

Appendix B: Recovery and Resiliency Plan

From Valley to Hilltop

The FHEDD Recovery and Resiliency Plan

Background

In 2020 the FHRC was awarded Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) grant funding through the EDA. The awarded CARES grant provided assistance to the region for COVID-19 economic recovery and resiliency efforts, including the creation of a regional recovery and resiliency plan.

COVID-19 has severely impacted the Flint Hills Region, and the road to recovery is anticipated to be long and hard. Our approach to recovery must be both holistic and practical. One of our top two regional strengths, identified in our SWOT analysis, is “unique community character and spirit”. The ongoing pandemic has highlighted this uniqueness and reinforced the notion that a “one size fits all approach” is not the path forward to effective recovery or creating a resilient region. The impact of COVID on our region has yet to be fully realized, however it is apparent that the impacts vary greatly across our region.

The Flint Hills Recovery and Resiliency Plan uses the Strategic Directions as its foundation, proposing cross-cutting strategies to aid in recovery and build a more resilient region:

1. Business Support, Economic Diversification, and Economic Development Infrastructure
2. Talent Attraction and Retention
3. Supporting Innovation and Entrepreneurialism
4. Recovery, Disaster Preparedness, and Resiliency
5. Partnership, Funding Strategies, Plan Implementation

In relation to our Strategic Directions, this plan looks at four primary areas that have been impacted by the ongoing pandemic: 1) Housing, 2) Workforce, 3) Small Businesses and the Local Economy, and 4) Digital Inclusion.

Other Recovery and Resiliency Planning Efforts

After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated impacts to our communities, a number of local efforts were undertaken across our region to help our communities not just survive the pandemic but to come back stronger and more resilient. Several of our downtown organizations and economic development organizations conducted periodic surveys to gauge business confidence, consumer confidence, and overall industry/workforce impacts. Local governments formed steering committees to assess and identify how to effectively and efficiently expend/request COVID-related funds. Additionally, two formalized planning efforts took place, anchored by two of our region's largest communities: Emporia and Manhattan.

Emporia-Lyon County Road to Recovery

In April 2020, partners from across Emporia and Lyon County joined forces to establish the Road to Recovery, to strengthen the local economy in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. Seven teams and two subsets were formed to address specific industries and sectors working to identify and help craft solutions that can assist businesses, organizations, and institutions successfully navigate the new economic and social conditions of our region.

The Road to Recovery effort produced two reports focusing on the following components: 1) Restore and 2) Resiliency, Renewal, and Transformation. The reports outlined each team's findings and proposed actionable strategies as they related to the following areas:

- Leveraging strengths of anchor institutions
- Restarting hospitality and tourism
- Rebuilding nonprofit, faith, and community organizations
- Reviving small businesses
- Protecting arts and creative economy
- Assessing key industries
- Preparing vital infrastructure

The actionable strategies outlined in these reports are instrumental in not only recovery and resiliency efforts in Emporia and Lyon County, but can serve as a tool for other communities throughout our region to help guide their planning efforts. The Road to Recovery also identified some lessons learned throughout the pandemic.

Other Recovery and Resiliency Planning Efforts (continued)

Manhattan Area Recovery Task Force

In April 2020, the Mayor of Manhattan announced the formation of the Manhattan Area Recovery Task Force with the charge to develop a measured and phased path forward for the community. The goal of the Task Force is successful reopening implementation through the transition phases.

To achieve the charge and goal, the focus of the Regional Task Force is to:

1. Facilitate how to make the phased reopening transition successful for multiple business types and organizations as well as for residents and visitors
2. Have broad representation that can help communicate information back to multiple networks and industries
3. Provide input from business and community leaders back to appointed and elected officials
4. Assist in shaping and coordinating consistent, practical information for business owners and individuals about how to safely provide products and services using best practices
5. Work towards and recommend consistent approaches and messaging among Geary, Potawatamie, and Riley Counties

The Task Force produced an "Opening With Care" toolkit for businesses and worked at the end of 2020 to determine lessons learned during the first year of the pandemic to assist with increased resiliency and effective recovery efforts.

Summary of Lessons Learned Identified Through These Planning Efforts:

- Early action was important
- Establishing effective, accurate, and accessible channels of communication is key
- Need to analyze the impact of the shutdown/lockdown to better understand what steps need to be taken in the future
- Technology is critical
- Decisions need to be data-driven when implementing protocols and mandates
- We need to assist small businesses in navigating e-commerce
- Businesses may need to adapt to provide increased flexibility for workers

Strategy Framework 4.1 - Identify and support efforts that assist in creating a more resilient, sustainable region. (responsive)

Action a. - Create a Regional Resiliency Task Force to coordinate planning efforts and to serve as an information-sharing hub (responsive)

The Impact of COVID on the FHEDD

The State of Kansas received \$1.034 billion in Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) dollars from the federal CARES Act to support State, Local and Tribal governments as they confront the COVID-19 pandemic. The investment priorities for these funds were determined by Governor Laura Kelly’s Strengthening People and Revitalizing Kansas (SPARK) Taskforce, which is composed of business, community, and legislative leaders from across Kansas and county governments with input from stakeholders in their communities.

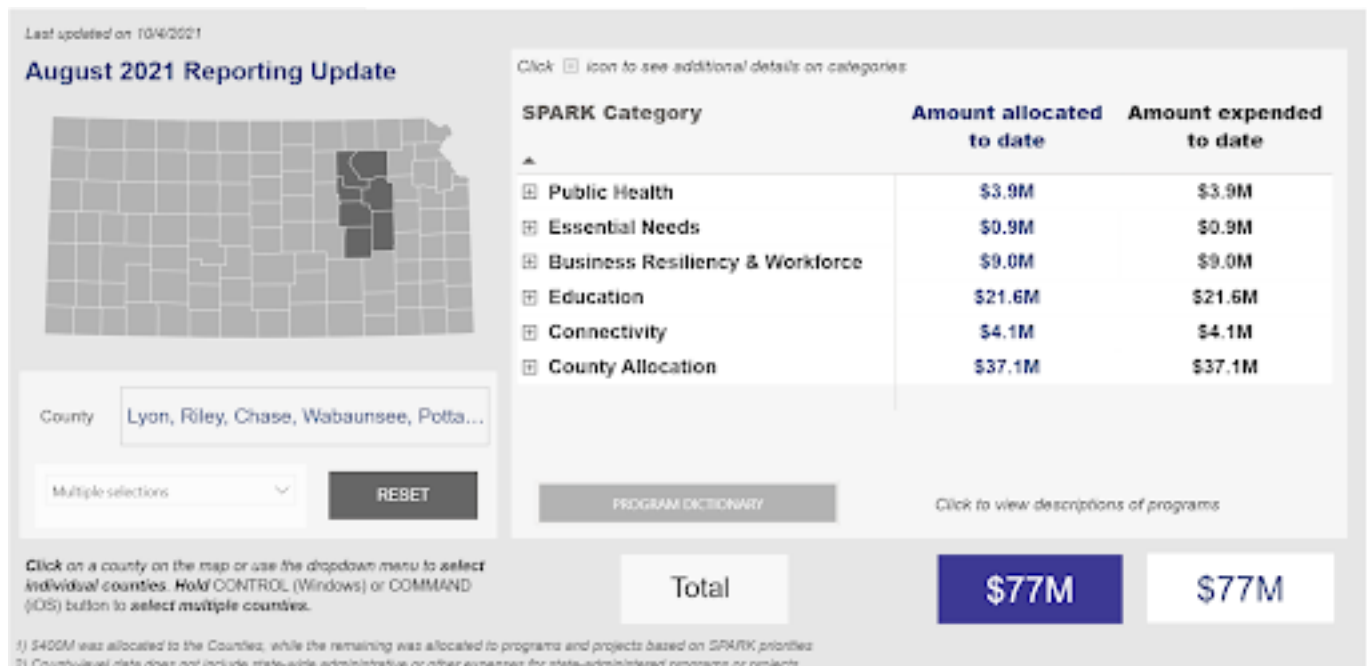
The Flint Hills Region received \$77 million in CRF dollars, with the bulk of those funds being directly allocated to counties. The

Kansas CRF Dashboard provides county-level data about the amount of funds allocated toward each investment priority.

The Regional Economic Impact Analysis will help guide data-driven discussions on the impact COVID has had on our regional economy. Every community in our region is unique, so it is imperative that we collect data that will accurately represent how each community was impacted. Despite the unique challenges each community faces, there are some common areas that were impacted: 1) **Housing**, 2) **Workforce**, 3) **Small Business**, and 4) **Digital Inclusion**.

▼ Map 1.1 FHEDD CRF Allocation

Source: <https://covid.ks.gov/covid-data/>



The Impact of COVID on the FHEDD (continued)

Housing

Housing affordability has been identified through our SWOT as our region’s primary threat. Data provided by the Kansas Office of Judicial Administration in May 2021 indicated that the FHEDD saw a 20 percent increase in eviction filings per year over a five year span ending in Fiscal Year (FY) 19, with a 24 percent increase between FY 18 and FY 19. This general trend, coupled with the economic downturn associated with the COVID-19 pandemic leading to increased housing prices, job uncertainty, and high inflation, makes this threat even more significant than before.

▼ **Figure 1.1. Eviction Filings by Fiscal Year**

Source: Kansas Office of Judicial Administration

District	County	FY 15	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19
2	Pottawatomie	28	29	20	11	33
2	Wabaunsee	2	3	1	2	2
5	Chase	0	0	1	2	1
5	Lyon	83	61	75	89	109
8	Geary	172	208	229	161	202
8	Morris	3	4	7	9	4
21	Riley	375	288	281	334	408

The Eviction Lab at Princeton University produces rigorous and novel research about the causes and consequences of the affordable housing crisis and housing instability in the United States. Eviction Lab analyzed housing policies across the nation from March 15, 2020 to June 30, 2021 and generated a COVID-19 Housing Policy Scorecard for each state; Kansas received a score of 1.43 out of 5.00.

Eviction Lab acknowledged that Kansas enacted tenancy preservation measures through focusing on housing stabilization. On March 15, 2021 the Kansas Emergency Rental Assistance (KERA) Program began accepting applications. KERA provides rent, utility, and internet assistance to households experiencing financial hardship as a result of the COVID pandemic. Landlords and tenants apply via a joint online process. If the application is approved, the landlord or service

provider receives funds directly from KERA and applies KERA funds to the applicant’s account. Approved applicants are eligible for up to 12 months of assistance.

Kansas Housing Resources Corporation reported that 420 KERA applications have been paid throughout the FHEDD.

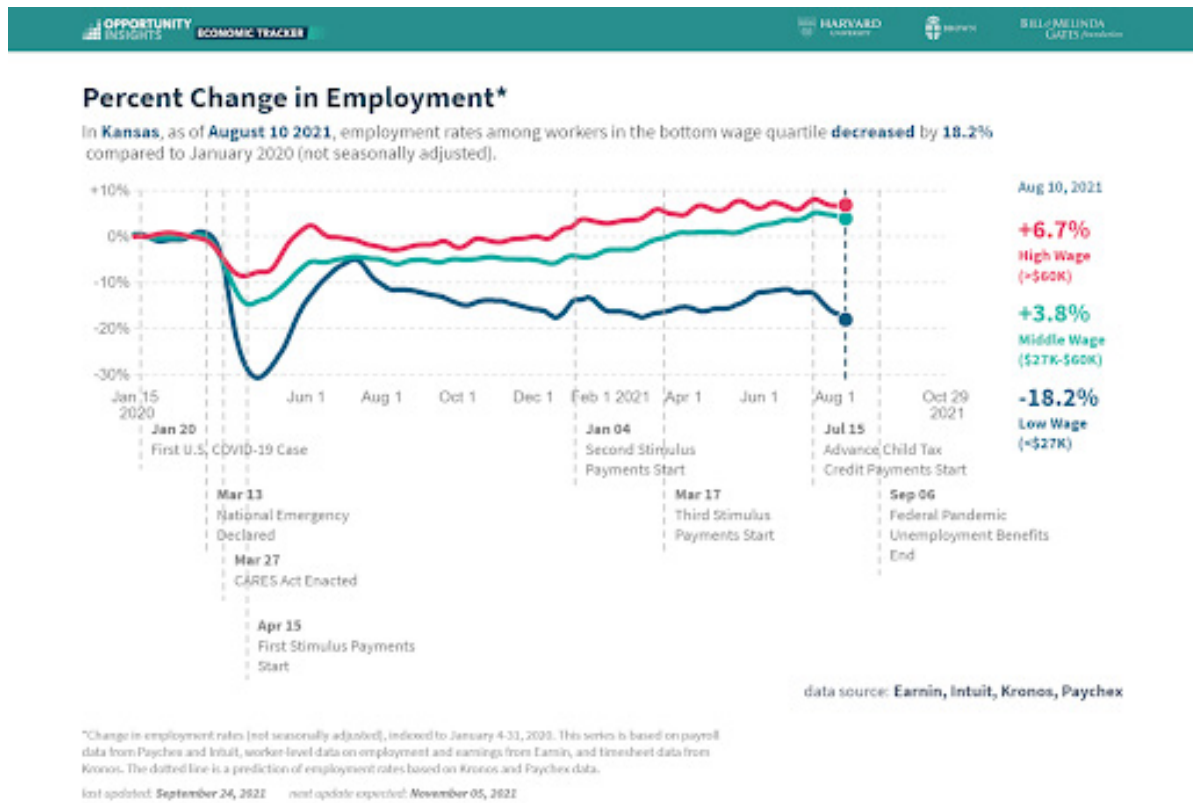
County Name	Total Applications in Process as of 9/7/21	Total Applications Paid as of 9/7/21
Chase	0	0
Geary	171	132
Lyon	61	40
Morris	6	4
Pottawatomie	16	14
Riley	182	205
Wabaunsee	1	1
Total Applications as of 9/7/21	459	420

The Impact of COVID on the FHEDD (continued)

Workforce

Our SWOT analysis and Business Confidence Survey both indicate that workforce issues threaten the resilience of our region. Unemployment across the nation, state, and our region peaked during the onset of the pandemic. Through a combination of steady-state and responsive actions associated with our Plan’s Strategic Direction 2: Talent Attraction and Retention our goal is to build a resilient workforce and resilient economy.

▼ **Figure 1.2. Kansas Unemployment**
Unemployment chart overlaid with COVID-19 timeline

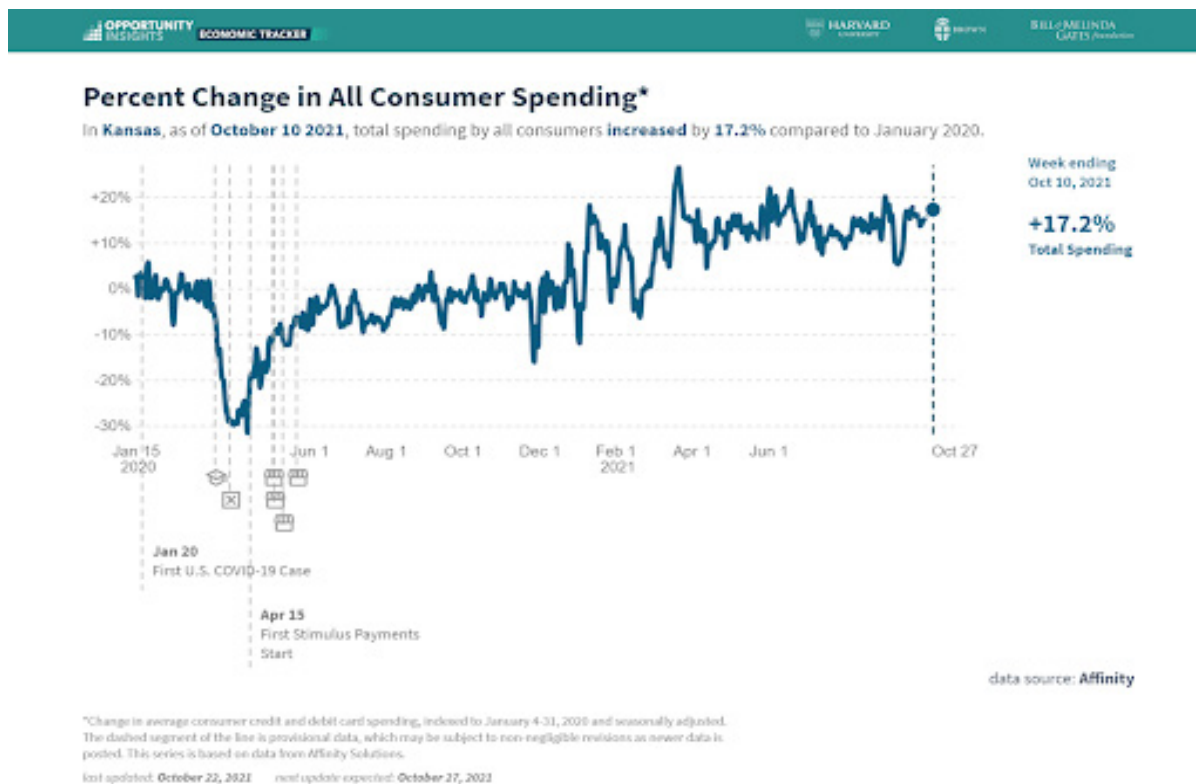


The Impact of COVID on the FHEDD (continued)

Small Business

On March 30, 2020, the State of Kansas enacted a “Stay Home” Order. Shortly thereafter, consumer spending throughout Kansas declined approximately 30 percent from January 2020. Although data show that as of October 2021, consumer spending in Kansas has increased over 17 percent from January 2020, our small businesses still need assistance to recover and thrive.

▼ **Figure 1.2. Kansas Consumer Spending**
Consumer Spending chart overlaid with COVID-19 timeline



\$77 million CRF dollars were allocated throughout the FHEDD; \$9 million was directed towards Business Resiliency and Workforce. Business Resiliency and Workforce allocations were used to support five areas: 1) workforce development, 2) securing local food systems, 3) remote learning, 4) private colleges, and 5) business retention and expansion. Almost 85 percent of those funds supported workforce development and business retention and expansion initiatives.

The Impact of COVID on the FHEDD (continued)

Digital Inclusion

Our SWOT survey results show that an almost equal number of respondents identify access to broadband as a regional strength as those who identify broadband access as a regional weakness. The 2015-2019 American Community Survey reports that 11.4 percent of households in the Flint Hills Region do not have access to the internet. This is slightly lower than that of Kansas, in which 14.5 percent of households are reported as not having access to the internet. In today's technology-driven society, purely having internet access is not sufficient; quality of access is key to a strong, resilient region.

The issue of broadband in rural America has been brought to the forefront at the local, state, and national levels as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The State of Kansas has prioritized this issue and established the Kansas Office of Broadband Development in 2020 to help ensure all Kansans have the opportunity to live, work, learn and compete in a global economy by improving universal access to quality, affordable and reliable broadband. This prioritization has led to the injection of funds into local communities to bolster not only their access to broadband, but their access to quality broadband.

Just over five percent of the total CRF dollars allocated throughout the FHEDD were applied to broadband connectivity, which entails expansion of broadband infrastructure (fiber, fixed wireless, etc.) through grants to reach areas currently unable to access minimally adequate services (residential: $\geq 25/3$ Mbps).

As school, work, and services (such as health and mental health) shift to adjust to the post-pandemic world, broadband access will play a key role in the success of our region's economic development efforts.

Strategy Framework 1.3 - Provide a sufficient supply of economic-growth-supportive infrastructure.

Action b1. -Engage service providers to assess the COVID-related broadband service expansions and identify remaining gaps in service or opportunities to improve quality of service. (responsive)

Cross-Cutting Strategies

Several resilience-related actions are associated with strategic directions other than Recovery, Disaster Preparedness, and Resiliency. These actions are considered cross-cutting and help to ensure that resilience is embedded throughout our economic development strategies.

Strategic Direction 1:

Business Support, Economic Diversification, and Economic Development Infrastructure

Strategy Framework 1.2. - Support and facilitate the retention and expansion of existing regional businesses

Action b. - Conduct a Regional Business Confidence Survey (responsive)

From January 8, 2021, to February 5, 2021, FHRC conducted a Business Confidence Survey, receiving responses from 127 businesses/organizations from across the Flint Hills Economic Development District. The goal of this survey was to identify what funding, tools, or resources were needed to help our businesses in the short-term, be prepared to pursue new economic recovery funding and resources that may help to support them in their recovery and resiliency efforts, and help our businesses and communities be more resilient in the future.

The survey was distributed by local chambers, economic development professionals, community members, and FHRC staff. Several downtown organizations and economic development organizations throughout our region conducted periodic surveys to gauge business confidence, consumer confidence, and overall industry/workforce impacts. A coordinated effort was made to ensure the Business Confidence Survey was complementary to these efforts and not duplicative.

Our survey responses came from a large cross-section of businesses/organizations from across the Flint Hills Economic Development District, including both large and small businesses. Industries represented include many impacted by efforts to help “flatten the curve” and slow the spread of COVID-19: retail, food services, personal services, events, arts, entertainment, and recreation.

Cross-Cutting Strategies (continued)

Action b. - Conduct a Regional Business Confidence Survey (continued)

Initial findings indicated that:

- Losing business and customer traffic were the biggest concerns for respondents' organizations and employees
- COVID exposure of staff and employees (quarantines, staff turnover) and target market has avoided going out were the most cited impacts
- Cumulatively, over 25 percent of respondents were unsure or did not feel like they had the resources and information to bring employees back to work safely
- Faster access to vaccines was the most cited tool or resource that would most help their businesses survive the pandemic and be able to thrive during recovery
- Marketing/social media marketing training was the most cited training/technical assistance category to help respondents' businesses to be more resilient
- 20 percent of respondents plan to create a social media presence and/or increase marketing

Despite the challenges the pandemic posed to our local economy and business community, the survey indicated that seven of the respondents represented businesses that opened during the pandemic, highlighting the resiliency of the entrepreneurial spirit of our region. Survey results were shared with the public via an online dashboard and summary report.

Action c. - Conduct an annual follow-up Business Confidence Survey in January 2022 (responsive)

Action d. - Provide access to business training opportunities (steady-state)

The Flint Hills Regional Council became an affiliate member of Kansas Main Street in 2021. This membership provides interested parties throughout the FHEDD with the opportunity to attend business-related training sessions. The first training session was centered on social media, complementing the feedback we received from the Business Confidence Survey.

Cross-Cutting Strategies (continued)

Strategic Direction 2:

Talent Attraction and Retention

Strategy Framework 2.1. - Develop medical education capacity in the region and increase support for mental health services.

Action a.-Continue to facilitate the Kansas Eighteen-County Multi-Regional Healthcare Growth Cluster (responsive)

In 2021, the Kansas Eighteen-County, Multi-Regional Healthcare Growth Cluster was established. The Growth Cluster is charged with addressing the critical shortage of healthcare workers through the creation of a robust, innovative talent pipeline--bringing together public and private sector investment to create a holistic wraparound approach to expand training capacity, and provide equitable access to both physical and mental healthcare services across rural Kansas and ultimately across the nation at one of the most critical times in U.S. history. To meet this charge, the FHRC submitted a Build Back Better Regional Challenge concept proposal on behalf of the Growth Cluster.

Strategy Framework 2.2. Continue to enhance the capacity and productivity of the region's pre-K to 20 educational institutions and other training programs geared to enhance employability skills of the emerging, transitional and current workforce.

Action a. -Conduct a regional Skills Gap Analysis to quantitatively identify how effectively the region is producing the talent necessary to meet the region's future occupational demand (steady-state)

Our SWOT identifies several threats to the resiliency and strength of our region's economy, such as inadequate workforce, reduction in forces, and loss of rural jobs. In addition to our SWOT, the Community Impacts Associated with Army Personnel Reductions at Fort Riley (CIAR) has highlighted workforce needs as a priority, specifically related to addressing skills gaps, career readiness training, job placement, and retention of separating personnel from Fort Riley. One way to address these threats and work towards becoming a more resilient region is to conduct a regional Skills Gap Analysis.

In July 2021, FHRC issued an RFP calling for qualified contractors to conduct the regional Skills Analysis to define the unique skill shapes, roles, and the particular skill gaps in our region. After completing an open and competitive process and obtaining the FHRC Board of Directors' approval, FHRC entered a contract with Emsi Burning Glass in October 2021 to conduct this analysis. The Skills Analysis is anticipated to be completed by April 2022.

Cross-Cutting Strategies (continued)

Strategic Direction 2:

Talent Attraction and Retention

Strategy Framework 2.9 - Support the continuation of enhanced online tools for individuals to connect their skills to employment opportunities specifically within our seven-county region.

Action a. -Establish a regional workforce hub (steady-state)

In July 2021, FHRC issued an RFP calling for qualified contractors to procure and launch a software system that would serve as a regional workforce hub. After completing an open and competitive process and obtaining the FHRC Board of Directors' approval, FHRC entered a contract with Emsi Burning Glass in October 2021 to develop this software system. The FHEDD chose Emsi Burning Glass' SkillFit to allow individuals to search and browse local careers, obtain relevant labor market information, and see the related education and training requirements/offering. The FHEDD's goal for this web application is to create a more resilient region through aiding talent attraction and retention efforts by assessing a worker's career interests and competencies and connecting those skills and competencies with relevant job postings or educational opportunities. This system combines job searching, career exploration, upskilling, and skills mapping for workers to have a holistic view of career opportunities throughout our region. Additionally, SkillFit will provide FHEDD decision-makers with insights on these data points to help guide decisions on gaps in training offerings, business opportunities, etc.

SkillFit launched October 29, 2021 on the Flint Hills Regional Councils [Skills2Careers webpage](#).

Strategic Direction 4:

Recovery, Disaster Preparedness and Resiliency

Strategy Framework 4.1. - Identify and support efforts that assist in creating a more resilient, sustainable region.

Action b. - Economic Modeling Information (responsive)

To make data-driven decisions we must have access to current, quality data. In July 2021, FHRC issued an RFP calling for qualified contractors to provide a software system that would provide the region with economic modeling information to help guide recovery and resiliency decisions and include in regional reports and plans. After completing an open and competitive process and obtaining the FHRC Board of Directors' approval, FHRC entered a contract with Emsi Burning Glass in October 2021 to obtain access to their Developer software application.

Cross-Cutting Strategies (continued)

Strategic Direction 2:

Talent Attraction and Retention

Strategy Framework 4.3 - Analyze the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through an economic impact study to better understand how we can be more resilient in the future.

Action a. -Conduct a regional Economic Impact Analysis (steady-state)

In July 2021, FHRC issued an RFP calling for qualified contractors to conduct an economic impact analysis to evaluate the impact COVID-19 has had on the regional workforce. After completing an open and competitive process and obtaining the FHRC Board of Directors' approval, FHRC entered a contract with Emsi Burning Glass in October 2021 to conduct this analysis.

The FHEDD Economic Impact Analysis (EIA) will provide data and insights on components such as county-level unemployment rates, industry and occupational-level job postings, county-level COVID-19 index and how it affects industries throughout the region, and industry-level job posting index. These data will lay the foundation for the EIA with the ultimate goal of providing the FHEDD with the information necessary to understand how to develop resilient strategies to address business support, economic diversification, and economic development infrastructure.

EIA work has already been started, with a kickoff meeting taking place in December 2021. It is estimated the EIA will be completed by February 2022.

Cross-Cutting Strategies (continued)

Strategic Direction 5:

Partnerships, Funding Strategy Development, Plan Implementation

Strategy Framework 5.1 - Create partnerships, leverage resources and obtain grant funding to move priorities forward

Action a. -Develop regional hub to facilitate dialogue between economic development professionals, local government officials, and other stakeholders regarding COVID investments and allocations. (responsive)

Throughout our region, local government officials and economic development professionals indicated that it would be beneficial to have more detailed information about how their counterparts across the region utilized COVID-related funds.

The Kansas CRF Investment Dashboard helps to provide high level detail about where funds were allocated. The Kansas Association of Counties (KAC) has created a Listserv for local government officials to exchange specific questions, feedback, and information regarding COVID-related funds. These are valuable resources that can be scaled to our region to help enhance communication, identify common ground, and possibly assist with developing holistic funding strategies throughout our region.

Strategy Framework 5.3 - Utilize the regional needs assessment system for identified unfunded needs so that FHRC and regional partners can assist in developing funding strategies.

Action a. -Create an online Needs Assessment System (responsive)

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the lack of fully scoped projects. It also brought to light other projects that did not fit within the confines of current funding sources or lacked funding strategies. In March 2021, FHRC issued an RFP calling for qualified contractors to develop a web-based Regional Needs Assessment System. The goal of the Needs Assessment System is to provide the efficient and safe collection and ranking of unfunded needs as it relates to regional recovery and resiliency and overall economic and community development needs that will contribute to recovery and resiliency for our region. The Needs Assessment System will provide the FHEDD with the tool necessary to identify unfunded needs, prioritize those needs, and pursue appropriate funding strategies. The Regional Needs Assessment System was launched October 29, 2021. Training on how communities can submit their unfunded needs will be conducted throughout the remainder of the year and as needed.