

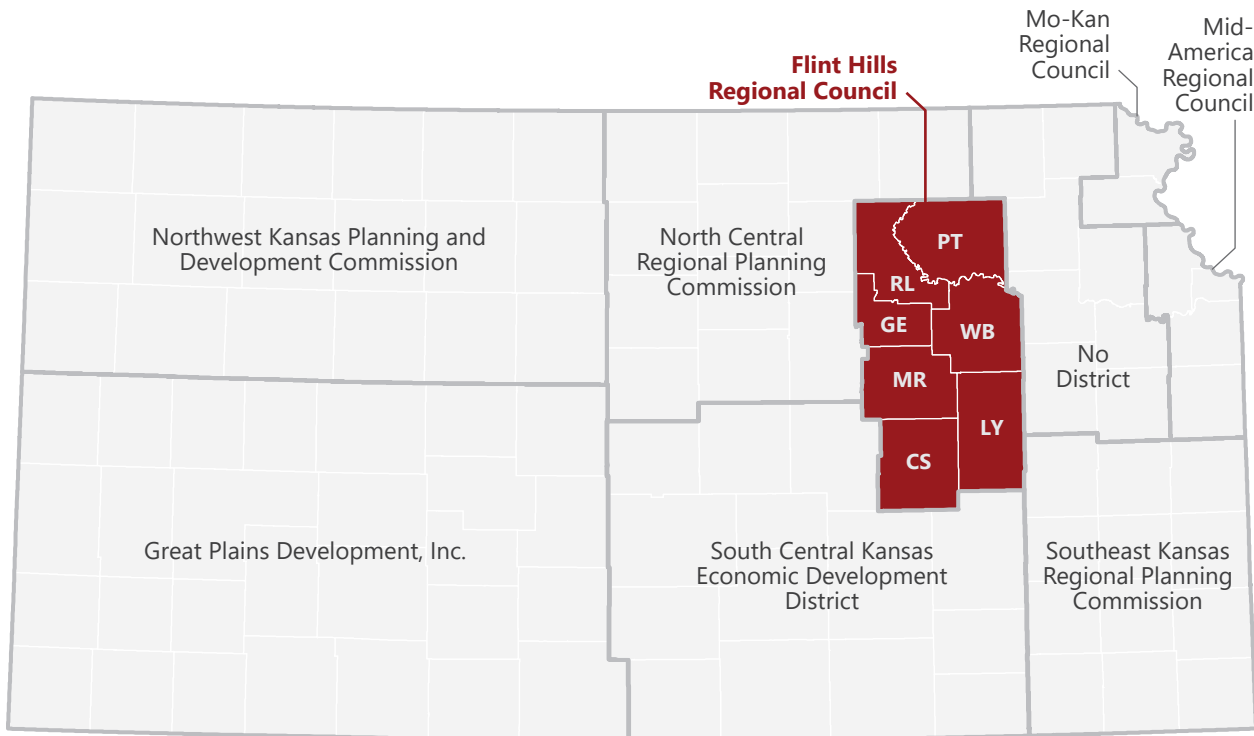
Flint Hills Economic Development District (FHEDD)

Annual Progress Report:

Our Strategy-Driven Plan for Regional Economic Development

April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021

Serving Chase, Geary, Lyon, Morris, Pottawatomie, Riley, and Wabaunsee Counties since 2014.



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REGION

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Flint Hills Regional Council
PO Box 514
Odgen, KS, 66517
www.flinthillsregion.org



This annual report was developed by the Flint Hills Regional Council with financial investment from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

**Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
April 1, 2020 -March 31, 2021 (PP Grant Year 5)
Annual Progress Report**

Grantee: Flint Hills Regional Council, Inc.

Project Number: ED16DEN3020092

Period covered by the report: April 1, 2020 through March 31, 2021 - Year 5

I. Adjustments Summary

Staff Turnover - The Executive Director retired in December 2019, and so the Regional Planner served as Interim Director from January through June 2020--the first three months of Year 5 implementation of the Flint Hills Regional Council's Partnership Planning grant. In March 2020, the Community Planner accepted another position--leaving only the Regional Planner, a VISTA member, and an intern. For an organization of this size, this is high staff turnover. As a result, in year 5, the staffing plan was updated to reflect a new Executive Director (started June 17, 2020), a new Community Planner (part-time, project-based) and two part-time, project-based interns. The revised staffing plan was submitted and approved by EDA, which updated the work program consistent with the overall strategy and available resources.

COVID-19 Impacts to Regional Economy - In year 5, COVID-19 impacted the economic conditions of the region significantly, and FHRC applied for and obtained CARES funding (July 1, 2020) to assist with recovery and resiliency planning and implementation efforts, which is being incorporated into the CEDS Plan Update, among several other activities as outlined in a separate scope, as a supplement to the Partnership Planning award.

Regional Opportunity for Collaboration & Cross-Pollination of Existing Efforts- Another adjustment included taking advantage of an opportunity to leverage the new Executive Director's existing working relationships with a large network of economic development professionals and private sector stakeholders, and opportunity to form new partnerships and working relationships. Based on the Executive Director's prior role with a three-county economic and community development plan, she was able to leverage existing relationships and bring key stakeholders and Boards together to discuss the merging of existing planning efforts with the CEDS. This work included a proposal to the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce and discussions with ED organizations throughout the Flint Hills Economic Development District about developing a regional framework that each county could cross-pollinate other planning efforts with the CEDS. Based on these discussions and proposals, the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce agreed to enable the FHRC to utilize the Region Reimagined Plan as a regional framework for the CEDS Plan Update, while at the same time folding the goals of the Pottawatomie County EDC Strategic Plan, the Greater Morris County Development Corporation's Strengths and Weakness Assessment and strategic planning efforts, Junction City / Geary County EDC goals, Wabaunsee County's Office of Economic Development goals, Ignite Emporia's goals

and Chase County Chamber of Commerce's goals into the CEDS under this overarching framework.

Each county within the District will be provided an opportunity to provide input related to the strategies and provide action items and projects related to their community that aligns with an agreed upon framework. In addition, an effort among other Kansas Regional Economic Development Districts are working to incorporate relevant elements of the new Kansas Framework for Growth--statewide economic development plan into each CEDS Update. Each county is discussing county-by-county priorities to fold into the Plan Update, and the CEDS Strategy Committee is in the process of being revamped.

II. Partnership Planning / CEDS Scope, Goals & Accomplishments

Scope Overview

The Flint Hills Regional Council's Partnership Planning Work Program throughout the five-year grant period focused on services to communities within the Flint Hills Economic Development District (FHEDD) including comprehensive planning, technical assistance, projects that assist with capacity building, grant writing and administration, and overall CEDS implementation, planning and coordination. This included regional coordination, as well as, small group focused discussions with a variety of partners related to implementing the 2019 CEDS Plan, and working to update the plan in preparation to submit to EDA in the fall of 2021.

Implementation efforts also entailed implementing and reporting progress of more specific projects as identified in each Partnership Planning Program Year 's Scope of Work including the following goals and projects:

Goal #1 - Regional Economic Development

(CEDS Action 6 - Workforce Development / Attract & Retain Talent /Population)

Project 1.3 - Coordination of Regional Economic Development Issues

Description - Work with the economic development organization and economic development professionals to coordinate a regional approach to economic development issues such as workforce development, recruitment and retention of business, workforce housing and daycare.

Related CEDS Goals

- Action 1. Collaboration and communication with governments, regional institutions and other Flint Hills organizations
- Action 11. Leadership Training / EDA Planning Partnership Grant Goal - Coordination of Regional Economic Development Issues

Major Highlights & Accomplishments

- The Flint Hills Regional Council Director serves as an Ex-Officio Member of the Greater Manhattan Economic Partnership Board of Directors--a non-profit that assists with target industry marketing on behalf of the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce and

the Pottawatomie County EDC, and site selection tools and coordination, as appropriate.

- The FHRC Director meets with the ED organizations in Pottawatomie, Riley, Geary, Wabaunsee, and Morris Counties to ensure coordination and information sharing. Flint Hills Regional Council met both one-on-one and in groups with ED Directors and Chamber of Commerce staff throughout the Economic Development District. These meetings create an opportunity to share information, better understand individual county priorities and how existing initiatives align with regional priorities. In addition, the FHRC staff met with individual community staff and commissions to share funding opportunities, Plan Implementation progress, services FHRC can provide to assist them with their priorities.

Highlight 1.3.a. Communities to Call Home website development & promotion
(Recruitment Tool - Regional Living Options Highlighting Each Community, Commuting Distances to Major Employers, Housing, etc.)

Accomplishment

The Communities to Call Home website supports prospective residents and businesses considering moving to the Flint Hills with information about each community and commuting distances from major employers such as Fort Riley and Kansas State University.

In 2018 through 2020, the Community to Call Home was promoted by FHRC, the Region Reimagined Program Director, Chambers and Economic Development Organizations throughout the region.

In 2020, the Flint Hills Regional Council partnered with the Director of Region Reimagined to include information about the Communities to Call Home website <https://www.flinthillscommunities.org> in packets mailed to hundreds of NBAF employees in Plum Island, New York to provide information about communities in the Flint Hills, as they are trying to decide if they will relocate to Kansas once the NBAF facility construction is complete and operational. The National Bio & Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF) is anticipated to hire between 300-400 employees, of which will live all over the Flint Hills, both within Manhattan, Kansas and surrounding communities within commuting distance. The goal is to promote this site to those making decision about potentially moving to our region. The Manhattan Chamber of Commerce provided ~\$2,000 in shipping cost to mail packets to Plum Island, NY as a Workforce Attraction effort, as well as, the Region Reimagined Director's time expended to collect packet information and mail to NBAF representatives in preparation for a meeting to discuss the transition and relocation plan. (Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce's Funding Source = Advantage Manhattan – Private Investment Fund)

Highlight 1.3.b. Regional Conferences, Forums and Training Institutes

As a way to bring the region together, there is significant effort on the part of the Flint Hills Regional Council, the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce, the Pottawatomie County EDC, the Junction City Chamber of Commerce and the private sector to host events, conferences and training opportunities that promote economic development discussion

and collaboration, drill down further into key issues impacting economic development and identify ways to make progress and work toward solutions.

Throughout the Partnership Planning five-year grant period, regional conferences and training institutes have been hosted by the Flint Hills Regional Council that have been open to the entire seven-county Flint Hills Economic Development District, with the exception of 2020 due to COVID-19 safety precautions.

Annual Flint Hills Leaders Retreat Conference - (CEDS Action 1 & 11)

(Hosted primarily for Riley County, Pottawatomie County and Geary County)

Accomplishments

COVID-19 prevented regional conferences, forums and training institutes from taking place in Year 5 of the Partnership Planning grant, but it did not interfere with planning efforts of the Leaders Retreat.

The Flint Hills Regional Council serves each year on the Planning Committee in partnership with the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce, Junction City Chamber, Wamego Chamber, and Pottawatomie County Economic Development Corporation. FHRC, along with each partner is a featured presenter during the Community Updates portion of the agenda. Approximately 188-250 leaders from throughout the region attend to discuss economic development efforts and challenges impacting the Flint Hills.

Partnership Planning grant funding provides the financial support needed for the FHRC staff to participate on the Planning Committee and to attend and present at the conference. Funding for the event is provided primarily through private investment--averaging ~\$10,250 provided by Business Sponsorships collected through the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce.

In grant year 5, the conference normally would have been hosted in January 2021, but due to COVID-19 was delayed to July 2021, which fell outside grant year 5.

These collaborative efforts assist with discussions, partnerships, and the generation of regional economic development activities, initiatives and priorities throughout the year.

Goal #2 - Support for Rural Areas of the Flint Hills

Project 2.1. Services to Small Communities

The rural communities in the Flint Hills Region need technical assistance, which can be provided through the development of comprehensive planning, capital improvements programming, and human resources consultation.

Accomplishments

The EDA Partnership Planning Grant enabled the Flint Hills Regional Council staff to conduct critical planning services to multiple small communities through the Flint Hills over

the course of the five year grant, in which the planning process served as the catalyst to coordinate community participation in identifying both economic and community development priorities for each community and assisted in developing a vision for how growth should occur over the next 10-20 years.

PLANNING PROJECTS / INITIATIVES WITHIN THE GRANT PERIOD

Comprehensive Plans, Housing Studies and Brownfield Site Assessments & Area Plans – Supporting Multiple Goals within CEDs Plan

Year 5 - EDA Partnership Planning Funded Accomplishments

1. Chase County Housing Conditions Assessment - Completed January 2021

Chase County is within the Flint Hills Economic Development District, but is not a member of the Flint Hills Regional Council. In 2019 and early 2020, FHRC staff agreed to conduct a housing conditions assessment for Chase County Chamber of Commerce in preparation for the formation of a Housing Task Force. FHRC partnered with a Kansas State University Housing Professor, and utilized Partnership Planning grant funding to hire and train two graduate-level interns on how to conduct a housing conditions assessment and to write a report to provide to the Chase County Chamber of Commerce. This effort was to demonstrate the value of the services of the Flint Hills Regional Council, and to seek renewed membership interest, as well as provide continued service to a county within our Flint Hills Economic Development District.

2. City of Saint George Comprehensive Plan (City of Saint George & Pottawatomie County Economic Development Corporation provided match funding) - **Draft Completed in March 2021** (P&Z Commission Approved April 15, 2021 / City Adoption Scheduled for May 13, 2021)

FHRC partnered with Saint George to develop a comprehensive plan, as approved within the EDA Partnership Planning grant scope. City of Saint George and the Pottawatomie County EDC provided funding to FHRC's general fund to support FHRC's match requirement. This effort inspired residents to form committees and work on several key strategies that will assist with future development along Highway 24, improvements to the downtown corridor, community assets improvements that will attract more visitors and at the same time improve the quality of life and retention of Saint George residents.

Project 2.2 - Grant Writing & Planning Initiatives

EDA Partnership Planning Supported FHRC Staff to Apply for Grants from Other Agencies that Supported Additional Planning Projects with Leveraged Funding. Below are the grants awarded.

1. Department of Defense - Office of Economic Adjustment - Community Economic Adjustment Assistance for Compatible Use and Joint Land Use Studies = Multi-Year Grant \$449,465 - Awarded - April 13, 2018 to May 2021

The Flint Hills Regional Council staff actively developed several comprehensive plans using funding from the OEA JLUS Phase I Implementation grant--assisting small communities around Fort Riley to ensure compatible land uses between these communities and the operation of Fort Riley. These efforts support Fort Riley's mission readiness and helps to protect the region's largest economic generator. These plans also help communities with future development opportunities and policies, including economic goals which align with the goals of the CEDS Plan.

Year 5 accomplishments are as follows:

a. City of Ogden Comprehensive Plan - Draft Completed March 2021 (P&Z and City Adopted - May 19, 2021)

2. Regional Brownfield Project Site and Area Planning – (U.S. EPA Community-wide Assessment Coalition grant for Hazardous Substance and Petroleum Brownfields - Three-Year Grant Awarded October 2018 & Closes September 2021 = \$600,000)

Brownfield Advisory Committee meetings were held to identify and prioritize brownfield sites for assessment and potential future redevelopment. To date, 65 sites were nominated and 72 sites have been entered into a Brownfield Inventory Application. Eligibility determination requests for a total of 25 sites were submitted to US EPA and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment for approval to use US EPA Funding. All requests were approved. The Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) was developed and submitted to US EPA for Approval. The document describes protocols to be used as part of sampling and analysis of soil, groundwater, vapor and other media as part of site assessments. Two Area Plans are being developed. 1 - Junction City and 1 in Manhattan--both of which are actively underway, with online story maps / bang the table applications being used for community outreach purposes. Both Area Plans will be completed by September 2021 and are 100% funded by EPA. To date, a total of seven Phase I - Environmental Assessments and two Phase II - Environmental Assessments have been completed.

The Coalition includes Riley, Geary, Morris, and Lyon Counties, as well as, the City of Junction City and the City of Manhattan. Other jurisdictions within the region may participate as well. During this award period, FHRC staff continue to work with jurisdictions throughout the region to identify properties that may be eligible for Environmental Assessments.

Year 5 - Accomplishments

As of September 2020, only 16% of the grant funding had been expended and only a portion of the grant scope had been achieved. Flint Hills Regional Council's new Executive Director worked closely with the contractor and led staff to ensure the scope would be fully implemented and the remaining 84% of the grant funding expended according to the agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency by September 2021. Based on the collective efforts of FHRC staff, the contractor, and our regional partners, FHRC has been successful to outline and implement its game plan to ensure success so that funding opportunities with EPA will continue into the future.

3. EDA - Supplemental Planning Grant for CARES Act Recovery Assistance = \$400,000 Awarded for Recovery and Resiliency Planning Initiatives. - Awarded July 1, 2020 - June 2022

The FHRC will coordinate regional efforts in collaboration with key stakeholders to prevent, prepare for and respond to coronavirus and assist with economic injury response. The FHRC will conduct the following activities:

1. Develop an Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan as part of the CEDS to address the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.
2. Serve as a Regional Disaster Recovery Coordinator role to assist with the implementation of the region's response to the pandemic.
3. Provide technical assistance, as necessary to local governments, businesses, and other stakeholder organizations by increasing capacity to seek grant funding and developing partnerships to provide business recovery training & guidance.
4. Institute the necessary technology and staff support to implement pandemic-response activities, including the development of a needs assessment system and implement website enhancements that assist with recovery initiatives.

13. Department of Defense - Office of Economic Adjustment - Community Economic Adjustment Assistance for Compatible Use and Joint Land Use Studies = \$518,246 - Awarded - July 1, 2020 - December 31, 2021

This grant assists with several planning, economic and community development initiatives that promote compatible civilian development to support the long-term sustainability and operability of military installations and associated ranges, special use airspace, military operations areas, and military training routes. The primary objective of the JLUS Implementation project is to assist each jurisdiction with implementation of the recommendations for the jurisdiction and to protect and preserve military readiness and defense capabilities while supporting continued community economic development high priority recommendations. This grant has a series of scope elements including the following projects:

1. Kansas Wind Turbine Legislation
2. Junction City Housing Condition Assessment
3. Military Installation Resiliency
4. Planning Support for JLUS Recommendations

5. Pottawatomie County Green Valley Transportation Thoroughfare Study
6. Unmanned Aircraft Study Corridor Phase II Project

14. EDA Planning Partnership - 2021-2024 Grant - April 1, 2021 start if awarded - \$420,000

In February 2021, FHRC requested funding from several economic development organizations and the City of Junction City to seek and confirm financial commitments (both cash and in-kind contributions) to meet our 50% Partnership Planning match requirement for the new 2021-2024 application--a challenge that had previously prevented FHRC from expending the full awarded amount. The FHRC submitted a grant application and was awarded a new 2021-2024 Partnership Planning award. (Note: FHRC is in the process of wrapping up the 2016-2021 five- year grant and will be closing it out in full by June 2021.)

15. National Park Service - Rivers, Trail and Conservation Assistance Program - Applied March 1, 2021 - (Awarded April 15, 2021) - Regional Quality of Life and Economic Development Project (Non-Monetary)

The FHRC applied for a non-monetary award to provide technical assistance in developing a regional river and trail plan along the Kansas River. This is for both community and economic development purposes, as it will identify specific improvements that could be made at boat ramps and other public spaces to make better connections to downtown and other key activity areas--generating additional economic benefit and enhancing a community asset that will help to attract and retain talent to our region. This project was ranked #1 in priority among all quality of life project to pursue in Manhattan, as the economic value this project would bring is exponential.

16. Department of Commerce - Arts and Tourism Grant - The Flint Hills Regional Council also worked toward bringing the arts and tourism together by applying for several grant opportunities. An application was accepted, and award was pending when the pandemic hit in March 2020. It was determined by the new Executive Director that FHRC would need to turn down the award due to not having adequate match funding available to meet the grant requirements (\$40,000).

Goal #3 - CEDS Updates

Project 3.1 - Updating the CEDs

Accomplishments

During the five-year grant period, FHRC staff enhanced regional coordination and worked to implement the CEDS both through the Strategy Committee, as well as, through small group focused discussions with a variety of partners. Efforts were made to implement the 2014 CEDS Plan, and both the updating and implementing the 2019 CEDS Plan. In 2020, planning efforts began in preparation for the current plan update process for the 2021 CEDS Plan Update.

The Flint Hills Regional Council is taking advantage of an opportunity to leverage the new Executive Director's existing working relationships with a large network of economic development professionals and private sector stakeholders, and opportunity to form new partnerships and working relationships. Based on the Executive Director's prior role with a three-county economic and community development plan, she was able to leverage existing relationships and bring key stakeholders and Boards together to discuss the merging of existing planning efforts with the CEDS. This work included a proposal to the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce and discussions with ED organizations throughout the Flint Hills Economic Development District about developing a regional framework that each county could cross-pollinate other planning efforts with the CEDS. Based on these discussions and proposals, the Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce agreed to enable the FHRC to utilize the Region Reimagined Plan as the regional framework for the CEDS Plan Update. In addition, an effort among other Kansas Regional Economic Development Districts are working to incorporate relevant elements of the new Kansas Framework for Growth--statewide economic development plan into each CEDS Update. FHRC held multiple meetings with Economic Development professionals in each County within the District based on specific topics and initiatives, including Chase, Geary, Lyon, Morris County, Pottawatomie, Riley and Wabaunsee Counties. Each county discussed county-by-county priorities to fold into the Plan Update, and the CEDS Strategy Committee is currently being revamped to include both the FHRC Executive Committee and representatives from each ED organization/county and more private sector representatives.

The goal is to continue in identifying each county's economic development priorities and as feasible, cross-pollinate with other regional planning efforts. EDA implemented a new CEDS schedule for Kansas, and the FHRC update will be due in September 2021. FHRC is taking advantage of this new due date to prepare an extensive plan update in collaboration with its partners.

VISTA Member Contributions (Providing Technical Assistance – COVID Dashboard Creation)

Beginning in January 2020, an EDA Economic Development Coordinator/VISTA employee was assigned to the Flint Hills Regional Council to provide support in our efforts to implement the CEDS Plan—increasing our overall capacity as an organization. FHRC's VISTA member made improvements to the FHEDD website, the FHRC website, assisted with social media, and designed and updates a COVID-19 dashboard to track active cases throughout a nine-county service area. The VISTA Member resigned for a medical/personal matter.

Other CEDS Implementation Activities & Accomplishments

The new Executive Director worked with regional partners and collectively identified 18 businesses to participate in the Kansas State University, Center for the Advancement of Entrepreneurship to connect businesses with consultation services to have their business assessed and recommendations provided on how to make the business more successful and resilient. The business contact information was provided to the Center in January 2021, for a Spring Semester initiative.

FHRC continues to work with economic development professionals throughout the region to identify their priorities, and how we can provide better support, including assisting with initiatives that assist them to move to their next step and at the same time further the goals of the CEDS plan. FHRC will continue to implement grant programs that assist with redevelopment

opportunities, as well as, support and assist to protect our region's largest economic generator-- Fort Riley and contribute to initiatives in surrounding communities

FHRC launched a new website in January 2021 to better showcase the work being conducted, including information about the Flint Hills Economic Development District, COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Initiatives and Resources, and all FHRC initiatives.

We will continue to serve on the Greater Manhattan Economic Partnership as an ex-officio member to provide updates and provide support as able. The Flint Hills Regional Council's Executive Director also serves on the Kansas State University Career Center Employer Advisory Board, the Manhattan Area Recovery Task Force, Childcare Aware of Eastern Kansas Board of Directors, the Greater Manhattan Community Foundation Trustees, and a Kansas State University Friends of the Library Board of Directors, which assist to create connections and move CEDS initiatives forward.

Overall Difficulties Encountered During This Last Grant Year: The Flint Hills Regional Council acquired debt five years ago, at the same time of accepting this award, and has struggled to pay debt off and still meet match requirements, so the debt has remained stagnant in order to continue to meet match requirements and continue these planning efforts. The Flint Hills Regional Council is working hard to continue to provide significant value to the region, retain and/or grow membership, and identify methods to generate revenue outside of grant funded projects in order to pay down the long-standing debt. For the new grant award, the Executive Director partnered with several economic development organizations for a combination of in-kind and cash match so that FHRC can meet the match requirement with a better plan.

In addition, staff turn-over created periods of lag until new employees could be hired, including the prior Executive Director. The FHRC staff also needed more grant management training, of which existing staff are currently undergoing and/or currently being planned for.