2026 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

(CEDS)

Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission
Prepared for Adoption
September 2026

Serving Allen, Anderson, Bourbon, Cherokee, Coffey, Crawford, Labette, Linn, Montgomery, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson Counties

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Executive Summary

The 2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) establishes a shared five-year framework for economic development across the twelve-county Southeast Kansas region. Prepared by the Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission (SEKRPC), it satisfies the planning requirements of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) while providing local governments, businesses, educational institutions, utilities, development organizations, health-care providers, and nonprofit partners with a practical basis for coordinating investment and action.

The regional profile documents both resilience and structural pressure. The region had an estimated 188,085 residents in 2025, a decline of 2,268 people (1.2 percent) from the 2020 estimates base. Net migration added approximately 1,311 residents, but natural decrease totaled 3,318. Manufacturing and health care each employ more than 13,500 residents, providing a diversified economic foundation; however, labor-force participation is 60.8 percent, regional poverty is approximately 15 percent, 11.2 percent of households report no internet access, and housing vacancies often reflect condition and market mismatch rather than usable supply.

Southeast Kansas also possesses significant competitive assets. Major highway and rail corridors connect the region to Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and national markets. Manufacturing, energy, agriculture, health care, education, construction, logistics, and service industries support the economic base. Pittsburg State University, five community colleges, career and technical education programs, major power-generation facilities, Great Plains Industrial Park, public-use airports, health systems, downtowns, and established business-finance and technical-assistance networks create a strong platform for growth.

The CEDS planning process combined quantitative analysis with stakeholder input. Outreach included a regional survey, direct engagement with public, private, nonprofit, educational, and financial partners, and a June 18, 2026, stakeholder meeting. Because participation was limited, the survey and meeting results are treated as directional input rather than statistically representative findings. Their consistent themes were tested against regional data and existing conditions and then synthesized through the SWOT analysis.

Five priorities emerged across the evidence and engagement record: workforce development and talent retention; quality housing; modern, resilient infrastructure; business development, entrepreneurship, innovation, and access to capital; and stronger regional collaboration and implementation capacity. The regional vision is a collaborative, resilient, and competitive Southeast Kansas where communities work together to expand opportunity, strengthen quality of life, and create the conditions for people and businesses to remain, grow, and invest.

The strategic framework translates those priorities into five goals: (1) develop and retain a skilled workforce; (2) expand the availability of quality housing; (3) modernize infrastructure and strengthen community resilience; (4) support business development, entrepreneurship, innovation, and access to capital; and (5) strengthen regional collaboration and organizational capacity. Chapter 6 advances the goals through twenty objectives and a menu of regional strategies. Chapter 7 supplies the governance, prioritization, funding, performance-measurement, and annual-review framework needed to move from strategy to implementation.

Implementation will occur through coordinated action rather than a single program or organization. SEKRPC will serve as CEDS coordinator, regional convener, and technical-assistance provider. Local governments and project sponsors retain responsibility for project authorization, financing, implementation, operations, and required reporting, while public, private, educational, utility, health-care, philanthropic, and state and federal partners will participate according to project needs and organizational roles.

One emerging example of this coordinated approach is the Regional Economic Mobility Initiative led by Rural Community Partners. The initiative is designed to connect four implementation tracks: a regional Community Investment Fund providing affordable capital and coordinated entrepreneur support; entrepreneurship and small-business development through SEK Catalyst and related partners; workforce pathways involving WorkforceONE, SEKRPC, the Materials Alliance Zone of Kansas (MAZK), employers, and local networks; and Community Innovation Networks that advance early-win projects, coordinated referrals, and regional housing capacity. The proposed Kansas Health Foundation Transformation Grant includes a requested $250,000 impact investment to help seed the fund. Implementation remains contingent on funding, partner commitments, and final program design.

The CEDS is designed to remain active. Progress will be reviewed annually, performance indicators will be updated as reliable data become available, and strategies will be refined as conditions change. The preliminary regional project inventory framework provides a consistent method for collecting, screening, classifying, and advancing projects; inclusion does not constitute approval, a funding commitment, or a guarantee of assistance. Maintaining this disciplined regional approach will improve Southeast Kansas's ability to align resources, strengthen existing industries and communities, pursue new opportunities, and build long-term economic resilience.

Chapter 1
Introduction and Purpose

1.1 Introduction

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the principal regional economic development planning document for Southeast Kansas. Prepared by the Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission (SEKRPC) in accordance with current U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) CEDS Content Guidelines, it establishes a coordinated strategy for strengthening the regional economy, improving quality of life, increasing economic resilience, and guiding investment decisions over the next five years. The CEDS is more than a federal planning requirement: it is the region's shared economic development roadmap and a framework for collaboration among local governments, business and industry, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, utilities, financial institutions, and state and federal partners.

1.2 About Southeast Kansas

The Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission serves a twelve-county region consisting of Allen, Anderson, Bourbon, Cherokee, Coffey, Crawford, Labette, Linn, Montgomery, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson Counties. Located along the Missouri and Oklahoma borders, the region occupies a strategic position between the Kansas City, Tulsa, Wichita, Springfield, Joplin, and Northwest Arkansas markets. Major highway corridors—including U.S. Highways 69, 75, 160, 166, 169, and 400—together with freight rail, general aviation facilities, and access to nearby commercial airports connect the region to larger markets and supply chains.

Southeast Kansas is a network of small cities and rural communities functioning as an interconnected economy. Residents routinely cross county boundaries for employment, education, health care, shopping, and recreation. Employers recruit from multi-county labor sheds, while infrastructure systems, workforce programs, health care networks, and educational institutions serve populations extending beyond municipal and county boundaries. Many of the region's economic development challenges and opportunities therefore require regional—not solely local—responses.

Agriculture, rail transportation, coal mining, lead and zinc mining, and manufacturing shaped the region's communities and infrastructure. Today, manufacturing and health care anchor a more diverse economy that also includes agriculture and food processing, education, logistics, retail and service industries, tourism, and small-business entrepreneurship. Pittsburg State University, community colleges, career and technical education providers, regional medical centers, industrial parks, local economic development organizations, and revolving loan funds strengthen the region's capacity for growth.

The data presented in Chapter 3 show that regional conditions are not uniform. Some counties have recently gained population while others continue to decline; housing availability, labor-force participation, income, broadband access, and infrastructure capacity also vary substantially. Across the region, however, population aging, natural decrease, workforce constraints, housing shortages, and aging public infrastructure create shared strategic concerns. The CEDS provides a structure for addressing those concerns while building on each community's distinctive assets.

1.3 Purpose of the 2026 CEDS

The purpose of the 2026 CEDS is to establish a unified regional vision, identify strategic priorities, and provide an implementation framework for public and private investment. It is intended to help communities and regional partners prioritize projects, coordinate initiatives, pursue appropriate funding, and measure progress toward long-term economic development objectives. The CEDS also demonstrates the regional context and strategic alignment needed to support applications to EDA and other funding partners; project inclusion, however, does not constitute approval, endorsement, or a commitment of funding.

1.4 Why a Regional Strategy

Economic development increasingly occurs within regional economies rather than individual jurisdictions. Housing markets, labor sheds, transportation systems, utility networks, supply chains, and educational partnerships extend across county and municipal boundaries. A regional strategy enables communities to coordinate investments, reduce duplication, leverage limited financial and technical resources, and advance projects that produce benefits across Southeast Kansas. The CEDS therefore complements—and does not replace—local comprehensive plans, capital improvement plans, housing studies, transportation plans, utility master plans, hazard mitigation plans, and economic development initiatives.

1.5 Planning Philosophy

This CEDS is founded on collaboration, resilience, implementation, accountability, and data-informed decision-making. The regional profile, stakeholder survey, and June 18, 2026, stakeholder work session identified five connected priorities: workforce and talent; housing and community vitality; infrastructure and connectivity; business development, entrepreneurship, and access to capital; and regional collaboration and implementation capacity. These priorities provide the through-line from the existing-conditions analysis and

SWOT findings to the goals, objectives, strategies, action agenda, performance measures, and project inventory that follow.

1.6 Objectives of this CEDS

- Provide a comprehensive, data-informed economic development strategy for Southeast Kansas.
- Strengthen collaboration among public, private, educational, nonprofit, utility, and financial partners.
- Support quality job creation, business retention and expansion, entrepreneurship, and private investment.
- Improve workforce capacity, housing choice, infrastructure, connectivity, and community resilience.
- Guide project development, readiness, prioritization, and alignment with appropriate funding resources.
- Establish measurable implementation responsibilities, performance measures, and an annual review process.
- Maintain a living strategy that can be updated as regional conditions, opportunities, and priorities evolve.

1.7 Organization of the CEDS

The 2026 CEDS is organized as a connected sequence from evidence and engagement to strategy, implementation, and evaluation:

- **Chapter 2 – Planning Process and Stakeholder Engagement.** Documents how regional input was gathered, reviewed, and incorporated.
- **Chapter 3 – Regional Profile and Existing Conditions.** Provides the data foundation for understanding population, workforce, industry, income, housing, commuting, infrastructure, broadband, and economic assets.
- **Chapter 4 – Regional SWOT Analysis.** Synthesizes quantitative conditions, survey responses, and stakeholder input into regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and strategic implications.
- **Chapter 5 – Vision, Goals, and Guiding Principles.** Establishes the regional vision, five-goal framework, and principles that guide strategic choices.
- **Chapter 6 – Objectives and Strategies.** Translates each regional goal into objectives and actionable regional strategies.
- **Chapter 7 – Implementation and Evaluation.** Defines partner roles, project prioritization, the initial action agenda, performance measures, annual review, and CEDS maintenance.
- **Chapter 8 – Preliminary Regional Project Inventory Framework.** Provides a consistent process for collecting, screening, classifying, maintaining, and advancing regional projects.

Chapter 2
Regional Planning Process & Stakeholder Engagement

2.1 Planning Process

The 2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was developed through a collaborative regional planning process led by the Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission (SEKRPC). The process was designed to satisfy U.S. Economic Development Administration requirements while producing a practical, implementation-oriented strategy for the 12-county Southeast Kansas region.

The planning sequence combined existing-conditions research, a regional stakeholder survey, a facilitated stakeholder work session, review of completed worksheets and discussion notes, professional planning analysis, regional review, formal public comment, and adoption. Each step served a distinct purpose: the data established the regional baseline; stakeholder input identified lived conditions and priorities; the SWOT tested and organized those findings; and the strategic framework translated them into goals, objectives, strategies, implementation responsibilities, and project-development guidance.

2.2 Planning Objectives

The planning process was organized around the following objectives:

- Establish a shared regional vision grounded in current economic and demographic conditions.
- Identify regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- Define goals, objectives, and actionable strategies that can guide investment over the five-year planning period.
- Create a transparent framework for project identification, readiness, prioritization, and funding alignment.
- Clarify implementation roles, performance measures, annual review, and CEDS maintenance.
- Strengthen coordination among local governments, economic development organizations, employers, educational institutions, utilities, healthcare providers, nonprofit organizations, and other partners.

2.3 Stakeholder Outreach and Participation

SEKRPC solicited participation from elected officials; city and county administrators; economic development and chamber representatives; major employers and manufacturers; agricultural interests; workforce and education partners; healthcare providers; financial institutions; utilities; housing and nonprofit organizations; state and federal partners; and interested residents. Outreach was intended to obtain perspectives from different sectors and portions of the region, recognizing that labor markets, housing needs, infrastructure systems, supply chains, healthcare access, and business activity routinely cross jurisdictional boundaries.

Participation opportunities included the stakeholder survey, the June 18 work session, review of draft findings and priorities, submission of corrections or additional issues, project identification, and the formal public-comment process. The engagement process emphasized regional significance while preserving locally specific information needed to understand how shared challenges vary among counties and communities.

2.4 Regional Stakeholder Survey

SEKRPC distributed a regional stakeholder survey to gather early input on economic conditions, emerging opportunities, barriers to growth, resilience, and potential priorities. The survey was used as a qualitative planning instrument rather than a statistically representative poll. Responses were reviewed for recurring themes, cross-sector concerns, and issues requiring additional discussion; the number of mentions was not treated as a formal ranking.

Survey responses consistently emphasized five connected themes: workforce and talent; housing and community vitality; infrastructure and connectivity; business development, entrepreneurship, and access to capital; and regional collaboration and implementation capacity. These themes helped shape the June 18 agenda and later provided a consistent organizing structure for the SWOT and strategic framework.

2.5 June 18 Regional Stakeholder Work Session

SEKRPC conducted a regional stakeholder work session on June 18, 2026, at its offices in Chanute. Participants reviewed preliminary survey findings, discussed regional economic conditions, completed structured SWOT worksheets and priority-identification exercises, and identified potential projects and strategies for consideration.

Attendance was lower than anticipated, so the meeting results were not treated as a stand-alone representation of the entire region. Instead, the worksheets and facilitated discussion were used to validate, interpret, and add context to the broader survey findings. The strong convergence between the two input sources increased confidence in the recurring themes, while differences in emphasis were retained where they were relevant to regional competitiveness or resilience. Chapter 4 explains this synthesis and its limitations in greater detail.

2.6 Supplemental Review and Input

Because not every invited stakeholder could participate in the June 18 session, the engagement process included additional opportunities to review draft findings, recommend revisions, identify missing issues, and submit projects or investment needs. This supplemental review was designed to broaden validation beyond a single meeting and to distinguish regional priorities from isolated comments.

Comments were evaluated for factual accuracy, consistency with available data, regional significance, relationship to recurring themes, and practical implications for strategy or implementation. Input did not need to be universally shared to be retained; locally concentrated concerns were included when they affected economic opportunity, critical systems, vulnerable populations, or the region's overall resilience.

2.7 Synthesis and Development of the Strategy

SEKRPC synthesized survey responses, stakeholder worksheets, meeting notes, draft-review comments, the Chapter 3 existing-conditions analysis, relevant regional plans, and the organization's program and project-development experience. Similar observations were grouped into common themes, then assessed against quantitative conditions and implementation realities. This method reduced duplication, preserved meaningful differences in perspective, and prevented a single comment or meeting from controlling the regional strategy.

The resulting evidence chain is carried through the CEDS: Chapter 3 documents existing conditions; Chapter 4 integrates data and stakeholder knowledge in the regional SWOT; Chapter 5 establishes the vision, principles, and goals; Chapter 6 defines objectives and strategies; Chapter 7 provides implementation and evaluation procedures; and Chapter 8 establishes the project-inventory framework. Project inclusion indicates strategic alignment and regional relevance, not a funding commitment or guarantee.

2.8 Public Review and Adoption

The approval sequence includes SEKRPC Executive Committee review of the Administrative Draft, release of the draft for the required 30-day public-comment period, evaluation of comments and appropriate revisions, final adoption by the Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission, and submission to the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The public-review notice and draft provide residents, organizations, businesses, and partner agencies an opportunity to comment before adoption.

The final administrative record will document the public-comment period, comments received, substantive revisions, and adoption action. Supporting outreach materials, the survey instrument, meeting materials, submitted comments, and adoption documentation will be retained in the administrative record or appendices, as appropriate.

2.9 Continuing Regional Engagement

Stakeholder engagement will continue after adoption. As described in Chapter 7, SEKRPC will coordinate annual implementation review with the Executive Committee and an appropriate group of regional partners. That review will assess progress, changes in economic conditions, performance measures, project readiness, funding opportunities, and the need to refine strategies or amend the CEDS.

Maintaining the CEDS as a living regional framework will allow partners to add or update projects, report implementation results, respond to disruptions, and pursue emerging opportunities without waiting for the next comprehensive update.

Table 2-1. Planning Process and Use of Input

Planning component	Primary purpose	How it is reflected in the CEDS
Existing-conditions research	Establish a current, county-level regional baseline	Chapter 3 data, maps, charts, tables, and analysis
Regional stakeholder survey	Identify perceived assets, constraints, risks, and opportunities	Recurring themes and issues tested in Chapter 4
June 18 work session	Validate and interpret survey themes through structured exercises	SWOT categories, connections among issues, and strategic implications
Supplemental stakeholder review	Correct, expand, and validate draft findings; identify projects	Revisions to findings, priorities, strategies, and project records
Professional synthesis	Reconcile qualitative input with data, plans, and implementation experience	Integrated goals, objectives, strategies, and action framework
Executive Committee and public review	Provide governance review and formal opportunity for comment	Documented revisions and final recommendation for adoption
Annual implementation review	Track results, changing conditions, and project readiness	Performance reporting, inventory updates, and amendments under Chapter 7

2.10 Transition to Chapter 3

Stakeholder knowledge establishes what regional partners experience and consider most consequential; the existing-conditions analysis establishes the scale, distribution, and direction of those conditions. Chapter 3 therefore examines the region's demographic, labor-market, industry, income, education, housing, commuting, transportation, infrastructure, broadband, employer, and economic-development assets. Together, the engagement record and quantitative profile provide the evidence base for the regional SWOT in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

Regional Profile & Existing Conditions

A data-driven assessment of the Southeast Kansas economy, workforce, communities, and infrastructure

Chapter purpose This chapter establishes the factual baseline for the 2026 CEDS. It integrates the newest complete county-level population, demographic, labor, industry, income, education, housing, commuting, broadband, transportation, utility, employer, and economic-development asset data available as of July 2026.

Figure 3-1. SEKRPC Twelve-County Service Area

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2025 TIGER/Line county boundaries; SEKRPC membership geography.

3.1 Regional Context and Method

The Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission (SEKRPC) service area includes Allen, Anderson, Bourbon, Cherokee, Coffey, Crawford, Labette, Linn, Montgomery, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson counties. The region spans the eastern border of Kansas from the Oklahoma line north toward the Kansas City and Interstate 35 influence area. Its communities range from the Pittsburg and Coffeyville employment centers to small county seats, manufacturing towns, energy communities, and predominantly rural areas.

The chapter uses U.S. Census Bureau Vintage 2025 population estimates for the current population trend; the 2024 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year dataset for county socioeconomic characteristics; the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024 annual Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) for workplace employment, establishments, and pay; and state, federal, and local sources for transportation, utilities, employers, and development assets. ACS values are estimates and should be interpreted as directional for small counties. Regional medians are shown as household-weighted county medians because the twelve counties do not constitute a published ACS geography.

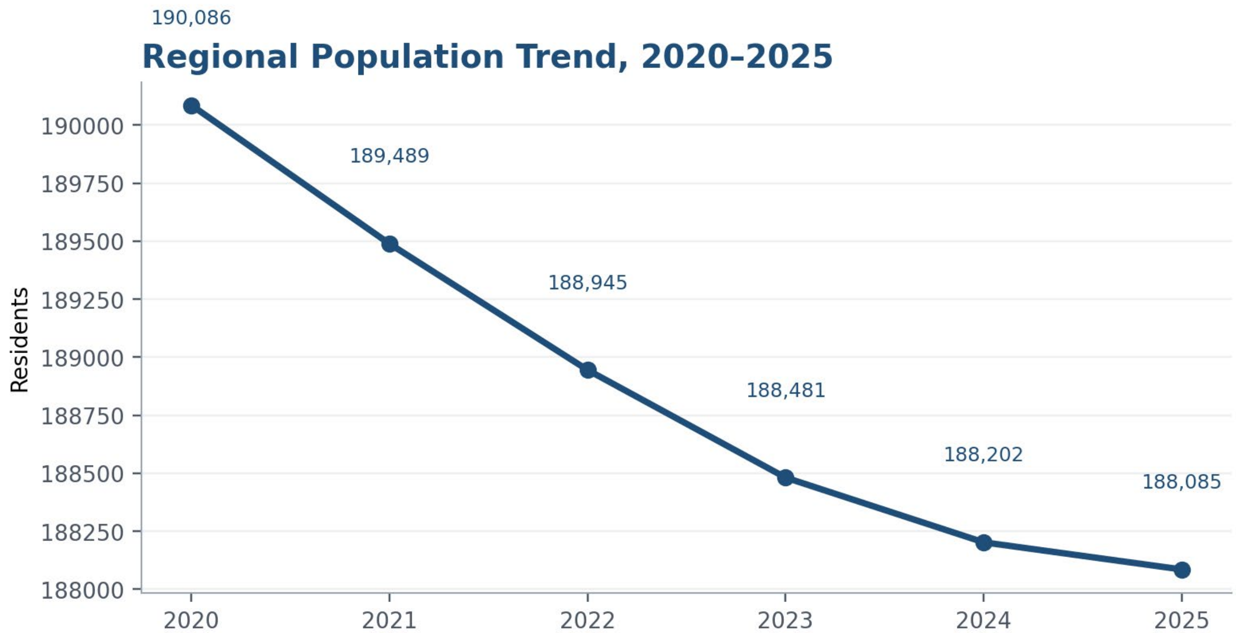
Topic	Measure used	Reference period
Population	Resident population and components of change	Vintage 2025; 2020–2025
Demographics, income, housing, broadband	ACS detailed tables; five-year estimates	2020–2024
Labor force and resident industry	ACS employment-status and industry tables	2020–2024
Workplace jobs, establishments, wages	BLS QCEW annual averages	2024
Transportation and economic assets	KDOT, rail carriers, Kansas Commerce, local sources	Current through July 2026

Source: Data sources and vintage selected by SEKRPC for the 2026 CEDS.

3.2 Population Trends

The twelve-county region had an estimated 188,085 residents in 2025, down 2,268 residents, or 1.2 percent, from the 2020 estimates base. The overall decline was moderate, but the components of change are strategically important: natural decrease totaled 3,318 residents, while net migration added approximately 1,311. Migration therefore offset about two-fifths of the natural loss. The population challenge is increasingly tied to age structure, mortality, and replacement of the working-age population—not solely to residents moving away.

Figure 3-2. Regional Population Trend, 2020–2025



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2025 Population Estimates.

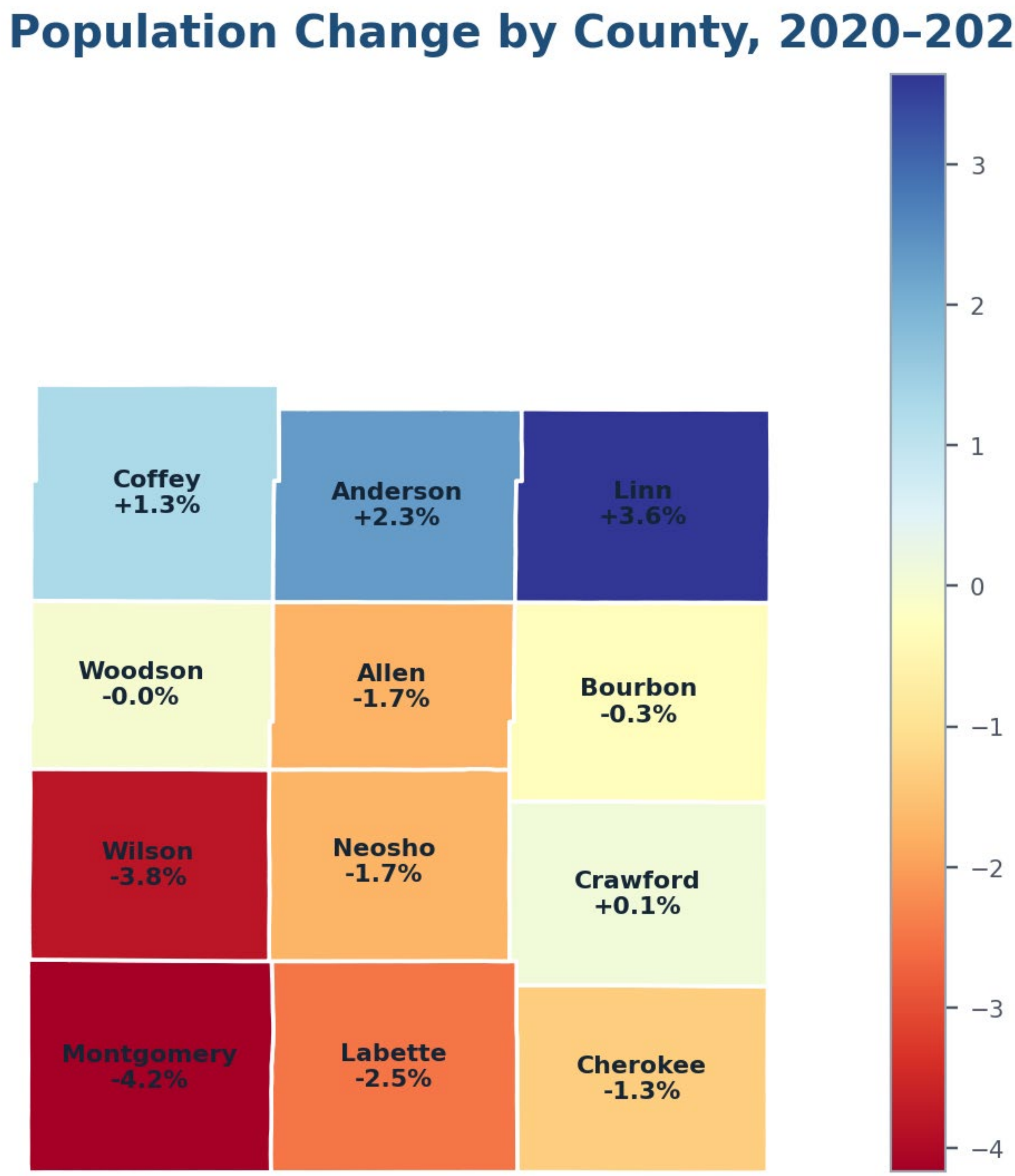
County	2020 base	2025	Change	Change %	Natural change	Net migration
Crawford	38,976	39,008	+32	+0.1%	-286	+329
Montgomery	31,489	30,177	-1,312	-4.2%	-863	-365
Labette	20,189	19,685	-504	-2.5%	-277	-199
Cherokee	19,361	19,105	-256	-1.3%	-606	+410
Neosho	15,910	15,637	-273	-1.7%	-125	-155
Bourbon	14,365	14,319	-46	-0.3%	-35	+12
Allen	12,521	12,302	-219	-1.7%	-303	+70
Linn	9,600	9,950	+350	+3.6%	-226	+590
Coffey	8,359	8,467	+108	+1.3%	-78	+185
Wilson	8,628	8,299	-329	-3.8%	-370	+86
Anderson	7,836	8,018	+182	+2.3%	-39	+218
Woodson	3,119	3,118	-1	-0.0%	-110	+130
Region	190,353	188,085	-2,268	-1.2%	-3,318	+1,311

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2025 Population Estimates. Components sum annual estimates for 2021–2025 and may not equal total change because of residual adjustments.

Growth was concentrated in the northern and central parts of the service area. Linn County grew 3.6 percent, Anderson 2.3 percent, Coffey 1.3 percent, and Crawford was essentially stable. Montgomery County declined 4.2 percent and Wilson

County 3.8 percent. Linn County's gain was migration-driven, while Coffey and Anderson also posted positive net migration sufficient to exceed natural decrease. This pattern points to housing access, proximity to larger labor markets, and community amenities as significant population-retention variables.

Figure 3-3. Population Change by County, 2020–2025



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2025 Population Estimates and 2025 TIGER/Line boundaries.

Strategic implication The region should treat population stabilization as a combined housing, workforce, health, and talent-attraction strategy. Positive net migration is a tangible asset; the policy challenge is converting that inflow into durable workforce growth while reducing losses among younger households.

3.3 Demographic Characteristics

The region has an older age profile than growth-oriented metropolitan areas: 19.9 percent of residents are age 65 or older, while 23.2 percent are under age 18. Woodson County has the highest older-adult share at 25.9 percent; Crawford County has the lowest at 16.0 percent, reflecting the influence of Pittsburg State University and a larger young-adult population. Aging affects labor-force replacement, health-care demand, housing design, mobility, and the fiscal capacity of small communities.

County	2025 pop.	Under 18	Age 65+	White, non-Hisp.	Hispanic
Allen	12,302	22.5%	21.0%	88.5%	4.3%
Anderson	8,018	25.6%	20.7%	90.9%	1.8%
Bourbon	14,319	25.0%	20.0%	88.8%	3.1%
Cherokee	19,105	22.7%	20.2%	85.3%	3.0%
Coffey	8,467	21.5%	22.5%	91.3%	3.9%
Crawford	39,008	22.2%	16.0%	83.4%	7.5%
Labette	19,685	24.3%	20.3%	83.2%	5.1%
Linn	9,950	22.0%	22.8%	91.0%	3.1%
Montgomery	30,177	23.7%	20.3%	76.5%	8.1%
Neosho	15,637	23.9%	20.6%	88.0%	6.0%
Wilson	8,299	23.9%	23.1%	90.4%	3.8%
Woodson	3,118	20.5%	25.9%	91.4%	2.9%
Region	188,085	23.2%	19.9%	85.1%	5.4%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau Vintage 2025 Population Estimates; 2024 ACS five-year tables B01001 and B03002.

Approximately 85.1 percent of regional residents are non-Hispanic White, 5.4 percent are Hispanic or Latino, 1.9 percent are non-Hispanic Black, and 0.8 percent are non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native. The aggregate percentages obscure community-level diversity, particularly in larger employment centers and communities with manufacturing, food processing, agriculture, and educational institutions.

> **Planning significance** An older population increases demand for health care, accessible housing, and mobility services. At the same time, the region's children, young adults, and increasingly diverse workforce represent the central talent pipeline. Economic development and quality-of-life investments should be evaluated for their ability to serve both groups.

3.4 Labor Force, Employment, and Wages

Across the region, an estimated 60.8 percent of residents age 16 and older participate in the civilian labor force, and the ACS unemployment rate is 4.3 percent. QCEW records 75,813 covered workplace jobs at 6,634 establishments in 2024, with average annual pay of $47,840. These datasets answer different questions: ACS measures the employment status of residents, while QCEW measures jobs located at covered establishments in the region.

County	Labor-force participation	ACS unemployment	QCEW jobs	QCEW establishments	Average annual pay
Crawford	65.1%	4.1%	17,354	1,084	$45,212
Montgomery	57.0%	4.4%	14,716	2,228	$46,284
Labette	58.3%	3.1%	8,525	498	$47,757
Neosho	62.2%	3.2%	6,502	492	$46,327
Cherokee	60.8%	3.3%	5,829	416	$56,667
Allen	62.7%	7.9%	5,640	400	$45,881
Bourbon	61.7%	5.3%	5,529	406	$42,850
Coffey	58.8%	6.4%	3,367	260	$67,828
Wilson	60.6%	3.0%	3,149	236	$48,496
Anderson	62.0%	4.1%	2,422	259	$47,571
Linn	57.5%	4.4%	2,090	259	$49,856
Woodson	54.2%	1.6%	690	96	$38,174
Region	60.8%	4.3%	75,813	6,634	$47,840

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table B23025; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024 annual QCEW. QCEW excludes some self-employed workers and certain uncovered employment.

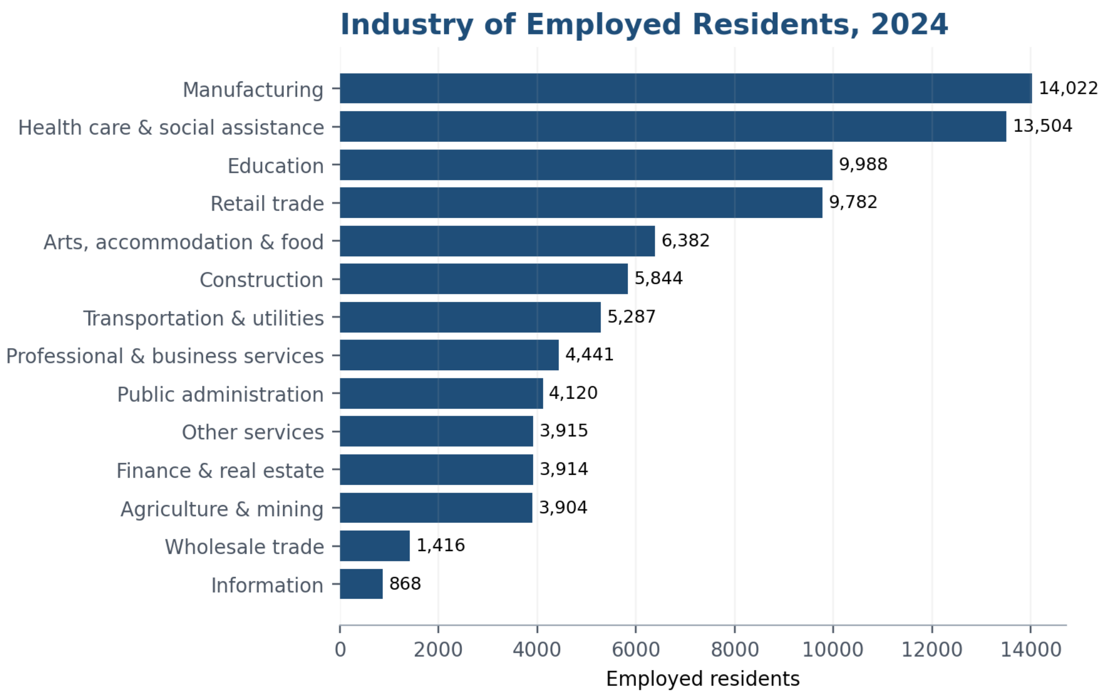
Crawford County contains the largest workplace employment base, followed by Montgomery and Labette counties. Coffey County reports the highest average annual pay, reflecting the influence of the Wolf Creek Generating Station and other utility and specialized employment. Woodson County has the smallest employment base and lowest average pay. The geographic distribution reinforces the importance of regional labor sheds: many smaller counties depend on jobs, education, health care, and services located in adjoining counties.

Workforce constraint A low unemployment rate does not necessarily mean the labor market is healthy. Participation, retirements, child care, transportation, housing, skills, and the number of working-age residents determine whether employers can expand. The CEDS should track labor-force participation and working-age population alongside unemployment.

3.5 Industry Structure and Economic Base

Manufacturing is the region's largest resident-employment sector, with approximately 14,022 workers, or 16.0 percent of employed residents. Health care and social assistance follows closely at 13,504 workers (15.5 percent). Education, retail trade, construction, transportation and utilities, and accommodation and food services form the next tier. The mix confirms that Southeast Kansas is simultaneously an industrial, health-care, education, logistics, energy, and service economy.

Figure 3-4. Industry of Employed Residents, 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table C24030. Values classify employed residents by industry, not jobs by workplace.

Industry sector	Employed residents	Share
Manufacturing	14,022	16.0%
Health care & social assistance	13,504	15.5%
Education	9,988	11.4%
Retail trade	9,782	11.2%
Arts, accommodation & food	6,382	7.3%
Construction	5,844	6.7%
Transportation & utilities	5,287	6.1%
Professional & business services	4,441	5.1%
Public administration	4,120	4.7%
Other services	3,915	4.5%
Finance & real estate	3,914	4.5%
Agriculture & mining	3,904	4.5%
Wholesale trade	1,416	1.6%
Information	868	1.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table C24030; SEKRPC aggregation of non-overlapping industry categories.

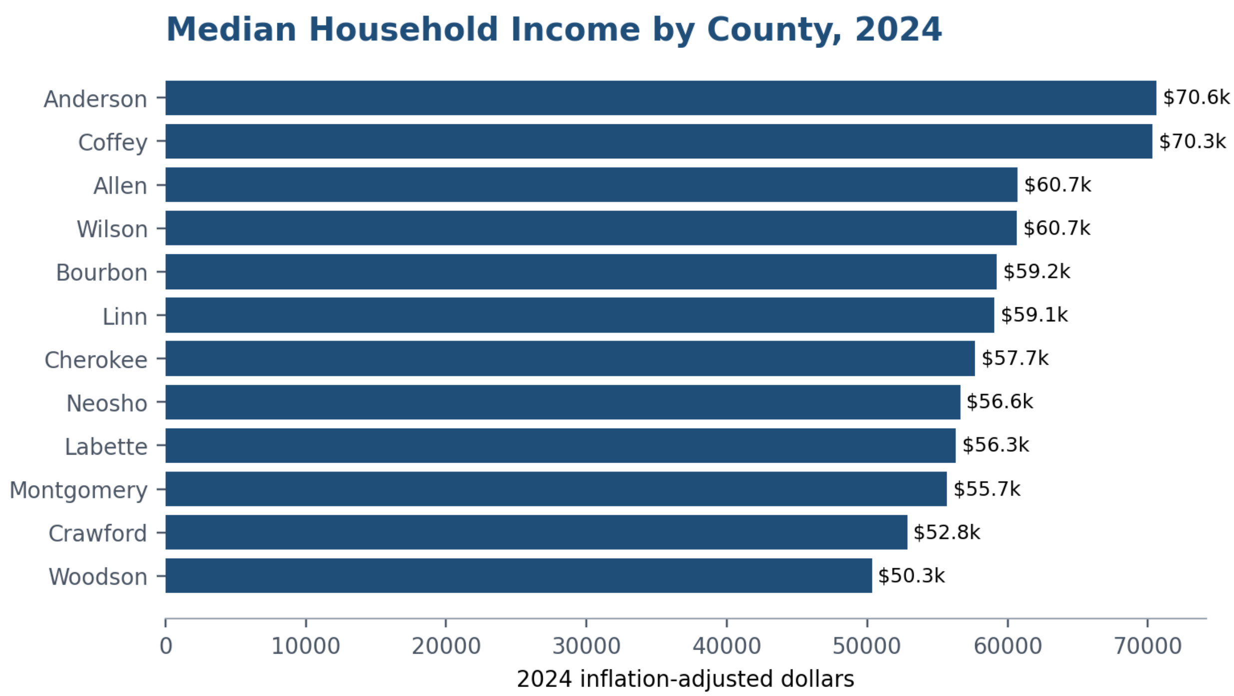
The manufacturing base is unusually broad for a rural region. Major activities include cement and building materials, fabricated products, plastics, aircraft and transportation-related production, industrial equipment, food processing, cabinetry, and specialized manufacturing. Energy production and refining add high-wage employment in Coffey, Linn, and Montgomery counties. Health systems, schools, colleges, state facilities, and local governments stabilize employment in nearly every county.

The industry structure also creates exposure. Manufacturing and energy facilities can produce large county-level impacts when operations expand, contract, automate, or close. Retail and accommodation employment supports community vitality but generally pays less than utilities, manufacturing, or specialized technical work. Strategy should therefore focus on retaining traded-sector employers, strengthening supplier networks, developing technical talent, and increasing the number of higher-value small and mid-sized firms.

3.6 Income and Poverty

The household-weighted county median income is approximately $57,622, and 15.0 percent of residents are estimated to live below the federal poverty level. County median household income ranges from $50,326 in Woodson County to $70,614 in Anderson County. Poverty ranges from 8.4 percent in Linn County to 20.6 percent in Crawford County; the Crawford measure is influenced by the student population but still signals material household need.

Figure 3-5. Median Household Income by County, 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table B19013. Values are in 2024 inflation-adjusted dollars.

County	Median household income	Poverty rate	Median home value	Median gross rent
Allen	$60,689	9.9%	$107,600	$720
Anderson	$70,614	11.0%	$171,400	$853
Bourbon	$59,238	13.6%	$113,800	$752
Cherokee	$57,668	14.1%	$100,100	$799
Coffey	$70,346	10.7%	$157,400	$836
Crawford	$52,844	20.6%	$132,600	$849

County	Median household income	Poverty rate	Median home value	Median gross rent
Labette	$56,325	16.0%	$94,600	$746
Linn	$59,069	8.4%	$173,600	$691
Montgomery	$55,697	15.9%	$101,700	$761
Neosho	$56,618	13.1%	$111,300	$681
Wilson	$60,677	15.5%	$93,500	$736
Woodson	$50,326	12.4%	$81,200	$618
Region*	$57,622	15.0%	$117,419	$770

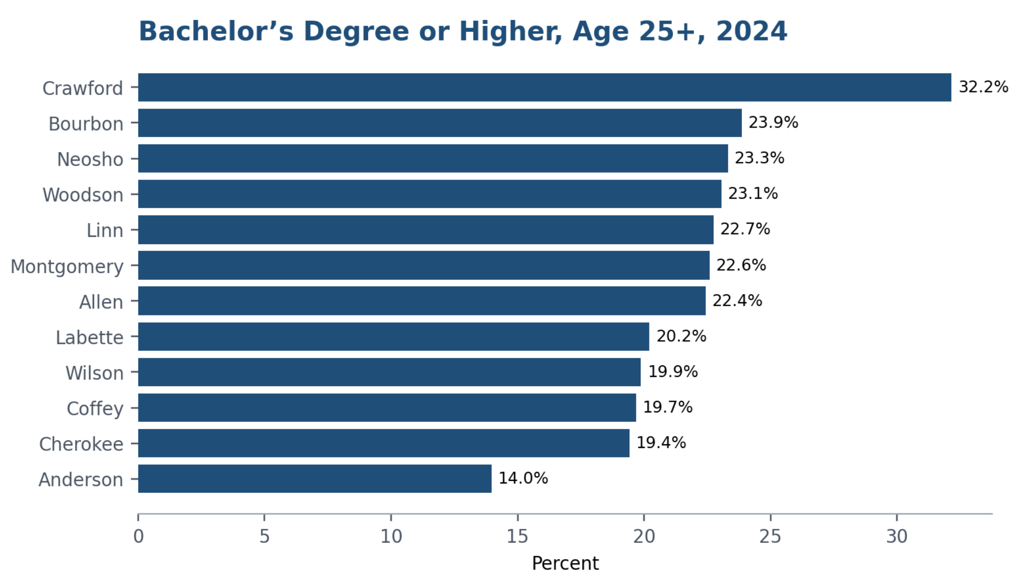
*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year tables B19013, B17001, B25077, and B25064. *Regional medians are household- or unit-weighted county medians, not a published ACS regional estimate.*

Lower housing prices reduce the nominal cost of living, but they do not eliminate affordability problems. Rehabilitation needs, insurance, utility costs, limited rental supply, down-payment barriers, and the mismatch between available units and household needs can make low-value housing expensive to occupy. Income growth therefore needs to be considered together with housing quality and access.

3.7 Educational Attainment and Talent Pipeline

Among residents age 25 and older, 91.3 percent have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, while 23.3 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. Bachelor's attainment ranges from 14.0 percent in Anderson County to 32.2 percent in Crawford County. The Crawford result reflects Pittsburg State University and a concentration of professional, educational, and health-care employment.

Figure 3-6. Bachelor's Degree or Higher by County, 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table B15003.

County	High school or higher	Bachelor's or higher
Crawford	92.3%	32.2%
Bourbon	90.8%	23.9%
Neosho	92.8%	23.3%
Woodson	90.6%	23.1%

County	High school or higher	Bachelor's or higher
Linn	94.2%	22.7%
Montgomery	90.9%	22.6%
Allen	94.1%	22.4%
Labette	89.7%	20.2%
Wilson	90.3%	19.9%
Coffey	92.3%	19.7%
Cherokee	89.4%	19.4%
Anderson	88.0%	14.0%
Region	91.3%	23.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table B15003.

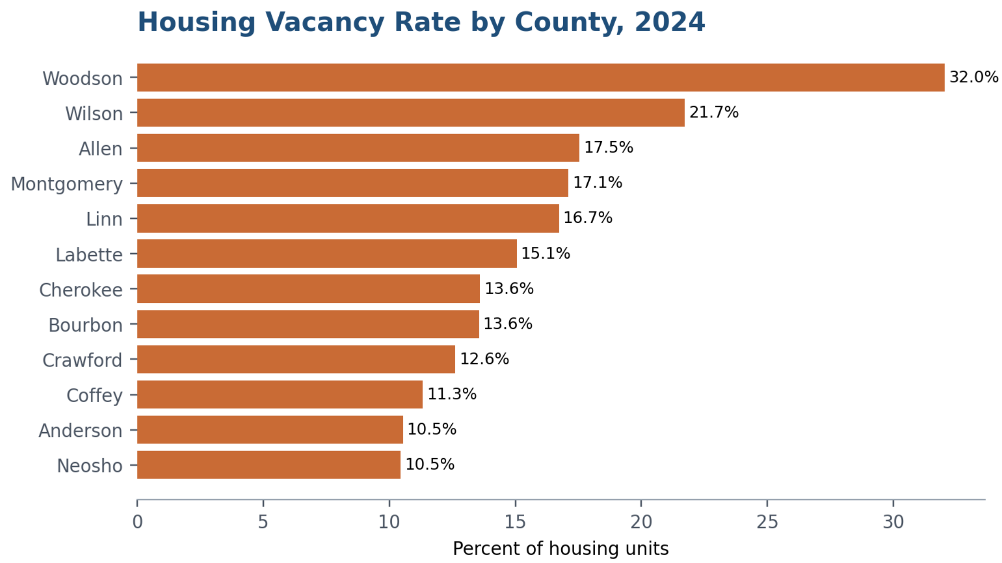
The region has a substantial postsecondary and workforce-training infrastructure: Pittsburg State University; Allen Community College; Coffeyville Community College; Fort Scott Community College; Labette Community College; Neosho County Community College; and career and technical education programs operated through school districts and industry partnerships. The challenge is not simply producing credentials. It is aligning programs with employer demand, creating work-based learning and apprenticeship pathways, and retaining graduates by ensuring that housing, wages, advancement, and quality of life are competitive.

> **Talent-development priority** Educational attainment data support a dual strategy: expand short-cycle technical credentials for immediate employer needs while creating stronger pathways for professional, managerial, engineering, health-care, and entrepreneurial talent to build careers in the region.

3.8 Housing Characteristics

The region contains an estimated 91,499 housing units. Approximately 72.7 percent of occupied units are owner-occupied, and the overall vacancy rate is 14.9 percent. Vacancy ranges from 10.5 percent in Neosho County to 32.0 percent in Woodson County. A high vacancy rate does not necessarily indicate usable supply: seasonal units, dilapidated structures, estate properties, units lacking modern systems, and housing in locations distant from employment can remain technically vacant but unavailable to workers.

Figure 3-7. Housing Vacancy Rate by County, 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table B25002.

County	Housing units	Vacancy	Owner-occupied	Median value	Median gross rent
Allen	6,077	17.5%	75.4%	$107,600	$720
Anderson	3,586	10.5%	78.9%	$171,400	$853
Bourbon	6,756	13.6%	74.0%	$113,800	$752
Cherokee	9,129	13.6%	75.5%	$100,100	$799
Coffey	3,998	11.3%	75.9%	$157,400	$836
Crawford	18,126	12.6%	60.8%	$132,600	$849
Labette	9,510	15.1%	74.0%	$94,600	$746
Linn	5,222	16.7%	81.1%	$173,600	$691
Montgomery	15,538	17.1%	72.9%	$101,700	$761
Neosho	7,219	10.5%	77.2%	$111,300	$681
Wilson	4,493	21.7%	77.7%	$93,500	$736
Woodson	1,845	32.0%	84.6%	$81,200	$618
Region*	91,499	14.9%	72.7%	$117,419	$770

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year tables B25002, B25003, B25077, and B25064. *Regional medians are weighted county medians.*

The data support the stakeholder finding that housing is both a workforce issue and an infrastructure issue. New construction is constrained by appraisal gaps, infrastructure-extension costs, small-market absorption risk, and limited contractor capacity. Existing housing often requires rehabilitation, accessibility improvements, weatherization, or demolition. County strategies should distinguish among new workforce housing, senior housing, rental rehabilitation, owner-occupied rehabilitation, infill, and removal of unsafe structures.

> **Market interpretation** The coexistence of high vacancy and reported housing shortages is not contradictory. It indicates a quality, location, price, and readiness mismatch. Project design should begin with community-level housing inventories rather than county vacancy rates alone.

3.9 Commuting and Regional Labor Sheds

Driving remains the dominant means of travel to work: 78.9 percent of regional workers drive alone and 10.9 percent carpool. Only 6.3 percent work from home, and 6.1 percent of households have no vehicle available. About 22.3 percent of commuters travel 30 minutes or more.

County	Drive alone	Carpool	Work from home	30+ minute commute	No vehicle households
Linn	76.9%	11.1%	8.1%	53.8%	5.0%
Anderson	79.6%	6.3%	11.5%	34.5%	7.2%
Woodson	77.3%	10.1%	4.4%	28.8%	5.7%
Coffey	82.6%	9.4%	4.6%	26.5%	5.2%
Bourbon	69.1%	14.5%	11.1%	26.1%	4.2%
Cherokee	84.2%	8.7%	5.0%	23.9%	4.9%
Wilson	81.8%	10.3%	4.2%	23.7%	5.6%
Montgomery	80.7%	10.8%	3.5%	19.5%	6.8%
Allen	77.9%	9.9%	6.9%	18.3%	7.7%
Labette	75.6%	13.7%	6.8%	17.7%	5.3%
Neosho	77.6%	12.1%	7.7%	17.7%	4.6%
Crawford	79.7%	10.5%	5.9%	17.0%	7.5%
Region	78.9%	10.9%	6.3%	22.3%	6.1%

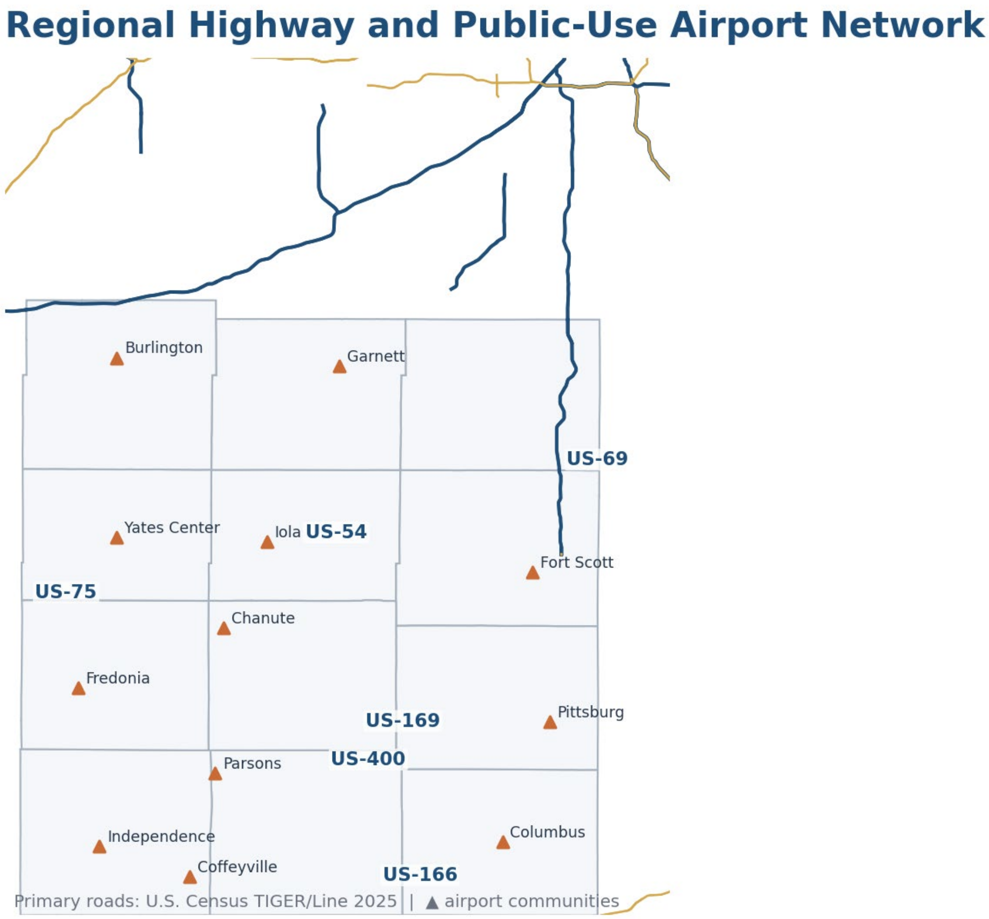
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year tables B08301, B08303, and B08201.

Linn County has the largest long-commute share, at 53.8 percent, consistent with its connection to the Kansas City labor market. Crawford County has the smallest, at 17.0 percent, reflecting its larger internal employment base. Highways link labor markets across county lines, while rural transit is limited and primarily focused on human-service needs. Transportation barriers can remove otherwise available workers from the labor pool, especially lower-wage workers, people with disabilities, older adults, and households sharing one vehicle.

Remote work is a modest but meaningful economic-development channel. Broadband, housing, and community amenities can allow residents to earn metropolitan wages while living in the region; however, the current work-from-home share shows that remote work cannot substitute for a strong local employer base.

3.10 Transportation Assets

Figure 3-8. Regional Highway and Public-Use Airport Network



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2025 TIGER/Line primary roads and county boundaries; KDOT aviation resources. Airport symbols identify principal public-use airport communities.

The region is crossed by six major U.S. highway corridors. US-69 provides a north–south connection along the eastern tier; US-75 serves the western tier; US-169 connects the central region; and US-54, US-400, and US-166 provide east–west access. US-400 is particularly important to the industrial and logistics corridor extending through Wilson, Neosho, Labette, Crawford, and Cherokee counties. Interstate access is indirect, principally through I-35 to the north and west and I-44 near Joplin and northeastern Oklahoma.

Asset	Regional role	Key locations / connections
Highways	Freight, commuting, market access	US-54, US-59, US-69, US-75, US-160, US-166, US-169, US-400
Short-line rail	Industrial freight and Class I interchange	South Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad; Humboldt, Cherryvale, Coffeyville, Columbus, Pittsburg and connecting corridors
Class I rail access	National freight network	Union Pacific, BNSF and CPKC interchanges; direct UP access at Great Plains Industrial Park
Public-use airports	Business aviation, emergency access, industry support	Facilities serving Iola, Garnett, Fort Scott, Columbus, Burlington, Pittsburg, Parsons, Independence, Coffeyville, Chanute, Fredonia and Yates Center
Rural transit	Mobility for residents without reliable vehicles	Human-service and general-public services vary by county; Pittsburg-area fixed-route and campus services

Sources: KDOT transportation and aviation resources; Watco and Union Pacific rail profiles; SEKRPC synthesis.

The South Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad operates a multi-state short-line network carrying grain, cement, chemicals, steel, plastics, and other commodities, with Class I interchanges at Coffeyville, Columbus, Oswego, and Pittsburg. Great Plains

Industrial Park near Parsons adds a regionally significant rail-served site with direct Union Pacific access and extensive on-site rail. Transportation priorities should focus on pavement and bridge condition, industrial access, grade-crossing safety, airport modernization, and freight-supporting last-mile improvements.

3.11 Utilities and Infrastructure

Economic competitiveness depends on infrastructure systems that are often older than the businesses and households they serve. The twelve-county region includes municipal, rural-water, and regulated utility systems of widely different scale and financial capacity. Many communities are addressing water-source reliability, treatment compliance, storage, distribution loss, wastewater collection and treatment, storm drainage, streets, and public-facility needs.

System / asset	Existing regional condition	Economic-development significance
Electric generation	Wolf Creek Generating Station in Coffey County and La Cygne Generating Station in Linn County are among Kansas's largest power plants; municipal and investor-owned distribution systems serve communities across the region.	High-wage employment, tax base, grid reliability, and potential energy-intensive development.
Industrial utilities	Great Plains Industrial Park offers on-site water, wastewater, electric, fiber, rail, warehousing, and large contiguous development tracts.	One of the region's strongest large-site recruitment assets.
Water supply	Communities rely on surface water, reservoirs, purchased water, wells, and rural water districts. The Coffeyville-to-Caney regional water project demonstrates the need for drought resilience and interconnection.	Reliable source capacity is a prerequisite for housing, industry, health care, and emergency resilience.
Wastewater	Small systems face aging collection networks, inflow and infiltration, treatment upgrades, operator capacity, and rate pressure.	Compliance and capacity can determine whether a community can support new housing or industry.
Local streets and bridges	Large networks serve dispersed populations and freight-generating industries; maintenance costs are distributed over a limited tax base.	Condition and load capacity affect employer costs, safety, and site readiness.
Stormwater and resilience	Flash flooding, drainage limitations, severe storms, heat, drought, and aging facilities affect communities and businesses.	Resilient design reduces service interruptions and protects prior public investment.

Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2024 Kansas electricity profile; Kansas Commerce project information; Great Plains Industrial Park; SEKRPC project and infrastructure portfolio.

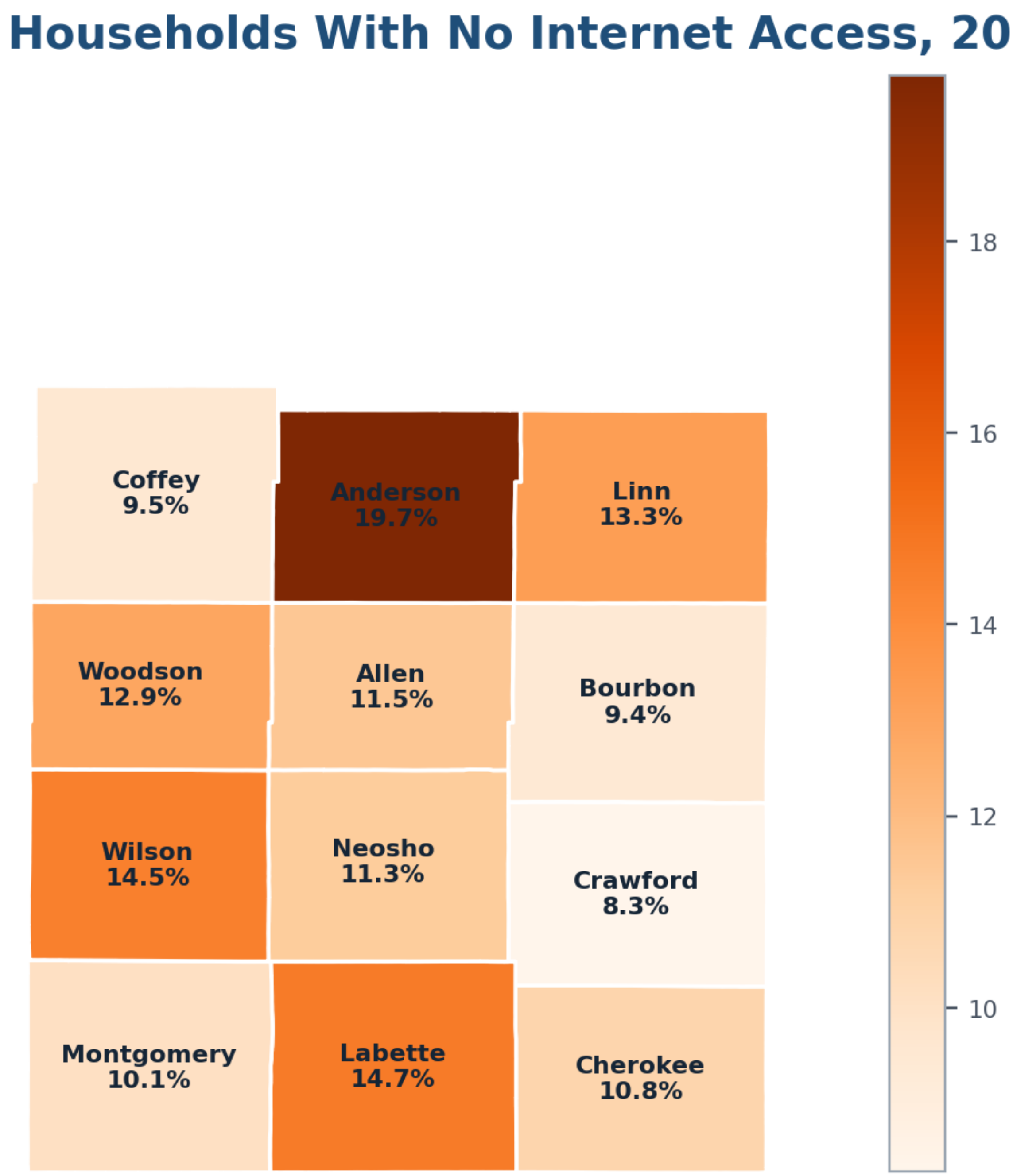
The central constraint is not a lack of eligible projects. It is the combination of engineering cost, local match, debt capacity, rates, procurement timelines, certified operators, and administrative capacity. The CEDS should treat preliminary engineering, rate analysis, asset management, environmental review, and funding-readiness work as economic-development activities because they determine whether projects can advance when funding becomes available.

Regional implementation opportunity Shared technical assistance, coordinated funding strategies, regional interconnections where feasible, and standardized project-readiness practices can lower the transaction cost of infrastructure investment for small communities.

3.12 Broadband and Digital Access

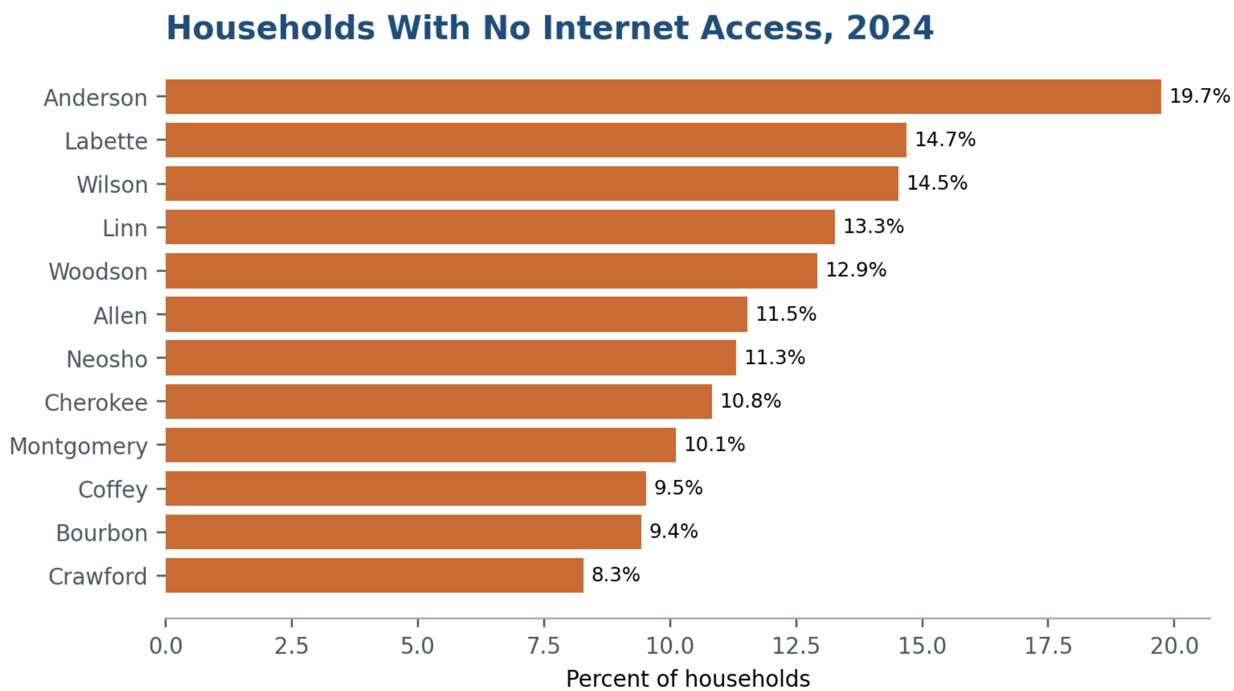
An estimated 85.8 percent of regional households have a broadband subscription of some type, while 11.2 percent report no internet access. The no-access rate ranges from 8.3 percent in Crawford County to 19.7 percent in Anderson County. These figures measure household adoption and access, not the technical availability or advertised speed of service at every location.

Figure 3-9. Households With No Internet Access by County, 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table B28002 and 2025 TIGER/Line county boundaries.

Figure 3-10. Households With No Internet Access by County, 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table B28002.

County	Broadband subscription	No internet access
Anderson	75.8%	19.7%
Labette	82.7%	14.7%
Wilson	83.6%	14.5%
Linn	83.7%	13.3%
Woodson	85.0%	12.9%
Allen	84.4%	11.5%
Neosho	85.6%	11.3%
Cherokee	87.0%	10.8%
Montgomery	87.1%	10.1%
Coffey	87.3%	9.5%
Bourbon	87.6%	9.4%
Crawford	88.5%	8.3%
Region	85.8%	11.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS five-year table B28002. Subscription data should be evaluated with FCC and Kansas Office of Broadband Development availability data for project design.

Broadband strategy must address three distinct barriers: infrastructure availability, affordability, and adoption. Fiber and fixed-wireless deployment can close availability gaps, but households may still remain offline because of price, device access, digital skills, or skepticism. The Kansas Office of Broadband Development's deployment and digital-opportunity programs provide a framework for combining infrastructure with adoption, skills, cybersecurity awareness, and device support.

Data caution County averages can conceal unserved pockets. Project development should use the current FCC Broadband Data Collection location fabric, state challenge results, provider engineering, and community validation rather than relying on county subscription rates alone.

3.13 Major Employers and Institutional Anchors

The region's employer base combines private manufacturers, health systems, educational institutions, energy facilities, retail and service employers, state facilities, school districts, and local governments. The following list is representative rather than an employment ranking. It uses Kansas Department of Labor employer data published through the Kansas Department of Commerce in July 2025 and supplements it with regionally significant institutions and energy assets.

County	Representative major employers and anchors
Allen	B&W Custom Truck Beds; Monarch Cement; Gates Corporation; Allen County Regional Hospital; Walmart
Anderson	Garnett USD 365; Anderson County Hospital; public-sector and local service employers
Bourbon	Ward-Kraft; Peerless Products; USD 234; Ascension Via Christi / emergency and health services
Cherokee	Crossland Construction; Celltron; Calibrated Forms; school and local-government employers
Coffey	Wolf Creek Generating Station; Coffey Health System; USD 244; construction and specialized service firms
Crawford	Pittsburg State University; Pitsco; SugarCreek Packing; Pitt Plastics; Ascension Via Christi; Walmart
Labette	Labette Health; Parsons State Hospital and Training Center; Ruskin; Grandview Products; Old Dominion; CLASS
Linn	Evergy / La Cygne Generating Station; USD 344; USD 346; Youthfront; local government
Montgomery	Cessna / Textron Aviation; Coffeyville Resources Nitrogen Fertilizers; Windsor Place; refining and health-care employers
Neosho	Neosho Memorial Regional Medical Center; Ash Grove Cement; Kustom Signals; Chanute Manufacturing; Bridgewood Cabinetry
Wilson	Cobalt Boats; Holcim; Fredonia Regional Hospital; Wilson Medical Center; Tindle Construction
Woodson	Yates Center Health & Rehabilitation; USD 366; county and municipal government

Sources: Kansas Department of Commerce county profiles using Kansas Department of Labor employer data, July 2025; U.S. EIA; institutional sources. Names are representative and not ranked by employment.

Several conclusions follow. First, manufacturing and health care are distributed across multiple counties rather than concentrated in one center. Second, public and nonprofit institutions are critical anchors in smaller counties. Third, a limited number of facilities can account for a large share of wages, tax base, and supplier demand in a county. Business retention and expansion, leadership succession, infrastructure reliability, and workforce pipelines are therefore as important as external recruitment.

3.14 Existing Economic Development Assets

Southeast Kansas enters the 2026 CEDS with a substantial platform of institutions, sites, networks, financing tools, and natural and cultural assets. The strategic issue is not whether assets exist; it is whether the region can coordinate, market, maintain, and connect them at sufficient scale.

Asset category	Key regional assets	Development value
Higher education and workforce	Pittsburg State University; Allen, Coffeyville, Fort Scott, Labette, and Neosho County community colleges; school-district CTE; employer training partnerships.	Credentials, customized training, applied learning, student talent, entrepreneurship, and research connections.
Industrial sites and logistics	Great Plains Industrial Park; local industrial parks and business parks; rail-served sites; US-400 and US-69 corridors; public-use airports.	Recruitment, expansion, warehousing, advanced manufacturing, energy and logistics.
Energy and industrial base	Wolf Creek; La Cygne; Coffeyville refining and nitrogen fertilizer; cement, plastics, fabrication, aircraft, food processing, cabinetry, and boat manufacturing.	High-wage jobs, export activity, supplier demand, tax base, and specialized workforce.
Health-care network	Regional hospitals, critical-access hospitals, clinics, long-term care, behavioral health, emergency services, and state facilities.	Anchor employment, quality of life, workforce attraction, and service access.
Business finance and technical assistance	SEKRPC revolving loan funds, grant and funding assistance, local economic-development organizations, chambers, Network Kansas resources, SBDCs, and state programs.	Capital access, project development, entrepreneurship, succession, and public-infrastructure finance.
Downtowns and community assets	Historic downtowns, Main Street and preservation activity, Route 66 assets, cultural institutions, recreation, lakes, trails, and state parks.	Tourism, entrepreneurship, resident attraction, placemaking, and adaptive reuse.
Regional collaboration	SEKRPC, county and municipal governments, economic-development organizations, educational institutions, utilities, health systems, and industry partnerships.	Shared capacity, multi-county project development, advocacy, and funding alignment.

Sources: SEKRPC asset inventory and program portfolio; Kansas Commerce; Great Plains Industrial Park; KDOT; regional institutions.

The largest opportunity is to convert these assets into connected systems. Colleges can be linked more directly to employers and young-adult retention. Industrial sites can be paired with utility and housing readiness. Downtown investment can support entrepreneurship and workforce attraction. Transportation and broadband can enlarge labor sheds. Revolving loan funds and grant technical assistance can move businesses and communities from concept to implementation.

3.15 Existing-Conditions Synthesis

Overall finding Southeast Kansas has a diversified economic base and positive migration momentum, but it is constrained by natural population decrease, uneven labor-force participation, housing readiness, infrastructure capacity, digital-access gaps, and limited implementation bandwidth in smaller communities.

Evidence	What the data show	CEDS implication
Population	Regional decline of 1.2% since 2020; positive net migration offset part of a larger natural decrease.	Prioritize retention, in-migration, family formation, health, and working-age population replacement.
Workforce	60.8% labor-force participation; 75,813 QCEW jobs; employers report tight labor supply despite moderate unemployment.	Address child care, transportation, housing, skills, participation, and talent attraction together.
Industry	Manufacturing and health care each employ more than 13,500 residents; education, retail, construction, logistics and energy add diversification.	Protect traded-sector anchors, strengthen suppliers, and build technical and professional pipelines.
Income and opportunity	Regional poverty near 15%; substantial county variation in income and wages.	Target quality jobs, advancement, entrepreneurship, and access to essential services.
Housing	High homeownership but 14.9% vacancy; vacancy reaches 32% in Woodson County.	Distinguish usable supply from obsolete vacancy; combine rehabilitation, infill, infrastructure, and new production.
Mobility	Nearly 79% drive alone; 22.3% commute 30+ minutes; 6.1% of households have no vehicle.	Maintain freight corridors while addressing workforce transportation and rural mobility.
Broadband	11.2% of households report no internet; county rates vary from 8.3% to 19.7%.	Pair deployment with affordability, devices, digital skills, and current location-level mapping.
Infrastructure	Major energy and industrial assets coexist with aging small-system water, wastewater, street, bridge, and stormwater needs.	Build project-readiness capacity and align local, state, and federal funding.

Source: SEKRPC synthesis of the datasets and inventories presented in this chapter.

This profile provides the empirical basis for the SWOT analysis in Chapter 4. The population data explain why workforce and housing appear as cross-cutting concerns. The industry and employer data establish manufacturing, health care, education, energy, logistics, and institutional capacity as core strengths. The infrastructure and broadband findings clarify why project readiness and regional collaboration are necessary. The analysis also shows that county conditions differ enough that implementation must be regionally coordinated but locally tailored.

Data Sources and Notes

1. U.S. Census Bureau. County Population Estimates, Vintage 2025, including annual population totals and components of change for 2020–2025.
2. U.S. Census Bureau. 2024 American Community Survey five-year estimates, detailed tables B01001, B03002, B23025, B19013, B17001, B15003, B25002, B25003, B25064, B25077, B08201, B08301, B08303, B28002, and C24030.
3. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2024 annual averages.
4. U.S. Census Bureau. 2025 TIGER/Line county-boundary and primary-road files.
5. Kansas Department of Commerce. County profiles and major-employer data sourced from Kansas Department of Labor, July 2025.
6. Kansas Department of Transportation. Transportation, aviation, rail, and local-program resources.
7. U.S. Energy Information Administration. Kansas electricity profile and 2024 plant information.
8. Watco, Union Pacific, and Great Plains Industrial Park. Rail and industrial-site asset information.
9. SEKRPC. Membership geography, project portfolio, revolving loan funds, technical-assistance functions, and regional asset inventory.

Chapter 4
Regional SWOT Analysis

4.1 Purpose of the SWOT Analysis

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis is one of the foundational elements of the 2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Prepared in accordance with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) CEDS Content Guidelines, the SWOT provides a structured assessment of the internal and external factors influencing the long-term economic competitiveness, resilience, and prosperity of Southeast Kansas. Rather than serving as a stand-alone exercise, the SWOT establishes the strategic foundation upon which the vision, goals, objectives, implementation strategies, and regional project priorities presented throughout this CEDS are built.

While demographic and economic data describe current conditions, the SWOT captures the experience and perspective of those who live, work, invest, govern, educate, provide healthcare, own businesses, and support economic development throughout the region. It combines quantitative information with stakeholder knowledge to identify both the assets that distinguish Southeast Kansas and the challenges that require coordinated regional action.

For the 2026 CEDS update, the SWOT was intentionally developed from a regional perspective. Workforce recruitment, housing availability, infrastructure investment, business expansion, entrepreneurship, transportation, education, healthcare, and access to capital extend beyond municipal and county boundaries. Consequently, the analysis focuses on the collective strengths and needs of the twelve-county Southeast Kansas region while recognizing that individual communities possess unique characteristics and priorities.

The purpose of the SWOT analysis is not simply to create four lists of observations. Instead, it is intended to answer several fundamental planning questions that guide regional decision-making. These include: What competitive advantages distinguish Southeast Kansas? Which internal conditions limit long-term growth? What emerging opportunities should regional partners pursue? What external risks could affect future prosperity? And how should public and private investments be prioritized to maximize regional benefit?

Throughout the planning process, stakeholders consistently emphasized that successful economic development requires building upon existing regional assets while addressing persistent challenges. The SWOT therefore provides a balanced assessment of both opportunity and need. It recognizes Southeast Kansas as a region with significant economic assets—including a diverse industrial base, productive agricultural resources, educational institutions, healthcare systems, transportation infrastructure, and experienced regional organizations—while acknowledging workforce shortages, housing constraints, demographic change, aging infrastructure, and increasing competition for investment.

The findings presented in this chapter directly informed every subsequent chapter of the CEDS. The regional Vision Statement, Guiding Principles, Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Project Inventory were developed in response to the issues identified through the SWOT process. As implementation progresses, the SWOT should continue to serve as a living planning tool that is revisited periodically to evaluate changing regional conditions and ensure that regional priorities remain aligned with emerging opportunities and challenges.

Key Planning Questions Addressed by the SWOT

- What competitive advantages distinguish Southeast Kansas?
- What internal conditions limit economic competitiveness?
- What emerging opportunities should regional partners pursue?
- What external threats could affect long-term prosperity?
- How should regional investments be prioritized to strengthen economic resilience and competitiveness?

4.2 SWOT Methodology

The SWOT analysis for the 2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was developed through a structured planning process designed to comply with U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) guidance while accurately reflecting the perspectives of stakeholders across Southeast Kansas. Rather than relying solely on statistical indicators or consultant observations, the methodology combined quantitative information, stakeholder engagement, and professional planning analysis to identify the region's principal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The planning process began with a regional stakeholder survey distributed to representatives of local governments, economic development organizations, businesses, educational institutions, healthcare providers, nonprofit organizations, utilities, financial institutions, workforce partners, and other regional stakeholders. Survey participants were asked to identify the issues they believed most significantly influenced the region's economic competitiveness and future development. Responses were collected and reviewed to identify recurring themes, areas of consensus, and issues requiring additional discussion during the planning process.

Survey results were then used to develop the agenda for the June 18, 2026 Regional Stakeholder Meeting hosted by the Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission. Participants reviewed preliminary survey findings and completed structured SWOT worksheets and regional priority exercises. Facilitated discussions encouraged participants to evaluate issues from a regional perspective rather than focusing solely on individual community interests. This approach helped identify economic conditions, infrastructure needs, workforce challenges, housing issues, business development opportunities, and emerging trends that affect multiple counties and jurisdictions.

Following the meeting, all survey responses, completed worksheets, facilitator notes, and planning observations were synthesized into a single regional assessment. Similar comments were grouped into common themes to distinguish isolated concerns from issues consistently identified by multiple participants. Particular attention was given to recurring observations that crossed organizational sectors or geographic boundaries, as these represented the strongest evidence of regional priorities.

The resulting SWOT reflects the collective perspective of the planning process rather than the opinions of any single participant or organization. Where differences of opinion existed, emphasis was placed on issues supported by multiple sources of input. This synthesis process produced a balanced assessment that recognizes Southeast Kansas' considerable assets while candidly acknowledging the challenges that must be addressed to improve long-term economic competitiveness.

Finally, the SWOT findings were evaluated alongside existing regional planning documents, demographic and economic trends, and SEKRPC's experience administering infrastructure, housing, revolving loan fund, and economic development programs throughout the region. This additional review ensured that stakeholder observations were considered within the broader context of regional conditions and implementation experience. The resulting analysis provides the strategic foundation for the Vision, Goals, Objectives, Implementation Strategies, and Regional Project Inventory presented in the remainder of this CEDS.

The methodology is intended to be transparent and repeatable. As future CEDS updates are prepared, the same combination of stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and regional collaboration can be used to reassess changing conditions, evaluate implementation progress, and refine regional priorities. The following synthesis explains where the survey and June 18 stakeholder worksheets converged and how that combined evidence shaped the regional SWOT.

Key Elements of the SWOT Methodology

- Broad stakeholder participation representing multiple sectors and all portions of the region.
- Regional survey to identify emerging issues and priorities.
- Facilitated June 18, 2026 stakeholder workshop using structured SWOT worksheets.
- Systematic synthesis of survey responses, worksheets, and facilitator observations.
- Validation against regional planning experience and existing economic conditions.
- Direct linkage of SWOT findings to the Vision, Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Project Inventory.

4.3 Synthesis of Survey Responses and June 18 Stakeholder Worksheets

This section integrates two complementary sources of stakeholder input: responses to the 2026 Regional Economic Survey and worksheets completed during the June 18, 2026 regional stakeholder meeting. The survey provided broad input across industry clusters, workforce, housing, infrastructure, equity, and resilience. The June 18 session gave participants an opportunity to test those findings, identify connections among issues, and translate individual observations into regionally significant themes.

The synthesis is qualitative. It identifies areas of convergence, recurring concerns, and strategic implications rather than treating the number of mentions as a formal ranking. This approach is appropriate because participation represented a range of communities, organizations, and perspectives, while the stakeholder meeting served as a validation and interpretation exercise rather than a statistically representative vote.

Relationship Between the Two Input Sources

The survey and worksheets performed different but mutually reinforcing functions. Survey responses captured how stakeholders assessed current conditions and future risks across multiple topic areas. The June 18 worksheets added context by asking participants to distinguish internal conditions from external forces, consider how issues affect one another, and identify matters that require regional rather than purely local action.

Input source	Primary contribution	Use in the synthesis
Regional Economic Survey	Broad, topic-based assessment of assets, constraints, opportunities, and risks.	Establishes recurring regional conditions and the range of stakeholder perspectives.
June 18 worksheets	Facilitated interpretation of SWOT factors, priorities, and connections among issues.	Validates prominent survey themes and clarifies their strategic significance.
Combined evidence	Areas where independent input sources reinforce one another.	Forms the basis for the regional SWOT and the strategic priorities developed in later chapters.

Areas of Strong Convergence

Across both input sources, stakeholders repeatedly returned to a common set of regional assets and constraints. The most important finding is not that any single issue dominates every community, but that the same structural issues influence economic development throughout the 12-county region and frequently reinforce one another.

1. Workforce Capacity and Labor-Force Participation

Assets and opportunities. Stakeholders consistently identified Southeast Kansas residents' work ethic, practical experience, and the presence of educational institutions as regional strengths. Established manufacturing, agriculture, health care, construction, education, and public-sector employers provide a base of occupational knowledge and career pathways.

Constraints and risks. At the same time, employers face a limited supply of available workers, skill mismatches, an aging workforce, and difficulty attracting or retaining younger workers. Child care, transportation, health, and housing barriers further reduce labor-force participation. The combined input makes clear that the workforce issue is not solely a training problem; it is a labor-supply and participation problem shaped by multiple community conditions.

Strategic meaning. The regional response should connect employer needs, education and training, child care, transportation, housing, and talent attraction. Strategies that address only one element are unlikely to produce sustained gains.

2. Housing Availability, Quality, and Affordability

Assets and opportunities. Respondents recognized available land, opportunities for rehabilitation and new construction, and supportive local leadership as foundations for housing development. Existing neighborhoods and the region's comparatively low cost of living remain potential recruitment and retention advantages.

Constraints and risks. These advantages are offset by low rental availability, an aging housing stock, limited development capacity, infrastructure constraints, and gaps in financing for projects that do not readily meet conventional market feasibility tests. Housing conditions affect employers' ability to recruit workers and communities' ability to retain families, older adults, and essential-service employees.

Strategic meaning. Housing should be treated as economic infrastructure. Regional strategies should support rehabilitation, infill, development-ready sites, financing tools, and projects aligned with documented workforce and community needs.

3. Infrastructure Modernization and Connectivity

Assets and opportunities. The region benefits from highway and freight connections, established utility systems, and infrastructure that has supported agriculture, manufacturing, logistics, and community development for decades. Stakeholders also recognized broadband and digital connectivity as essential to education, health care, business, and household resilience.

Constraints and risks. Aging water and wastewater systems, maintenance backlogs, limited public transportation, funding gaps, and uneven digital access were recurring concerns. Smaller communities often lack the staff capacity and local revenue base needed to plan, finance, and administer major improvements.

Strategic meaning. Infrastructure priorities should be tied to economic outcomes and sequenced through capital planning, project development, funding coordination, and regional technical assistance. Resilience and long-term operating capacity should be incorporated into project selection.

4. Business Development, Entrepreneurship, and Access to Capital

Assets and opportunities. Stakeholders identified the region's diverse economic base, local businesses, agricultural assets, manufacturing experience, and potential for value-added production as important strengths. Local relationships and community loyalty can help entrepreneurs establish and grow businesses.

Constraints and risks. Constraints include succession challenges, limited entrepreneurial support in some locations, difficulty accessing appropriately structured capital, workforce shortages, and the vulnerability of small businesses to economic shocks. Participants also noted that development opportunities are not distributed evenly across the region.

Strategic meaning. The CEDS should support both existing firms and new ventures through coordinated technical assistance, financing, succession planning, market development, site and infrastructure readiness, and connections to state and federal resources.

5. Regional Collaboration and Implementation Capacity

Assets and opportunities. Community leadership, strong local networks, institutional partnerships, and a demonstrated willingness to cooperate were repeatedly identified as strengths. These relationships provide a foundation for coordinated planning, shared services, and multi-jurisdictional initiatives.

Constraints and risks. Capacity remains uneven. Smaller jurisdictions and organizations may have limited staff, fiscal resources, data, or grant-management capability. Competition for funding and fragmented project development can also weaken the region's ability to advance complex initiatives.

Strategic meaning. Regional collaboration should move beyond information sharing to coordinated implementation. The CEDS can provide a common framework for developing projects, assigning leadership, assembling partnerships, pursuing funding, and tracking results.

Cross-Cutting Findings

Several findings do not fit neatly within a single theme. Instead, they explain why the region's economic challenges persist and how strategies should be designed.

Cross-cutting finding	Interpretation
The issues are interconnected.	Workforce recruitment is affected by housing, child care, transportation, and quality of life. Business expansion depends on labor, utilities, sites, financing, and permitting. Infrastructure investment affects housing feasibility, industrial readiness, public health, and resilience.

Cross-cutting finding	Interpretation
Capacity is as important as funding.	Stakeholders identified financial constraints, but they also emphasized shortages of staff time, technical expertise, planning capacity, and project-development resources. A funding opportunity has limited value if a community cannot prepare, manage, or sustain the resulting project.
Conditions vary, but the underlying barriers are regional.	The severity and form of each issue differ by county and community. Even so, the same barriers recur across the region. This supports regional coordination while preserving flexibility for locally tailored implementation.
Equity is embedded in economic participation.	Transportation barriers, digital access, housing conditions, income differences, and limited service availability influence who can participate in the economy and which communities can compete for investment. Equity considerations should therefore be integrated into project design and performance measures.
Resilience depends on diversification and readiness.	Strong community networks are an asset, but fiscal limitations, aging infrastructure, employer concentration, and small-business vulnerability increase exposure to disruption. Diversification, continuity planning, infrastructure reliability, and responsive regional partnerships are central to resilience.

Differences in Emphasis

The two input sources were highly consistent, but they differed in emphasis. Survey responses tended to describe conditions within specific topic areas and reflected the respondent's organizational or geographic perspective. The June 18 worksheets more often emphasized relationships among issues, the practical limits on implementation, and the need to identify initiatives that can be advanced collectively.

These differences strengthen, rather than weaken, the analysis. The survey helps establish the breadth of concern; the stakeholder worksheets help explain how those concerns should shape strategy. Where an issue appeared strongly in one source but less directly in the other, it was retained when it was consistent with the larger regional pattern and relevant to economic competitiveness or resilience.

Implications for the Regional SWOT and Strategic Framework

The synthesis supports a regional SWOT that is selective and action-oriented. Strengths should identify assets that can be mobilized; weaknesses should identify internal barriers the region can influence; opportunities should identify external or emerging conditions that can be leveraged; and threats should identify forces that could undermine regional progress.

The five themes also provide the bridge from public and stakeholder input to the CEDS strategic framework. They should not be interpreted as isolated program areas. Instead, they function as an integrated agenda in which progress in one area improves the feasibility of progress in others.

Strategic theme	Primary desired outcome	Examples of regional action
Workforce capacity	A larger, more skilled, and more connected labor force.	Employer–education alignment; participation supports; talent attraction and retention.
Housing	A more diverse, attainable, and reliable housing supply.	Rehabilitation; infill and new development; infrastructure and financing coordination.
Infrastructure	Reliable systems that support residents, employers, and future investment.	Capital planning; project development; funding strategy; broadband and transportation access.
Business and capital	More resilient existing firms and a stronger pipeline of new and expanding businesses.	Technical assistance; financing; succession; market development; site readiness.
Regional collaboration	Greater capacity to move priority projects from concept to implementation.	Shared project development; multi-jurisdictional partnerships; grant coordination; performance tracking.

Conclusion

The survey responses and June 18 stakeholder worksheets provide a coherent foundation for the 2026 CEDS. They describe a region with meaningful assets and strong community commitment, but also one in which structural constraints limit the ability of residents, businesses, and local governments to fully use those assets.

The central strategic conclusion is that Southeast Kansas does not face a collection of unrelated problems. It faces a connected set of capacity challenges that require coordinated responses. The regional SWOT presented in the following sections converts this synthesis into a concise assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The strategic framework developed later in the CEDS will use that assessment to identify goals, objectives, actions, partners, and measures of progress.

4.4 Regional Opportunities

Building on the combined survey and June 18 worksheet findings, the regional opportunities below identify the external trends, emerging conditions, and actionable openings that Southeast Kansas can leverage to strengthen long-term economic competitiveness. The synthesis confirmed that the region possesses substantial assets—including an established industrial base, productive agricultural resources, experienced local leadership, strong educational institutions, transportation connections, and a collaborative network of regional organizations—that provide a solid foundation for pursuing these opportunities.

One of the greatest opportunities identified throughout the planning process is the continued expansion of existing businesses. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that business retention and expansion remain among the most effective economic development strategies available to the region. Existing employers already possess established facilities, trained workforces, supplier relationships, and community investments that position them for continued growth. Supporting these employers through infrastructure improvements, workforce initiatives, technical assistance, financing programs, and regulatory coordination offers significant potential to create new jobs and increase private investment while strengthening the regional economy.

Entrepreneurship and small business development emerged as another major opportunity. Stakeholders recognized that entrepreneurial activity plays a critical role in diversifying the regional economy, increasing innovation, and expanding employment opportunities. Participants identified opportunities to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems through business incubators, technical assistance, mentoring programs, revolving loan funds, microloan programs, gap financing, and stronger connections between entrepreneurs and financial institutions. Encouraging local entrepreneurship was viewed not only as a means of creating new businesses but also as an important strategy for retaining talented individuals, fostering innovation, and increasing local wealth creation.

Access to capital was consistently identified as an area where regional collaboration could produce meaningful economic benefits. Participants noted that many businesses, particularly startups, expanding small businesses, and rural enterprises, experience difficulty obtaining financing that meets their specific needs. Strengthening partnerships among lenders, regional revolving loan funds, economic development organizations, and state and federal financing programs represents a significant opportunity to improve business investment throughout Southeast Kansas. Stakeholders also encouraged exploration of innovative financing mechanisms, public-private partnerships, and philanthropic investment to support projects that may not fit traditional financing models.

Emerging Regional Economic Mobility Initiative

An emerging opportunity is the Kansas Health Foundation Transformation Grant initiative being led by Rural Community Partners in Southeast Kansas. The initiative advances an integrated regional model for increasing economic mobility through four interconnected implementation tracks: a regional Community Investment Fund; entrepreneurship and small-business development; workforce development; and Community Innovation Networks. Together, these tracks are intended to connect capital, coaching, career pathways, community capacity, housing support, and coordinated referrals rather than treating those needs as separate systems.

The proposed Community Investment Fund includes a request for $250,000 in impact-investment capital to seed a professionally managed regional platform and attract additional investment. The fund would provide affordable capital for entrepreneurs who are not yet able to obtain conventional financing while coordinating underwriting, loan servicing, business coaching, technical assistance, mentorship, connections, and impact measurement. The entrepreneurship track would expand regional outreach and launch SEK Catalyst, empowered by the University of Kansas School of Business, to strengthen business planning, financial readiness, and entrepreneur development.

The workforce track would integrate WorkforceONE into local Community Innovation Networks, pilot youth career-awareness and workforce-development activities, and develop technician and engineering career pathways through partnerships among WorkforceONE, SEKRPC, the Materials Alliance Zone of Kansas (MAZK), employers, and local networks. The Community Innovation Networks would use asset mapping, relationship building, collaborative action, and visible early-win projects to strengthen local implementation capacity. Rural Connect, Community Health Worker outreach, and partner referrals would connect more residents with entrepreneurship, workforce, and community resources, while a Housing Specialist housed at SEKRPC would support regional housing strategies. Implementation remains contingent on funding and partner commitments; however, the initiative provides a concrete model for translating the CEDS's cross-sector priorities into coordinated regional action.

Housing development represents one of the most significant opportunities for long-term regional growth. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders consistently linked housing availability with workforce recruitment, business expansion, and population stability. Rather than viewing housing solely as a residential issue, participants recognized it as a critical component of economic competitiveness. Opportunities identified include the construction of workforce housing, rehabilitation of existing housing stock, redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties, adaptive reuse of commercial buildings, expansion of senior housing options, and increased collaboration among public agencies, private developers, financial institutions, and nonprofit housing organizations. Strategic housing investment was viewed as an essential prerequisite for attracting new employers, retaining existing businesses, and supporting future population growth.

Workforce development also presents substantial opportunities for regional collaboration and innovation. Stakeholders emphasized that Southeast Kansas benefits from a strong network of educational institutions, including Pittsburg State University, community colleges, technical education providers, and local school districts. Opportunities exist to strengthen partnerships between education and industry, expand apprenticeship and internship programs, increase career awareness beginning in K–12 education, enhance workforce recruitment efforts, and improve access to continuing education and workforce training. Participants also identified opportunities to address barriers to workforce participation through childcare initiatives, transportation improvements, and programs designed to attract former residents and new populations to the region.

Industrial site development represents another significant opportunity. Southeast Kansas possesses numerous communities with existing industrial parks, transportation access, utility infrastructure, and available land suitable for commercial and industrial expansion. Stakeholders encouraged continued investment in site readiness, utility capacity, transportation improvements, environmental assessments, and infrastructure planning to ensure that industrial properties remain competitive for future recruitment opportunities. Participants also emphasized the importance of maintaining a current inventory of available industrial properties and promoting regional assets through coordinated marketing efforts.

Transportation and logistics continue to provide Southeast Kansas with important competitive advantages. The region's location along major highway corridors connecting Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and the broader Midwest positions Southeast Kansas as an attractive location for manufacturing, distribution, agriculture, and logistics-related industries. Stakeholders identified opportunities to further capitalize on these transportation assets through continued highway improvements, freight mobility enhancements, industrial site development, and coordinated infrastructure planning.

Broadband expansion and technological advancement were repeatedly identified as emerging opportunities capable of influencing nearly every sector of the regional economy. Participants recognized that reliable high-speed internet has become essential for business operations, education, healthcare, remote work, entrepreneurship, precision agriculture, and government services. Continued investment in broadband infrastructure, digital literacy, cybersecurity, and technology adoption offers opportunities to improve economic competitiveness while supporting both urban and rural communities.

Agriculture continues to represent one of Southeast Kansas' most significant economic assets and offers numerous opportunities for future growth. Stakeholders identified opportunities to expand value-added agriculture, food processing, specialty crop production, agribusiness innovation, local food systems, meat processing capacity, and agricultural technology adoption. Participants also emphasized opportunities to strengthen relationships between agricultural producers, processors, educational institutions, and regional economic development organizations to improve market access and increase economic value retained within the region.

Tourism, recreation, and quality-of-life investments emerged as increasingly important economic development opportunities. Stakeholders noted growing recognition that community amenities play an important role in workforce recruitment, talent retention, business attraction, and overall community vitality. Downtown revitalization, historic preservation, parks, trails, outdoor recreation, cultural attractions, agritourism, and heritage tourism were identified as opportunities capable of generating visitor spending while improving the quality of life for residents. Participants emphasized that investments in quality of place complement traditional economic development initiatives and contribute to long-term community sustainability.

Regional collaboration itself represents one of Southeast Kansas' greatest opportunities. Stakeholders consistently observed that many of the region's challenges—including workforce development, housing, infrastructure, healthcare, education, transportation, and economic diversification—cannot be effectively addressed by individual jurisdictions acting independently. Continued collaboration among counties, municipalities, educational institutions, employers, nonprofit organizations, utilities, healthcare providers, financial institutions, and state and federal partners creates opportunities to leverage resources, coordinate investments, pursue larger funding opportunities, and improve implementation capacity. Participants repeatedly emphasized that Southeast Kansas has developed a strong culture of regional cooperation that should continue to serve as a distinguishing competitive advantage.

Finally, stakeholders recognized that Southeast Kansas is entering a period during which significant state and federal investments in infrastructure, economic development, broadband, housing, energy, and community resilience present unprecedented opportunities for the region. Communities that maintain current planning documents, develop implementation-ready projects, strengthen regional partnerships, and pursue coordinated funding strategies will be better positioned to compete successfully for these resources. Throughout the planning process, participants consistently expressed confidence that Southeast Kansas possesses the leadership, experience, and institutional capacity necessary to capitalize on these opportunities and translate strategic planning into measurable economic outcomes.

Collectively, these opportunities reflect more than isolated projects or individual funding programs. They represent long-term strategic directions capable of improving regional competitiveness, increasing economic resilience, strengthening communities, and expanding opportunity throughout Southeast Kansas. The goals, objectives, implementation strategies, and project priorities presented in the following chapters are intended to capitalize upon these opportunities while addressing the challenges identified elsewhere in this SWOT analysis.

4.5 Regional Threats

While Southeast Kansas possesses numerous strengths and opportunities, stakeholders consistently recognized that the region also faces several external threats that have the potential to limit economic growth, reduce community competitiveness, and constrain future investment if left unaddressed. Unlike weaknesses, which generally represent internal conditions that regional partners can influence directly, threats are largely external factors that originate outside the immediate control of local communities but nevertheless require proactive planning and coordinated regional responses. Understanding these threats allows the region to improve resilience, strengthen preparedness, and position itself to respond effectively to changing economic conditions.

The most frequently identified threat throughout the stakeholder engagement process was the continued shortage of available workers. Participants consistently indicated that workforce availability has become one of the most significant constraints on regional economic growth. Employers across manufacturing, healthcare, education, construction, public utilities, local government, retail, and service industries reported increasing difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified employees. Stakeholders expressed concern that prolonged labor shortages could discourage business expansion, reduce industrial recruitment opportunities, limit entrepreneurial growth, and increase competition among employers for an increasingly limited workforce.

Closely related to workforce shortages is the continued demographic shift affecting many Southeast Kansas communities. Population decline, aging populations, and the outmigration of younger residents have reduced labor force participation in many areas while increasing demand for healthcare and other community services. Stakeholders recognized that reversing these demographic trends will require sustained investment in workforce development, housing, quality-of-life amenities, education, healthcare, and economic opportunity. Without coordinated action, demographic changes could continue to reduce the region's long-term economic competitiveness and increase fiscal pressure on local governments.

Housing availability was identified not only as an existing weakness but also as an emerging threat to future economic development. Employers increasingly report difficulty recruiting employees because prospective workers cannot locate suitable housing within reasonable commuting distances. Participants noted that limited housing inventory, rising construction costs, aging housing stock, and insufficient private housing development may continue to constrain workforce recruitment and business expansion unless addressed through coordinated public and private investment. Stakeholders consistently emphasized that housing should be viewed as an economic development issue rather than solely a community development concern.

Rising construction costs and inflation were repeatedly cited as significant threats affecting nearly every aspect of economic development. Escalating material prices, labor costs, equipment expenses, and financing costs have increased the cost of public infrastructure projects, housing construction, business expansion, and community facilities. Stakeholders expressed concern that inflation reduces the purchasing power of local governments and funding programs while increasing the amount of local financial participation required to complete projects. Communities with limited fiscal capacity may find it increasingly difficult to maintain infrastructure or pursue major capital improvements if these trends continue.

The long-term condition of public infrastructure represents another significant threat to regional competitiveness. Many communities continue to operate aging water systems, wastewater facilities, streets, bridges, stormwater systems, and public buildings that require substantial rehabilitation or replacement. Deferred maintenance, increasing regulatory requirements, and limited local funding capacity create growing financial obligations that may compete with other community priorities. Stakeholders emphasized that failure to modernize critical infrastructure could reduce the region's ability to attract investment, support housing development, retain existing businesses, and maintain quality public services.

Uncertainty surrounding future federal and state funding programs was also identified as an external threat. Many communities throughout Southeast Kansas depend upon competitive grant and loan programs to finance infrastructure improvements, community facilities, housing initiatives, and economic development projects. Changes in program eligibility, funding priorities, appropriations, or administrative requirements could significantly affect the region's ability to implement priority projects. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of maintaining current planning documents, developing implementation-ready projects, and strengthening regional partnerships to improve competitiveness regardless of future funding conditions.

Competition for business investment and workforce talent continues to increase throughout the Midwest and the nation. Communities throughout the country are investing heavily in industrial site development, workforce recruitment, housing, broadband infrastructure, and quality-of-life amenities designed to attract employers and residents. Stakeholders recognized that Southeast Kansas cannot rely solely on its traditional economic strengths but must continue improving its competitiveness through strategic investment, innovation, collaboration, and responsive economic development policies. Failure to adapt to changing market conditions could place the region at a disadvantage when competing for future investment opportunities.

Technological change represents both an opportunity and a threat. Advances in automation, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, precision agriculture, digital commerce, and remote work are reshaping labor markets and business operations. While these technologies offer opportunities to improve productivity and expand economic activity, they also require new workforce skills, updated infrastructure, and continued investment in education and training. Stakeholders expressed concern that communities and businesses unable to adapt to technological change may experience reduced competitiveness over time.

Natural hazards and environmental resilience also emerged as important considerations during the planning process. Flooding, severe weather, drought, and other natural events periodically affect Southeast Kansas communities, agricultural producers, transportation systems, and public infrastructure. Stakeholders recognized the importance of integrating resilience into infrastructure planning, hazard mitigation, utility improvements, and community development efforts. Investments that improve resilience not only reduce future recovery costs but also increase long-term economic stability and investor confidence.

Healthcare accessibility represents another emerging concern with economic implications. Stakeholders observed that healthcare availability increasingly influences workforce recruitment, population retention, and quality of life. Rural healthcare providers continue to face workforce shortages, financial pressures, and increasing service demands associated with aging populations. Continued erosion of healthcare services could affect both community vitality and employer recruitment efforts, making healthcare capacity an important component of regional economic competitiveness.

Participants also identified concerns regarding business succession, particularly among small businesses and agricultural enterprises. Many locally owned businesses are operated by aging owners without clearly identified succession plans. Failure to successfully transition these businesses to new ownership could result in business closures, employment losses, reduced commercial activity, and diminished community services. Stakeholders viewed succession planning as an increasingly important component of business retention and long-term economic sustainability.

Finally, stakeholders emphasized that fragmented planning and reduced regional collaboration could itself become a significant threat. Southeast Kansas has historically benefited from strong partnerships among local governments, educational institutions, economic development organizations, nonprofit agencies, and regional service providers. Participants consistently observed that future economic challenges will become increasingly complex and resource-intensive. Communities acting independently may struggle to compete successfully for funding or respond effectively to regional issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries. Continued collaboration therefore represents not only an opportunity but also an essential strategy for reducing future risk.

Although the threats identified throughout the planning process are substantial, stakeholders generally expressed confidence that they can be effectively managed through coordinated regional action, strategic investment, and continued collaboration. Many of these threats are not unique to Southeast Kansas but are shared by rural and micropolitan regions throughout the United States. The distinguishing factor identified by participants is the region's demonstrated willingness to work collaboratively, leverage diverse funding sources, and develop practical solutions that address long-term economic challenges.

The strategic goals and implementation strategies presented in the following chapters have been intentionally designed to reduce these threats by strengthening workforce development, expanding housing opportunities, modernizing infrastructure, supporting business growth and entrepreneurship, improving access to capital, and reinforcing the collaborative partnerships that have historically served as one of Southeast Kansas' greatest competitive advantages. Through proactive planning and sustained implementation, the region will be better positioned to adapt to changing economic conditions while maintaining long-term resilience and competitiveness.

4.6 Strategic Implications

The SWOT analysis confirms that Southeast Kansas enters the 2026–2031 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy planning period with significant competitive advantages, a strong tradition of regional collaboration, and substantial opportunities for future economic growth. At the same time, the planning process clearly demonstrated that the region faces persistent structural challenges that require coordinated action if Southeast Kansas is to remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic national and global economy. The strategic implications identified through the SWOT analysis establish the policy direction for the remainder of this CEDS and provide the rationale for the goals, objectives, implementation strategies, and regional investment priorities presented in subsequent chapters.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion emerging from the SWOT analysis is that Southeast Kansas possesses considerably more assets than deficiencies. Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, participants consistently identified a diversified industrial base, productive agricultural economy, established transportation infrastructure, quality educational institutions, healthcare providers, experienced regional organizations, and collaborative local leadership as defining strengths of the region. These assets provide a strong foundation upon which future economic development efforts can build. Rather than attempting to fundamentally redefine the regional economy, stakeholders overwhelmingly supported a strategy that builds upon these existing strengths while strategically addressing the barriers that currently limit economic growth.

The planning process also demonstrated that many of the region's highest priorities are interconnected. Workforce shortages cannot be addressed independently from housing availability. Housing development depends upon adequate infrastructure. Business expansion requires both workforce availability and access to capital. Entrepreneurship depends upon financing, technical assistance, broadband, and quality-of-life amenities capable of attracting skilled workers. These relationships reinforce the importance of adopting an integrated regional strategy rather than pursuing isolated initiatives. Economic development investments that address multiple priorities simultaneously are likely to generate greater long-term regional benefit than projects focused on individual issues in isolation.

One of the clearest strategic implications identified through stakeholder engagement is the need to strengthen the region's workforce development system. Employers across virtually every economic sector identified workforce availability as the single greatest constraint on expansion and long-term competitiveness. The shortage extends beyond highly specialized occupations and affects manufacturing, healthcare, education, construction, public utilities, local government, retail, logistics, agriculture, and professional services. Consequently, workforce development must remain a central organizing principle of the CEDS. This requires continued collaboration among employers, educational institutions, workforce agencies, local governments, and economic development organizations to expand career pathways, strengthen technical education, improve workforce recruitment, and remove barriers to labor force participation.

Housing similarly emerged as a strategic priority with implications extending far beyond residential development. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders consistently described housing as essential economic infrastructure. The availability of quality housing influences workforce recruitment, business retention, entrepreneurship, healthcare staffing, educational employment, and population growth. Communities that are unable to provide adequate housing will face increasing difficulty attracting both employers and workers. Accordingly, the CEDS recognizes housing investment as one of the region's highest economic development priorities and recommends continued collaboration among public agencies, private developers, financial institutions, nonprofit organizations, and state and federal funding partners to expand housing opportunities throughout Southeast Kansas.

The SWOT analysis also reinforces the strategic importance of continued infrastructure investment. Reliable transportation systems, modern water and wastewater facilities, broadband connectivity, utility capacity, industrial site readiness, and resilient public facilities represent foundational components of regional competitiveness. Stakeholders consistently emphasized that infrastructure should not be viewed merely as maintenance of public assets but rather as long-term investment supporting private economic activity, business expansion, housing development, and community resilience. The CEDS therefore places significant emphasis on coordinated infrastructure planning, capital investment, and continued pursuit of state and federal funding opportunities.

Business development strategies identified through the planning process reflect a balanced approach that supports both existing employers and future investment. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that existing businesses remain the region's greatest source of future employment growth. Business retention, expansion, succession planning, technical assistance, and workforce support therefore remain essential economic development activities. At the same time, participants recognized opportunities to diversify the regional economy through entrepreneurship, innovation, technology adoption, industrial recruitment, and expansion of value-added agriculture and food processing. Collectively, these strategies strengthen economic resilience by encouraging diversification while reinforcing established industries that continue to serve as economic anchors throughout the region.

The planning process also highlighted the strategic importance of improving access to capital. Participants noted that financing gaps continue to limit business expansion, entrepreneurship, housing development, and community revitalization efforts. Expanding access to revolving loan funds, microloan programs, gap financing, public-private partnerships, and other innovative financing mechanisms represents an opportunity to accelerate private investment while leveraging limited public resources. Strengthening relationships among lenders, economic development organizations, philanthropic partners, and government financing programs will be essential to implementing many of the projects envisioned throughout this CEDS.

The Rural Community Partners-led economic mobility initiative illustrates how these financing and support strategies can be combined in practice. By linking a proposed Community Investment Fund with entrepreneur development, workforce pathways, Community Innovation Networks, coordinated referrals, and regional housing capacity, the initiative responds directly to the SWOT finding that economic barriers are interconnected. Whether advanced through the pending Kansas Health Foundation proposal or through other partner and funding commitments, this integrated model represents a significant opportunity to improve access to capital, strengthen local implementation capacity, and expand economic mobility across Southeast Kansas.

Perhaps the most significant finding of the SWOT analysis is the importance of regional collaboration as a continuing competitive advantage. Stakeholders consistently recognized that the challenges facing Southeast Kansas—including workforce development, housing, infrastructure modernization, healthcare access, broadband expansion, and economic diversification—extend beyond individual community boundaries. Likewise, many funding opportunities increasingly emphasize regional cooperation, partnership, and measurable economic impact. The CEDS therefore recognizes collaboration not simply as a desirable planning principle but as an essential implementation strategy. Continued coordination among counties, municipalities, educational institutions, employers, nonprofit organizations, utilities, financial institutions, healthcare providers, and state and federal agencies will remain critical to achieving long-term regional success.

The SWOT analysis also underscores the importance of maintaining flexibility throughout implementation. Economic conditions will continue to evolve as demographic trends, technological innovation, public policy, global markets, and funding opportunities change over the planning period. Consequently, the CEDS should remain a living document rather than a static planning report. Annual evaluation, periodic updates, continued stakeholder engagement, and regular review of project priorities will allow

Southeast Kansas to respond effectively to emerging opportunities while remaining focused on long-term strategic objectives.

Collectively, the strategic implications identified through the SWOT analysis provide the foundation for the remainder of this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The Vision Statement presented in Chapter 5 reflects the future stakeholders seek to create. The Goals and Guiding Principles establish the long-term direction necessary to achieve that vision. The Objectives and Implementation Strategies presented in Chapter 6 translate those goals into practical actions. Finally, the Regional Project Inventory and Implementation Framework identify the investments, partnerships, and measurable outcomes required to move the strategy from planning to implementation.

The planning process consistently demonstrated that Southeast Kansas is not defined by its challenges but by its capacity to address them. The region possesses experienced leadership, resilient communities, strong institutions, collaborative partnerships, and a demonstrated history of successfully implementing complex economic development initiatives. By building upon these strengths while strategically addressing workforce, housing, infrastructure, business development, and regional collaboration, Southeast Kansas is well positioned to strengthen its economy, improve quality of life, and increase long-term resilience throughout the 2026–2031 planning period.

Regional SWOT Matrix

The matrix below consolidates the detailed findings into the internal and external conditions most consequential to regional competitiveness and resilience.

STRENGTHS

Internal assets to build upon

- Established manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, education, and small-business base
- Strong work ethic, practical skills, and experienced community leadership
- Highway, rail, freight, utility, and industrial assets that support investment
- Affordable land and communities offering quality-of-life advantages
- Trusted regional organizations and a demonstrated culture of collaboration

WEAKNESSES

Internal constraints to address

- Limited labor supply, skill mismatches, and barriers to labor-force participation
- Aging and insufficient housing stock, with limited development capacity
- Aging water, wastewater, transportation, and digital infrastructure
- Uneven access to capital, technical assistance, and succession support
- Limited staffing, fiscal capacity, and project-development resources in smaller communities

OPPORTUNITIES

External openings to pursue

- Expansion of existing employers, entrepreneurship, and value-added agriculture
- Workforce partnerships linking employers, schools, colleges, and support services
- Housing rehabilitation, infill, new construction, and development-ready sites
- Industrial-site readiness, broadband, logistics, tourism, and quality-of-life investment
- Regional economic mobility initiative integrating a Community Investment Fund, entrepreneur support, workforce pathways, Community Innovation Networks, and housing capacity | State and federal funding aligned through coordinated regional project pipelines

THREATS

External risks to manage

- Population decline, aging residents, and continued outmigration of younger workers
- Intensifying competition for workers, employers, investment, and public funding
- Rising construction, operating, and financing costs
- Infrastructure failure, severe weather, flooding, drought, and other disruptions
- Healthcare access challenges, business succession risk, and weakened regional coordination

Figure 4-1. Regional SWOT Matrix

SWOT → Strategy

The CEDS converts the SWOT from a diagnostic exercise into an action framework. Each pathway below represents a different strategic response and informs the goals, objectives, strategies, and priority initiatives presented in Chapter 5.

BUILD + GROW *Strengths + Opportunities* Mobilize regional assets to expand employers, develop industries and sites, grow entrepreneurship, and capture investment.	**CLOSE GAPS** *Weaknesses + Opportunities* Build workforce, housing, infrastructure, financing, and implementation capacity so communities can act on emerging opportunities.
STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE *Strengths + Threats* Use established institutions, infrastructure, leadership, and partnerships to anticipate disruption and adapt to change.	**REDUCE VULNERABILITY** *Weaknesses + Threats* Protect essential systems and communities through targeted investment, succession planning, risk reduction, and coordinated delivery.
CHAPTER 5: VISION • GOALS • OBJECTIVES • STRATEGIES • PRIORITY INITIATIVES	

Figure 4-2. Translating SWOT Findings into Strategy

Together, the matrix and strategy figure provide the final analytical bridge from stakeholder-identified conditions to the regional strategic framework.

Transition to Chapter 5

The SWOT analysis establishes the strategic context for the remainder of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The following chapter translates these findings into a shared regional vision, guiding principles, and strategic goals that will direct economic development efforts throughout Southeast Kansas over the next five years. Each goal presented in Chapter 5 is directly linked to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified through the stakeholder engagement process, ensuring that the CEDS remains firmly grounded in regional priorities and positioned for successful implementation.

Chapter 5

Vision, Goals, and Guiding Principles

Strategic direction for a resilient, connected, and opportunity-rich Southeast Kansas

Chapter 4 identified the region's strategic conditions. Chapter 5 establishes the shared direction for responding to them. Chapter 6 will translate that direction into objectives and implementation strategies.

5.1 Purpose and Role of the Strategic Framework

The strategic framework is the decision-making core of the 2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). It converts the regional conditions identified through the data analysis, stakeholder survey, June 18 workshop, and SWOT assessment into a clear statement of the future Southeast Kansas seeks to create. The framework is intended to guide regional investment, partnership development, project selection, and performance evaluation throughout the 2026-2031 planning period.

This chapter establishes three levels of direction. The Vision Statement describes the desired future condition of the region. The Guiding Principles define how regional partners will approach decisions and implementation. The Regional Goals identify the broad results that must be advanced to achieve the vision. Detailed objectives and implementation strategies are presented in Chapter 6 so that the distinction between long-term direction and specific action remains clear.

The framework is regional but not prescriptive. Southeast Kansas includes communities of different sizes, economic bases, fiscal capacities, and development needs. The goals are therefore designed to support coordinated action while allowing counties, municipalities, educational institutions, employers, nonprofit organizations, utilities, healthcare providers, and other partners to select the approaches most appropriate to their circumstances.

5.2 Regional Vision Statement

Southeast Kansas will be a connected, resilient, and opportunity-rich region where people can build careers and lives, businesses can start and grow, communities can sustain essential infrastructure and housing, and regional partners work together to turn local assets into shared prosperity.

The Vision Statement reflects the central conclusion of the planning process: economic competitiveness depends on the interaction of people, place, infrastructure, enterprise, and institutional capacity. No single program or investment can create the desired future. Progress will result from coordinated improvements that make Southeast Kansas a stronger place to live, work, operate a business, and invest.

The vision also recognizes that regional success must be broadly shared. Growth is most durable when residents can access opportunity, existing businesses can remain competitive, new ventures can obtain support and capital, communities can maintain reliable systems, and smaller jurisdictions can participate in regional initiatives. The CEDS therefore defines prosperity not only as job or investment growth, but also as increased capacity, resilience, quality of life, and access to opportunity across the twelve-county region.

5.3 Guiding Principles

The following principles will guide the selection, design, and implementation of CEDS initiatives. They apply across all five regional goals and provide a consistent basis for evaluating future opportunities.

- Regional benefit with local relevance. Prioritize initiatives that address shared needs, connect communities, or create benefits beyond a single jurisdiction while recognizing that implementation must remain responsive to local conditions.
- Implementation over planning alone. Move priority concepts toward action through project development, leadership assignments, partnerships, funding strategies, realistic schedules, and measurable outcomes.
- Build on existing assets. Use the region's employers, agricultural resources, educational institutions, healthcare systems, transportation connections, infrastructure, natural resources, and community leadership as foundations for growth.
- Inclusive access to opportunity. Consider how strategies affect rural communities, low- and moderate-income households, people facing barriers to employment, small businesses, and jurisdictions with limited administrative or fiscal capacity.
- Resilience and long-term stewardship. Design investments to withstand economic, demographic, environmental, technological, and fiscal change while accounting for maintenance, operating capacity, and continuity of essential services.
- Collaboration and leverage. Align public, private, nonprofit, philanthropic, and educational resources to increase impact, reduce duplication, and compete more effectively for investment.
- Evidence, accountability, and adaptation. Use relevant data, stakeholder knowledge, and performance measures to guide decisions; review progress annually and adjust priorities as conditions and opportunities change.

5.4 Regional Goal Framework

The five goals below correspond directly to the cross-cutting themes established in Chapter 4. They are intentionally interdependent. Workforce gains depend on housing, transportation, child care, health, and training. Business growth depends on workers, sites, infrastructure, capital, and technical assistance. Local governments' ability to advance these conditions depends on regional implementation capacity. The goal structure therefore provides organizing clarity without treating the region's challenges as separate programs.

Effective implementation will require coordinated regional systems that connect workforce development, entrepreneurship and access to capital, housing, health and participation supports, and community development. These connections are especially important for residents, entrepreneurs, and smaller communities that may otherwise face fragmented services or limited access to specialized resources.

Goal	Strategic focus	Long-term result
1	**Workforce and talent**	A larger, more skilled, and more connected labor force that can meet employer needs and support household prosperity.
2	**Housing and community vitality**	A more diverse, attainable, and reliable housing supply in communities that can attract and retain residents.
3	**Infrastructure and connectivity**	Reliable, resilient systems that support residents, employers, essential services, and future investment.
4	**Business, entrepreneurship, and capital**	Competitive existing firms, a stronger pipeline of new ventures, and broader access to the resources required for growth.
5	**Regional capacity and implementation**	Stronger partnerships and project-development capacity that move regional priorities from concept to measurable results.

GOAL 1 | WORKFORCE AND TALENT

Develop, attract, retain, and connect a skilled workforce capable of supporting regional employers, essential services, and household economic mobility.

Why This Goal Matters

Workforce capacity was the most persistent issue across the survey and June 18 stakeholder worksheets. Employers described difficulty filling positions, replacing retiring workers, finding specialized skills, and retaining younger residents. The analysis also demonstrated that labor-force participation is shaped by more than education or training. Housing availability, child care, transportation, health, broadband, wages, and awareness of career pathways all affect whether residents can enter, remain in, or advance within the workforce.

Southeast Kansas nevertheless has important assets on which to build: a strong work ethic, practical occupational knowledge, established employers, community colleges and technical education providers, K-12 systems, workforce organizations, and local leaders committed to talent development. The strategic task is to connect these assets more deliberately to employer demand and to remove the barriers that keep people and jobs from finding one another.

Priority Directions

- Align education, training, and work-based learning with current and emerging employer needs.
- Increase labor-force participation by coordinating workforce services with child care, transportation, housing, health, and other participation supports.
- Strengthen talent attraction and retention, including efforts focused on young adults, former residents, skilled workers, and essential-service professionals.
- Support career awareness, employer engagement, incumbent-worker training, and pathways that allow residents to advance without leaving the region.
- Use regional labor-market information and direct employer input to identify shared occupational needs and guide investments.

Desired Regional Outcomes

Over the planning period, the region should demonstrate stronger alignment between employer demand and training, improved connections between residents and available work, increased participation among people facing employment barriers, and greater success attracting and retaining workers in high-need occupations. Chapter 6 establishes the objectives and strategies through which these outcomes will be pursued.

GOAL 2 | HOUSING AND COMMUNITY VITALITY

Expand and preserve a diverse, attainable, and quality housing supply that supports workforce recruitment, household stability, and the long-term vitality of Southeast Kansas communities.

Why This Goal Matters

Housing emerged as both a quality-of-life concern and a fundamental economic constraint. Employers cannot recruit workers who cannot find suitable housing, and communities cannot retain families, older adults, or essential-service employees without a dependable range of options. Stakeholders identified low rental availability, aging housing stock, rehabilitation needs, limited development capacity, infrastructure constraints, and financing gaps that make many rural projects difficult to complete under conventional market conditions.

The region's relatively low cost of living, available land, established neighborhoods, and community interest in revitalization create meaningful opportunities. Realizing those opportunities will require treating housing as economic infrastructure and coordinating market analysis, site readiness, rehabilitation, financing, development partnerships, and public infrastructure.

Priority Directions

- Preserve and improve existing housing through rehabilitation, code compliance, weatherization, accessibility, and neighborhood reinvestment.
- Increase the supply and variety of housing through infill, new construction, adaptive reuse, and development-ready sites.
- Support housing that responds to documented workforce, senior, family, and community needs across a range of incomes and household types.
- Address rural feasibility gaps through layered financing, public-private partnerships, infrastructure coordination, and locally appropriate incentives.
- Improve the data, planning, and project-development capacity needed to move housing priorities from identified need to completed units.

Desired Regional Outcomes

The long-term result should be a healthier housing market with more available units, improved existing stock, a broader range of attainable choices, and stronger alignment between housing investment and workforce or community-development priorities. Success will be measured not only by units created, but also by the region's ability to assemble viable projects and retain residents.

GOAL 3 | INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

Modernize and sustain the infrastructure, transportation, utility, and digital systems necessary for economic competitiveness, public health, safety, and resilience.

Why This Goal Matters

Southeast Kansas' infrastructure has supported agriculture, manufacturing, freight movement, healthcare, education, and community life for decades. Highway connections, utility networks, rail and freight assets, broadband investments, and established public facilities remain important competitive strengths. At the same time, aging water and wastewater systems, deferred maintenance, limited transportation options, uneven digital access, and the high cost of major improvements threaten reliability and constrain development.

The challenge is especially significant for smaller jurisdictions with limited staff, rate bases, or borrowing capacity. Infrastructure decisions must therefore connect engineering needs with economic outcomes, capital planning, affordability, funding strategy, project sequencing, regulatory compliance, long-term maintenance, and resilience.

Priority Directions

- Advance reliable water, wastewater, stormwater, solid-waste, energy, and public-facility systems that protect health and enable growth.
- Improve transportation safety, access, freight movement, and connections among residents, jobs, education, healthcare, and services.
- Expand affordable, reliable broadband and digital connectivity for households, businesses, institutions, and emergency or essential services.
- Strengthen capital improvement planning, asset management, project development, rate analysis, funding coordination, and grant or loan administration.
- Incorporate resilience, cybersecurity, energy efficiency, hazard mitigation, lifecycle cost, and long-term operating capacity into infrastructure decisions.

Desired Regional Outcomes

The region should achieve more reliable essential systems, an increased pipeline of implementation-ready projects, improved access and connectivity, and infrastructure investments that directly support business activity, housing, public health, and community resilience. Regional technical assistance should help communities compete for and successfully manage available funding.

GOAL 4 | BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND CAPITAL

Strengthen existing businesses, cultivate new and expanding enterprises, diversify the regional economy, and improve access to capital, markets, sites, and technical assistance.

Why This Goal Matters

Existing employers remain the region's primary source of future job creation and investment. Southeast Kansas also benefits from a diverse industrial base, agricultural resources, manufacturing experience, local entrepreneurship, transportation connections, and opportunities for value-added production. These strengths provide a credible platform for business retention and expansion, entrepreneurship, industrial development, and targeted recruitment.

Businesses nevertheless face workforce shortages, succession risks, infrastructure and site-readiness constraints, limited specialized assistance, changing markets, and financing gaps. Small firms and rural entrepreneurs may have difficulty locating appropriately structured capital or navigating complex state and federal resources. A resilient economic strategy must reinforce established firms while widening the pipeline of new ventures and reducing dependence on any single employer or industry.

Priority Directions

- Prioritize business retention and expansion through coordinated outreach, workforce support, infrastructure solutions, technical assistance, and problem solving.
- Strengthen entrepreneurship, small-business development, succession planning, mentorship, incubation, and connections to markets or procurement opportunities.
- Expand access to revolving loan funds, microloans, gap financing, lender partnerships, equity or philanthropic capital, and state and federal business resources.
- Advance development-ready sites, buildings, utilities, and community assets that support business expansion and targeted recruitment.
- Promote innovation, technology adoption, value-added agriculture and food production, manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, energy, tourism, and other opportunities consistent with regional assets.

Desired Regional Outcomes

The region should retain and expand a larger share of its existing employers, increase the number and survival of new ventures, leverage more private investment, improve the readiness of priority sites and facilities, and strengthen connections between businesses and financing or technical-assistance resources. Diversification should increase resilience without weakening support for established economic anchors.

GOAL 5 | REGIONAL CAPACITY, COLLABORATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION

Strengthen the partnerships, leadership, technical capacity, and accountability systems required to develop, fund, implement, and evaluate regionally significant initiatives.

Why This Goal Matters

Regional collaboration is both a competitive advantage and an implementation necessity. Southeast Kansas has experienced local leadership, strong relationships, educational and healthcare institutions, economic development organizations, nonprofit partners, utilities, lenders, and a regional planning organization with a demonstrated history of managing complex initiatives. These assets allow the region to pursue opportunities that individual communities could not advance alone.

Capacity, however, is uneven. Smaller jurisdictions may lack staff, data, fiscal resources, grant-management capability, or the time needed to develop complex projects. Fragmented project development and competition for limited funding can also reduce regional effectiveness. Collaboration must therefore progress beyond information sharing to shared project development, clearly assigned leadership, coordinated funding, and transparent performance tracking.

Priority Directions

- Maintain the CEDS as a living regional framework through annual review, stakeholder engagement, project updates, and performance reporting.
- Develop multi-jurisdictional and cross-sector initiatives when shared action improves scale, competitiveness, service delivery, or access to funding.
- Expand technical assistance for planning, data analysis, feasibility, engineering coordination, funding strategy, application development, compliance, and administration.
- Clarify project leadership, partner responsibilities, anticipated resources, readiness, and next steps for priority initiatives.
- Communicate regional assets, results, needs, and investment opportunities consistently to decision-makers, funders, businesses, residents, and prospective partners.

Desired Regional Outcomes

By 2031, Southeast Kansas should have a stronger pipeline of fundable projects, more effective regional partnerships, increased external investment, improved implementation support for capacity-constrained communities, and a transparent process for reviewing progress and updating priorities. This goal supplies the institutional capacity necessary to advance every other goal.

5.5 How the Goals Work Together

The goals should be implemented as a connected system rather than as five independent work programs. Each major initiative should be evaluated for its effect on multiple goals and for the partnerships required to address those relationships.

An emerging example of this approach is the Kansas Health Foundation Transformation Grant initiative led by Rural Community Partners in Southeast Kansas. The proposed initiative would connect a regional Community Investment Fund; entrepreneurship development through SEK Catalyst and coordinated coaching, mentorship, technical assistance, and referrals; workforce and youth career pathways involving WorkforceONE, SEKRPC, the Materials Alliance Zone of Kansas (MAZK), employers, and local partners; and Community Innovation Networks that support early-win projects, Rural Connect and Community Health Worker outreach, and regional housing capacity through a Housing Specialist housed at SEKRPC. Implementation, including the proposed $250,000 impact investment to seed the Community Investment Fund, remains contingent on funding and partner commitments.

Strategic connection	Example of interdependence	Implication for implementation
Workforce + housing	Employers cannot recruit or retain workers without suitable housing.	Coordinate employer demand, housing data, sites, infrastructure, developers, and financing.
Workforce + access	Child care, transportation, health, and broadband influence labor-force participation.	Design workforce initiatives with participation supports rather than training alone.
Business + infrastructure	Expansion and recruitment depend on reliable utilities, transportation, broadband, sites, and facilities.	Tie capital improvements and site readiness to documented economic outcomes.
Housing + infrastructure	New units and rehabilitation often depend on utility capacity, streets, drainage, and public amenities.	Sequence housing development with capital planning and community investment.
All goals + capacity	Complex projects require leadership, partnerships, technical work, funding, and administration.	Use the CEDS to organize project development, assign roles, and track results.

5.6 Strategic Decision Framework

The Vision, Guiding Principles, and Goals provide a common basis for evaluating proposed strategies and regional projects. Inclusion in the CEDS does not guarantee funding or implementation; it indicates that an initiative is consistent with regional direction and warrants consideration as partners, readiness, and resources develop.

Strategies and projects should receive stronger regional priority when they:

- Respond directly to a documented SWOT condition or stakeholder-identified need;
- Advance one or more regional goals and produce benefits beyond a single organization or short-term activity;
- Build on identifiable regional assets or improve the region's ability to capture an emerging opportunity;
- Demonstrate feasible leadership, partnerships, technical readiness, funding potential, and long-term operating capacity;
- Improve access to opportunity or address the needs of communities and populations with limited capacity or persistent disadvantage;
- Strengthen resilience, reduce vulnerability, or protect essential economic and community systems; and
- Include outcomes that can be tracked and reviewed during annual CEDS implementation.

These criteria are not intended to create a rigid numerical ranking for every initiative. They establish a disciplined regional lens that can be applied as conditions change, projects mature, and new funding opportunities emerge. Chapter 6 uses this framework to organize objectives and implementation strategies; later chapters apply it to action planning, project prioritization, and performance evaluation.

5.7 Transition to Chapter 6

Chapter 5 establishes where Southeast Kansas intends to go and the principles that will guide the journey. Chapter 6 identifies the objectives and implementation strategies required to advance each goal, connecting long-term direction to practical regional action.

Chapter 6

Objectives and Strategies

Translating Southeast Kansas' regional goals into coordinated action

Chapter 5 established the regional vision and goals. Chapter 6 defines the objectives and strategies that will guide regional partners during the 2026-2031 planning period. Later chapters convert this framework into prioritized actions, responsibilities, schedules, and performance measures.

6.1 Purpose and Role

This chapter is the action framework of the 2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). It translates the five long-term goals established in Chapter 5 into twenty objectives and a coordinated set of implementation strategies. Together, they define what the region intends to advance and the types of action most likely to produce progress.

The framework reflects the regional data analysis, stakeholder survey, June 18 stakeholder worksheets, SWOT synthesis, and strategic decision criteria developed in Chapters 1 through 5. It is deliberately broad enough to accommodate changing conditions and funding opportunities, but specific enough to guide project development, partnership decisions, and annual CEDS review.

The objectives are outcome-oriented directions rather than promises that any single organization can fulfill independently. The strategies identify practical approaches available to regional partners. They do not require every community to pursue every action, nor do they imply that all strategies will begin at the same time. Implementation will depend on documented need, leadership, readiness, resources, local conditions, and the potential for meaningful regional benefit.

6.2 How to Use the Framework

Each goal section contains a goal statement carried forward from Chapter 5, a short implementation context, four objectives, and supporting strategies. The hierarchy is intended to remain consistent throughout the remaining CEDS:

- Goals describe the broad regional results Southeast Kansas seeks to achieve.
- Objectives define the principal conditions or capacities that must improve under each goal.
- Strategies identify the approaches regional partners can use to advance an objective.
- Actions and projects identify specific initiatives, responsible parties, schedules, resources, and next steps.

- Performance measures provide evidence of implementation progress and changing regional conditions.

A project may advance more than one objective, and many of the strongest initiatives will do so. For example, a housing development may also support workforce recruitment and require utility investment; an industrial-site project may combine infrastructure, workforce, business, and regional-capacity strategies. Cross-goal alignment should be viewed as a strength when the project remains focused, feasible, and supported by clear leadership.

6.3 Objective Framework at a Glance

The twenty objectives form a coordinated regional agenda. The table below provides a concise reference; the sections that follow define the implementation strategies associated with each objective.

Regional goal	Objectives
1. Workforce and talent	1.1 Demand alignment; 1.2 Participation supports; 1.3 Talent attraction and retention; 1.4 Career pathways and advancement
2. Housing and community vitality	2.1 Housing intelligence and planning; 2.2 Existing-stock preservation; 2.3 Supply and choice; 2.4 Development capacity and financing
3. Infrastructure and connectivity	3.1 Essential systems; 3.2 Transportation and access; 3.3 Broadband and digital capacity; 3.4 Capital planning and resilience
4. Business, entrepreneurship, and capital	4.1 Business retention and expansion; 4.2 Entrepreneurship and succession; 4.3 Capital access; 4.4 Sites, innovation, and diversification
5. Regional capacity and implementation	5.1 CEDS governance; 5.2 Project-development capacity; 5.3 Regional collaboration; 5.4 Communication and accountability

6.4 Goal 1: Workforce and Talent

GOAL 1 | WORKFORCE AND TALENT

Develop, attract, retain, and connect a skilled workforce capable of supporting regional employers, essential services, and household economic mobility.

The workforce strategy connects employer demand, education and training, participation supports, and talent retention. Regional action should be based on current labor-market evidence and direct employer input while recognizing that people cannot participate fully in the economy when housing, child care, transportation, health, or digital barriers remain unresolved.

Objective 1.1: Align education and training with employer demand

Objective. Increase the responsiveness of education, training, and workforce programs to current and emerging occupational needs across Southeast Kansas.

Implementation strategies

- Establish a recurring regional process for employers, workforce partners, K-12 systems, community colleges, technical programs, and other training providers to identify shared occupational shortages and changing skill requirements.
- Use labor-market data, employer surveys, job-posting information, and business outreach to validate demand before developing or expanding training initiatives.
- Support short-term credentials, apprenticeships, internships, clinical placements, customized training, and other work-based learning models tied to documented employment opportunities.
- Coordinate equipment, instructors, facilities, and curriculum across institutions when shared delivery can improve access or reduce duplication.
- Connect training investments to priority sectors and essential-service occupations, including manufacturing, healthcare, skilled trades, education, public services, transportation, and emerging industries.
- Partner with WorkforceONE, SEKRPC, the Materials Alliance Zone of Kansas (MAZK), employers, educational institutions, and local Community Innovation Networks to develop employer-informed career pathways for technicians, engineering-related occupations, and other priority roles.

Objective 1.2: Reduce barriers to labor-force participation

Objective. Increase the ability of residents to enter, remain in, and advance within the workforce by addressing practical barriers to employment.

Implementation strategies

- Integrate workforce planning with child care, transportation, housing, broadband, healthcare, disability services, and other supports that affect participation.
- Develop employer and community partnerships that expand dependable child-care capacity, flexible scheduling, transportation options, or other locally identified solutions.
- Improve coordination among workforce agencies, educational institutions, employers, social-service providers, and community organizations so residents can navigate available resources more easily.
- Integrate WorkforceONE and other workforce partners into Community Innovation Networks and coordinate referrals through Rural Connect, Community Health Workers, and partner organizations so residents can reach workforce, entrepreneurship, housing, health, and community resources through clearer pathways.
- Design outreach and training approaches that are accessible to rural residents, low- and moderate-income households, veterans, people with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and others facing persistent employment barriers.

- Promote job quality practices—including competitive compensation, predictable scheduling, supportive supervision, advancement opportunities, and employee well-being—that improve recruitment and retention.

Objective 1.3: Attract and retain talent

Objective. Increase the number of workers and families who choose to build careers and lives in Southeast Kansas, with emphasis on high-need occupations and younger adults.

Implementation strategies

- Develop coordinated regional and community talent-attraction messages that connect career opportunities with housing, schools, amenities, cost of living, and quality of life.
- Engage former residents, graduates, remote workers, military-connected households, and other prospective residents through targeted outreach and relocation pathways.
- Support employer recruitment initiatives for healthcare, education, public safety, engineering, skilled trades, and other occupations essential to community and economic stability.
- Expand place-based retention efforts, including internships, community engagement, leadership opportunities, and stronger connections between students, employers, and local civic life.
- Coordinate talent strategies with housing development, spousal employment, child care, broadband, and community amenities so recruitment commitments can be sustained.

Objective 1.4: Strengthen career pathways and worker advancement

Objective. Create visible, connected pathways that help residents understand regional careers, gain relevant experience, and advance over time.

Implementation strategies

- Expand career awareness beginning in middle and high school through employer visits, job shadowing, career exploration, technical education, and exposure to regional industries.
- Pilot youth career-awareness and workforce-development initiatives through employers, schools, WorkforceONE, MAZK, and local Community Innovation Networks, with particular attention to technical and engineering career opportunities.
- Map career pathways within priority sectors so students, workers, counselors, and employers can see entry points, credentials, advancement steps, and wage progression.
- Support incumbent-worker training and upskilling that help employers adopt new technologies, improve productivity, and retain experienced employees.
- Encourage employers to share promising practices in recruitment, onboarding, supervision, training, and retention through regional peer networks.
- Promote cross-county access to training and employment through coordinated scheduling, hybrid delivery, shared facilities, and transportation solutions.

6.5 Goal 2: Housing and Community Vitality

GOAL 2 | HOUSING AND COMMUNITY VITALITY

Expand and preserve a diverse, attainable, and quality housing supply that supports workforce recruitment, household stability, and the long-term vitality of Southeast Kansas communities.

Housing is treated as economic infrastructure within this CEDS. Strategies must address existing-stock conditions, new supply, infrastructure, market feasibility, development capacity, and financing together. The appropriate mix will differ by community, but all housing initiatives should be grounded in documented need and a realistic path to occupancy, operation, and long-term maintenance.

Objective 2.1: Strengthen housing intelligence and planning

Objective. Improve the regional and local information needed to identify housing needs, set priorities, and assemble viable projects.

Implementation strategies

- Conduct or update housing assessments that document vacancy, condition, tenure, price, rent, household needs, employer demand, and market gaps at useful geographic scales.
- Create and maintain inventories of infill lots, redevelopment properties, underused buildings, publicly controlled land, and sites with development potential.
- Coordinate housing priorities with comprehensive plans, capital improvement programs, utility capacity, transportation, schools, healthcare, and economic-development strategies.
- Use employer and institutional input to document workforce-housing needs and strengthen the case for development, financing, and public investment.
- Provide communities with practical tools for project scoping, developer outreach, site evaluation, financial feasibility, and funding strategy.

Objective 2.2: Preserve and improve existing housing

Objective. Extend the useful life, safety, efficiency, and accessibility of the region's existing housing stock and stabilize vulnerable neighborhoods.

Implementation strategies

- Expand rehabilitation, weatherization, lead-hazard reduction, accessibility modification, emergency repair, and energy-efficiency programs for eligible households and properties.
- Support locally appropriate code enforcement, nuisance abatement, title clearance, demolition, and property-reuse strategies that pair accountability with paths to rehabilitation.
- Promote acquisition-rehabilitation and resale or rental models that return vacant or deteriorated properties to productive use.
- Coordinate neighborhood reinvestment with streets, drainage, sidewalks, parks, broadband, public facilities, and other improvements that influence housing stability.

- Develop partnerships with contractors, lenders, nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, and training programs to expand rehabilitation capacity and address skilled-trade shortages.

Objective 2.3: Expand housing supply and choice

Objective. Increase the availability of quality housing options that respond to workforce, family, senior, and community needs across a range of incomes.

Implementation strategies

- Advance infill development, new subdivisions, rental housing, senior housing, accessible units, starter homes, and other types supported by documented demand.
- Evaluate adaptive reuse of upper stories, schools, commercial buildings, and other suitable structures when rehabilitation is technically and financially feasible.
- Prepare sites through land assembly, zoning, infrastructure planning, environmental review, and other predevelopment work needed to reduce uncertainty.
- Review local development regulations, permitting practices, incentives, and infrastructure policies for practical opportunities to support desired housing without compromising health, safety, or long-term fiscal capacity.
- Engage developers, builders, employers, housing authorities, community organizations, and residents early enough to align product type, price point, location, and financing.

Objective 2.4: Build development capacity and close feasibility gaps

Objective. Increase the region's ability to structure, finance, and complete housing projects that conventional rural markets may not support independently.

Implementation strategies

- Assemble layered financing strategies using local, state, federal, philanthropic, employer, lender, tax-credit, and private resources as appropriate.
- Develop reusable project-development tools, including pro formas, site packages, market summaries, funding calendars, and model partnership structures.
- Support predevelopment activities such as surveys, environmental review, architecture, engineering, legal work, acquisition planning, and infrastructure analysis.
- Explore regional or multi-community approaches to developer recruitment, housing program delivery, land banking, rehabilitation, or construction procurement when scale improves feasibility.
- Support regional housing project development and coordinated community assistance through a Housing Specialist housed at SEKRPC, subject to available funding and partner commitments.
- Track completed units, rehabilitation outcomes, occupancy, affordability, leverage, and barriers encountered so future housing initiatives can be refined.

6.6 Goal 3: Infrastructure and Connectivity

GOAL 3 | INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

Modernize and sustain the infrastructure, transportation, utility, and digital systems necessary for economic competitiveness, public health, safety, and resilience.

Infrastructure strategies must connect engineering and regulatory needs with economic and community outcomes. Because many Southeast Kansas jurisdictions face limited staff, rate bases, and borrowing capacity, the region must strengthen capital planning and project development while pursuing funding packages that remain affordable to users and sustainable for system owners.

Objective 3.1: Modernize essential utility and public systems

Objective. Improve the reliability, compliance, capacity, and efficiency of water, wastewater, stormwater, solid-waste, energy, and public-facility systems.

Implementation strategies

- Maintain current assessments of system condition, regulatory requirements, capacity constraints, public-health risks, and economic-development implications.
- Advance priority projects through preliminary engineering, environmental review, rate analysis, funding applications, design, procurement, construction, and closeout.
- Coordinate utility improvements with housing, industrial sites, downtown redevelopment, healthcare, schools, emergency services, and other documented development needs.
- Pursue energy efficiency, water conservation, inflow and infiltration reduction, loss control, process optimization, and other operational improvements that reduce lifecycle costs.
- Support shared services, interconnections, mutual aid, regional facilities, or cooperative procurement where they improve reliability or affordability.

Objective 3.2: Improve transportation, mobility, and access

Objective. Strengthen the movement of people and goods and improve connections to employment, education, healthcare, services, and markets.

Implementation strategies

- Coordinate local, county, regional, and state transportation priorities using safety, condition, freight, access, and economic-impact information.
- Advance roadway, bridge, rail, airport, trail, sidewalk, and multimodal projects that address documented safety or connectivity needs and support regional assets.
- Improve first- and last-mile freight connections for manufacturers, agricultural producers, logistics users, industrial sites, and other major employers.
- Develop flexible rural mobility solutions—including demand-response transit, employer transportation, volunteer models, and coordinated service delivery—where conventional fixed-route service is not feasible.

- Incorporate accessibility, pedestrian safety, complete-street principles, and connections to community destinations where appropriate to local context.

Objective 3.3: Expand broadband and digital capacity

Objective. Increase access to affordable, reliable, and usable digital connectivity for residents, businesses, institutions, and essential services.

Implementation strategies

- Identify remaining service, affordability, reliability, and adoption gaps using provider information, community input, and available mapping or challenge processes.
- Support last-mile and middle-mile investments that extend reliable service to underserved locations and strengthen redundancy for essential users.
- Coordinate broadband deployment with road, utility, facility, and economic-development projects to reduce cost and avoid missed opportunities.
- Expand digital-literacy, device-access, telehealth, remote-work, online-business, and cybersecurity support so infrastructure investment produces practical benefits.
- Encourage institutions, employers, libraries, schools, healthcare providers, and local governments to collaborate on connectivity, public access, and digital resilience.

Objective 3.4: Strengthen capital planning and infrastructure resilience

Objective. Improve the ability of communities and system owners to prioritize, finance, operate, maintain, and protect infrastructure over its full lifecycle.

Implementation strategies

- Develop and regularly update capital improvement plans, asset inventories, condition assessments, replacement schedules, and realistic cost estimates.
- Use rate, affordability, debt-capacity, operating-cost, and lifecycle analyses to support responsible funding and investment decisions.
- Create project pipelines that sequence technical work and position priority improvements for grants, loans, appropriations, and other funding opportunities.
- Integrate hazard mitigation, climate and weather resilience, cybersecurity, backup power, emergency continuity, and redundancy into project planning.
- Expand regional technical assistance for procurement, labor standards, environmental compliance, financial management, reporting, and grant or loan administration.

6.7 Goal 4: Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital

GOAL 4 | BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND CAPITAL
Strengthen existing businesses, cultivate new and expanding enterprises, diversify the regional economy, and improve access to capital, markets, sites, and technical assistance.

The region's strongest near-term opportunities begin with businesses already operating in Southeast Kansas, while long-term resilience also requires entrepreneurship, succession, innovation, and selective diversification. Strategies should solve documented business constraints, connect firms to resources, and prepare sites and communities for investments that fit regional assets and capacity.

An emerging Rural Community Partners-led economic-mobility initiative illustrates this connected approach by linking affordable capital, entrepreneur development, workforce pathways, and community-based delivery. Its implementation tracks—including a proposed regional Community Investment Fund, SEK Catalyst, WorkforceONE partnerships, and Community Innovation Networks—remain contingent on grant funding, impact investment, and formal partner commitments.

Objective 4.1: Strengthen business retention and expansion

Objective. Help existing employers remain competitive, address constraints, retain jobs, and pursue responsible expansion.

Implementation strategies

- Coordinate regular business outreach across economic-development, workforce, education, utility, financial, and government partners while protecting confidential information.
- Use outreach findings to identify shared needs involving workforce, infrastructure, sites, permitting, supply chains, technology, markets, financing, or succession.
- Create responsive problem-solving teams for significant retention or expansion opportunities requiring multiple organizations or jurisdictions.
- Connect firms to customized training, export assistance, procurement opportunities, energy or process improvements, research resources, and state or federal programs.
- Track aggregate outreach, issues resolved, investments supported, and jobs retained or created to guide future regional action.

Objective 4.2: Cultivate entrepreneurship and business succession

Objective. Increase the formation, survival, growth, and successful transfer of locally rooted businesses.

Implementation strategies

- Create a clear regional referral network connecting entrepreneurs and small businesses to counseling, mentoring, training, legal and accounting guidance, financing, procurement, and market assistance.
- Expand awareness and participation in the regional entrepreneurship ecosystem through coordinated outreach and a clear, accessible pathway connecting capital, coaching, professional assistance, peer networks, and market opportunities.
- Launch and expand SEK Catalyst, empowered by the KU School of Business, to provide coordinated business planning, financial readiness, and entrepreneur development, and connect participants with mentorship, grants, financing, technical assistance, and regional business resources.

- Support incubator, accelerator, coworking, maker-space, shared-kitchen, and other service models when demand and operating capacity are demonstrated.
- Expand entrepreneurship education and experiential opportunities for students, displaced workers, farmers, artisans, and residents interested in self-employment.
- Promote succession planning and ownership-transition resources for businesses whose closure would result in lost jobs, services, or community assets.
- Strengthen peer networks and sector-specific assistance for rural, minority, women, veteran, and other entrepreneurs who may face limited access to capital or professional networks.

Objective 4.3: Expand access to capital and financial readiness

Objective. Increase the availability and effective use of financing for business startup, retention, expansion, succession, and innovation.

Implementation strategies

- Coordinate revolving loan funds, microloan programs, lenders, certified development organizations, state programs, federal resources, and philanthropic or impact capital through a shared referral approach.
- Develop a regional Community Investment Fund that can combine impact-investment resources in a professionally managed platform and provide affordable capital to entrepreneurs who are not yet able to access conventional financing, with the goal of improving their readiness for traditional banking.
- Integrate underwriting, loan servicing, business coaching, technical assistance, mentorship, connections to regional resources, and impact measurement into a coordinated entrepreneur-support system.
- Pursue the proposed $250,000 in impact-investment seed funding and additional public, private, and philanthropic investment for the Community Investment Fund, while treating these resources as prospective until formally awarded or committed.
- Identify recurring financing gaps by business stage, project type, borrower profile, collateral, geography, and transaction size.
- Provide or connect businesses to financial-readiness assistance, including business planning, projections, bookkeeping, credit preparation, and lender packaging.
- Use public or mission-based capital strategically to fill documented gaps, leverage private investment, and maintain responsible underwriting and portfolio management.
- Increase awareness of available capital through consistent outreach to lenders, accountants, attorneys, economic-development organizations, and business-support providers.

Objective 4.4: Advance sites, innovation, and economic diversification

Objective. Position Southeast Kansas for business investment aligned with its infrastructure, workforce, natural resources, institutions, and industry strengths.

Implementation strategies

- Maintain current inventories of priority sites, buildings, utilities, transportation access, environmental conditions, ownership, and development constraints.
- Advance high-potential locations through due diligence, infrastructure planning, environmental work, site control, certification, and realistic development strategies.
- Support technology adoption, automation, product development, commercialization, and process improvement among existing firms and entrepreneurs.
- Pursue value-added agriculture and food production, advanced manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, energy, tourism, and other opportunities supported by regional assets and market evidence.
- Coordinate regional marketing and prospect response so business recruitment is accurate, timely, and matched to communities capable of supporting the investment.

6.8 Goal 5: Regional Capacity, Collaboration, and Implementation

GOAL 5 | REGIONAL CAPACITY, COLLABORATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION
Strengthen the partnerships, leadership, technical capacity, and accountability systems required to develop, fund, implement, and evaluate regionally significant initiatives.

Every goal depends on the region's ability to organize partners, develop projects, secure resources, and manage implementation. Capacity-building strategies should be especially responsive to smaller jurisdictions and organizations that cannot independently maintain specialized staff or navigate complex funding and compliance requirements.

Objective 5.1: Maintain an active CEDS governance process

Objective. Keep the CEDS current, representative, and useful as a regional framework for decisions and investment.

Implementation strategies

- Convene the CEDS committee or an appropriate regional stakeholder body at least annually to review conditions, progress, emerging needs, and project updates.
- Maintain broad participation from local governments, tribes where applicable, businesses, workforce and education partners, healthcare, utilities, nonprofits, financial institutions, and populations facing barriers to opportunity.
- Update the regional project list, implementation status, performance information, and strategic priorities as conditions and funding opportunities change.
- Document material amendments and maintain consistency with EDA requirements, the regional vision, and the strategic decision framework established in Chapter 5.

- Use the annual review to identify actions requiring new leadership, partnerships, technical work, or resource development.

Objective 5.2: Expand project-development and implementation capacity

Objective. Increase the number and quality of projects that move from identified need to fundable, compliant, and sustainable implementation.

Implementation strategies

- Provide or coordinate technical assistance for needs assessment, planning, feasibility, market analysis, preliminary engineering, environmental review, budgeting, and funding strategy.
- Develop reusable readiness tools that clarify project scope, ownership, beneficiaries, cost, partners, match, operations, maintenance, and next steps.
- Maintain awareness of federal, state, local, philanthropic, and private funding opportunities and align project-development schedules with realistic application windows.
- Support application development, procurement, compliance, financial management, reporting, labor standards, closeout, and post-award administration when capacity is limited.
- Build local knowledge through training, templates, peer exchange, and hands-on participation so technical assistance strengthens long-term institutional capacity.

Objective 5.3: Advance regional and cross-sector collaboration

Objective. Develop shared initiatives when coordinated action improves scale, competitiveness, service delivery, resilience, or access to funding.

Implementation strategies

- Identify needs and opportunities that cross jurisdictional, institutional, or sector boundaries and define the added value of a regional approach.
- Strengthen local coalitions as Community Innovation Networks that use asset mapping, relationship building, and collaborative action to identify opportunities, connect residents with resources, and leverage local and regional capacity.
- Support highly visible early-win projects through Community Innovation Networks when modest, strategic investments can demonstrate progress, build momentum, attract partners, and encourage continued community investment.
- Use the Rural Community Partners-led economic-mobility initiative as an emerging cross-sector implementation model, with Rural Community Partners serving as the anticipated lead and SEKRPC, WorkforceONE, MAZK, the KU School of Business, employers, local Community Innovation Networks, and other organizations participating according to formal roles and available resources.
- Establish clear lead organizations, partner roles, decision processes, resource commitments, and communication practices for collaborative initiatives.
- Use interlocal agreements, memoranda of understanding, shared-service arrangements, joint applications, or other structures appropriate to the work.

- Coordinate with neighboring regions, state agencies, federal partners, tribes, utilities, educational institutions, and private-sector organizations when the issue extends beyond the twelve-county region.
- Evaluate collaborative initiatives for practical results, partner value, administrative burden, sustainability, and opportunities for replication.

Objective 5.4: Strengthen regional communication and accountability

Objective. Improve understanding of regional assets, needs, opportunities, investments, and CEDS implementation results.

Implementation strategies

- Develop consistent messages and accessible materials explaining the regional strategy, priority initiatives, partnership opportunities, and demonstrated results.
- Maintain communication with elected officials, community leaders, businesses, funders, residents, and prospective partners through appropriate reports, briefings, digital channels, and meetings.
- Track a focused set of output and outcome measures aligned with the objectives, recognizing that regional partners influence—but do not solely control—many economic indicators.
- Report progress honestly, including completed actions, investments leveraged, projects delayed, barriers encountered, and strategic adjustments.
- Use performance information and stakeholder feedback to improve implementation rather than treating reporting as a compliance exercise alone.

6.9 Cross-Cutting Implementation Practices

The following practices apply across the objectives and should shape project design, funding decisions, and partnership development:

- Ground initiatives in documented need, current data, and direct stakeholder or beneficiary input.
- Define a capable lead organization and realistic partner roles before treating an initiative as implementation-ready.
- Connect planning, technical work, funding, compliance, operations, and long-term maintenance rather than treating them as separate stages.
- Use regional approaches when they add practical value, while preserving local ownership and responsiveness.
- Consider access, affordability, and the needs of communities or populations with limited administrative, fiscal, or institutional capacity.
- Build resilience, adaptability, cybersecurity, continuity, and lifecycle stewardship into investments where relevant.
- Establish proportionate measures that track outputs and outcomes without creating reporting burdens greater than the value of the information.

6.10 Strategy Selection and Adaptation

The framework is not a static checklist. Regional partners should select and sequence strategies according to urgency, impact, readiness, leadership, funding feasibility, and the Chapter 5 decision criteria. New opportunities may be incorporated when they advance an established goal and objective.

Annual CEDS review should identify strategies producing results, those requiring additional project development, and those that should be adjusted as conditions change. This preserves accountability to long-term direction while allowing implementation to adapt.

6.11 Transition to Chapter 7

Chapter 6 defines what regional partners can do to advance the five CEDS goals. Chapter 7 converts this strategy framework into an implementation plan by identifying priority actions and projects, lead and supporting partners, anticipated timeframes, resource considerations, and indicators of progress.

Chapter 7

Implementation and Evaluation

Moving the regional strategy from shared direction to measurable progress

Chapter 6 established the objectives and strategies available to regional partners. Chapter 7 defines how the CEDS will be implemented, how projects will be prioritized and advanced, how progress will be measured, and how the strategy will be reviewed and adapted throughout the 2026-2031 planning period.

7.1 Purpose and Implementation Approach

The CEDS becomes valuable only when it shapes decisions, organizes partnerships, and helps priority initiatives move toward completion. Implementation will not occur through a single program, funding source, or organization. It will result from a portfolio of locally led and regionally supported actions carried out by governments, employers, educational institutions, utilities, healthcare providers, economic-development organizations, nonprofits, financial institutions, and other partners.

This chapter establishes a disciplined but flexible implementation system. It identifies governance and partner roles, defines a project-development and prioritization process, presents an initial action agenda, establishes resource and funding principles, and creates an evaluation cycle. The framework is designed to improve accountability without implying that regional partners control every economic outcome or that every proposed project is ready to proceed.

Implementation will be iterative. Some actions can begin through coordination, outreach, data development, or technical assistance. Others require feasibility work, engineering, site control, local authorization, match, or competitive funding before they can advance. Annual review will therefore assess both completed results and meaningful movement through the project-development pipeline.

7.2 Governance and Partner Responsibilities

SEKRPC will coordinate the regional CEDS process and support implementation within its organizational authority, available resources, and agreements with participating entities. Project ownership will remain with the public, private, nonprofit, or institutional sponsor responsible for authorization, financing, delivery, operation, and long-term stewardship.

Participant	Primary implementation responsibility
SEKRPC Executive Committee	Provide policy oversight; receive implementation updates; review material amendments; and act on CEDS matters within the Commission's authority.
SEKRPC staff	Convene partners; maintain the strategy and project portfolio; provide or coordinate technical assistance; identify funding opportunities; support applications and administration under appropriate agreements; and prepare annual implementation reporting.
CEDS stakeholders	Review changing conditions and performance; identify emerging needs and opportunities; validate regional priorities; contribute sector expertise; and recommend adjustments.
Project sponsors	Define scope; secure governing or organizational authorization; establish ownership and site control; commit resources; select professional services; meet funding and compliance requirements; implement the project; and report progress.
Implementation partners	Contribute expertise, services, referrals, data, match, outreach, facilities, or other resources according to clearly defined roles.
State, federal, and philanthropic partners	Provide program guidance, technical resources, financing, regulatory coordination, and investment consistent with applicable requirements and available programs.

Participation in the CEDS does not create a financial or contractual obligation. Commitments for a specific initiative must be documented through the approvals, agreements, budgets, applications, or contracts appropriate to that work.

7.3 Regional Implementation Cycle

The implementation cycle connects long-range strategy to near-term decisions. Projects may enter at different stages and may move forward, pause, or be re-scoped as evidence, leadership, cost, and funding conditions change.

Stage	Principal task
1. Identify	Document the need or opportunity, beneficiaries, geographic reach, strategic alignment, and consequences of inaction.
2. Develop	Clarify scope, ownership, partners, alternatives, feasibility, cost, readiness gaps, operating responsibility, and likely resources.
3. Prioritize	Apply the Chapter 5 decision criteria and the readiness screen in this chapter to determine the appropriate regional attention and next step.
4. Resource	Assemble technical assistance, local commitment, match, grants, loans, private capital, philanthropy, or other resources suited to the project.
5. Implement	Complete approvals, design, procurement, construction or program delivery, compliance, financial management, and stakeholder communication.
6. Evaluate	Track outputs, outcomes, leverage, barriers, lessons, and changing conditions; report results and adapt the portfolio.

7.4 Project Prioritization and Readiness

CEDS consistency and implementation priority are related but distinct. A project may advance a regional goal and appropriately appear in the CEDS while still requiring substantial development. Priority attention should reflect both strategic value and a credible path forward.

Strategic Priority Screen

- Alignment: directly advances at least one CEDS goal and objective and responds to documented regional conditions.
- Impact: produces meaningful economic, community, public-health, access, or resilience benefits relative to cost and effort.
- Regional value: addresses a shared need, benefits multiple communities or sectors, can be replicated, or strengthens regional competitiveness.
- Inclusion: improves access to opportunity or addresses capacity and affordability barriers affecting rural communities or disadvantaged populations.
- Leverage and durability: builds on existing assets, attracts additional investment, and includes realistic operations, maintenance, and long-term stewardship.
- Risk reduction: protects essential systems, reduces vulnerability, or improves the region's ability to respond to disruption.

Implementation Readiness Screen

Stage	Readiness description	Appropriate next step
Concept	Need and strategic fit are documented, but scope, sponsor, cost, or next steps remain preliminary.	Facilitation, needs validation, sponsor identification, or initial scoping.
Development	A sponsor is engaged and scope is forming; feasibility, partnerships, cost, site, or technical work remains incomplete.	Planning, market analysis, preliminary engineering, environmental review, pro forma, or partnership development.
Funding-ready	Scope, sponsor, cost, site or ownership, partners, approvals, match, schedule, and operating plan are sufficiently defined for a realistic funding pursuit.	Funding package, application, commitment documentation, and pre-award requirements.
Implementation	Resources and approvals are secured and the project is in design, procurement, construction, delivery, or closeout.	Compliance, administration, issue resolution, communication, and performance tracking.
Operational	The project or program is complete and producing services or benefits.	Outcome evaluation, maintenance, sustainability, replication, and lessons learned.

The readiness classification is not a judgment of importance. It identifies the next work required. A high-impact concept may merit technical assistance before a smaller implementation-ready project, while an urgent health, safety, or regulatory need may advance despite limited regional scale.

7.5 Initial Regional Action Agenda

The following agenda translates the Chapter 6 strategy framework into a manageable set of regional implementation priorities. It does not replace locally adopted capital plans or the detailed CEDS project portfolio. Specific projects will be added and updated through annual review as sponsors, readiness, costs, and funding pathways are confirmed.

Goal / priority action	Implementation focus	Lead function	Supporting partners	Timeframe
Goal 1: Workforce and Talent **Regional employer-demand and career-pathway coordination**	Establish a recurring process to identify shared occupational needs and connect employer input to training, work-based learning, and incumbent-worker advancement.	SEKRPC and workforce/education conveners	Employers; K-12; colleges; workforce and service partners	Near term; ongoing
Goal 1: Workforce and Talent **Workforce participation barrier initiative**	Identify the most consequential child care, transportation, housing, health, and digital barriers and advance one or more cross-sector solutions.	Appropriate service or project sponsor	Employers; local governments; nonprofits; healthcare; funders	Near to mid term
Goal 1: Workforce and Talent **Talent attraction and retention toolkit**	Coordinate messages, employer resources, community information, and retention practices for high-need occupations and younger workers.	Economic-development and employer partners	SEKRPC; chambers; communities; institutions	Near term; ongoing
Goal 2: Housing and Community Vitality **Housing data and project pipeline**	Maintain useful information on market gaps, properties, sites, employer needs, infrastructure, and candidate projects.	Local housing/project sponsors with regional support	Cities; counties; employers; developers; utilities	Near term; annual update
Goal 2: Housing and Community Vitality **Existing-stock preservation and reuse**	Expand rehabilitation, weatherization, accessibility, acquisition-rehabilitation, demolition, title-clearance, and property-reuse capacity.	Local governments, housing organizations, or designated sponsors	Contractors; lenders; nonprofits; funders; training partners	Near to mid term
Goal 2: Housing and Community Vitality **Rural housing development packages**	Advance documented sites or buildings through predevelopment, infrastructure coordination, developer outreach, and layered financing.	Local project sponsor	SEKRPC; developers; employers; lenders; agencies	Mid term; project-specific
Goal 3: Infrastructure and Connectivity **Regional infrastructure project pipeline**	Maintain and sequence water, wastewater, stormwater, transportation, public-facility, broadband, and resilience projects by need and readiness.	System owners and local governments	SEKRPC; engineers; utilities; state and federal partners	Near term; annual update
Goal 3: Infrastructure and Connectivity **Capital planning and affordability support**	Expand capital improvement planning, asset management, rate and affordability analysis, lifecycle cost review, and funding strategy.	System owner	SEKRPC; engineers; financial advisors; funding agencies	Near to mid term
Goal 3: Infrastructure and Connectivity **Access and digital resilience initiatives**	Advance locally appropriate mobility, broadband adoption, cybersecurity, backup power, redundancy, and continuity solutions.	Qualified local or regional sponsor	Providers; institutions; employers; emergency partners	Mid term
Goal 4: Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital **Coordinated business retention and expansion outreach**	Use confidential, relationship-based outreach to identify shared constraints and organize responsive assistance.	Local and regional economic-development partners	Employers; workforce; utilities; lenders; education partners	Near term; ongoing
Goal 4: Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital **Entrepreneur and succession referral network**	Create a clear pathway to counseling, mentoring, capital, professional services, procurement, market assistance, and ownership-transition resources.	Business-support organizations	SEKRPC; lenders; chambers; colleges; professionals	Near term; ongoing
Goal 4: Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital **Sites, buildings, and capital readiness**	Improve information, due diligence, infrastructure planning, financing connections, and response capacity for priority business investments.	Property or project sponsor and economic-development partners	Utilities; lenders; engineers; state partners; SEKRPC	Near to mid term
Goal 5: Regional Capacity, Collaboration, and Implementation **Annual CEDS implementation review**	Update the project portfolio, indicators, accomplishments, barriers, emerging conditions, and recommended strategic adjustments.	SEKRPC	Executive Committee; CEDS stakeholders; project sponsors	Annual

Goal / priority action	Implementation focus	Lead function	Supporting partners	Timeframe
Goal 5: Regional Capacity, Collaboration, and Implementation Project-development technical assistance	Help sponsors define scope, readiness, partners, cost, funding, compliance, operations, and next steps for priority initiatives.	SEKRPC or appropriate technical provider	Project sponsors; engineers; agencies; sector experts	Ongoing
Goal 5: Regional Capacity, Collaboration, and Implementation Regional investment communication	Communicate priority needs, project opportunities, resources leveraged, and measurable results to decision-makers, funders, businesses, and residents.	SEKRPC with participating partners	Local governments; sponsors; institutions; media and outreach partners	Annual and opportunity-driven
Goals 1, 2, 4, and 5: Regional Economic Mobility Initiative	Coordinate a Community Investment Fund, entrepreneur development, workforce pathways, Community Innovation Networks, referrals, early-win projects, and regional housing support.	Rural Community Partners	SEKRPC; WorkforceONE; MAZK; KU School of Business; employers; local networks; finance, health, and community partners	Near to mid term; funding-dependent

Emerging Regional Economic Mobility Initiative

Rural Community Partners is leading a Kansas Health Foundation Transformation Grant initiative designed to build the interconnected regional infrastructure needed to increase economic mobility across Southeast Kansas. The initiative reflects the CEDS emphasis on linking entrepreneurship, workforce, housing, health, and community capacity rather than addressing these conditions through isolated programs. Implementation is anticipated through the following coordinated tracks:

- Community Investment Fund. Launch a professionally managed regional fund that combines impact investments and provides affordable capital to entrepreneurs who are not yet able to obtain conventional financing. The proposed model would coordinate underwriting, loan servicing, business coaching, technical assistance, mentorship, and impact measurement to help entrepreneurs progress toward traditional bank financing. The current proposal requests $250,000 in impact-investment funding to seed the fund and attract additional investment.
- Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development. Expand awareness of and participation in the regional entrepreneurship ecosystem through coordinated outreach; launch SEK Catalyst, empowered by the KU School of Business, to support business planning, financial readiness, and entrepreneur development; and connect entrepreneurs to mentorship, grants, financing, technical assistance, and regional business resources through a coordinated pathway.
- Workforce Development. Integrate WorkforceONE into Community Innovation Networks, pilot youth career-awareness and workforce initiatives, and use a WorkforceONE Career Advisor as an anticipated in-kind contribution. WorkforceONE, SEKRPC, the Materials Alliance Zone of Kansas (MAZK), employers, and local networks would collaborate on career pathways for technician and engineering occupations.
- Community Innovation Networks. Strengthen local coalitions through asset mapping, relationship building, and collaborative action; support visible early-win projects that build momentum and attract additional partners and investment; expand Rural Connect,

Community Health Worker outreach, and partner referrals; and support regional housing strategies through a Housing Specialist housed at SEKRPC.

The initiative's specific scale and implementation schedule will depend on grant decisions, impact-investment commitments, local participation, and agreements among the participating organizations. Whether or not the current proposal is funded in full, the model provides a useful regional framework for coordinating capital, coaching, connections, workforce services, housing support, and community development around shared economic-mobility outcomes.

7.6 Resource and Funding Strategy

Implementation will require different combinations of staff time, technical expertise, local resources, user revenues, debt, grants, private investment, philanthropy, and in-kind support. The presence of a potential grant should not define the project. Sponsors should first establish need, scope, ownership, beneficiaries, lifecycle responsibility, and affordability, then pursue resources suited to those conditions.

- Sequence resources. Use planning and predevelopment funds to resolve feasibility and readiness gaps before seeking full implementation financing.
- Layer funding responsibly. Combine grants, loans, local funds, private capital, tax incentives, philanthropy, and in-kind resources only when requirements, timing, security, and administration are compatible.
- Protect affordability and sustainability. Consider debt capacity, rates, operating costs, maintenance, staffing, replacement, and long-term program support before accepting an award.
- Match the source to the benefit. Use public resources for documented public purposes and private or beneficiary investment where the return and ownership structure warrant it.
- Build administrative capacity into the plan. Account for procurement, environmental review, labor standards, financial management, reporting, audit, closeout, and post-award obligations.
- Avoid application-driven fragmentation. Coordinate related projects and funding pursuits so individual awards advance a coherent capital or program strategy.

7.7 Performance Measurement Framework

Evaluation will use three complementary types of evidence. Outputs show what partners completed. Outcomes show the nearer-term changes associated with that work. Regional condition indicators provide context for whether the broader economy and communities are moving in the desired direction. Because many forces affect regional conditions, context indicators should not be treated as results attributable to one organization or project.

Goal	Illustrative outputs	Illustrative outcomes	Regional condition indicators
1. Workforce and Talent	Employers engaged; training or work-based-learning initiatives; participants served; barrier-reduction actions	Credentials completed; placements; retention or advancement; positions supported	Labor-force participation; employment; unemployment; earnings; population by age
2. Housing and Community Vitality	Assessments; sites or properties advanced; units constructed or rehabilitated; predevelopment resources	Units occupied; vacancy reduction; private investment leveraged; households or workers housed	Housing supply and vacancy; cost burden; tenure; age and condition; population and household trends
3. Infrastructure and Connectivity	Plans and assessments; projects advanced or completed; dollars secured; systems or locations served	Improved compliance, reliability, capacity, access, efficiency, or resilience	System needs; commute and mobility patterns; broadband availability/adoption; capital investment
4. Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital	Businesses contacted or assisted; loans and technical assistance; sites advanced; referrals completed	Jobs retained or created; firms started, expanded, or transferred; private investment and capital leveraged	Establishments; employment by industry; business births and closures; wages; industrial diversity
5. Regional Capacity, Collaboration, and Implementation	Stakeholder participation; projects in pipeline; applications; awards; technical-assistance engagements; joint initiatives	Projects advancing in readiness; resources leveraged; improved sponsor capacity; completed collaborative actions	Geographic distribution of investment; funding success; implementation pace; partner participation

Measurement Principles

- Use a focused set of measures that can be maintained consistently; do not create reporting requirements that exceed the value of the information.
- Establish a baseline, data source, responsible party, geography, and update frequency before adopting a measure for formal reporting.
- Disaggregate information by county, community, population, or project type when useful and available without compromising confidentiality.
- Combine quantitative measures with concise qualitative evidence explaining barriers, leverage, partnerships, and lessons.
- Avoid double-counting shared projects and distinguish announced, awarded, under-construction, completed, and operational results.
- Revise measures when data sources change or when experience shows that an indicator does not inform decisions.

7.8 Annual Review and Reporting

SEKRPC will coordinate an annual implementation review with the Executive Committee and an appropriate group of CEDS stakeholders. The review should occur on a schedule that allows findings to influence work planning, funding pursuits, and required EDA reporting.

Annual step	Review task
1. Collect	Request concise updates from project sponsors and partners; refresh selected regional indicators and funding information.
2. Assess	Review accomplishments, delays, readiness changes, emerging risks and opportunities, geographic and sector participation, and measures of progress.
3. Convene	Engage stakeholders to interpret the evidence, validate changing conditions, and identify actions requiring leadership or coordination.

Annual step	Review task
4. Update	Revise project status, next steps, lead and supporting roles, anticipated resources, timeframes, and priority classifications.
5. Report	Provide a clear summary of completed work, resources leveraged, measurable results, barriers, and recommended adjustments.
6. Act	Incorporate approved adjustments into technical assistance, partnership development, advocacy, funding strategy, and the next implementation cycle.

Project sponsors should provide only the information needed to understand status and results. At minimum, updates should identify the current readiness stage, work completed during the year, resources secured or expended, key outcomes when available, barriers, and the next decision or action.

7.9 CEDS Maintenance, Amendments, and Update

The CEDS is intended to remain a living regional framework. Routine administrative changes—such as project status, refined costs, funding, partner information, or measurement updates—may be incorporated through annual review without reopening the full strategy, consistent with EDA requirements and SEKRPC procedures.

A material amendment should be considered when a change would alter the regional vision or goals, add a major initiative not reasonably aligned with an existing objective, substantially change the implementation approach, or respond to significant disruption. The rationale, stakeholder involvement, relationship to current conditions, and approval should be documented. A comprehensive update on the cycle required by EDA will reassess conditions and performance, renew stakeholder participation, revisit the SWOT, and reconsider the full strategic framework.

7.10 Accountability and Continuous Improvement

Accountability means making priorities visible, clarifying responsibility, documenting progress and barriers, using evidence, and adjusting deliberately. Projects that no longer demonstrate need, feasibility, leadership, or strategic value should be re-scoped, deferred, or removed. Successful partnership structures, funding packages, technical-assistance tools, and delivery models should be documented and adapted for other Southeast Kansas communities when appropriate.

7.11 Transition to Chapter 8

Chapter 7 establishes the operating system for implementing and evaluating the regional strategy. Chapter 8 applies that system to economic resilience, identifying how Southeast Kansas can prepare for, withstand, and recover from disruptions while protecting essential economic and community functions.

Chapter 8

Preliminary Regional Project Inventory Framework

Creating a living pipeline from regional need to implementation-ready investment

Chapter 7 established how regional initiatives will be prioritized, advanced, and evaluated. Chapter 8 provides the structure for documenting the projects that will move through that system. It is a preliminary, living framework—not a guarantee of funding, a commitment by an outside partner, or a substitute for locally adopted plans and approvals.

8.1 Purpose and Use of the Project Inventory

The regional project inventory is the operational bridge between the CEDS strategic framework and specific investments. It provides a consistent way to capture locally and regionally proposed projects, connect them to the goals and objectives in Chapters 5 and 6, identify the next development step, and organize technical assistance and funding pursuits. A well-maintained inventory also allows Southeast Kansas to communicate credible investment needs when programs, partners, or time-sensitive opportunities emerge.

The inventory is preliminary because project information will continue to change. Sponsors may refine scope, combine or separate activities, revise costs, complete engineering or feasibility work, secure partners, change schedules, or determine that an alternative approach is more appropriate. The CEDS therefore establishes a durable information structure rather than a static list frozen on the date of adoption.

Inclusion means that a project is generally consistent with regional direction and has enough information to remain under consideration. It does not constitute endorsement of a particular design, certify eligibility, establish priority for every funding program, reserve SEKRPC staff capacity, or obligate a sponsor, partner, funder, governing body, or lender.

Inventory Principles

- Sponsor-led. Every project should have, or be working toward, an identifiable entity able to authorize and ultimately own or administer the work.
- Strategy-aligned. Each entry should identify the CEDS goal and objective it advances and the documented condition it addresses.
- Readiness-based. The inventory should distinguish important early concepts from projects prepared for funding or implementation.

- Current and transparent. Costs, schedules, status, partners, and next steps should be updated as material information changes.
- Useful across programs. Information should be detailed enough to guide development while remaining flexible enough to support different funding sources.
- No implied commitment. Listing a project does not replace local authorization, due diligence, program review, environmental requirements, procurement, or formal award decisions.

8.2 Project Identification and Development Process

Projects may be identified through local capital planning, stakeholder outreach, employer or institutional needs, utility assessments, housing studies, hazard or resilience planning, business-development activity, funding notices, engineering or feasibility work, and annual CEDS review. SEKRPC may help sponsors clarify and document potential projects, but responsibility for decisions and implementation remains with the appropriate project owner.

Step	Inventory action
1. Submit or identify	Capture the need, proposed response, location, beneficiaries, sponsor, and available supporting information.
2. Confirm strategic fit	Connect the project to a documented condition and at least one CEDS goal and objective; identify cross-goal benefits where relevant.
3. Establish the record	Assign a project identifier and document scope, ownership, cost range, readiness stage, partners, schedule, funding status, and next step.
4. Develop	Complete the technical, financial, organizational, regulatory, site, market, or partnership work required for the current readiness stage.
5. Screen and sequence	Apply the Chapter 5 strategic criteria and Chapter 7 readiness framework to determine appropriate attention and timing.
6. Advance or maintain	Pursue technical assistance, funding, or implementation when justified; otherwise retain, re-scope, defer, combine, or remove the entry.
7. Report and update	Record material progress, barriers, investment, outputs, outcomes, and lessons during annual CEDS review.

8.3 Evaluation and Classification

The inventory should not rely on a single score that implies false precision. Projects differ in purpose, scale, urgency, maturity, and eligible funding. Review should instead combine three judgments: strategic value, implementation readiness, and the appropriate next action.

Review factor	Question addressed	Illustrative evidence
Strategic alignment	Advances one or more CEDS goals and objectives and responds to documented regional or local conditions.	Goal/objective citation; needs assessment; plan, study, survey, or stakeholder evidence.
Expected impact	Produces meaningful economic, community, health, access, or resilience benefits relative to cost and effort.	Population or businesses served; jobs, units, capacity, reliability, access, risk reduction, or other expected outcomes.
Regional value	Benefits multiple jurisdictions or sectors, addresses a shared constraint, improves regional competitiveness, or offers a replicable model.	Service area; partner jurisdictions; shared facilities or systems; transferable approach.
Inclusion and access	Improves opportunity or reduces barriers for rural communities, disadvantaged populations, or capacity-constrained jurisdictions.	Target population; affordability; accessibility; geographic or administrative barriers addressed.
Leadership and partnerships	Has a credible sponsor and clearly understood ownership, decision-making, partner, and operating responsibilities.	Sponsor authorization; ownership or site control; partner roles; operating entity.

Review factor	Question addressed	Illustrative evidence
Feasibility and leverage	Shows a plausible scope, cost, schedule, technical path, resource strategy, match, and long-term stewardship.	Planning or engineering; estimates; pro forma; match; funding pathway; operations and maintenance.
Urgency and risk	Addresses health, safety, regulatory, continuity, market, deterioration, or time-sensitive opportunity considerations.	Compliance schedule; failure risk; documented hazard; business or funding deadline; consequences of delay.
Measurability	Identifies outputs and outcomes that can be tracked through implementation and operation.	Baseline where available; target; data source; reporting responsibility.

Readiness Classification

Every active entry should use the same five-stage classification established in Chapter 7. The stage describes maturity, not importance.

Stage	Inventory meaning	Typical next action
Concept	Need and strategic fit documented; sponsor, scope, cost, or path remains preliminary.	Validate need; identify sponsor; facilitate initial scoping.
Development	Sponsor engaged and scope forming; key feasibility, technical, site, cost, partnership, or operating questions remain.	Complete planning, engineering, market, environmental, financial, or partnership work.
Funding-ready	Scope, sponsor, cost, site or ownership, approvals, match, schedule, partners, and operating plan support a realistic pursuit.	Assemble funding package, commitments, application, and pre-award requirements.
Implementation	Resources and approvals secured; design, procurement, construction, delivery, or closeout is underway.	Administer, comply, resolve issues, communicate, and track performance.
Operational	Project or program is complete and producing services or benefits.	Evaluate outcomes, maintain assets, sustain services, replicate lessons.

Portfolio Attention

Readiness and regional attention should be recorded separately. An early-stage project may deserve immediate development assistance because its expected impact or urgency is high. Conversely, a funding-ready project may require little regional coordination if the sponsor has the capacity and resources to proceed independently.

Portfolio status	Use
Active regional priority	Warrants coordinated near-term development, funding, or implementation attention.
Sponsor-led / regionally supported	Sponsor is advancing the project; regional assistance may be provided for defined needs or opportunities.
Development pipeline	Remains strategically relevant but requires scoping, feasibility, leadership, or other predevelopment work.
Monitor / future consideration	Retain for changing conditions, future planning, or a more suitable funding cycle.
Complete / operational	Implementation is complete; retain temporarily for outcome reporting and lessons learned.
Deferred / removed	No longer timely, feasible, sponsored, aligned, or necessary; document the reason and reconsider only if conditions change.

8.4 Preliminary Regional Project Categories

The preliminary inventory should be organized under the five regional goals. The following fifteen investment areas reflect the strategy already developed; they are categories for collecting and shaping projects, not fifteen pre-approved projects. The emerging initiative documented below is included as a preliminary regional entry and remains subject to funding, partner commitments, organizational approvals, and continued project development.

CEDS goal	Investment area	Illustrative project types
Goal 1 — Workforce and Talent	Employer-demand and career pathways	Training alignment, work-based learning, career awareness, incumbent-worker advancement, high-need occupations, and employer-driven technician and engineering pathways involving WorkforceONE, MAZK, employers, and education partners.
Goal 1 — Workforce and Talent	Workforce participation supports	Child care, transportation, health, digital access, benefit navigation, and other barriers to entering or remaining in work.
Goal 1 — Workforce and Talent	Talent attraction and retention	Recruitment tools, quality-of-place connections, essential-professional recruitment, alumni engagement, and retention practices.
Goal 2 — Housing and Community Vitality	Housing preservation and neighborhood reinvestment	Rehabilitation, weatherization, accessibility, code compliance, demolition, title clearance, and property reuse.
Goal 2 — Housing and Community Vitality	Housing production and adaptive reuse	Infill, new construction, rental and ownership options, upper-story or building conversion, and development partnerships.
Goal 2 — Housing and Community Vitality	Housing sites, infrastructure, and financing	Market data, predevelopment, site readiness, utility coordination, employer-supported housing, layered financing, and regional housing project-development capacity, including support through a Housing Specialist housed at SEKRPC.
Goal 3 — Infrastructure and Connectivity	Water, wastewater, stormwater, and solid waste	Reliability, capacity, compliance, asset management, affordability, resilience, and growth-supporting improvements.
Goal 3 — Infrastructure and Connectivity	Transportation and access	Roads, bridges, freight, aviation, rail interfaces, transit or mobility, trails, safety, and access to jobs and services.
Goal 3 — Infrastructure and Connectivity	Broadband, energy, public facilities, and resilience	Digital access and adoption, cybersecurity, energy efficiency, backup power, continuity, and essential public facilities.
Goal 4 — Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital	Business retention, expansion, and succession	Employer outreach, problem solving, modernization, workforce and infrastructure solutions, and ownership transition.
Goal 4 — Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital	Entrepreneurship and access to capital	Counseling, mentorship, incubation, SEK Catalyst business planning and financial-readiness support, revolving loans, microloans, a regional Community Investment Fund, lender partnerships, coaching, technical assistance, and procurement or market access.
Goal 4 — Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital	Sites, buildings, innovation, and targeted sectors	Site and building readiness, value-added agriculture, manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, energy, tourism, and technology adoption.
Goal 5 — Regional Collaboration and Implementation Capacity	Regional data, planning, and project development	Shared data, studies, feasibility, capital planning, engineering coordination, funding strategy, and implementation tools.
Goal 5 — Regional Collaboration and Implementation Capacity	Multi-jurisdictional and cross-sector initiatives	Shared services, coordinated delivery, Community Innovation Networks, visible early-win projects, Rural Connect and Community Health Worker referrals, joint facilities or systems, regional procurement, and partnership governance.
Goal 5 — Regional Collaboration and Implementation Capacity	Regional communication, investment, and performance	CEDS maintenance, project portfolio reporting, asset and opportunity communication, funder engagement, and replication of effective models.

8.4.1 Emerging Regional Economic Mobility Initiative

Rural Community Partners is leading development of an interconnected regional initiative intended to increase economic mobility by linking access to capital, entrepreneur development, workforce pathways, housing capacity, and locally organized community action. The initiative has been advanced through a Kansas Health Foundation Transformation Grant proposal, but the proposal and the requested resources described below should be treated as proposed rather than committed.

Inventory field	Preliminary project information
Project / lead	Regional Economic Mobility Initiative; Rural Community Partners as the proposed lead and coordinating entity.
Location and reach	Multi-county Southeast Kansas, with implementation through regional partners and local Community Innovation Networks.
Need and purpose	Build a coordinated regional system that connects residents, entrepreneurs, employers, communities, and organizations with capital, coaching, workforce pathways, housing capacity, and other resources needed to expand economic mobility.
Implementation tracks	Community Investment Fund - Launch a professionally managed regional platform that combines impact investments and provides affordable capital to entrepreneurs not yet able to access conventional financing. Integrate underwriting, loan servicing, business coaching, technical assistance, mentorship, connections, and impact measurement. Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development - Expand coordinated outreach and launch SEK Catalyst, empowered by the KU School of Business, to strengthen business planning, financial readiness, and entrepreneur development and to connect entrepreneurs with mentors, grants, financing, technical assistance, and regional business resources. Workforce Development - Integrate WorkforceONE into Community Innovation Networks, pilot youth career-awareness and workforce initiatives, and develop technician and engineering career pathways with SEKRPC, MAZK, employers, and local networks. WorkforceONE has proposed a Career Advisor as an in-kind contribution. Community Innovation Networks - Strengthen local coalitions through asset mapping, relationship building, and collaborative action; support visible early-win projects; expand Rural Connect, Community Health Worker outreach, and partner referrals; and support regional housing strategies through a Housing Specialist housed at SEKRPC.
CEDS alignment	Primarily advances Goal 1 (Workforce and Talent), Goal 2 (Housing and Community Vitality), Goal 4 (Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital), and Goal 5 (Regional Collaboration and Implementation Capacity), with cross-goal benefits for health, access, and community resilience.
Readiness / status	Development stage; emerging regional implementation priority. The concept and partner framework are defined, while funding, final governance, operating agreements, detailed budgets, performance targets, and implementation schedules remain under development.
Proposed resources	Kansas Health Foundation Transformation Grant resources, including a requested $250,000 in Impact Investment dollars to seed the Community Investment Fund and attract additional investment; anticipated in-kind partner contributions; and other philanthropic, public, private, lender, CDFI, and impact-investment resources. No proposed funding should be considered awarded or committed until formally approved.

Inventory field	Preliminary project information
Anticipated partners	Rural Community Partners, SEKRPC, WorkforceONE, MAZK, KU School of Business, employers, local Community Innovation Networks, Rural Connect, Community Health Workers, financial institutions, CDFIs, philanthropic and impact investors, entrepreneur-support organizations, and other regional and community partners. Roles and commitments remain subject to confirmation.
Expected results	More entrepreneurs progressing toward conventional financing; increased use of coordinated business-development services; stronger youth and adult career pathways; improved connections to workforce and community resources; increased local collaborative capacity; visible early wins; and expanded capacity to advance regional housing strategies.
Immediate next actions	Complete the grant and partner-development process; confirm governance and fiduciary arrangements for the Community Investment Fund; define underwriting, servicing, referral, coaching, and measurement protocols; establish partner roles and agreements; refine budgets and schedules; identify early pilot communities and projects; and establish baseline measures and reporting responsibilities.

Inventory note. The initiative may proceed in phases, be revised as funding and partnership decisions are made, or advance through separate but coordinated projects. Inclusion in this preliminary inventory does not commit any listed organization or funding source.

8.5 Project Inventory Record

Each project should be documented through a standard record. Early concepts may begin with limited information, but missing fields should be treated as development tasks. The record should be concise enough to maintain and detailed enough to support decisions, referrals, technical assistance, and funding preparation.

Inventory field	Minimum information to maintain
Project identification	Unique project ID; project name; date submitted; date last updated; portfolio status.
Sponsor and contacts	Lead sponsor; authorized contact; ownership or operating entity; governing-body or organizational status.
Location and reach	Community, county, service area, site or corridor; jurisdictions and populations served.
Need or opportunity	Problem or opportunity; supporting data or plan; consequences of inaction; urgency.
Proposed scope	Principal activities, alternatives considered, expected deliverables, and known exclusions.
CEDS alignment	Primary and secondary goal; objective(s); SWOT condition; regional or cross-sector value.
Benefits and measures	Expected beneficiaries, outputs, outcomes, baseline and target where available, and proposed data source.
Readiness	Concept, Development, Funding-ready, Implementation, or Operational; evidence supporting the classification.
Development gaps	Unresolved sponsor, site, ownership, technical, environmental, cost, market, partnership, approval, match, or operating issues.
Cost and resources	Planning and implementation cost range; estimate basis and date; committed and potential resources; match status.
Funding pathway	Candidate programs or capital sources; eligibility questions; anticipated application cycle; restrictions or dependencies.
Schedule and next action	Milestones; target dates; immediate next step; responsible party; assistance requested.
Partners and roles	Confirmed and prospective partners; anticipated role; commitment status; agreements needed.
Implementation and operations	Procurement or delivery approach; compliance considerations; long-term owner, operator, maintenance, and sustainability.
Progress and decisions	Status history, funding results, material changes, barriers, decision notes, completion results, and lessons learned.

Minimum Entry Standard

A project may enter the preliminary inventory when the need, location or service area, proposed response, strategic alignment, and a sponsor or sponsor-development path can be described. A project should not be classified as funding-ready until scope, ownership, cost, approvals, partners, match, schedule, operating responsibility, and program fit are sufficiently developed for the specific funding opportunity.

8.6 Funding and Resource Framework

The funding strategy should begin with project needs and readiness rather than a preferred grant program. Many regional priorities will require layered resources and a sequence of predevelopment, capital, implementation, and operating support. Program rules, appropriations, eligibility, competitiveness, match, and timing change; candidate sources should therefore be verified when a project is ready to pursue them.

Resource category	Illustrative sources	Likely role
Local and sponsor resources	Capital budgets, utility revenues, reserves, bonds, special assessments, tax tools, land or facilities, staff time, and in-kind contributions.	Demonstrate ownership, support match, fund ineligible work, and sustain operations.
State and federal grants	Economic development, infrastructure, housing, workforce, transportation, broadband, energy, resilience, public facilities, and community-development programs.	Support eligible planning, capital, equipment, program, or technical-assistance costs.
Public financing	State revolving funds, USDA and other federal loans, revenue or general-obligation debt, infrastructure banks, and credit enhancement.	Finance durable assets where repayment and affordability are supportable.
Private capital and lenders	Commercial debt, equity, developer investment, employer participation, community banks, CDFIs, and revolving loan funds.	Finance business, housing, mixed-use, equipment, working-capital, and gap needs.
Philanthropic and nonprofit resources	Foundations, health-conversion foundations, community foundations, nonprofit intermediaries, impact investors, and program-related investments.	Support innovation, capacity, predevelopment, pilots, community services, professionally managed community investment funds, and flexible gap financing.
Partnership and shared resources	Joint applications, shared staff or services, institutional assets, educational facilities, technical experts, procurement collaboration, and data sharing.	Increase scale, reduce duplication, improve competitiveness, and fill capacity gaps.

SEKRPC may assist with funding research, project development, application preparation, and award administration within its authority, staff capacity, program rules, and applicable agreements. Such assistance does not guarantee eligibility, competitiveness, award, or approval by a governing body or funding agency.

8.7 Inventory Maintenance and Next Steps

The inventory should be maintained as part of the annual implementation process established in Chapter 7. SEKRPC will coordinate the regional record, while sponsors remain responsible for providing accurate and timely project information and for securing their own approvals and commitments.

Action	Purpose	Timing
Initial population	Invite local governments, utilities, economic-development organizations, employers, educational and healthcare institutions, housing partners, nonprofits, and other stakeholders to submit or validate candidate projects.	Following CEDS adoption and during targeted outreach.
Quality review	Check minimum information, strategic alignment, sponsor status, readiness evidence, duplication, and whether related entries should be combined or cross-referenced.	As projects are received.
Development support	Identify the next unresolved step and connect appropriate projects to facilitation, planning, engineering, feasibility, funding strategy, or partner development.	Ongoing; based on priority and capacity.
Funding alignment	Match sufficiently developed projects to realistic programs or capital sources and work backward from application, approval, match, and compliance requirements.	As funding cycles and project readiness align.
Status updates	Request and record material changes in scope, cost, sponsor, readiness, schedule, funding, implementation, operations, and results.	At least annually and after major milestones.
Portfolio review	Confirm active priorities; identify stalled or urgent projects; reclassify readiness; defer, combine, remove, or complete entries; and identify regional patterns.	Annual CEDS implementation review.
Regional reporting	Summarize pipeline movement, investment leveraged, implementation results, barriers, and next-year priorities without disclosing protected or confidential information.	Annual implementation report.
Comprehensive refresh	Reassess the categories, record fields, evaluation framework, and full portfolio as part of the next comprehensive CEDS update.	On the EDA-required comprehensive-update cycle.

Information Stewardship

The working inventory may contain preliminary estimates, proprietary business information, site-sensitive material, security considerations, or contact information that should not be broadly distributed. Public CEDS reporting should present information at an appropriate level while maintaining a more detailed internal record where necessary. Project sponsors should identify information that is confidential, protected, preliminary, or restricted by program requirements.

8.8 Conclusion

The Preliminary Regional Project Inventory Framework completes the progression from analysis to action. Chapters 1 through 4 establish the region's conditions and SWOT findings; Chapter 5 defines the vision and goals; Chapter 6 identifies objectives and strategies; Chapter 7 establishes implementation and evaluation; and Chapter 8 provides the structure for maintaining the specific project pipeline through which much of that strategy will be carried out.

The value of the inventory will depend on disciplined maintenance rather than the number of projects listed at adoption. A credible portfolio will make strategic fit visible, distinguish readiness from importance, identify the next responsible action, and document movement from concept through operation. Used in this way, the inventory will help Southeast Kansas organize partnerships, improve project quality, respond to funding opportunities, communicate investment needs, and demonstrate measurable progress throughout the 2026–2031 planning period.

The project inventory remains a living implementation tool. Detailed project records may be maintained separately from the adopted narrative and updated through the annual CEDS review process, consistent with Chapter 7, applicable public procedures, and EDA requirements.

2026–2031

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

APPENDICES

Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission

Allen • Anderson • Bourbon • Cherokee • Coffey • Crawford
Labette • Linn • Montgomery • Neosho • Wilson • Woodson Counties

Appendices Guide

These appendices preserve supporting documentation and provide working tools for implementation of the 2026–2031 CEDS. They should be read with the adopted chapters. Raw survey responses, personally identifiable information, confidential business information, and detailed working project records remain in SEKRPC's administrative files when public reproduction would be inappropriate.

Appendix	Contents	Primary use
A	Data Sources and Methodology	Source vintages, geographic rules, limitations, and update protocol for Chapter 3.
B	Stakeholder Engagement and Input Record	Outreach channels, survey and June 18 work-session documentation, synthesis method, and record-retention index.
C	Strategic Framework Crosswalk	Traceability from SWOT findings to the five goals and twenty objectives.
D	Regional Project Submission and Update Form	Standard intake and annual-update form for the living project inventory.
E	Annual Implementation and Performance Review	Review agenda, performance worksheet, and annual reporting structure.
F	Public Comment and Adoption Record	Publication-ready forms for completing the 30-day review and adoption record.
G	CEDS Content Crosswalk	Location of the principal CEDS elements identified by EDA guidance.

Administrative note: Appendices F should be completed after the public-comment period and formal adoption. Blank fields are intentional and should not be interpreted as missing events before those steps occur.

Appendix A

Data Sources and Methodology

Technical documentation for the regional profile and ongoing data updates

Chapter 3 uses the most recent complete county-level datasets available during preparation. Years differ by source because federal population estimates, ACS estimates, employment records, and infrastructure datasets are released on different schedules. Every chart and table identifies its data year; the CEDS does not combine unlike years as if they represented one observation date.

Topic	Principal source	Vintage	Use and limitation
Population and components of change	U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2025 Population Estimates; 2025 TIGER/Line county boundaries	2020 estimates base and annual estimates through 2025	Population level and change, births, deaths, migration, regional geography.
Demographics, labor force, income, poverty, education, housing, commuting, internet subscription	U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey five-year estimates	2019–2024 pooled estimate period	County characteristics; ACS uncertainty is greatest for small counties.
Workplace employment, establishments, and wages	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages	2024 annual averages	Covered employment by workplace; excludes some self-employed and uncovered work.
Industry of employed residents	U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 ACS table C24030	2019–2024 pooled estimate period	Resident employment by industry; differs from QCEW workplace jobs.
Transportation network and assets	U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line; Kansas and federal transportation sources; airport, rail, and highway references	Most current information reviewed in 2026	Regional access and asset description; project status should be verified before funding use.
Broadband	2024 ACS internet-subscription measures and available federal/state infrastructure references	ACS 2024; infrastructure references current when reviewed	Adoption and access indicators; subscription is not the same as service availability or speed.
Employers and development assets	Employer, institutional, utility, state, local, and regional sources reviewed by SEKRPC	Current when reviewed in 2026	Illustrative anchors and assets, not a certified ranking or exhaustive directory.

A.1 Geographic and Aggregation Rules

- The controlling service area is Allen, Anderson, Bourbon, Cherokee, Coffey, Crawford, Labette, Linn, Montgomery, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson counties.
- Regional totals are sums of non-overlapping county values unless otherwise noted.
- Regional percentages are calculated from summed numerators and denominators when those components are available.
- Regional medians are household- or unit-weighted county medians when the twelve counties do not constitute a published ACS geography; they are labeled as approximations.
- ACS and QCEW measure different populations. ACS primarily describes residents; QCEW describes covered jobs at workplaces.
- Rounding may cause displayed components not to sum exactly to totals or 100 percent.

A.2 Interpretation and Quality Controls

Small-county estimates should be interpreted as directional rather than exact. A single estimate should not control a funding, regulatory, or site decision when a current local study, engineering record, utility record, employer confirmation, or program-specific dataset is required. County differences are retained because regional averages can conceal concentrated need or opportunity.

Control	Required practice
Geography	Confirm all 12 counties and exclude similarly named or adjacent counties outside the service area.
Vintage	Label every figure and table with the actual source year or estimate period.
Denominator	Confirm whether a measure applies to total population, adults, households, occupied units, workers, or workplaces.
Suppression/uncertainty	Do not infer suppressed QCEW detail; flag ACS small-sample limitations.
Reconciliation	Compare narrative statements with underlying tables and investigate outliers before publication.
Reproducibility	Retain downloaded source files, queries, transformations, and calculation notes in the administrative record.

A.3 Annual Data Update Protocol

The annual implementation review should refresh a limited dashboard rather than reproduce Chapter 3 in full. At minimum, SEKRPC should review population change, labor-force participation and employment, earnings, housing and vacancy, broadband adoption, establishment and industry trends, capital investment, and project-pipeline movement. Material changes should be described in the annual report and incorporated through a CEDS amendment only when they change strategic direction.

Appendix B

Stakeholder Engagement and Input Record

Documentation of how regional knowledge informed the strategy

The stakeholder survey was a qualitative planning instrument, not a statistically representative poll. The June 18 session was used to interpret and validate themes, not as a stand-alone representation of all twelve counties.

B.1 Engagement Sequence

Stage	Documented purpose
Initial outreach	Invite elected officials, administrators, economic-development and chamber representatives, employers, agricultural interests, education and workforce partners, healthcare, lenders, utilities, housing and nonprofit organizations, agency partners, and residents.
Regional stakeholder survey	Collect observations on assets, constraints, opportunities, threats, resilience, and priorities; group recurring themes without treating mention counts as a formal ranking.
June 18, 2026 work session	Review initial findings; complete structured SWOT and priority exercises; identify potential projects and strategies; record facilitated discussion.
Professional synthesis	Compare survey responses, worksheets, notes, Chapter 3 data, regional plans, and implementation experience; retain material differences in emphasis.
Draft and supplemental review	Invite corrections, additional issues, project information, and comments beyond the single meeting.
Public review and adoption	Provide a 30-day public-comment opportunity, evaluate comments, revise as appropriate, and document formal adoption.

B.2 June 18 Work-Session Agenda

Time	Purpose
10:00–10:15	Welcome, introductions, purpose, and CEDS process
10:15–10:35	Regional context and initial stakeholder-survey findings
10:35–11:30	Structured regional SWOT discussion and worksheets
11:30–12:00	Lunch and cross-theme discussion
12:00–12:40	Priority, project, and strategy identification
12:40–12:55	Convergence, gaps, and next-step validation
12:55–1:00	Closing and continued participation opportunities

B.3 Cross-Cutting Themes Carried Forward

Theme	Scope
Workforce and talent	Labor-force availability, employer demand, career pathways, participation barriers, recruitment, retention, and worker advancement.
Housing and community vitality	Housing condition and choice, rehabilitation, development feasibility, neighborhood reinvestment, amenities, and quality of place.
Infrastructure and connectivity	Water, wastewater, transportation, broadband, energy, public facilities, reliability, affordability, and resilience.
Business development, entrepreneurship, and capital	Retention and expansion, succession, entrepreneurship, technical assistance, financing, sites, buildings, and diversification.
Regional collaboration and implementation capacity	Shared data, project development, funding alignment, partnerships, communication, accountability, and CEDS maintenance.

B.4 Synthesis Rules

- Recurring comments were grouped by meaning, not merely by identical wording.
- The number of mentions was not treated as a vote or formal priority score.
- Survey findings and June 18 worksheets were distinguished, then compared for convergence and differences.
- Stakeholder observations were tested against Chapter 3 data and implementation realities.
- Locally concentrated concerns were retained when they affected critical systems, vulnerable populations, economic opportunity, or regional resilience.
- No individual respondent or single meeting was allowed to control the regional strategy.

B.5 Administrative Record Index

Record group	Items retained
Outreach	Invitation and reminder emails; distribution lists; meeting notice; RSVP records.
Survey	Final survey instrument; response export; non-identifying summary; analysis notes.
June 18 session	Participant sign-in or attendance record; participant agenda; presentation or handouts; completed SWOT and project/strategy worksheets; facilitator notes.
Draft review	Distribution record; corrections; supplemental input; project submissions; revision log.
Public process	Public notice; draft made available; comments; response/disposition record; adoption materials.
Retention	Original electronic files and signed or scanned records maintained according to SEKRPC's record-retention and confidentiality practices.

Appendix C

Strategic Framework Crosswalk

Traceability from the SWOT synthesis to goals and objectives

Goal	Principal SWOT link	Objective	Implementation emphasis
1. Workforce and Talent	Workforce shortages; aging labor force; participation barriers; education and training assets; employer demand	1.1 Align education and training with employer demand	Employer-informed programs, work-based learning, and high-demand pathways
		1.2 Reduce barriers to labor-force participation	Child care, transportation, health, housing, digital access, and service coordination
		1.3 Attract and retain talent	Recruitment, quality of place, essential professions, alumni, and newcomer support
		1.4 Strengthen career pathways and worker advancement	Career awareness, credentials, apprenticeships, incumbent-worker advancement
2. Housing and Community Vitality	Aging stock; limited rental and ownership choice; affordability and rehabilitation gaps; community assets	2.1 Strengthen housing intelligence and planning	Market data, property and site information, employer needs, and project pipeline
		2.2 Preserve and improve existing housing	Rehabilitation, weatherization, accessibility, code compliance, and reuse
		2.3 Expand housing supply and choice	Infill, new construction, adaptive reuse, rental and ownership options
		2.4 Build development capacity and close feasibility gaps	Predevelopment, infrastructure, developer partnerships, and layered financing
3. Infrastructure and Connectivity	Aging systems; compliance and affordability pressure; transportation and broadband assets; resilience needs	3.1 Modernize essential utility and public systems	Reliability, capacity, compliance, efficiency, and public facilities
		3.2 Improve transportation, mobility, and access	Roads, bridges, freight, aviation, transit, safety, and access
		3.3 Expand broadband and digital capacity	Availability, adoption, affordability, skills, cybersecurity, and redundancy
		3.4 Strengthen capital planning and infrastructure resilience	Asset management, CIP, rates, lifecycle cost, continuity, and funding
4. Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital	Broad manufacturing base; anchor institutions; succession and capital gaps; market and technology change	4.1 Strengthen business retention and expansion	Confidential outreach, problem solving, modernization, workforce and utilities
		4.2 Cultivate entrepreneurship and business succession	Counseling, mentoring, procurement, market access, and ownership transition
		4.3 Expand access to capital and financial readiness	Loan funds, lenders, gap financing, borrower preparation, and referrals
		4.4 Advance sites, innovation, and economic diversification	Sites, buildings, infrastructure, value-added sectors, and technology
5. Regional Capacity, Collaboration, and Implementation	Limited local capacity; strong partnership tradition; fragmented data and funding cycles; need for accountability	5.1 Maintain an active CEDS governance process	Annual review, stakeholder engagement, amendments, and oversight
		5.2 Expand project-development and implementation capacity	Scoping, feasibility, engineering, funding, compliance, and administration
		5.3 Advance regional and cross-sector collaboration	Shared services, joint initiatives, role clarity, and partnership governance
		5.4 Strengthen regional communication and accountability	Investment communication, performance reporting, data, and replication

This crosswalk is a traceability aid, not a substitute for Chapters 4–7. Projects may advance more than one goal or objective. Annual review should preserve the primary alignment while recording meaningful cross-goal benefits.

Appendix D

Regional Project Submission and Update Form

Standard record for the preliminary regional project inventory

Project inclusion indicates strategic alignment and sufficient information for continued consideration. It does not guarantee eligibility, funding, endorsement, staff capacity, or commitment by any sponsor, partner, lender, or agency.

D.1 Project Identification

Field	Response
Project name	
Lead sponsor / legal entity	
Authorized contact / title	
Email / phone	
Community, county, site, or service area	
Date submitted / last updated	
Project status	☐ New ☐ Update ☐ Completed ☐ Deferred/withdrawn

D.2 Need, Scope, and Strategic Alignment

Field	Response or guidance
Documented need or opportunity	Describe the condition, affected population or businesses, supporting data or plan, urgency, and consequences of inaction.
Proposed response and scope	Describe principal activities, alternatives considered, expected deliverables, and known exclusions.
Primary CEDS goal	☐ 1 Workforce ☐ 2 Housing ☐ 3 Infrastructure ☐ 4 Business/Capital ☐ 5 Regional Capacity
CEDS objective(s)	
SWOT or existing-condition link	
Regional or cross-sector value	Identify multiple jurisdictions/sectors served, shared constraints addressed, or replicable benefits.
Expected beneficiaries and benefits	
Proposed outputs and outcomes	Include baseline and target when available.

D.3 Readiness and Resource Plan

Field	Response or guidance
Readiness stage	☐ Concept ☐ Development ☐ Funding-ready ☐ Implementation ☐ Operational
Evidence supporting readiness	
Unresolved development gaps	☐ Sponsor ☐ Scope ☐ Site/ownership ☐ Technical ☐ Environmental ☐ Cost ☐ Market ☐ Partners ☐ Approvals ☐ Match ☐ Operations
Planning / implementation cost	Amount or range; estimate basis and date.
Committed resources / match	
Potential funding or capital sources	Programs must be verified when pursued.

Field	Response or guidance
Partners and commitment status	Distinguish confirmed from prospective roles.
Long-term owner / operator	
Immediate next action	
Responsible party / target date	
Assistance requested from SEKRPC or partners	

D.4 Annual Update

Update field	Response
Material progress since last update	
Changes in scope, cost, schedule, sponsor, site, or partners	
Applications, awards, financing, or investment	
Outputs completed	
Outcomes observed	
Barriers or decisions needed	
Recommended status / readiness change	
Confidential or restricted information note	

Appendix E

Annual Implementation and Performance Review

Working tools for the annual CEDS cycle

E.1 Annual Review Agenda

Step	Annual task
1. Collect	Obtain project and partner updates; refresh selected regional indicators and funding information.
2. Assess	Review accomplishments, delays, readiness changes, emerging risks and opportunities, geographic and sector participation, and measures.
3. Convene	Engage the Executive Committee and appropriate stakeholders to interpret evidence and identify actions requiring coordination.
4. Update	Revise project status, next actions, roles, resources, timeframes, and portfolio classifications.
5. Report	Summarize completed work, resources leveraged, results, barriers, and recommended adjustments.
6. Act	Carry approved adjustments into technical assistance, partnership development, advocacy, funding strategy, and the next cycle.

E.2 Goal-Level Performance Worksheet

Goal	Illustrative outputs	Illustrative outcomes	Condition indicators
1. Workforce and Talent	Employers engaged; training/work-based-learning initiatives; participants served; barrier-reduction actions	Credentials; placements; retention/advancement; positions supported	Labor-force participation; employment; unemployment; earnings; age structure
2. Housing and Community Vitality	Assessments; sites/properties advanced; units constructed or rehabilitated; predevelopment resources	Units occupied; vacancy reduction; private investment; households/workers housed	Supply; vacancy; cost burden; tenure; age/condition; population and households
3. Infrastructure and Connectivity	Plans; projects advanced/completed; dollars secured; systems or locations served	Compliance, reliability, capacity, access, efficiency, or resilience improved	System needs; mobility; broadband adoption; capital investment
4. Business Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Capital	Businesses contacted/assisted; loans; technical assistance; sites; referrals	Jobs retained/created; firms started, expanded, or transferred; investment/capital leveraged	Establishments; industry employment; business births/closures; wages; diversity
5. Regional Capacity, Collaboration, and Implementation	Stakeholder participation; pipeline projects; applications; awards; technical assistance; joint initiatives	Projects advancing; resources leveraged; sponsor capacity; collaborative actions completed	Investment distribution; funding success; implementation pace; participation

E.3 Annual Summary Record

Record field	Annual entry
Review period	
Prepared by / date	
Executive Committee review date	
Major accomplishments	
Investment and resources leveraged	
Projects advancing in readiness	
Material delays or barriers	
Emerging threats and opportunities	
Geographic / sector participation gaps	

Record field	Annual entry
Strategy or project-inventory adjustments	
Amendment required?	☐ No ☐ Administrative update ☐ Material amendment—describe required process
Priorities for next year	

Appendix F

Public Comment and Adoption Record

Finalization forms for the official administrative record

Complete this appendix after the public-comment period and adoption. Replace blank fields with actual dates and actions; attach or cross-reference the official notice, comment record, minutes, and signed resolution.

F.1 Public-Review Record

Item	Final record
Draft authorized for release by	
Authorization date	
Public notice publication / posting date	
Draft availability locations and web address	
Public-comment opening date	
Public-comment closing date	
Length of comment period	30 calendar days, or the final documented period required for this CEDS
Submission methods	
Number of comments / commenters	
Custodian of complete comment record	SEKRPC

F.2 Comment and Disposition Log

No.	Commenter / date	Issue or recommendation	Disposition and rationale	Revision location
1				
2				
3				
4				

F.3 Adoption Record

Item	Final record
Adopting body	Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission
Meeting date / location	
Quorum confirmed	
Motion	
Vote	
Resolution number	
Effective date	
EDA submission date	
Certification / signature record	Attach signed resolution, certification, or approved minutes.

F.4 Finalization Checklist

- Insert the actual public-review dates and methods in Chapter 2 and the executive summary if those sections contain prospective language.
- Reconcile the final table of contents and page numbers after assembling all chapters and appendices.
- Confirm that comments and revisions are retained even when no change is made.
- Attach the adopted resolution or approved minutes and retain proof of public notice.
- Archive the submitted final CEDS and the version transmitted to EDA.

Appendix G

CEDS Content Crosswalk

Location of core elements in the 2026–2031 CEDS

This crosswalk is based on EDA's 2025 CEDS Content Guidelines and 13 C.F.R. § 303.7 as referenced by EDA. The guidelines describe the principal content areas as Summary Background, SWOT Analysis, Strategic Direction/Action Plan, Evaluation Framework, Economic Resilience, and Workforce Development. The guidance is a planning aid; final acceptability remains subject to applicable regulations and EDA review.

CEDS element	Primary location	Evidence
Summary background / regional conditions	Executive Summary; Chapters 1–3; Appendix A	Geography, population, demographics, labor, industry, income, education, housing, commuting, transportation, infrastructure, broadband, employers, and assets.
Planning process and participation	Chapter 2; Appendix B; Appendix F	Outreach, survey, June 18 work session, synthesis, public review, adoption, and continuing engagement.
SWOT analysis	Chapter 4; Appendix C	Detailed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, regional matrix, strategic implications, and SWOT-to-strategy logic.
Strategic direction	Chapter 5	Vision, guiding principles, five regional goals, desired outcomes, and decision criteria.
Objectives and strategies	Chapter 6; Appendix C	Twenty objectives and implementation strategies aligned to the five goals.
Action plan / implementation	Chapter 7; Chapter 8; Appendices D–E	Roles, implementation cycle, priorities, readiness, resource alignment, action agenda, and living project inventory.
Evaluation framework	Chapter 7; Appendix E	Outputs, outcomes, condition indicators, annual review, reporting, accountability, amendments, and continuous improvement.
Economic resilience	Chapters 3–7, particularly infrastructure resilience, business diversification, continuity, housing, workforce, and implementation capacity	Resilience is integrated across the SWOT, goals, objectives, action agenda, indicators, and project screening rather than isolated as an unrelated plan.
Workforce development	Chapters 3–7, especially Goal 1 and Objectives 1.1–1.4	Employer demand, participation barriers, attraction and retention, pathways, advancement, measures, and priority actions.
Project pipeline	Chapter 8; Appendix D	Standard project record, readiness stages, portfolio attention, funding/resource framework, maintenance, and confidentiality.
Public review and adoption	Chapter 2; Appendix F	Thirty-day review record, comments and disposition, adoption action, and submission documentation.

G.1 Final Assembly Check

- Use the definitive, reviewed versions of the cover/executive summary and Chapters 1–8.
- Update the table of contents after all documents are merged and pagination is final.
- Resolve any prospective public-review language after the 30-day comment period and adoption.
- Confirm consistent chapter titles, service-area counties, planning period, headers, footers, and figure/table numbering.
- Verify all data sources and links, remove internal drafting notes, and complete an accessibility and visual review of the assembled document.

Official guidance reference: U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2025 CEDS Content Guidelines, available through EDA's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy resources.