

EDA Policy Academy Report

Transforming Economic Development in Kansas

Funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and implemented by the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness, the Academy provides an opportunity for improved returns on investment through developing policies that are in the best interests of their constituents. Commerce and SCKEDD will be joined in the process by economic development representatives from all seven EDA-designated districts (EDDs) in the state, two universities and other stakeholders across Kansas.

Executive Summary and Value Proposition



**Create dynamic,
inclusive and
actionable
economic
development
strategies.**

In January 2023, the Kansas Department of Commerce (KDC) embarked on a transformative journey through the EDA Policy Academy, a pilot program that provides an opportunity for improved returns on investment through developing policies that are in the best interests of their constituents with a vision to, “Create dynamic, inclusive, and actionable economic development strategies that align each region’s assets to grow vibrant communities, enhance our competitive edge, and accelerate economic prosperity throughout the state.”

Leveraging the resources provided by the EDA Policy Academy, our agency fortified its partnerships with state economic development districts (EDDs). This strategic collaboration ensured that we harnessed the best practices, insights, and tools available to drive economic growth and sustainability.

Recognizing the significance of direct engagement, we prioritized creating capacity for in-person meetings. This initiative facilitated representation from each EDD, ensuring that diverse perspectives were integrated into our strategic planning processes. Such engagement mechanisms enriched our understanding of regional nuances, challenges, and opportunities.

Our strategy development prioritized the establishment and enhancement of communication channels among local, regional, and state partners. This proactive approach aimed to foster transparent dialogue, share knowledge, and co-create solutions.

Background/Operating Environment

Prior to the Academy, the relationship between the State of Kansas and its seven EDA-designated EDDs was characterized by a lack of collaboration and strategic vision. There was no active state-level association of EDDs, which meant that there was no unified voice or platform for these entities to collaborate effectively. This absence of coordination led to a fragmented approach to economic development planning. Additionally, feelings of isolation existed among rural areas, particularly in western Kansas, due to perceived neglect and disparities in access to resources compared to metropolitan areas.

A proposal was submitted to participate in the Academy to address the challenges faced by Kansas in economic development planning and collaboration. The launch of the Framework for Growth in February 2021 highlighted the need for educating partners and aligning economic development strategies across the state. Recognizing the lack of a cohesive approach, the EDDs, along with KDC, identified the Academy as a potential forum to discuss and address these challenges. The goal was to foster collaboration, bridge the perceived divide between urban and rural areas, and establish a stronger, more unified economic development strategy for the state.

Several factors drove the submission of the proposal, including:

- **Lack of Collaboration:** Historically, there was a lack of collaboration among economic development entities, resulting in misaligned planning efforts.
- **Geographical Differences:** The geographical diversity across Kansas, with distinct challenges faced by rural and urban areas, highlighted the need for a tailored approach to economic development.
- **Perceived Neglect:** Rural areas, particularly in western Kansas, felt neglected compared to metropolitan areas, leading to feelings of isolation and resentment.
- **Complexity in Service Coordination:** Frustrations among EDDs and stakeholders regarding which office to contact for specific services created delays, confusion, and mistrust.
- **Population Distribution:** Nearly half of the state's population resides in rural and frontier counties, emphasizing the importance of addressing the unique needs of these areas.

The proposal development was led by the EDDs in collaboration with the KDC. At a January 2023 meeting involving all EDDs and KDC, there was a strong desire expressed to reboot the state-level association of EDDs. This collective effort aimed to present a unified voice and platform for regional cooperation and development. While specific individuals or organizations may have spearheaded the proposal development, it was a collaborative effort involving multiple stakeholders committed to promoting economic development and prosperity across Kansas.

Team Members and Affiliation

Our key team consisted of members from universities, state agencies, and economic development districts.

Jeff Tucker
Executive Director, Technology Development Institute (TDI)
Kansas State University

Expertise & Experience: With over 18 years leading the EDA University Center at Kansas State University, Jeff brings a wealth of experience in tech-based economic development. His extensive background includes 5 years as an SBA Regional Innovation Cluster Manager and project management across federal economic and workforce development grants, including collaborations with EDA, SBA, and USDA-Rural Development.

Key Contributions: Jeff's leadership and expertise have been pivotal in steering technology-based economic development initiatives, fostering innovation, and cultivating strategic partnerships at both state and federal levels.

Matt Godinez
Director of Performance and Programming
Kansas Department of Commerce

Expertise & Experience: Matt boasts over 8 years in Economic Development and Community Development Management, holding executive director positions across state, local, and regional levels. His commitment to professional growth was evident when he achieved the Master of Economic Development Practitioner designation from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2022.

Key Contributions: Matt's multifaceted experience and academic achievements have been instrumental in enhancing performance, driving strategic initiatives, and fostering collaboration within the economic development landscape.

Brandon Hutton
Director of Advanced Technology
Kansas Department of Commerce

Expertise & Experience: With over 13 years in STEM education, youth development, and workforce development, Brandon brings a unique blend of expertise. His proficiency in grant writing, reviewing, and management spans local, state, and federal levels, further solidified by his master's degree in Instructional Technology from FHSU in 2023.

Key Contributions: Brandon's leadership in advanced technology initiatives has facilitated innovation, workforce development, and strategic grant management, positioning Kansas at the forefront of technological advancement.

Stephanie Marsh
Grant Team Manager
South Central Economic Development District (SCKEDD)

Expertise & Experience: Since May 2022, Stephanie has spearheaded SCKEDD's Grants Department, leveraging over 5 years of nonprofit experience, coupled with a background in Human Resources and Contracts. Her department's focus on enhancing the quality of life in rural Kansas communities through strategic grant administration underscores her commitment to community development.

Key Contributions: Stephanie's leadership in grant management and community engagement has fostered collaboration, resource allocation, and sustainable development across rural communities in Kansas.

Kayla Savage
Director of the Community Engagement
Kansas Department of Commerce

Expertise & Experience: With 14 years in nonprofit management and community development, Kayla oversees a diverse portfolio encompassing Kansas Main Street, Creative Arts Industries Commission, Community Service Tax Credits, and more. Her extensive tenure with the state of Kansas, coupled with her leadership roles across various boards, exemplifies her dedication to community enhancement.

Key Contributions: Kayla's multifaceted leadership within the Community Development Division has driven impactful initiatives, promoted cultural enrichment, and strengthened community partnerships, ensuring sustainable growth and prosperity across Kansas.

The team's diverse expertise, leadership acumen, and unwavering commitment to economic and community development have been instrumental in driving strategic alignment, fostering collaboration, and advancing Kansas's economic prosperity and quality of life through the EDA Policy Academy. Their collaborative efforts reflect a synergistic approach, leveraging individual strengths to achieve collective impact and sustainable growth across the state.



Strategic Elements

Collaboration

The Kansas home team collaborated through a combination of virtual and in-person meetings, playing a pivotal role in shaping the strategic elements outlined below. Informed by valuable insights gleaned directly from the voices of the EDDs, this data formed the bedrock of the development process for these crucial elements. The culmination of this collaborative effort was expertly presented to a wider audience during the impactful June in-person meeting, underscoring the team's commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and the advancement of strategic initiatives.

Our Vision

Create dynamic, inclusive, and actionable economic development strategies that align each region's assets to grow vibrant communities, enhance our competitive edge, and accelerate economic prosperity throughout the state.

Goals

- Re-building relationships with EDDs
- Creating stronger communication channels for EDDs to share resources and information
- Building internal capacity to continue pushing the work forward



The Policy Academy Action Plan

Goal 1: Re-building relationships with EDDs

Conduct Relationship Assessment:

- Initiate a comprehensive assessment of the current state of relationships between KDC and EDDs.
- Identify specific challenges, concerns, and areas for improvement through stakeholder feedback and surveys.

Facilitate Collaborative Workshops:

- Organize workshops or forums that bring together representatives from KDC and EDDs to openly discuss challenges and expectations.
- Create a platform for open dialogue, ensuring that all voices are heard, and concerns are addressed.

Establish Relationship Liaisons:

- Assign relationship liaisons within the KDC who will be dedicated points of contact for each EDD.
- Foster personalized communication and support channels to build trust and strengthen individual relationships.

Implement Joint Initiatives:

- Collaboratively identify and implement joint initiatives or projects that demonstrate a shared commitment to economic development.
- These initiatives can serve as catalysts for rebuilding relationships and creating a sense of common purpose.

Goal 2: Creating Stronger Communication Channels for EDD

Develop KDC Grant Calendar:

- Establish a centralized grant calendar accessible to all EDDs, detailing available grants, deadlines, and application procedures.
- Ensure regular updates and communication about funding opportunities to facilitate resource-sharing.

Frequent In-person and Virtual Meetings:

- Plan yearly in-person and more frequent virtual meetings between KDC and EDDs.
- Provide platforms for real-time communication, information sharing, and collaborative discussions on economic development priorities.

Utilize Social Media Platforms:

- Experiment with and leverage social media platforms to share information regularly.
- Identify platforms that resonate with EDDs and create a consistent content strategy for timely updates and engagement.

Goal 3: Building Internal Capacity within KDC

Recruitment of Sector Development Specialist:

- Actively recruit and onboard a Sector Development Specialist with expertise in fostering partnerships with EDDs.
- Ensure the specialist has a clear mandate to continue the work initiated through the EDA Policy Academy.

Integration within the Office of Innovation:

- House the EDA Policy Academy work within the Office of Innovation to provide a dedicated and structured environment for ongoing efforts.
- Appoint Brandon Hutton, a member of the home team, to supervise the Sector Development Specialist role and ensure continuity.
- Capacity-building Workshops:
- Conduct internal workshops and training sessions for KDC staff to enhance their skills in collaborative partnership-building.
- Equip staff with the necessary tools to effectively engage with EDDs and contribute to the collaborative economic development agenda.

Regular Review and Adaptation:

Regular Review and Adaptation:

- Establish a regular review process to assess the internal capacity-building initiatives.
- Adapt strategies based on feedback, lessons learned, and emerging needs to ensure continuous improvement.
- By implementing this action plan, the Kansas Department of Commerce can strategically work towards rebuilding relationships, creating robust communication channels, and enhancing internal capacity to drive sustainable economic development in collaboration with EDDs..

Members of the home team recognized the critical importance of rebuilding relationships with EDDs as the foundation for collaborative success. Strengthening these relationships ensures a cohesive and united approach, fostering a sense of shared purpose and trust that is essential for effective economic development initiatives. The goal of creating stronger communication channels resonated deeply with the home team as it served as a conduit for seamless information exchange between the KDC and EDDs. This enhanced communication fosters a more connected and informed network, enabling timely sharing of resources, opportunities, and updates. Lastly, building internal capacity within KDC was deemed crucial by the home team to sustain the momentum of collaborative efforts. By recruiting a dedicated Sector Development Specialist and integrating the EDA Policy Academy work within the Office of Innovation, the team aims to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of ongoing initiatives, solidifying KDC's commitment to long-term economic development success.

Timeline of Team's Activity Noting Accomplishments

April 2023

- CREC Meeting in Virginia: The month kicks off with an impactful gathering at the CREC Meeting in Virginia, where key stakeholders converge to discuss and strategize on economic development initiatives.
- Develop partner list and increase capacity of home team: Simultaneously, efforts are intensified to develop a comprehensive partner list, fostering collaborations that will amplify the state's economic development. The home team's capacity is increased, ensuring a robust foundation for future endeavors.

June 2023

- EDA Policy Academy In-person Meeting in Wichita: Building on the momentum from April, June witnesses a significant in-person meeting in Wichita as part of the EDA Policy Academy. This face-to-face interaction provides a platform for in-depth discussions and collaborative planning.
- Follow-up on in-person meeting with small-group assignments: The aftermath of the in-person meeting sees a strategic follow-up, with small-group assignments ensuring focused and targeted efforts towards specific economic development goals.

July 2023

- Begin small-group meetings: July marks the commencement of small-group meetings, where stakeholders delve into nuanced discussions and action plans. These intimate gatherings facilitate a more tailored and effective approach to economic development challenges.

September 2023

- Continue small-group meetings and begin to design post-academy activities: The momentum of small-group meetings is maintained throughout September, fostering ongoing collaboration. Simultaneously, efforts are initiated to design post-academy activities, ensuring a seamless transition from discussions to actionable plans.

November 2023

- CREC meeting in Cleveland: Kansas EDA Policy Home Team attends the EDA Policy Academy meeting, this time in Cleveland. The focus is on finalizing the development of post-academy activities and sharing these initiatives with the small groups for collective input.
- Finishing development of post-academy activities: The month concludes with a dedicated push towards finishing the development of post-academy activities, setting the stage for comprehensive and sustainable economic development strategies.

January 2024

- Hire Sector Development Specialist: The new year commences with a strategic move to strengthen the team by hiring a Sector Development Specialist. This key addition brings specialized expertise to further enhance economic development efforts.
- Begin discussions of state-wide economic development group:
 - Simultaneously, discussions kick off regarding the formation of a state-wide economic development group, laying the groundwork for a cohesive and united approach to fostering prosperity across the entire state.

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Outcomes/Deliverables



Communication

Improving communication channels between local, regional, and state partners is a key priority aimed at fostering a more connected and informed network. This strategy involves implementing a structured approach, including quarterly virtual meetings, yearly in-person meetings conducted at each of the EDDs, and regular newsletters/eblasts. Additionally, KDC is actively exploring the use of various social media platforms as experimental tools to facilitate more dynamic and real-time information sharing. This multi-pronged communication approach is designed to enhance collaboration, promote transparency, and ensure that partners at all levels are consistently well-informed about developments and opportunities.

Improving communication channels between local, regional, and state partners is a key priority aimed at fostering a more connected and informed network. This strategy involves implementing a structured approach, including quarterly virtual meetings, yearly in-person meetings conducted at each of the Economic Development Districts (EDDs), and regular newsletters/eblasts. Additionally, the Kansas Department of Commerce is actively exploring the use of various social media platforms as experimental tools to facilitate more dynamic and real-time information sharing. This multi-pronged communication approach is designed to enhance collaboration, promote transparency, and ensure that partners at all levels are consistently well-informed about developments and opportunities.

Enhancing the utility of state-wide economic development organizations, such as the KARDO, is a forward-looking initiative. Although in the conceptual phase, the Kansas Department of Commerce is actively collaborating with partners to develop a state-wide economic development organization. The goal is to house this organization within a sustainable environment, potentially a university or state agency, providing a cohesive platform for collaboration between EDDs and other economic development agencies across the state. This strategic initiative aims to amplify the impact of economic development efforts by fostering a unified approach, leveraging resources, and promoting shared goals for the benefit of the entire state.

Obstacles and Challenges



Re-building relationships with EDD

Programmatic changes causing turbulence in EDD and Kansas Commerce relationship:

The relationship between EDDs and KDC has encountered turbulence due to recent programmatic changes. These shifts have impacted the dynamics and coordination between the two entities. To rebuild this relationship, there is a focused effort to address the challenges arising from these changes. This involves open dialogue, understanding concerns, and collaboratively navigating the evolving landscape to ensure alignment and mutual support.

Inclusivity

Recognizing the importance of inclusivity, there is a deliberate commitment to ensuring that all voices within the Economic Development Districts are not only heard but also actively listened to. This involves creating platforms for open discussions, soliciting feedback, and incorporating diverse perspectives into decision-making processes. By fostering a culture of inclusivity, the aim is to strengthen relationships and build a more resilient foundation for collaborative economic development efforts.

Grant Calendar

To enhance communication and resource-sharing, a KDC grant calendar is being developed. This calendar serves as a centralized resource, providing Economic Development Districts with visibility into available grants, deadlines, and application processes. This proactive approach ensures that EDDs stay informed about funding opportunities, fostering a more streamlined and coordinated effort in accessing resources to drive economic development initiatives.

Planning more frequent meetings (in-person and virtual) with economic development organizations throughout the state:

Recognizing the significance of communication, plans are underway to increase the frequency of both in-person and virtual meetings with economic development organizations across the state. These meetings serve as platforms for sharing information, discussing challenges, and fostering collaboration. The goal is to create a dynamic and responsive network that facilitates real-time information exchange, enabling EDDs to stay connected and collectively address evolving economic development needs.



Building internal capacity to continue pushing the work forward:

Addition of a Sector Development Specialist with capacity devoted to continuing the EDA Policy Academy work on developing stronger partnerships with the EDDs:

To bolster internal capacity, a key addition to the team is the Sector Development Specialist. This specialist is dedicated to advancing the work initiated through the EDA Policy Academy, specifically focusing on cultivating, and strengthening partnerships with Economic Development Districts. By having a dedicated staff member, there is a sustained commitment to the long-term success of the collaborative efforts, ensuring that progress continues beyond the initial phases of the Academy.



Grant Calendar Published



Sector Developer Hired

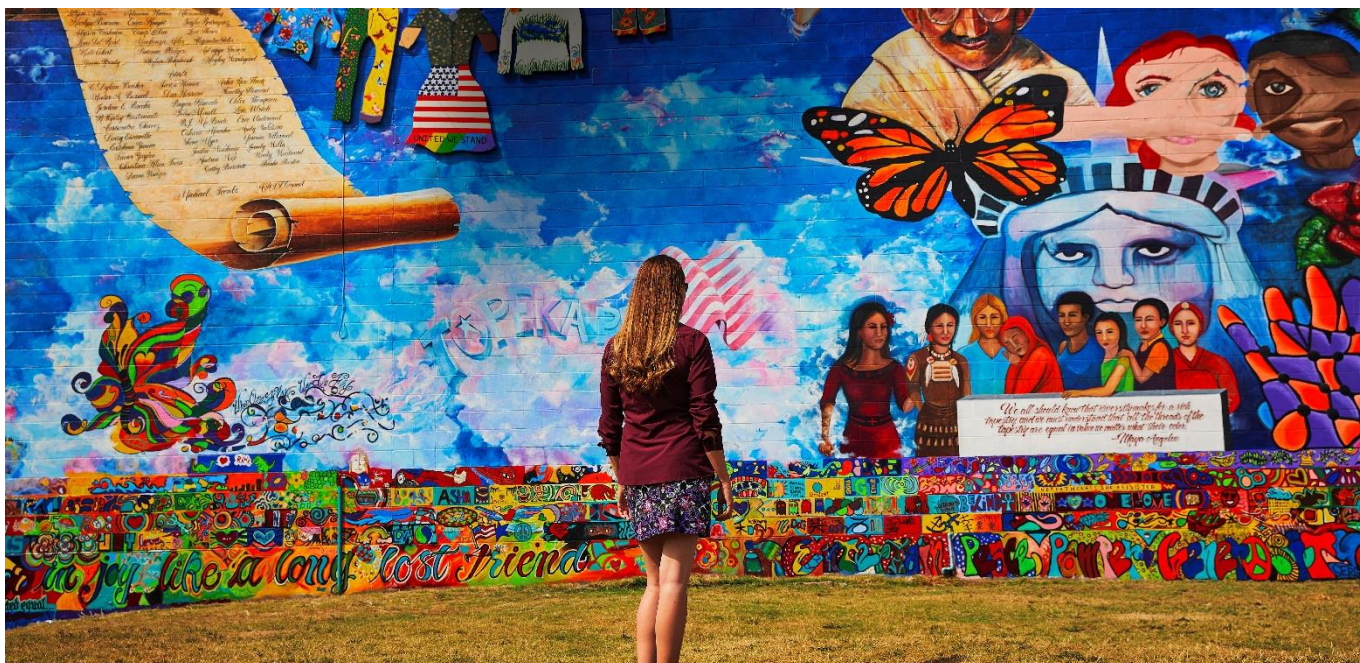


Lessons Learned

Kansas EDDs exhibit a unique diversity with distinct characteristics across rural and urban regions, each having different resources, job sector focuses, needs, and community structures. This inherent diversity underscores the crucial lesson that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to economic development in the state. Recognizing this, it becomes imperative to provide individualized support and resources to each EDD, tailoring strategies to meet the specific requirements of their organization and region. The lesson learned is that a nuanced and customized approach is essential to effectively strengthen the capabilities of EDDs and foster sustainable development.

The lesson of recognizing the energy in improving relationships between EDDs and the KDC highlights a commitment to collaborative progress. While EDDs are dedicated to enhancing their districts, the support and alignment of economic development goals from the Commerce department are pivotal for success. The lesson underscores the importance of a tandem process where both EDDs and the state align their efforts and resources to achieve shared economic development objectives. This realization emphasizes the need for ongoing communication and cooperation between the entities to harness the collective energy and drive positive outcomes.

Lastly, the understanding that economic development is a living process is a critical lesson. The work is never truly finished, and continual enhancement is necessary for sustained success. Both EDDs and the KDC need to make commitments to ongoing improvement and collaboration. This lesson emphasizes the dynamic nature of economic development efforts, requiring adaptability, flexibility, and a shared dedication to constant progress. By acknowledging that this is an evolving journey, stakeholders can embrace the iterative nature of the process and work collaboratively to navigate challenges and seize opportunities for growth.



Sustainability

Integrating partnership building between EDDs and Commerce within the Sector Development Specialist position is a pivotal step in fostering stronger collaboration. The Sector Development Specialist's responsibilities encompass actively engaging with all state EDDs to establish and fortify relationships. This involves proactive communication strategies, facilitating resource-sharing initiatives, and providing technical assistance where needed. By centralizing these efforts within the role, there is a dedicated focus on nurturing partnerships that extend beyond mere communication, ensuring a robust foundation for collaborative economic development between EDDs and the Kansas Department of Commerce.

Housing the EDA Policy Academy work within the Office of Innovation is a strategic move to provide a stable and dedicated environment for ongoing efforts. Establishing a defined "home" for the work ensures that the progress made during the EDA Policy Academy has continuity and remains at the forefront of the state's economic development agenda. Supervised by Brandon Hutton, a valuable member of the home team, the Sector Development Specialist role operates within this structured framework, assuring that the initiatives launched during the Academy persist and evolve over time. This consolidation within the Office of Innovation serves as a testament to the commitment to sustained progress and the lasting impact of collaborative economic development efforts.

Empowering EDDs and supporting the strengthening of their organizations and regions is a core objective for sustainable development. By providing targeted technical assistance and valuable resources, the aim is to empower EDDs to independently drive their initiatives. The inherent sustainability of such efforts becomes evident as EDDs, armed with the necessary tools and knowledge, become catalysts for positive change in their respective regions. This approach aligns with a vision of long-term impact, where the collaborative endeavors initiated through the EDA Policy Academy led to self-sufficient and thriving EDDs, thereby contributing to the overall prosperity of the state.

The proposal development was led by the EDDs in collaboration with the Kansas Department of Commerce. At a January 2023 meeting involving all EDDs and the Kansas Department of Commerce, there was a strong desire expressed to reboot the state-level association of EDDs. This collective effort aimed to present a unified voice and platform for regional cooperation and development. While specific individuals or organizations may have spearheaded the proposal development, it was a collaborative effort involving multiple stakeholders committed to promoting economic development and prosperity across Kansas.

Let's Talk

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