

2021 REAP Yearly Review

Vision

A connection between communities in South Central Kansas to convene partners for collaboration to develop regional initiatives and strategies to promote economic growth, job expansion & workforce development, and to give local governments an organized forum to identify policy priorities and take joint actions.

Mission

Provide a strong voice for the region at the state and national levels, advance greater economic prosperity through regional cooperation, and address issues that cross governmental boundaries.

With a solid work plan in place, REAP staff and members worked to enhance and increase collaboration with the federal and state legislative delegations, as well as regional organizations, councils of governments and education institutions in south central Kansas. Through combined efforts we have worked tirelessly to mobilize resources in fighting the unprecedented global health, social, and economic crises. Continued cooperation with governments and private and public sector partners, is key to maintaining a sustainable path of recovery and development for our region.

In January, REAP co-hosted the South Central Kansas Legislative Delegation's (SCKLD) Annual Meeting and Public Forum. Important legislative and policy issues that were to be addressed during the 2021 legislative session were identified. For those key issues (education and workforce development, behavioral health, and regional infrastructure) that are shared as priorities among and between organizations in South-Central Kansas, a coordinated awareness and advocacy strategy was developed.

During the 2021 state legislative session, REAP staff coordinated many virtual meetings and events for the SCKLD. The purpose of these meetings is to encourage collaboration and education to solve complex state policy issues. Meetings included: Kansas Power Alliance, Elected Leadership Summit, Kansas Association of Nurse Anesthetists, rural Kansas hospitals, aviation and manufacturing, industrial hemp, behavioral health and substance abuse, criminal justice reform, and workforce development.

In March, REAP members approved a change to the REAP bylaws enable education institutions membership in REAP. Expanding REAP memberships to educational institutions not only increases REAP revenue, but it enhances collaboration between REAP members and educational institutions

on key policy issues, regional initiatives and strategies that promote economic growth, job expansion and workforce development, through the sharing of resources and expertise. New education institution members include: Wichita State University, Friends University, Cowley Community College, USD 259 Wichita, USD 265 Goddard, and USD 375 Circle.

REAP is represented and engaged on the following boards and committees: Covid-19 Community Task Force, K-254 Corridor Development Association, South Central Kansas Transportation Task Force, Wichita/Sedgwick County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition, Childcare Advocacy Task Force, WAMPO, Wichita Airport Advisory Board, and Wichita Transit Advisory Board.

Through combined efforts with both public and private partners on the South Central Kansas Transportation Task Force, the REAP region was able to identify and prioritize transportation projects in our region. The North Junction, where I-235, I-135, K-96 and K-254 connect, was recognized as the top priority project and was awarded both state and federal funds to complete the Gold Phase of the multi-phase project. Completing the North Junction project will provide travel time savings of \$127 million, safety savings of \$4.6 million resulting from reduced crashes, and the creation of 1,220 jobs.

The Wichita/Sedgwick County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition is in the process of formulating a five-year plan to address mental health, substance abuse and homelessness in South Central Kansas. The three goals it hopes to achieve are:

1. Access to care to allow patients to get services they need
2. Coordination, communication and collaboration between service providers, and
3. Have enough qualified employees in Wichita to take care of mental-health patients

REAP will continue to encourage the legislature and administration to consider additional investments in south central Kansas designed to address the treatment of mental health and advocate for additional and innovative solutions to combat, treat and prevent addiction to opioids and other drugs.

In early 2020, a workgroup was established to address child care capacity in the region as it directly impacts workforce sustainability. Based on the most recent 2019 Childcare Supply Demand Report, 11-20 children are vying for every one childcare opening in Sedgwick County. Before Covid-19 impacted the region, existing licensed centers/providers had the capacity to accept only about 45% of the potential demand for children under six years of age needing care. The Covid pandemic further amplified the childcare crisis. Many child care centers closed to prevent the spread of the disease and the physical, emotional, and economic impacts on providers, families, and workplaces, have added additional stressors. While some funding relief has been identified, more investment is needed.

Through participation on WAMPO, Airport and Transit advisory boards, REAP remains vested and engaged in regional transportation projects and initiatives. REAP staff and members have provided

valuable input on policy and strategic long-term development issues affecting our airports and regional transit system.

REAP hosted three regional convenings in 2021; one virtual and two in-person. The focus of the convenings were priority issues identified by REAP members:

1. Role of the Agriculture Industry on Economic Recovery - Agriculture directly contributes approximately \$9.3 billion to the south central Kansas economy and 25,757 jobs;
2. Impact of Higher Education on Economic Recovery & Growth – Higher education significantly impacts business and workforce development;
3. The Role of Regional Collaboration in Creating, Developing, and Maintaining Mental Health and Substance Abuse Care - Reaching out to all local and regional partners for cooperation and action to ensure everyone is working toward a common goal

In 2020, REAP was alerted to action taken by the Equus Beds Groundwater Management District 2 (GMD2) Board of Directors. At their annual meeting in August 2020, the GMD2 members removed the last remaining municipal representative from its board. The GMD charges annual water use and land assessments to finance their operations. The water use assessment fee is applied on a per acre-foot of water basis (1 acre-foot = 325,851 gallons), and the land assessment is applied on a per acre basis. Assessment rate caps, established by the Kansas Legislature, have experienced multiple increases over time. The most recent change was in 2018, when the legislature increased the assessment rate for water use from \$1 per acre-foot to \$2 per acre-foot. The land assessment rate remained at \$0.05/acre. In 2019, GMD2 increased the fees being assessed water users in the REAP area from \$1.10/acre-foot to the maximum cap limit of \$2.00/acre-foot (82% rate hike). It is important that our members have input on how much is assessed and for what purposes. REAP staff and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members continue to collaborate with other regional organizations, state legislators and water policy experts to draft legislation that will ensure municipal governments are fairly represented on the GMD2 Board.

Regional collaborations is hard work. In order to be successful, the leadership of every REAP member needs to be involved and continually supportive of a successful outcome. Many of the challenges facing our communities have no jurisdictional boundaries and are of a scale and complexity beyond the resources, capacity, and expertise of any single city to tackle on its own. Only by working together, across jurisdictions, can there be possibilities for action and change.