019	Percent Change 2014-2019	
NCRPC*	\$ 46,127	\$ 49,466	7.2%	↑
Kansas	\$ 51,872	\$ 59,597	14.9%	↑
United States	\$ 53,482	\$ 62,843	17.5%	↑

*Indicates the average median household income for the 12-county region; Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census American Community Survey five-year average ending in year shown.](#)

Labor Force

Since 2010 the [civilian labor force](#) has decreased in the region. Civilian Labor Force is the sum of civilian employment and civilian unemployment. These individuals are civilians (not members of the Armed Services) who are age 16 years or older, and are not in institutions such as prisons, mental hospitals, or nursing homes.

Aging workforce without replacements was identified as a weakness for the region in both the 2018 and 2021 regional surveys. Continuing to support existing businesses, exploring potential for new industry in the region, and helping to attract and maintain residents—all identified in the CEDS Action Plan — will help address this issue.

Average Annual Unemployment in the region, which peaked in the region in recent years in 2010 at 5.8%, has decreased. The annual unemployment rate for the NCRPC region in 2019 was 3.0%, which was just under that of the State of Kansas (3.2%). Low unemployment has been identified as a weakness in the SWOT analysis. COVID-19 has strongly impacted employment in the region. The State of Kansas unemployment rate in January 2020 was 3.1%, but rose as high as 12.6% in April 2020. Numbers have improved, although it varies across the region as seen in this [interactive unemployment rate map](#) provided by the Kansas Department of Labor.

Commuting Patterns

In an increasingly mobile society, many workers commute significant distances to places of employment. According to U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2019 data, 90.6% of residents with jobs live *and* work in this region. There are more residents employed outside the region (6,343) than those who commute into the region for work (4,936).

2015 Commuting Tallies Based on People Living in this Region	
Number of residents with jobs (in or outside this region)	67,495
Live and work in this region	61,152
Live here but work outside this region	6,343

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey using [Stats America's Regionizer Tool](#).

Agriculture

Both national and state trends have shown **reductions in the numbers of farms and increases in the average farm size in recent years**. According to the [US Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service \(NASS\)](#), in 2017 there were 6,578 farms in the region with an average farm size approximately 820 acres. Although [farm employment](#) in the region has historically been on the decline, it has been fairly steady since about 2013. Kansas [net farm income](#) was up in 2020, but there were significant impacts related to COVID-19. Despite the recent volatility and challenges facing production agriculture, it continues to be an important component of the regional economy.

Banking

Small business accounts for a significant amount of all business borrowing. The number of [small business loans](#) in the region has decreased from 2013-2017 while the average loan amount at origination during that same time period has increased. Small businesses and entrepreneurs are vital to economic development in the region. Emphasis on small business development can help create opportunities to bring young people back to the region. It also helps residents create wealth. Supporting business development in the region will always be a goal of NCRPC.

Average Wages

From 2013-2018, the trend in [Average Wage Per Job](#) was positive for all counties in the region. Unfortunately, **these numbers are still lower than the \$47,702 average wage per job in Kansas in 2018**. Many of the opportunities identified in the SWOT analysis have potential to help bolster the region's workforce or wages including an emphasis on Entrepreneurship/Growth, Remote Working, Business Development and Support, and Collaboration with Educational Institutions.

Economic Clusters

Certain industries are more highly concentrated in the region than others. Cluster employment research in the region by the Technology Development Institute at Kansas State University indicates a **strong presence of clusters present in the manufacturing and agribusiness sectors**. The cluster employment coefficient reflects the concentration of employment in a cluster versus the concentration of the same cluster nationally. Clustering allows businesses benefits such as access to a broad base of suppliers and support services, skilled workforce and natural synergy.

Top Economic Employment Clusters in NC Kansas		
Industry Description	Cluster Employment	Cluster Employment Coefficient
Electrical Equipment, Appliance and Component Manufacturing	1,302	13.25
Primary Metal Manufacturing	320	6.58
Machinery Manufacturing	1,980	5.61
Agribusiness: Food Processing	5,214	3.74
Manufacturing Supercluster	5,686	2.49
Fabricated Metal Production Manufacturing	1,235	2.29

Source: Technology Development Institute, Kansas State University, 2017.



Sharp Manufacturing, LLC, located in Blue Rapids, is one example of the manufacturing industry in the region. The company worked with Technology Development Institute through the Innovation Stimulus Program to develop technical drawings of some of the company's trailers. *Photo courtesy of Sharp Manufacturing, LLC*

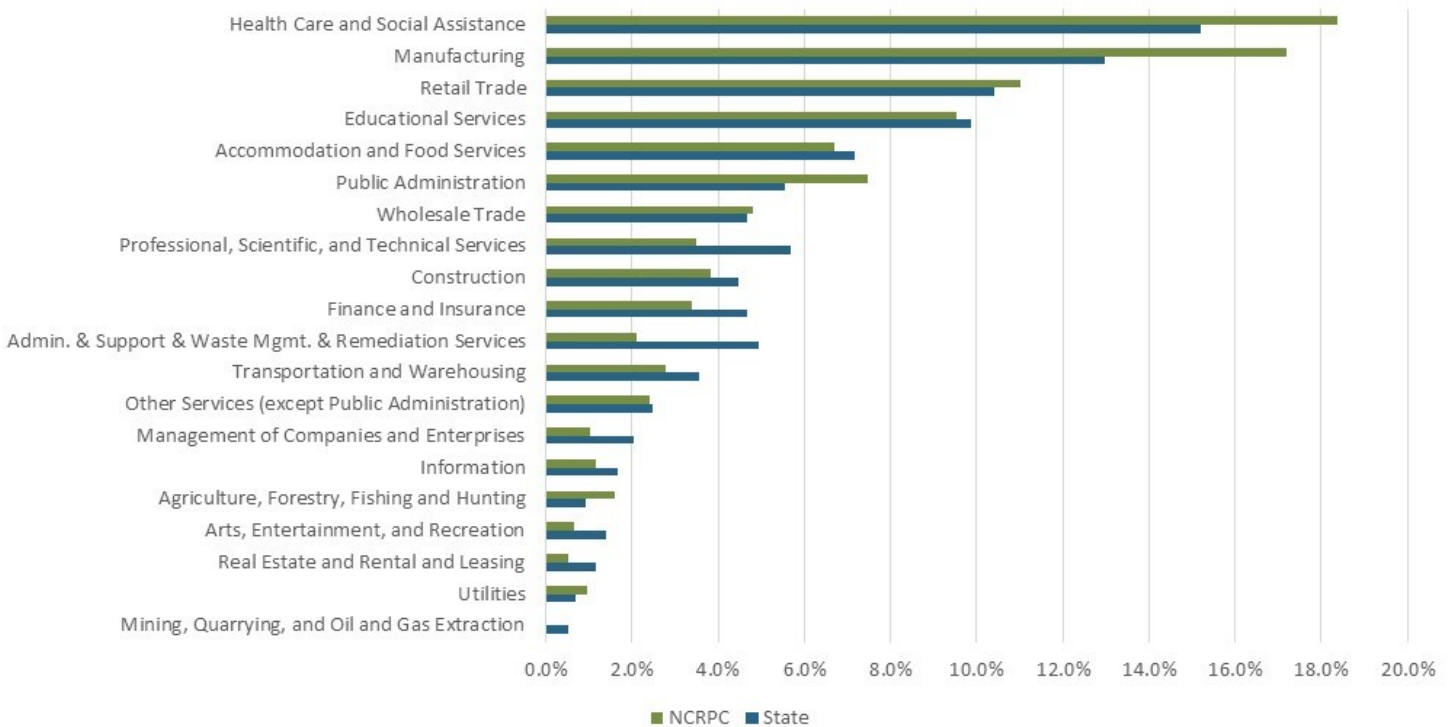


The Healthcare and Social Assistance industry employs many in the region. Pictured above is Clay County Medical Center. *Photo courtesy of www.cmcks.org*

Employment by Industry

The following chart shows average stable employment by industry in 2017. The percentage of workers employed in the health care and social assistance and manufacturing sectors is higher in the region than in the state while a lower percentage of workers are employed in the finance and insurance and professional and technical services industries than in Kansas. The Kansas Regional Data Portal also offers a tool to explore [top industries by employment](#) in the region at the 4-digit [NAICS](#) classification level.

Average Employment by Industry, 2017



Largest 2-digit NAICS Industries by Employment in Qtr 4 2020				
2-Digit NAICS	Employment	% of Total	Annualized Earnings per Job	Relative to Total
00 Total	57,186	100.00%	\$44,085	100.00%
31-33 Manufacturing	8,704	15.20%	\$54,423	123.50%
44-45 Retail Trade	6,828	11.90%	\$28,883	65.50%
62 Health Care and Social Services	6,160	10.80%	\$54,453	123.50%
92 Public Administration	3,886	6.80%	\$38,762	87.90%
61 Educational Services	3,457	6.00%	\$34,958	79.30%
72 Accommodation and Food Services	3,208	5.60%	\$16,160	36.70%
23 Construction	2,287	4.00%	\$53,754	121.90%
48-49 Transportation & Warehousing	1,855	3.20%	\$51,620	117.10%
54 Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,847	3.20%	\$59,001	133.80%
42 Wholesale Trade	1,741	3.00%	\$53,250	120.80%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, accessed via [StatsAmerica Big Radius Tool](#).

Housing

In the fall of 2018, we surveyed 30% of our member cities regarding the current condition of everyday infrastructure. In this survey, we asked member cities, "What are your community's housing issues?" **Overall condition of housing stock, large number of dilapidated houses needing demolished and the availability of single family homes came out as being the overwhelming majority of housing issues** chosen among cities. We feel these responses are very representative of the entire region based on conversation and observation within our membership cities and counties. The following overview of housing in North Central Kansas provides further evidence of the current obstacles facing housing in the service area.

Housing Units

The quality, availability and types of housing units in NCRPC's 12 county service area vary from across the region; however, the issues revolving around housing are common throughout rural North Central Kansas. In the table below, you will see the breakdown of the NCRPC service area housing units compared to the state.

	Total Housing Units
NCRPC	66,248
Kansas	1,288,401

[U.S. Census Bureau: Decennial Census and Housing Unit Estimates](#)

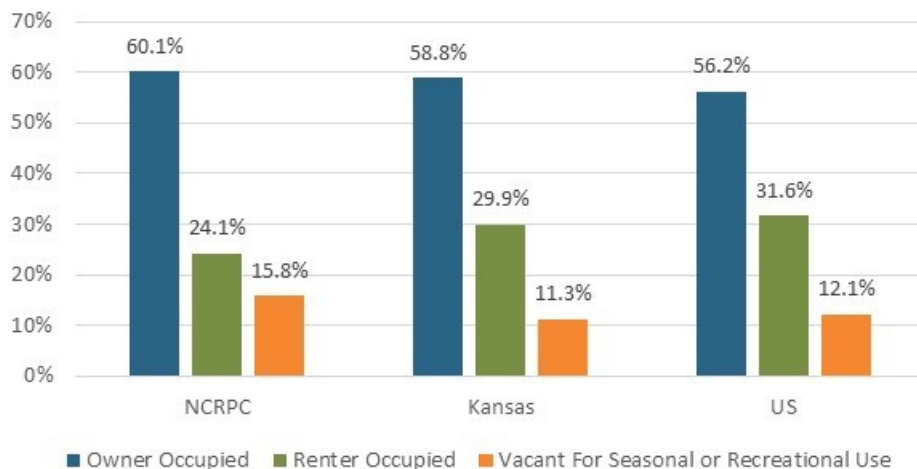
Housing Occupancy

The region's [owner occupancy rate](#) is higher than the state and national averages; however, the vacancy ratings are also higher. The high number of vacancies is a reflection of both abandoned homes, as well as seasonal or recreational use homes. North Central Kansas is quite popular for recreational opportunities and amenities due to the high concentration of state parks, bodies of water and more, resulting in homes used solely for seasonal or recreational purposes. Abandoned and forgotten, vacant homes are becoming an increasing health and safety hazard in the 12-county region. NCRPC continues to search for new ways to help the member cities and counties address dilapidated and vacant housing throughout the region, as well as other housing needs.

An overwhelming majority of housing units in the region are [detached single family homes](#). This reflects both the high number of family households versus non-family households and the low cost of living. On the other hand, the high number of single-family homes is also indicative of the need for more housing choices in the region.

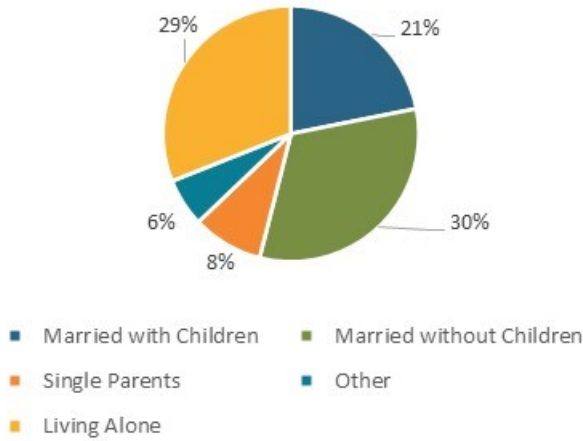
While the NCRPC region does have a greater number of family households than non-family households, we are still lower than both the state and national averages for family households. According to HUD, "a family household is simply one or more individuals who live together. Members of the family do not need to be related by blood, marriage or in any other legal capacity."

Housing Occupancy, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, latest 5-Year Estimates; Accessed via [StatsAmerica Anywhere Tool](#).

Households, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, latest 5-Year Estimates, 2014-2019.

When looking at the breakdown of households in the region, the numbers support the aging population, as well as the loss of adults most likely to be married with children at home (18 to 44 years). Helping member cities and counties enhance quality of life in their communities in order to increase population growth and lower the average age of residents is a high priority for NCRPC.

Cost of Housing

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Families who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care".

In 2019, the region's average [percentage of cost burdened renters](#), or renters spending more than 30% of their income for housing, was lower than both the state and national averages; however, the average has increased by nearly 9% since 2015.

% of Cost Burdened Renters, 2019	
Region	38.58%
Kansas	43.40%
United States	49.60%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019

In 2019, the region's average [percentage of cost burdened home owners](#), or home owners spending more than 30% of their income for housing, is lower than both the state and national averages.

% of Cost Burdened Home Owners, 2019	
Region	15.50%
Kansas	17.00%
United States	22.50%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year average ending in 2019

Based on the trend in rental units in the region, one hypothesis on why the cost of rental housing has escalated is the shortage of rentals available in our region. The high demand in our region for rentals combined with little competition among landlords for tenants results in higher rental costs overall.

Our region will likely see a higher percentage of cost burdened home owners if the availability of quality, affordable housing continues to decline.

Housing Conditions

Housing conditions can be defined by a variety of different characteristics, including presence of whole plumbing facilities, existence of a complete kitchen, the age of a structure and the income level of the household. Most notably, age affects the reliability of a home because of higher rates of structural or systems problems in older homes. Lead based paint is also more likely to be prevalent in homes built prior to 1940. In 2017, 32.50% of homes in North Central Kansas were [built prior to 1940](#) which is significantly higher than the state and national averages.

	NCRPC	Kansas	US
Total Housing Units	66,155	1,259,647	135,393,564
Houses built prior to 1940	32.50%	16.70%	12.90%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year average ending in 2017

SWOT Analysis

Determining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the region in order to better understand “where we are” and “where we are going” is vital to regional economic development. The North Central Regional Planning Commission has focused on collecting data from different stakeholders throughout the region to assist with the SWOT analysis.

Strengths are a region’s relative competitive advantages and often are internal in nature.

Weaknesses are a region’s relative competitive disadvantages, often internal in nature.

Opportunities are chances or occasions for regional improvement or progress, often external in nature.

Threats are chances or occasions for negative impacts on the region and regional decline, often external in nature.

Stakeholder Participation

North Central Regional Planning Commission Staff Members

On January 18, 2018, all staff participated in contemplating and completing a SWOT analysis specifically for our office, not the entire region. We opted to complete a SWOT analysis related to our office to better understand how we can improve the service to the region and expand our efforts. Additionally, it enabled our office to build our resiliency by taking the time to identify our own internal weaknesses and external threats. Staff members also completed an updated 2021 regional survey.

Executive Board Meeting

A committed group of board members meet monthly to govern the NCRPC. Board membership is representative of the socioeconomic conditions found across the region we serve with all member counties having a voice. The NCRPC Executive Board has been invited to participate in SWOT analysis, as well as comment on the

SWOT findings from other stakeholders periodically. Board members also completed an updated 2021 regional survey. For the roster of Executive Board Members, please see the acknowledgements.

Strategy Team

A small group of individuals were invited to participate on the CEDS Strategy Team. This external group augments the NCRPC Executive Board. For a roster, please see the acknowledgements.

Work Sessions/Round Table Discussions

A major contributor to the initial SWOT process was a series of four work sessions NCRPC hosted in 2017. These work sessions brought together individuals who are passionate about what they do and about strengthening the region. Virtual Round Table Discussions also took place in June-July 2021 that focused on resiliency in North Central Kansas and touched on key components of the SWOT analysis. A breakdown of participants follows on the next page.

Regional Surveys

Two regional surveys have been completed in the past three years to seek input from anyone living or working in the 12-county region of North Central Kansas. The results of each survey were used to confirm the NCRPC was addressing the most relevant weaknesses and threats, while embracing the region’s strengths and opportunities.

The first survey was conducted in November 2018 and 196 responses were received. It included questions that helped prioritize the lists of items identified in the SWOT analysis. The second survey was conducted in May-June 2021 and had 184 respondents. The primary survey emphasis once again was on the SWOT analysis to ensure the 2021 CEDS update reflects the current needs and priorities of the region.

It also included three pandemic-related questions, the results of which are included in the Addendum to the CEDS (North Central Kansas Pandemic Resiliency Plan).

Work Session/Round Table Discussion Participants by Category

Date	Focus Area	Participant Summary
April 6, 2017	Economic Development	11 - 9 Economic Development Directors, 1 Chamber of Commerce, 1 county resident/entrepreneur (11 of 12 counties represented)
July 13, 2017	Education	11 - 4 Superintendents, 2 Counselors, 2 Principals, 2 Post Secondary, 1 Chamber Director (7 of 12 counties represented)
September 19, 2017	Business/Bankers	17 - 6 Business Owners, 11 Bankers (9 of 12 counties represented)
November 9, 2017	Government/Nonprofits	27 - 8 Government (5 City, 3 County), 19 Nonprofit (9 of 12 counties represented)
June-July 2021	NCK Resiliency	63 - 7 Business/Bankers, 9 Education, 7 Economic Development, 9 Emergency Management, 5 Government, 5 Healthcare, 3 Law Enforcement, 2 Nonprofit, 11 Public Health, 5 Other

2018 Survey Results

The initial 2018 survey included three open-ended questions about the region, which revealed the following word clouds.

What do you like most about living or working in North Central Kansas? (2018)



What do you like least about living or working in North Central Kansas? (2018)



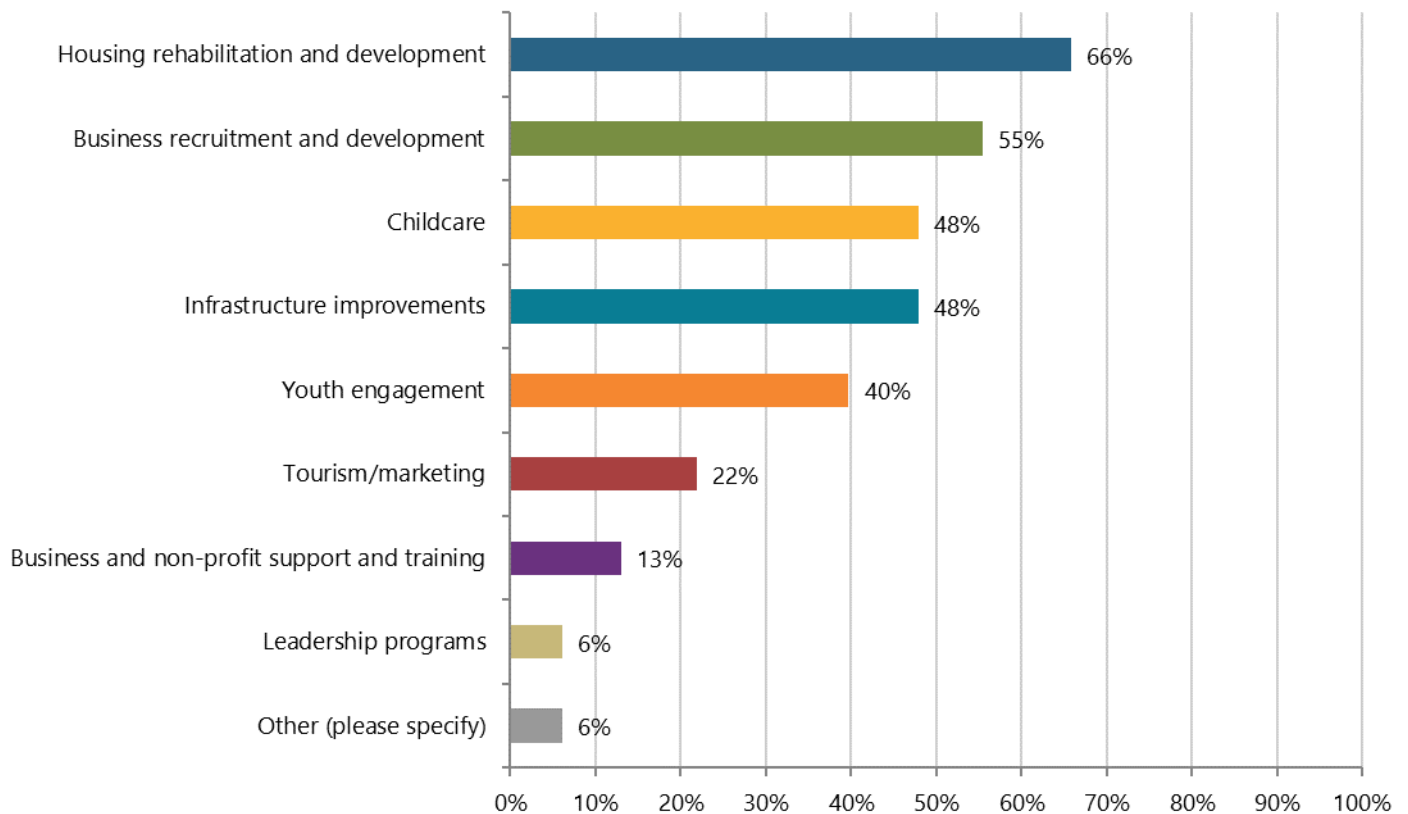
What makes North Central Kansas unique? How can we capitalize on that? (2018)

support population farm important Great people larger many comes care sure values larger cities
 schools Tourism keep low cost living access something quality life neighbors
 small
 opportunities world home town great us work way life town
 great place unique will businesses Nothing area create
 community still people life good beautiful need
 big small NCK family capitalize help best work ethic region jobs going
 living residents location activities rural natural resources think Agriculture things really
 bring much make State North Central Kansas buildings back one hard working cities

2021 Survey Results

The 2021 regional survey included two new open-ended questions, the results of which follow.

What do you think should be the top priorities for your community in the next 5 years? (2021)



What would you like to have in the region that does not exist now? (2021)

access Housing Development food development etc activities jobs towns
housing opportunities businesses funding
community system Better entertainment store families

Additional SWOT References

Since 2019, the State of Kansas created the Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP). As described in their 2020 annual report, this newly created office “advocates for and promotes rural Kansas and focuses on efforts designed to aid rural improvements.” Through a listening tour with stakeholders across Kansas along with numerous additional public outreach efforts, ORP developed an annual report identifying priority areas which need to be addressed.

ORP also partnered with the Kansas Sampler Foundation to listen to and learn from Kansans ages 21-39 to find ways to help recruit and retain young people in rural Kansas communities.

These two studies through ORP, along with the Kansas Framework for Growth, have been released at the state level since the 2019 CEDS was completed. Several of the issues addressed in these studies mirror results of the most recent regional survey as well as some of the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and priorities of the region. Below are links to those reports:

[Office of Rural Prosperity 2020 Annual Report](#)

[Power Up & Go](#)

[Kansas Framework for Growth](#)



One stop on the Office of Rural Prosperity listening tour was Cloud County Community College in Concordia City, Cloud County. Several NCRPC staff attended the meeting to provide input about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in NCK. Lieutenant Governor Lynn Rogers, now State Treasurer Rogers, began his day with a tour of Republic and Cloud Counties in North Central Kansas. *Photo courtesy of the Concordia Blade-Empire*

Top Identified Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats in NCK (2021)



Strategic Direction, Action Plan & Evaluation Framework

The strategic planning process was developed directly out of the results of our SWOT analysis. By studying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats most commonly voiced by both stakeholders and the NCRPC staff, we were able to develop a strategic plan that works to build on our strengths and opportunities, while addressing the weaknesses and threats of North Central Kansas. The development of our strategic plan involved a wide variety of input from different groups of stakeholders throughout the region.

Because our organization is rooted in a number of specific services for the region, as well as the state, like weatherization and homeland security, several of our goals and objectives have been consistently ongoing over the past few decades. Through our strategic plan, we will continue to offer the services that make up the foundation of our organization while continuing to develop, support and encourage new programs both in the region and among office staff.

Action Plan

In order to develop a comprehensive and effective action plan that fulfills our mission to advance rural Kansas through comprehensive planning and development services, the NCRPC identified five main visions critical to the success of North Central Kansas:

- 1. Regional Collaboration**
- 2. Economic Prosperity through Innovation**
- 3. Superior Physical Assets**
- 4. Passionate Leadership from Empowered Citizens**
- 5. Exceptional Quality of Place**

Each vision, or priority area, is given a vision statement and broken down into goals and objectives which contribute directly to that vision's success. On the following pages, the action plan and evaluation for each vision is shown on tables providing details on goal with corresponding objectives, partners, timeframes and evaluation measures.

Goals are defined as broad outcomes or general intentions that build upon the vision and are often intangible.

Objectives are defined as more specific, measurable, concrete, and support the obtainment of the goals. Goals and objectives provide benchmarks by which the organization can measure performance.

Partners represent a roster of key individuals and institutions that will aid in the implementation of and support each objective. Partners listed also includes integrated funding sources (public, private and nonprofit) which will support the costs associated with each objective.

Timeframes represent the projected years in which each objective will be started and completed. While the completion of the objectives is proposed for 1 to 5+ years, initial research and project development is already occurring for many of the proposed objectives. The "+" column represents projects which will continue for more than 5 years. Many objectives are projects that the NCRPC has overseen and successfully administered throughout the past decade or more.

Evaluation Framework

In order to develop our evaluation framework, specific performance measures are identified for each objective. The performance measures provide benchmarks that can be tracked and documented over time. By using performance measures to document successes, we will continue to prioritize the most important and essential services in the region as needed.

Vision 1: Regional Collaboration

NCRPC believes regional collaboration among stakeholders is vital for successful rural development. We believe the region must work together towards the common goals of vitality and resiliency in the region.

Goal 1a: Connect Stakeholders to Strengthen Regional Resiliency

1. Host Annual Round Table Discussion with Regional EDD
2. Continue to coordinate preparedness activities of the NCKPHI in order to strengthen and enhance local and regional capabilities to respond effectively to evolving threats and other emergencies, as well as to ensure the earliest possible recovery and return of the public health and communities to pre-incident levels;
3. Continue to serve as the fiscal agent for six of the Regional Homeland Security Councils in Kansas, which includes all but three Kansas counties;
4. Continue to oversee project investments which address the planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise needs that help build local and regional response capabilities and encourage citizen safety and preparedness;
5. Continue to support local foods initiatives throughout our 12 counties by being involved in at least one local foods program annually;
6. Host an annual work session with one specific group of stakeholders representing each county in order to stay connected with the region's current needs and initiatives;
7. Assist in the development of County comprehensive plans within our region directly related to the Unmanned Aircraft Systems corridor between Fort Riley and Smoky Hill Weapons Range;
8. Continue our relationship with CTC from Glen Elder in providing High Speed Fixed Wireless Internet, Email, Web Hosting, and Co-Location.



(Top) A full-scale exercise in Osborne County provided an opportunity to test emergency response capabilities. The NCRPC is fiscal agent for six Regional Homeland Security Councils.

(Bottom) Town hall style information gathering sessions were held in three counties in the region as part of a comprehensive planning process in those counties directly related to the Unmanned Aircraft Systems corridor between Fort Riley and Smoky Hill Weapons Range. Pictured above is a meeting in Clay County.

Vision 1: Regional Collaboration

Goal 1a: Connect Stakeholders to Strengthen Regional Resiliency

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Host Annual Round Table Discussion with Regional EDD	EDD; CCD	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Participants and Sessions
Continue to coordinate preparedness activities of the NCKPHI in order to strengthen and enhance local and regional capabilities to respond effectively to evolving threats and other emergencies, as well as to ensure the earliest possible recovery and return of the public health and communities to pre-incident levels	County Health Department Directors; County Government; County Emergency Managers	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Counties Participating in and Supporting the NCKPHI
Continue to serve as the fiscal agent for six of the Regional Homeland Security Councils in Kansas, which includes all but three Kansas counties	KHP; Regional Homeland Security Councils; County Emergency Managers; Local Law Enforcement	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Regional Homeland Security Councils in Kansas
Continue to oversee project investments which address the planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise needs that help build local and regional response capabilities and encourage citizen safety and preparedness	KHP; Regional Homeland Security Councils; County Emergency Managers; Local Law Enforcement	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Annual Homeland Security Projects
Continue to support local foods initiatives throughout our 12 counties by being involved in at least one local foods program annually	KAW; BCBS; EDD; KHFI; KSU CECD; Local Growers and Producers	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Annual Successful Local Foods Projects assisted or administered by NCRPC
Host an annual work session with one specific group of stakeholders representing each county in order to stay connected with the region's current needs and initiatives	EDD; CCD; Partners will vary based on discussion topics		X	X	X	X	X	Number of Participants and Sessions

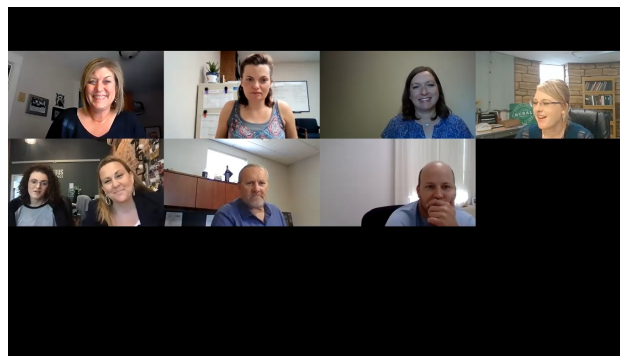
Vision 1: Regional Collaboration

Goal 1a: Connect Stakeholders to Strengthen Regional Resiliency

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Assist in the development of County comprehensive plans within our region directly related to the Unmanned Aircraft Systems corridor between Fort Riley and Smoky Hill Weapons Range	County Government; FHRC; Fort Riley and Smoky Hill Weapons Range; Marvin Planning Consultants	X	X					Successful adoption of County Comprehensive Plans in 4 Counties impacted by the UAS Corridor
Continue our relationship with CTC from Glen Elder in providing High Speed Fixed Wireless Internet, Email, Web Hosting, and Co-Location.	NCKCN; CTC	X	X	X	X	X	X	Continued collaboration with CTC
Utilize non-traditional funding to expand internet services to underserved areas.	NCKCN; CTC		X					Successful expansion of NCKCN services throughout the region

BCBS: Blue Cross Blue Shield
 CCD: Chamber of Commerce Directors
 CTC: Cunningham Telephone and Cable
 EDD: Economic Development Directors
 FHRC: Flint Hills Regional Council
 KAW: Kansas Alliance for Wellness
 KHFI: Kansas Healthy Foods Initiative

KHP: Kansas Highway Patrol
 KSU: Kansas State University
 KSU CECD: KSU Center for Engagement and Community Development
 NCK: North Central Kansas
 NCKCN: North Central Kansas Community Network
 NCKPHI: North Central Kansas Public Health Initiative



(Left) NCKCN provides free NCK-WiFi hotspots at 20 locations through a partnership with Cunningham Telephone & Cable (CTC). These signs can be seen hanging in public spaces throughout the region.

The 2021 Round Table Discussion with Economic Development Directors from around the region took place virtually via Zoom and focused on resiliency in North Central Kansas.

Vision 2: Economic Prosperity through Innovation

NCRPC supports a more resilient entrepreneurial culture across generations by organizing, maintaining and utilizing existing human and physical resources throughout North Central Kansas. We provide both existing businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs with access to the services, capital, labor and infrastructure needed to be successful. We continually search for new forms of business that could be successful in NCK. Finally, we enhance technology in the region's businesses in order to expand their market potential, as well as foster relationships among the region's businesses to increase both resiliency and locally sourced products.

Goal 2a: Support Business Development

1. Partner with and promote the SBDC offices to enhance small business support services in the region;
2. Annually facilitate a business training opportunity in the region (virtually or on site). Topics will vary based on expertise available and the needs shared at the annual economic development roundtable discussion. Examples include business plan writing, social media, e-commerce, etc;
3. Continue to assist in the start-up of new business and encourage the success of existing businesses in NCK by providing technical assistance in reviewing the viability of obtaining financing to start, buy, or expand a business in NCK;
4. Continue to assist viable business projects with obtaining financing to start, buy or expand a business by providing loan packaging assistance in NCK;
5. Continue to discuss potential local/regional/state/federal programs available to fund business development projects including eligibility requirements.

Goal 2b: Enhance Economic Development

1. Research and partner with existing organizations to develop a system to determine and evaluate the potential or feasibility for new industry in our region;
2. Continue to provide services which assist in the creation and retention of jobs in NCK. For example, creating or retaining at least 25 jobs a year through business development services and attracting or retaining 25 residents a year through the Regional Home Ownership Program;
3. Explore the feasibility of an online business succession platform with criteria relevant to small business owners in order to encourage both business and workforce retention in NCK;
4. Develop a pilot Business Façade Improvements Program initially serving 2 counties with the goal of expanding to all 12 counties;
5. Continue to explore and develop an Implementation Plan for local foods that results in at least 2 local foods projects in the region over the next 5 years.

Vision 2: Economic Prosperity through Innovation

Goal 2a: Support Business Development

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Partner with and promote the SBDC offices to enhance small business support services in the region	SBDC; EDD; CCD		X	X	X	X	X	Number of Clients in the Region served by SBDC
Annually facilitate a business training opportunity in the region (virtually or on site). Topics will vary based on expertise available and the needs shared at the annual economic development roundtable discussion. Examples include business plan writing, social media, e-commerce, etc	SBDC; Center for Rural Enterprise Engagement; EDD; CCD; NetWork Kansas; Colleges and Universities; Regional Private Business Consultants	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Participants and Number of Trainings Offered
Continue to assist in the start-up of new business and encourage the success of existing businesses in NCK by providing technical assistance in reviewing the viability of obtaining financing to start, buy, or expand a business in NCK	EDD; CCD; Local Banks; Regional Small Business Development Offices; NW Kansas Innovation Center; NetWork Kansas; KDOC; SCORE; SBA; USDA; RBDI	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Successful New Businesses and Business Succession Transactions
Continue to assist viable business projects with obtaining financing to start, buy or expand a business by providing loan packaging assistance in NCK	EDD; CCD; Local Banks; Regional Small Business Development Offices; NW Kansas Innovation Center, NetWork Kansas; KDOC, SCORE, SBA; USDA; RBDI	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Business Loan Approvals and related Impacts, such as Dollars and Job Creation/ Retained
Continue to discuss potential local/regional/state/federal programs available to fund business development projects including eligibility requirements	EDD; CCD; Local Banks; Regional Small Business Development Offices; NW Kansas Innovation Center, NetWork Kansas; KDOC, SCORE, SBA; USDA						X	Annual Review of Funding Programs Available

Vision 2: Economic Prosperity through Innovation

Goal 2b: Enhance Economic Development

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Research and partner with existing organizations to develop a system to determine and evaluate the potential or feasibility for new industry in our region	TDI; KSU Institute for Commercialization, Knowledge Based Economic Development; EDD; KU Institute for Policy and Social Research; Innovation Index				X	X		Number of new Industries in the Region identified to have potential for Success; Development of a new system or identification of an existing system which can be utilized in North Central Kansas
Continue to provide services which assist in the creation and retention of jobs in NCK. For example, creating or retaining at least 25 jobs a year through business development services and attracting or retaining 25 residents a year through the Regional Home Ownership Program	Local Banks, EDD, CCD, Local Realtors, SBDC, NW Kansas Innovation Center, NetWork Kansas, KDOC, SCORE, SBA, USDA, and NCK Area Foundations.	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Jobs Created and Retained
Explore the feasibility of an online business succession platform with criteria relevant to small business owners in order to encourage both business and workforce retention in NCK	University of Kansas Institute for Policy and Social Research, RedTire Program; SBDC; NW Kansas Innovation Center; EDD				X	X		Research Conducted to make Determination of Feasibility
Develop a pilot Business Façade Improvements Program initially serving 2 counties with the goal of expanding to all 12 counties	Local Banks, CDD, EDD, Dane Hansen Foundation, and NCK Area Foundations	X	X	X				Number of Counties served by a Business Façade Improvements Program
Continue to Explore and Develop an Implementation Plan for local foods that results in at least 2 local foods projects in the region over the next 5 years.	KAW; KHFI; KSU CECD; EDD; Local Growers and Producers	X	X	X	X	X		Number of Local Foods projects successfully completed in the next 5 Years

Vision 2: Economic Prosperity through Innovation

TDI: Technology Development Institute

ARPI: Advancing Rural Prosperity, Inc

CCD: Chamber of Commerce Directors

EDD: Economic Development Directors

KAW: Kansas Alliance for Wellness

KDOC: Kansas Department of Commerce

KHFI: Kansas Healthy Foods Initiative

KSU: Kansas State University

KSU CECD: KSU Center for Engagement and
Community Development

KU: University of Kansas

NCK: North Central Kansas

NCKFC: North Central Kansas Food Council

NWKS EICI: Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center

RBDI: Rural Business Development Initiative

SBA: Small Business Administration

KSU CECD: KSU Center for Engagement and
Community Development

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture



NCRPC administered a CDBG Commercial Rehabilitation project that helped restore a former historic Missouri Pacific depot located in downtown Salina.



In 2021, U.S. Senator Jerry Moran announced an EDA grant award to the City of Salina to support storm water and street improvements around a major food manufacturing facility expansion project. *Photo courtesy of KSAL*

Vision 3: Superior Physical Assets

NCRPC guides rural communities to understand the importance of maintaining the resiliency of everyday physical assets, like infrastructure systems and housing. In order for rural NCK to maintain resilience, there is a need to continuously plan for improvements within the communities as a way of encouraging a more pleasant quality of life for both existing and future residents.

Goal 3a: Increase Access to Quality Affordable Housing

1. Explore the feasibility of initiating a Home Improvement Loan Program based on a percentage of home value and loan-to-value ratio;
2. Continue to ensure that a minimum of 10 houses participating in a City home rehabilitation program is improved sufficiently enough to meet current housing quality standards, adding a minimum of 20 years to its useful life;
3. Partner with Regional Organizations to oversee the completion of a Comprehensive Senior Housing Feasibility Study in order to determine what Cities or Counties would be best suited for new Senior Housing Developments;
4. Continue to apply the weatherization program to eligible homes in order to improve energy efficiency within our 41-county region;
5. Determine additional funding sources to either help homes that do not qualify for weatherization services or to increase weatherization impact by making dollars go further;
6. Continue to explore an updated contractor bidding system for weatherization in order to increase contractor interest, as well as spread work out among multiple contractors;
7. Continue to provide down payment and closing cost loan assistance in the purchase of up to a maximum 50 homes in NCK as part of the Regional Home Ownership Program under the NCK Housing

Opportunities, Inc and Four Rivers Housing Opportunities, Inc non-profit housing entities.

8. Develop and Administer a Regional Comprehensive Housing Plan which includes 4 to 5 programs which start to address Regional Housing Issues, as well as encourage Population Growth.

Goal 3b: Secure and Maintain Basic Infrastructure

1. Assist at least one City biennially in completing a 5 year Capital Improvements Plan;



A summer 2021 ribbon cutting ceremony in the City of Washington celebrated the recently completed water distribution improvements project of which NCRPC served as the project administrator.

2. Continue to survey Cities and Counties every other year in order to maintain a Regional snapshot of infrastructure and equipment inventory, as well as regional needs. Utilize this data for future community project development;
3. Continue to sustainably deliver the highest quality internet access, e-mail services, webhosting and more to thousands of customers in the region;
4. Expand the number of NCK-WiFi wireless internet hotspots throughout the region from 20 hotspots within 9 communities to 30 hotspots within 12 communities over the next 5 years;
5. Continue to work with member cities and counties in helping them access financing to address their infrastructure and development needs. This includes administering at least 5 loan or grant funded infrastructure projects annually.



An example of a recent multi-family weatherization project that NCRPC administered in Ness City. The NCRPC administers the Weatherization Assistance Program for 41 counties in Kansas.



These images show a house before (left) and after (right) being renovated through the housing rehabilitation program.

Vision 3: Superior Physical Assets

Goal 3a: Increase Access to Quality Affordable Housing

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Explore the feasibility of initiating a Home Improvement Loan Program based on a percentage of home value and loan-to-value ratio	Contractors; Local Banks; Realtors; Cities; Area Housing Organizations; Dane G. Hansen Foundation; FHLB; Local Community Foundations				X	X		Research Conducted to make Determination of Feasibility
Continue to ensure that a minimum of 10 houses participating in a City home rehabilitation program is improved sufficiently enough to meet current housing quality standards, adding a minimum of 20 years to its useful life	KDOC; Local Contractors; Municipal Governments	X	X	X	X			Number of Houses improved by a City Housing Home Rehabilitation Program
Partner with Regional Organizations to oversee the completion of a Comprehensive Senior Housing Feasibility Study in order to determine what Cities or Counties would be best suited for new Senior Housing Developments	KHRC; EDD; Developers; Lenders; Dane G Hansen Foundation	X	X	X				Completion of a Comprehensive Feasibility Study by 2024
Continue to apply the weatherization program to eligible homes in order to improve energy efficiency within our 41 county Region	LIEAP; KHRC; Local Contractors; DOE	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Homes Weatherized
Determine additional funding sources to either help homes that do not qualify for weatherization services or to increase weatherization impact by making dollars go further	KHRC; DOE; FHLB			X	X			Research Conducted to find additional Funding Sources; Expanded List of Funding Sources
Continue to explore an updated contractor bidding system for weatherization in order to increase contractor interest, as well as spread work out among multiple contractors	Local Contractors; SCKEDD			X	X	X		Number of Contractors for Weatherization

Vision 3: Superior Physical Assets

Goal 3a: Increase Access to Quality Affordable Housing

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Continue to provide down payment and closing cost loan assistance in the purchase of up to a maximum 50 homes in NCK as part of the Regional Home Ownership Program under the NCK Housing Opportunities, Inc and Four Rivers Housing Opportunities, Inc non-profit housing entities	Realtors; Banks; EDD; CCD; Employers; Municipal Governments	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of People benefitting from the Regional Home Ownership Program; Number of Homes Sold; Number of Jobs Impacted
Develop and Administer a Regional Comprehensive Housing Plan which includes 4 to 5 programs which start to address Regional Housing Issues, as well as encourage Population Growth	Dane G Hansen Foundation; KHRC; DOE; KDOC; EDD; Municipal Governments; County Governments	X	X	X	X	X	X	Successful Implementation of 4 to 5 New Housing Programs over the next 5 Years; Overall Improvement in the Housing Stock of North Central Kansas

Goal 3b: Secure and Maintain Basic Infrastructure

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Assist at least one City biennially in completing a 5 year Capital Improvements Plan	Municipal Governments; Local Engineering Firms; KARDO	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Cities with Capital Improvement Plans
Continue to survey Cities and Counties every other year in order to maintain a Regional snapshot of infrastructure and equipment inventory, as well as regional needs and utilize this data for future community project development	Municipal Governments; County Governments	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of City or County Officials completing the Survey; Inventory of Regional Infrastructure Created
Continue to sustainably deliver the highest quality internet access, e-mail services, webhosting and more to thousands of customers in the region	NCKCN; CTC	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Internet Customers; Measurement of Internet Quality and Speed

Vision 3: Superior Physical Assets

Goal 3b: Secure and Maintain Basic Infrastructure

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Expand the number of NCK-WiFi wireless internet hotspots throughout the region from 20 hotspots within 9 communities to 30 hotspots within 12 communities over the next 5 years	NCKCN; CTC		X	X	X	X		Number of Wireless Internet Hotspots; Number of Cities Served
Continue to work with member cities and counties in helping them access financing to address their infrastructure and development needs. This includes administering at least 5 loan or grant funded infrastructure projects annually	KDOC; KDHE; USDA Rural Development; Municipal Governments; County Governments	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Successful Grant and Loan Applications; Number of Communities Served

CCD: Chamber of Commerce Directors

CTC: Cunningham Telephone and Cable

DOE: Department of Energy

EDD: Economic Development Directors

FHLB: Federal Home Loan Bank

KARDO: Kansas Association of Regional Development Organizations

KDHE: Kansas Department of Health and Environment

KDOC: Kansas Department of Commerce

KHRC: Kansas Housing Resource Corporation

LIEAP: Low Income Energy Assistance Program

NCKCN: North Central Kansas Community Network

SCKEDD: South Central Kansas Economic Development District

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture



The Linn Community Nursing Home utilized the state's Community Service Tax Credits to fund a project for a new generator, HVAC and plumbing.



The City of Tipton completed a project in 2020 that improved the city's storm drainage system by installing new culvert pipes, a portion of enclosed storm sewer, area inlets, ditch grading and minor street repairs.

Vision 4: Passionate Leadership from Empowered Citizens

NCRPC fosters leadership through resilient NCRPC staff with sufficient skill sets to provide leadership to our region through a strong knowledge base of available resources and a constant study of new resources. We continue encouraging the education and development of both current and future area leaders at a young age so they can more swiftly address the challenges threatening the resiliency of our region. We encourage a culture of learning, leading and teaching that will strengthen communities and the region by supporting our region's passionate people who are pushing to better their communities and the region.

Goal 4a: Encourage a Culture of Learning, Leading and Teaching

1. Continue to support career exploration and leadership programs in the region as a way to engage area students and encourage them to return back to NCK, as well as encourage greater community involvement from residents;
2. Continue to sponsor the Rural Voices Youth Contest for high school seniors in NCK to share their unique perspectives on rural Kansas;



The Mitchell County Career Exploration and Leadership Program is one example of a summer youth learning program in the region. It allows 7th to 9th graders explore local job opportunities in an effort to retain more youth in our region. *Photo courtesy of NCK Technical College*

3. Encourage the development of youth councils in membership cities and counties in order to start the education and development of area leaders early on to ensure they have the knowledge and skill sets needed to both recognize and confront the challenges facing the region now and in the future;
4. Market leadership learning opportunities as they relate to local government in order to encourage more interest and strong leaders in our city and county governments;
5. Work with the post-secondary educational networks operating in the region by helping them initiate and structure academic and technical training offerings to meet specific regional workforce needs.



Each year the NCRPC sponsors someone to attend the Kansas Leadership Center's "Your Leadership Edge" training program. It was offered virtually in 2020 and 2021.

Goal 4b: Maintain a Highly Skilled Staff Capable of Addressing the Constant Change in the Region

1. Organize a biennial meeting with other regional planning organization staff throughout the state;
2. Develop staff capacity in relevant program areas such as environmental reviews, strategic doing, meeting facilitation, et al. through annual professional development workshops and conferences;

3. Continue to secure and explore non-traditional funding sources to fill program gaps as needed;
4. Continue to maintain NCRPC's online funding resource with specific application periods and deadlines for both public or private funding opportunities which meet the criteria of projects commonly inquired of or administered by NCRPC;
5. Continue to invest time and effort into KARDO in order to support and collaborate on comprehensive, statewide projects



NCRPC staff volunteer each year to help serve lunch at the Beloit Summer Kids Café.



The NCK Technical College Nursing Program hosted NCKTC Disaster Day in Beloit, KS. The event provided an opportunity for leadership growth and training in North Central Kansas. The North Central Kansas Rural Development Initiative, administered by the NCRPC, provided a financial contribution in support of videography services for the event. *Photo courtesy of Chandra Feldman, Marketing Director, NCK Technical College*

Vision 4: Passionate Leadership from Empowered Citizens

Goal 4a: Encourage a Culture of Learning, Leading and Teaching

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Continue to support career exploration and leadership programs in the region as a way to engage area students and encourage them to return back to NCK, as well as encourage greater community involvement from residents	Regional School Districts; Colleges and Universities; EDD; Dane G Hansen Foundation; NetWork Kansas; Local Community Foundations	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Career Exploration and Leadership Programs developed in the Region for both students and residents alike
Continue to sponsor the Rural Voices Youth Contest for high school seniors in NCK to share their unique perspectives on rural Kansas	Regional School Districts	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Student Entries into the Rural Voices Youth Contest
Encourage the development of youth councils in membership cities and counties in order to start the education and development of area leaders early on to ensure they have the knowledge and skill sets needed to both recognize and confront the challenges facing the region now and in the future	Regional School Districts; EDD; Dane G Hansen Foundation; NetWork Kansas; Local Community Foundations				X	X		Number of Membership Counties or Cities with Youth Councils
Market leadership learning opportunities as they relate to local government in order to encourage more interest and strong leaders in our city and county governments	Municipal Governments; County Governments; EDD; Colleges and Universities; Kansas Leadership Center			X				Number of Candidates running for Local Government; Number of Learning Opportunities; Numbers of Participants
Work with the post-secondary educational networks operating in the region by helping them initiate and structure academic and technical training offerings to meet specific regional workforce needs	Colleges and Universities; Regional School Districts; Local Employers; EDD; CCD; Dane G Hansen Foundation			X	X			Number of Workforce Trainings in the Region; Number of Workers in Specific Industries; Educational Attainment

Vision 4: Passionate Leadership from Empowered Citizens

Goal 4b: Maintain a Highly Skilled Staff Capable of Addressing the Constant Change in the Region

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Organize a biennial meeting with other regional planning organization staff throughout the state	KARDO; Kansas Regional Planning Commission and Economic Development Districts		X		X		X	Number of Regional Development Organizations Participating in biennial meeting
Develop staff capacity in relevant program areas such as environmental reviews, strategic doing, meeting facilitation, et al. through annual professional development workshops and Conferences	Professional Development Opportunities Vary Annually by Program Areas	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Trainings attended by Staff
Continue to secure and explore non-traditional funding sources to fill program gaps as needed	Private Funding Programs and Foundations	X	X	X	X	X	X	Research Conducted to find Non-traditional Funding Sources; Number of new Programs administered by NCRPC Staff
Continue to maintain NCRPC's online funding resource with specific application periods and deadlines for both public or private funding opportunities which meet the criteria of projects commonly inquired of or administered by NCRPC	Maintaining a Funding Matrix will be an Internal Operation	X	X	X	X	X	X	Research Conducted to Maintain an up-to-date Funding Resource; Number of new Programs administered by NCRPC Staff
Continue to invest time and effort into KARDO in order to support and collaborate on comprehensive, statewide projects	KARDO	X	X	X	X	X	X	KARDO Meetings Attended Annually; Number of Statewide Initiatives Developed out of KARDO

CCD: Chamber of Commerce Directors

EDD: Economic Development Directors

KARDO: Kansas Association of Regional Development Organizations

NCK: North Central Kansas

NCRPC: North Central Regional Planning Commission

Vision 5: Exceptional Quality of Place

NCRPC grows and supports North Central Kansas' ability to attract and retain residents, as well as a highly-skilled and talented workforce. We help promote a regional sense of place while creating and sustaining livable and resilient places for residents. We help leverage the assets of our rural lifestyle and exceptional geography in order to attract others who want to experience the same rural quality of life.

Goal 5a: Attract and Maintain Residents

1. Expand online advertising services in the region via NCKCN online;
2. Market housing incentive programs to attract residents to NCK;
3. Market regional incentives for bringing business to the region, as well as choosing to be "Rural by Choice";
4. Continue to support community clean up efforts through the demolition of at least 4 dilapidated houses annually in cities participating in a housing program;

5. Explore the feasibility of hiring a Regional Code Enforcement offer to aid in code enforcement efforts in our cities with populations less than 1,000 people;
6. Encourage local school districts to connect virtually with young persons in the region in order to dialogue about the future of NCK to better understand what can be done to encourage young adults to return to their home communities, or to the region, in the future.
7. Assist cities, counties, and local organizations in identifying both successful, traditional and nontraditional childcare provider options for our region.



Festivals and fairs are an annual highlight for residents of North Central Kansas and provide unique experiences that contribute to an exceptional quality of life in the region. Pictured above is live music featured at Courtland Fun Days. Photo by Tom Parker/Courtesy of Courtland Arts Council

Goal 5b: Leverage Rural Assets

1. Facilitate the development of a database of the region's amenities showcasing a high quality of life through assets including but not limited to natural resources, arts, agritourism, restaurants, specialty stores, schools, essential services and healthcare;
2. Continue to utilize the bi-monthly newsletter, website and blog as resources for sharing "spotlight projects", success stories and other case studies to showcase the region's accomplishments.
3. Continue to research and market existing incentives for remote working in NCK, as well as remote working best practices.

Vision 5: Exceptional Quality of Place

Goal 5a: Attract and Maintain Residents

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Expand online advertising services in the region via NCKCN online	NCKCN; Local Businesses		X	X				Number of Advertisements on NCKCN Online
Market housing incentive programs to attract residents to NCK	Regional Employers; Regional School Districts; EDD	X	X	X	X	X	X	Population Growth and Retention; Number of Homes Sold or Built
Market regional incentives for bringing business to the region, as well as choosing to be "Rural by Choice"	EDD; CCD; Kansas Sampler Foundation; Municipal Governments; County Governments; KDOC		X	X	X	X	X	Population Growth and Retention; Number of Businesses Created or Retained; Job Retention and Growth
Continue to support community clean up efforts through the demolition of at least 4 dilapidated houses annually in cities participating in a housing program	KDOC; Local Contractors; Municipal Governments	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Dilapidated Homes Demolished
Explore the feasibility of hiring a Regional Code Enforcement offer to aid in code enforcement efforts in our cities with populations less than 1,000 people	Municipal Governments; EDD; Local Community Foundations; Dane G Hansen Foundation		X	X	X	X	X	Development of a Program around a Regional Code Enforcement Officer; Number of cities involved in the Pilot Program
Encourage local school districts to connect virtually with young persons in the region in order to dialogue about the future of NCK to better understand what can be done to encourage young adults to return to their home communities, or to the region, in the future	Regional School Districts; Local Businesses; EDD; Local Community Foundations				X	X		Population Growth age 19 to 39; Number of School Districts Participating
Assist cities, counties, and local organizations in identifying both successful, traditional and nontraditional childcare provider options for our region	KDHE; Municipal Government; County Government; EDD; CCD; Local Businesses; Dane G Hansen Foundation; KDOC	X	X	X				Increase in Childcare Providers in our Region

Vision 5: Exceptional Quality of Place

Goal 5b: Leverage Rural Assets

Objective	Partners	Timeframe						Performance Measures
		1	2	3	4	5	+	
Facilitate the development of a database of the region's amenities showcasing a high quality of life through assets including but not limited to natural resources, arts, agritourism, restaurants, specialty stores, schools, essential services and healthcare.	EDD; CCD; Kansas Sampler Foundation; Municipal Governments; County Governments; From the Land of Kansas; Local Businesses; Convention and Visitors Bureaus; Tourism Directors; Arts Councils				X	X	X	Research Conducted to Develop Database; Meetings Facilitated among Stakeholders; Tourism Expenditures
Continue to utilize the bi-monthly newsletter, website and blog as resources for sharing "spotlight projects", success stories and other case studies to showcase the region's accomplishments.	Municipal Governments; County Governments; Clients and Partners of NCRPC	X	X	X	X	X	X	Number of Spotlight Projects, Success Stories and other Case Studies by NCRPC
Continue to research and market existing incentives for remote working in NCK, as well as remote working best practices	EDD: Rural and Remote; Local Businesses; CCD	X	X	X	X	X	X	Increase in Remote Workers moving to NCK, as well as Remote Work Options from Local Businesses to promote Population Growth

CCD: Chamber of Commerce Directors
 EDD: Economic Development Directors
 KARDO: Kansas Association of Regional Development Organizations
 KDOC: Kansas Department of Commerce

NCK: North Central Kansas
 NCKCN: North Central Kansas Community Network
 NCRPC: North Central Regional Planning Commission



Completion of a new swimming pool in the City of Blue Rapids offers summer recreation opportunities for residents and visitors to the community. *Photo by Tom Parker*



Several communities in the region have celebrated 150 years. For its celebration in June 2021, volunteers in the City of Burr Oak organized the creation of 150 sunflowers out of old farming equipment and scrap metal.

Economic Resilience

Regional economic prosperity is linked to an area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from any type of shock or disruption.

The Economic Development Administration provides the following guidance on integrating regional economic resilience through a two-pronged approach:

1. Planning for and implementing resilience through specific goals or actions to bolster the long-term economic durability of the region (**steady-state**); and,
2. Establishing information networks among the various stakeholders in the region to encourage active and regular communications between the public, private, education, and non-profit sectors to collaborate on existing and potential future challenges (**responsive**).

NCRPC routinely partners with a broad range of emergency responders, community and economic development professionals, government leaders, and other key regional stakeholders. These strong networks help establish and build capacity for economic resilience in the region. The NCRPC also has a long history of delivering readiness assistance and recovery support to communities and businesses after disaster strikes. The organization will continue to be a resource for planning and responding to regional economic impacts and natural disasters.

Resilience and disaster recovery in a digital era creates unique challenges including dependence on technology

and safety of data. NCRPC affiliate [North Central Kansas Community Network \(NCKCN\)](#) helps bolster the region's resilience in a technology-dependent environment. One example of this is its available rover hotspot technology.

The NCRPC vision is that communities in rural Kansas will favor choices that embrace *innovation*, increase *prosperity* and demonstrate *resilience*. In support of that vision, economic resilience is woven throughout this CEDS. The SWOT Analysis identified several potential threats to economic resilience. The top two threats identified were declining rural population and lack of industry diversity. Many of the goals and objectives outlined in the Action Plan will strengthen the region's resilience.

Steady-State Initiatives

Steady-state initiatives for economic resilience include:

- Continue to coordinate preparedness activities of the North Central Kansas Public Health Initiative in order to strengthen and enhance local and regional capabilities to respond effectively to evolving threats and other emergencies, as well as to ensure the earliest possible recovery and return of the public health and communities to pre-incident levels.
- Engage in planning efforts that will lead to stronger communities including capital improvement planning and strategic doing.
- Lead the effort to focus on evaluating the potential for new industry in the region.



- Continue to support business development and encourage both business and workforce retention in the region.
- Continue to deliver internet services through affiliate NCKCN and ensure strong broadband networks are available to strengthen businesses and be available for public safety in the event of a disaster.
- Build a resilient workforce and foster partnerships between businesses and post-secondary educational institutions in the region to ensure academic and technical training offerings meet specific regional workforce needs—and that trainings can adapt if needed.
- Promote the region’s exceptional quality of place to people and businesses to help encourage the attraction and retention of both.

Responsive Initiatives

Responsive initiatives for economic resilience include:

- Continue to collaborate with stakeholder groups, including those identified in Vision 1, to monitor existing and future challenges and work toward solutions.
- Strengthen coordination between the Kansas Department of Labor, the regional workforce development board, local economic development entities, and support services to address short, intermediate, and long-term recovery needs of specific sectors.
- Collaborate with state and local officials as needed on updating existing hazard mitigation plans and other environmental hazard planning efforts.

- Continue to serve as fiscal agent for six Regional Homeland Security Councils, including that of the North Central region. These project investments address the planning, organization, equipment, training and exercise needs that help build local and regional response capabilities.

An objective of this CEDS is to identify where investment can be made to further diversify the economic base of the region. Creating local value-chains and industries will result in stronger local economies and, therefore, a more resilient regional economy. Through the CEDS Strategy Committee and an annual SWOT analysis, economic resilience is intentionally examined for regional survival, recovery and progression.

Resiliency Update in Response to COVID-19

The resiliency of North Central Kansas has been tested as the region works to recover from the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, there has been innovation, collaboration and partnerships in the region working to make our communities more resilient.



More information about NCRPC and the region’s response is available in the CEDS Addendum: North Central Kansas Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan.

Acknowledgements

Strategy Committee

The North Central Regional Planning Commission acknowledges the contributions of the members of its Strategy Committee and Executive Board. The Strategy Committee represents the main economic interests of the region and includes Private Sector Representatives as a majority of its membership. The Strategy Committee also includes public officials, community leaders, and institutions of higher education.

1. Private Sector Representatives (*At least 51%*)

Any person holding a decision-making position with respect to a private enterprise.

Name	Company	Position
Tom Claussen	Asher Creek Tire	Owner-Manager
Vicki Steffens	Central National Bank	Mortgage Loan Originator/Teller
Luke Mahin	JenRus Freelance Marketing	Owner
Patrick Hoffman	Sherman, Hoffman & Hoffman LC	Attorney
Austin Gilliard	Clay County Medical Center	Chief Executive Officer
Kelly Gourley	Prairie Stone Properties LLC	Owner-Operator
Aaron Peck	BluTerra Commercial Weed Control	Owner-Operator
Debra Ohlde	New Heartland Freelance	Owner-Operator

2. Representatives of other Economic Interests (*No more than 49%*)

Persons who provide additional representation of the main economic interests of the region. These may include, but are not limited to: public officials, community leaders, representatives of workforce development boards, institutions of higher education, minority and labor groups, and private individuals.

Name	Area of Interest	Position
Karen MacCroy	Early Childhood Education	Mitchell County Partnership for Children, USD 273
Larry Pankratz	Higher Education & Outreach	Director of Development, Salina Area Technical College
Julie Roller	Tourism	Director, City of Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau
Heather Hartman	Community Development	Mitchell County Community Development
Ellen Barber	Economic Development	Marshall County Partnership 4 Growth
Brenda Gutierrez	Minority Groups	Program Director, United Way, Salina
Hannah Stambaugh	Local Government	Deputy County Administrator, Saline County

Executive Board Roster, September 2021

1. Government Representatives (56%)

Elected officials and/or employees of a general purpose unit of state, local or Indian tribal government who have been appointed to represent the government.

Name	Government	Position
D.D. Malmberg	Ottawa County	County Commissioner
Craig Chamberlin	Dickinson County	County Commissioner
Ron Copple	Cloud County	County Commissioner
Keith Roe	Jewell County	County Commissioner
Heather Hartman	Mitchell County/City of Beloit	Community/Economic Development Director
Hannah Stambaugh	Saline County	Deputy County Administrator
Stacie Schmidt	City of Ellsworth	Economic Development Director
Greg Bender	Ellsworth County	County Commissioner
David Thurlow	Clay County	County Commissioner

2. Non-Government Representatives (38%)

A. Private Sector Representatives: *Any senior management official or executive holding key decision-making position, with respect to any for-profit enterprise. (At least one required)*

B. Stakeholder Organization Representatives: *Executive directors of chambers of commerce, economic development or representatives of institutions of post-secondary education, workforce development groups or labor groups. (At least one required)*

Name	Company/Enterprise	Position
Ellen Barber	Marshall Co. Partnership4Growth	Economic Development Director
Tom Claussen	Asher Creek Tire Co.	Owner-Operator
Aaron Peck	BluTerra Commercial Weed Control	Owner-Operator
Luke Mahin	JenRus Freelance	Partner
Raleigh Ordoyne	Herrs Machine Hydrostatics	Owner
Kelly Gourley	Prairie Stone Properties LLC	Owner-Operator

3. At-Large Representatives (6%)

Individuals who represent the principal economic interests of the region. (No minimum required)

Name	Area of Interest	Background
Vicki Steffens	Finance	Central National Bank, Mortgage Lending Operator

North Central Regional Planning Commission Staff Roster

Staff	Title	Year Hired
Margaret Cathey	Weatherization Assistant, PT	1990
Debra Peters	Business Finance Director	1988-1993; 1998
Todd Tuttle	NCKCN Systems Administrator	1999
Dell Gier	Housing Inspector	2002
Rod Thompson	Weatherization Inspector	2002
Pepper Roberg	Office Manager	2004
Lori Thielen	Communications Specialist	2004
Brett Beck	NCKCN Assistant Systems Administrator/Outside Plant Manager	2006
Lisa Peters	Assistant Director/Homeland Security Coordinator	2011
Devin Karraker	Weatherization Inspector	2009-2012; 2014
Amanda Peterson	Weatherization Director	2014
Keegan Bailey	Housing Director	2015
Emily Benedick	Executive Director	2015
Michael Draemel	NCKCN Assistant Systems Administrator/IT Plant Manager	2016
Jack Burks	Weatherization Inspector	2018
Lacey Miller	Regional Public Health Preparedness Coordinator/HLS Assistant	2019
Amanda Horn	Community Development Representative	2019
Kendra Ryser	Weatherization Assistant	2019
Dairiahna Smith	Administrative Assistant/Housing Management	2020
Brianne Beck	Community Development Representative	2020
Craig Haver	Weatherization Inspector	2021

NORTH CENTRAL KANSAS PANDEMIC RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY PLAN



Addendum to the 2021-2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Serving North Central Kansas — including Clay, Cloud, Dickinson, Ellsworth, Jewell, Lincoln, Marshall, Mitchell, Ottawa, Republic, Saline and Washington Counties



**North Central Regional
Planning Commission**
Serving Kansans since 1972

Produced with financial assistance from the
United States Department of Commerce
Economic Development Administration (EDA)



Executive Summary

The past year has been one of adaptability as North Central Kansas worked to recover from the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, there has been innovation, collaboration and partnerships in the region working to make our communities more resilient.

The North Central Regional Planning Commission (NCRPC) was awarded funds from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) to help coordinate a response to the pandemic's economic impacts within the 12 counties the NCRPC serves. The research that follows in this Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan is one part of that response. The NCRPC remains committed to continuing to work with local businesses, non-profits, cities and counties to help build capacity and assess needs of the region to better plan for and respond to future disasters.

During the late spring and early summer of 2021, the North Central Regional Planning Commission hosted round table discussions with stakeholders in its 12-county service area to determine ongoing impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific focus was on the concept of **resiliency**. What would limit the region's ability to bounce back from hardships? What would position the region for future success? What specific aspects of the region are vulnerable? In addition, participants were asked what they felt were the biggest keys to economic development of the region.

Economic Resilience defined for purposes of the discussions was the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness. The description also included an ability to recover from or adjust easily to adversity or change.

At the conclusion of the round table discussions, NCRPC staff and contracted consultants interviewed 63 individuals who lived or worked throughout the entire 12-county region. These individuals were fairly evenly split across multiple sectors of the economy. Representatives worked in the areas of healthcare, public health, government, emergency management, public service, education, non-profits, businesses, and economic development.

In addition to the discussions, the NCRPC also conducted a regional survey to collect information on resiliency and the impacts of COVID-19. While the primary intention of the survey was to gather information about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the region, a few questions regarding resiliency also provided insight. The online survey had 183 respondents representing all 12 counties. While this is a very small percentage of the region's population, the trends in survey responses were strong.

Survey responses and roundtable discussion feedback both documented concerns in three primary areas:

- 1 Housing
- 2 Childcare
- 3 Workforce

On the Cover:

Photo second from left: Technology has been increasingly relied upon to work and connect. Members of the North Central Kansas Public Health Initiative (NCKPHI) pictured here used Zoom to conduct meetings when meeting in person was not possible.

Photo on right: Communities rallied together to support each other over the past year. One example was the Mitchell County Strong program, which started as a collaborative effort to support local businesses, non-profits, and residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mitchell County Strong's food deliveries through Hungry Heroes was one way that the program shared its appreciation to those working on the front lines. *Photo courtesy of Mitchell County Strong*

Statistical Monitoring in the Region

Participants in the round table discussions were asked what specific statistics they monitor to determine the health and economic vitality of their community. The NCRPC intends to build a trend line based on these key statistics in order to track them going forward. The following statistics were identified as directly contributing to resiliency and economic success:

- Day care slots available;
- Available housing units, number of houses sold and length of time on the market;
- Unemployment, number of job postings and length job postings are open;
- Sales tax collected; and
- Household income.

Specific Input from Discussion Groups and Survey

Key lessons learned and ideas for improvement from the round table discussion groups are detailed below by sector. In many cases the same issues overlap across sectors, but may be described somewhat differently.

Discussion Questions



- What are the main issues that have arisen or been made worse because of the pandemic?
- What key statistical change(s) are you monitoring?
- What are your next priorities for recovery and going forward?
- How can we increase resiliency against future pandemics, disasters, disruptions?

Emergency Management

- Social media is your best friend and your worst enemy in a crisis;
- Weaknesses in local level communication and teamwork were exposed;
- The way the state communicated to the local level was not effective;
- Determining who is the "lead" agency is key and making sure they are talking to all other departments; making accommodations to have all hands-on deck to deal with the top priority and putting routine work on hold during a crisis (to the extent possible);
- Who the governor chooses to be the spokesperson in this environment is key to how the information flows to the local level;
- Counties would benefit from adopting a "one spokesperson model" for communication.

Healthcare

- Struggles continue to fill key positions and entry level positions;
- This sector needs day care with unique, longer hours (i.e. 24 hours, 7 days a week).

Public Health

- The pandemic exposed counties that had technology limitations (i.e. lap tops with no cameras when Zoom was critical or inability to work remotely due to lack of lap tops);
- There is intersection between pandemics and mass casualty events, but there needs to be unique planning for this type of event (i.e. the morgue becoming full during a pandemic much like you would expect in a mass casualty situation);

- Communication between state government departments is key and was lacking during the pandemic;
- Local communication plans are important;
- There are difficulties with billing and insurance, which requires a specialist;
- Communication that relied only on emails was overwhelming; too much information to digest and too much that was conflicting;
- Employees are burned out and positions are hard to fill which leads to a concern for employee health and welfare.

Education

- Lack of key staff (i.e. math, science, counselors) has been a concern, but is now reaching a crisis level;
- Of most importance is identifying a consistent and accurate information source;
- People in public health were not trained for a pandemic situation and need more training to lead in a crisis;
- There are many high needs families and schools are expected to fill all those needs;
- Rural districts take great care of students because they are very visible, and everyone is concerned about students in a personal, one-on-one way;
- Teachers learned they can do new things in new ways and school districts want to maintain that momentum;
- Daycare need is critical for staffing;
- The generation of teachers that are retiring now have a different work ethic and approach to managing work hours. This will impact staffing going forward;
- Education that is hands-on does not work effectively over Zoom;
- There is a need to train students at secondary and post-secondary level for remote work.

Businesses and Banks

- Day care is a very big need;
- Housing is in extremely short supply;
- Restaurants and retail are still struggling because they are not able to rebuild as rapidly due to employee shortages;
- Workforce is in very short supply, both in numbers and in skill sets;
- Training for business needs to happen one-on-one;
- Businesses need training in basic financial record keeping, business planning, estate planning, and succession planning;
- Strategic and tactical wage increases may help with the workforce issues;
- Higher end housing is necessary;
- Recruiting younger people for professional level positions has become harder;
- More efficient government is needed;
- Scholarships for the trades should be encouraged and business should help fund such scholarships.

NCRPC Staff

- The importance of networks and relationships was prominent in the ability to access information and get it out quickly;
- Networking is not a wasted effort at the local level and between levels of government;
- Some money from the federal level is not helping those who needed it and may be going to those who did not need the funding;
- Local Economic Development staff were key conduits of information. NCRPC saw firsthand that in this pandemic and post-pandemic environment, businesses, cities and counties without economic development staff were left out of the process to a certain extent.

Non-profits

- Lost the rhythm of volunteers, BUT made new connections;
- The stress was tough on people, there may be long-term mental challenges;
- Zoom is not the same as face-to-face for board meetings because a certain synergy is lost;
- There is opportunity if a model can be found to incentivize investments to keep investment dollars local;
- Governments and businesses have to be willing and supported to move forward with technology;
- Nursing homes and other long-term care facilities lost their connection to the community;
- Immigrants and diversity are important among boards and outreach must happen in new ways, such as in alternate languages;
- Key to resilience is helping each other;
- Vulnerable populations need “neighborhood” access to services and supports.

Economic Development

- Workforce is lacking;
- Housing is limited in availability;
- The pandemic exposed issues with weak financial analysis among small businesses;

- Resurgence in shopping local may permanently change the landscape of business;
- Businesses realized the critical importance of an online presence;
- Communities need to learn to dream big and start taking steps around a rallying point;
- Uncovering and connecting with remote workers will be important to understand the economy going forward;
- Downtown buildings are in decline, but there is huge need for business space; therefore, saving downtown buildings and available business open spaces is important;
- Market business training and support programs with business mentors and testimonials or through banks with a financial carrot for participating;
- The region needs more people skilled in trades.

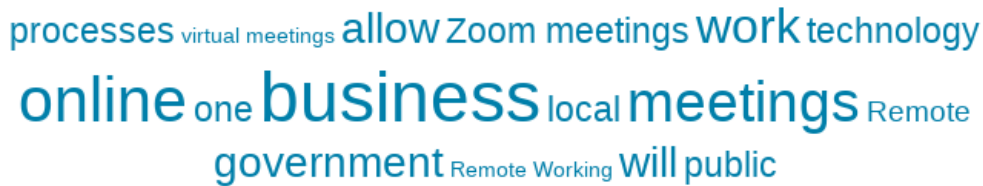
Government

- Region needs a very tight county-wide emergency operations plan and tight communication plan;
- Need strong leaders in public office;
- Civic engagement is critical, including getting counted in the census;
- Internet access and speed, especially in the country, is highly important as a utility going forward. This access directly impacts remote work.

Key Survey Questions

Some key survey questions and results related to resiliency are highlighted below. The following word clouds give a snapshot of the primary topics on participant's minds.

1 Did any overall community/commercial/governmental processes change in response to the pandemic that will likely stay in place? If so, what?



processes virtual meetings allow Zoom meetings work technology
online one business local meetings Remote
government Remote Working Will public

As shown above, when asked "Did any overall community/commercial/governmental processes change in response to the pandemic that will likely stay in place," several obvious trends came forward. Survey respondents acknowledged that government and businesses changed some ways that they interact with the public that will have a positive impact on relationships and transactions, making overall communication easier in the future. Respondents noted having meetings available online and the availability of businesses who could sell online as positive results that should not be abandoned.

2 What area of your business or community is still vulnerable due to the impact of the pandemic?



Small businesses elderly Retail community People due
Restaurants service businesses supply
work vulnerable still will lack

The image above illustrates that when asked what area of business or community is still vulnerable due to the pandemic, retail businesses and restaurants, as well as especially small businesses, were the most common response.

Overall, the regional survey revealed information that complimented what was gathered throughout the round table discussions.

The top critical weaknesses identified in the survey were:

- Housing - 64%
- Childcare - 48%

Items identified as needing further development or attention included:

- Better understanding of public health;
- Whether or not businesses and individuals have sufficient "rainy day" funds;
- Decisions about government control; and
- Lack of workforce skills in certain areas.

Positive outcomes from the pandemic included:

- Remote work;
- Shopping local.

Vulnerabilities exposed during the pandemic included:

- Supply chain connections and roadblocks;
- Restaurants; and
- Lack of broadband.

What Others Are Saying

Peer to peer connections and learning are important, especially in rural economic development. A survey of a broader rural area released results at the same time that the NCRPC was gathering resiliency feedback. The additional survey provided a beneficial point of ground truthing for what was discovered in the NCRPC region in Kansas.

Every year, the staff at SaveYour.Town, a professional training and coaching group out of Oklahoma, conducts a survey of rural challenges. It is noteworthy that the 280 participants of the survey across rural America, largely are similar in composition to the residents of the NCRPC service area. The most recent survey was focused on what concerns rural residents had moving through and beyond the pandemic. The results of the survey, which is not a scientific poll, show that during the COVID-19 era, concerns of rural individuals remained mostly the same as what had been concerning them for several years prior. Ongoing challenges identified included housing, population loss, business loss, and lack of workers.

Since 2015, over 1,500 people have been engaged with the rural challenges survey, which is carried out in cooperation with Small Biz Survival. Full results of the [Survey of Rural Challenges](#) may be found at smallbizsurvival.com.

We look to the results of this survey as a meaningful comparison to the information gathered from stakeholders throughout the NCRPC region.

In the Rural Community Challenges survey, the pandemic and economic crisis were not even in the top 10 rural challenges identified. Housing, as well as business and population losses continue to rank highest despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

The top five rural community challenges in 2021 were:

1. Not enough good housing
2. Downtown is dead
3. Losing young people
4. Need new residents
5. Not enough volunteers

The top five challenges ranked by rural small businesses were:

1. Can't find good employees
2. Online competition
3. Tried later hours without success
4. Marketing isn't working
5. Need to sell my business

Building Future Resiliency in North Central Kansas

NCRPC has been working hard to build resiliency throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in the results of our discussion groups, the pandemic brought to light many challenges throughout the region that were either irrelevant pre-pandemic or simply had not previously been addressed.

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act, NCRPC received funding provided by EDA in order to begin the process of building future resiliency throughout our region. At the time this CEDS document was being developed, the following projects were being overseen by NCRPC utilizing the CARES Act grant funding:

- Free trainings for businesses and non-profits in our region to aid in successful recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 as well as become more resilient overall;
- NCRPC hosted round table discussions with stakeholders in its 12-county service area to determine ongoing impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic;
- The findings from the round table discussions were utilized to begin developing this Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan.

While these initiatives made possible by the CARES Act funding have provided an excellent starting point for building future resiliency in our region, the NCRPC knows from our round table discussions that these ongoing projects are just a starting point. Based on the feedback received during the round table discussions, NCRPC has determined several possible cooperative projects at the regional level that could boost resiliency including:

- Creating a shared regional position focused on more effectively accessing insurance coverage in the public health realm;
- Development of communication plans and key points of contact at regional and county levels;
- Strategies to deliver services in a crisis with the primary focus being how to effectively serve all clients when every person needs significant help simultaneously; and
- Studying and recommending a reasonable approach to wage levels that will be feasible for gathering a workforce and keeping businesses financially viable.

The pandemic also brought to light several priority projects related specifically to recovery including:

- Government employees need flexible and up-to-date tools to deliver service effectively in a crisis;
- Daycare is critical to growing the workforce and the economy;
- Quality, affordable housing is lacking overall.

Several items were also brought to light as potential future major challenges in North Central Kansas. Preparing for these will play an important role in building a more resilient region overall.

Future challenges included:

- Managing and adequately serving immigrants; and
- Mental health concerns among parents and students.


While the nationwide pandemic seemed unprecedented, it made our region and the communities within our region much more aware of the need to prepare for future resiliency. As a region we learned that helping each other is critical in a pandemic or other emergencies and ultimately will accelerate success when times are good; however, we also learned the importance of being better prepared for future unprecedented pandemics or disasters.

In many cases, individual communities successfully came together to offer support to their neighbors, local businesses and local government; however, many concerns as well as opportunities identified are tied directly to regional cooperative efforts and the ability to share staff and expertise across county lines, or even city limits, in times of emergency. These same cooperative efforts can drive proactive projects that will fill gaps and strengthen the region's future resiliency and preparedness.



North Central Regional Planning Commission

Serving Kansans since 1972

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