

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Resilience is defined by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) as the ability of a region to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from shocks and disruptions. While we often think of resiliency in terms of environmental disruptions, including natural disasters or climate change, there are several types of economic shocks in regional systems that can occur. These could include the closure of a large employer, the decline of an important industry, or changes in the workforce.

This CEDS provides the COEDD Region a map to move as a collective unit towards economic stability, inclusivity, and prosperity. The CEDS seeks to understand what current disruptions are occurring in the region, and how to plan for unanticipated shocks. While economic resiliency cannot be placed on one industry, business, or person alone, the numerous businesses, local governments, chambers, community development boards, and ultimately the citizens of the region are responsible for planning to develop proactive approaches. The 2022-2026 CEDS aims to build on the current work and initiatives in place, adapt to the rapidly changing world, and build programs for issues the community values and relies on.

Industry Diversification

For decades the COEDD Region relied on the oil industry as its main source of jobs, revenue, and exports. As seen from past oil boom and busts, a risky over-dependence on a single industry sector can result in an extremely unstable community. While the oil and gas industry is still significantly important to the region's economy, motivating local leaders and planners to invest in the long-term resiliency of the community is needed for stable and sustained growth. Several emerging industries are present in the region, while other historical sectors are seeing consistent growth. Diversification efforts built and outlined in this plan should continue to be evolved to meet the needs of the region's business community.

Regional Collaboration

While many of the counties and cities within the COEDD Region have a unique history and culture, the problems they face regarding economic and social issues remain largely the same. In order to match the scale of what is needed to improve industries and infrastructure around the area, regional solutions offer a form of resiliency that can impact more people, attract more funding, and help fix systematic issues. Unfortunately, regionalism can be hard to achieve due to competition in economic development and differences in community views. That said, as the region looks to fix its largest problems, many will rely on the leaders in each community who push for collaboration between partners, and work towards the shared goals and concerns of each community.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Achieving economic resilience in the region also relies on addressing issues related to persistent poverty and economic inequity. The region will ultimately struggle with wealth creation if it does not focus on those populations that have been disproportionately impacted based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Regional stakeholders should embrace the idea of equity within the region and understand its relevance today as it can propel communities forward with proper leadership and support. For the COEDD Region to reach its goals of the future and outlined in this plan, they must consider diversity, equity, and inclusion each step of the way while pushing to elevate the economic development needs of the historically underserved business and populations in the community.

The background of the page is a close-up photograph of numerous red flowers, possibly gerberas, with their petals in various shades of red and pink, set against a soft, out-of-focus background.

COVID-19 IMPACT

Beyond the devastating social and physical impact, the economic impact triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has been unlike any other the world has experienced. The pandemic hit all economies differently, as social distancing, restrictions on mobility, and even shutting down all nonessential economic activity was implemented. While the pandemic most certainly hurt the COEDD Region's economy in terms of lost jobs, revenue, and wages, the innovation and resiliency that many sectors showcased remains a positive sign moving forward. As we continue to embrace a changing world with quickly changing habits and practices, it will be crucial for the COEDD Region to continue to focus on how it can endure shocks to its economy in the future and what unique challenges it may face.

Jobs

In the COEDD Region, jobs were steadily increasing from 2015-2019 until the pandemic hit in 2020. Peaking at 94,369 jobs in 2019, at the end of the 2020 year the COEDD region had 91,719 jobs resulting in roughly 3,500 jobs decline. That said, jobs are predicted to rebound in a "V-Shaped" curve and recover to pre-pandemic levels by 2023. By 2025, jobs are projected to be at 95,140 in the COEDD region.

Historic and Projected Jobs in the COEDD Region

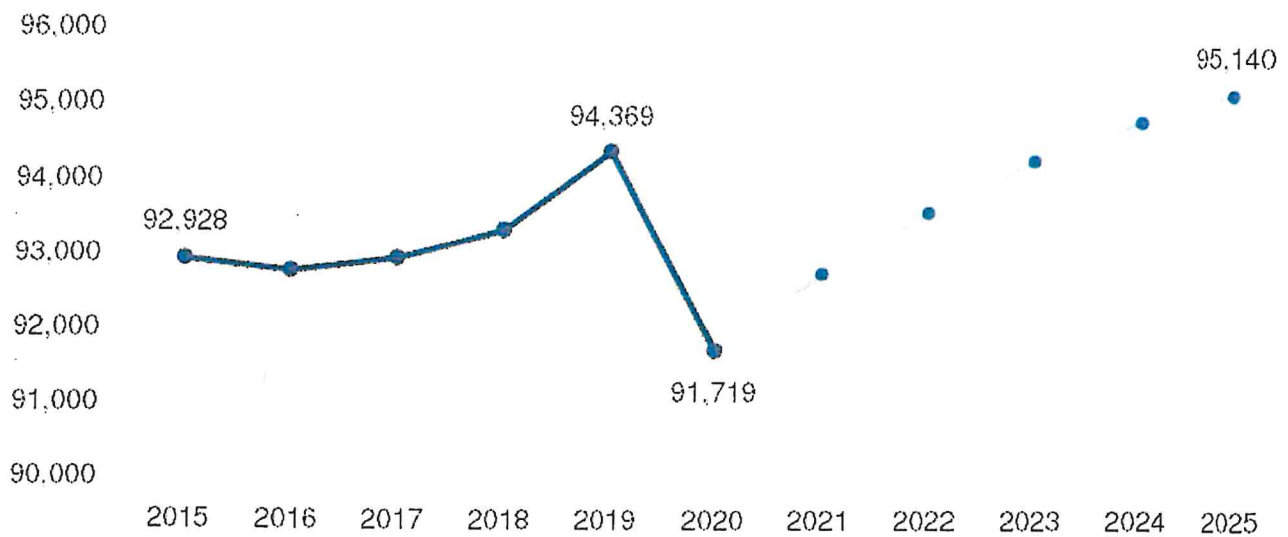


Figure 33: Regional Jobs, Emsi 2021.2

Unemployment

Looking at the unemployment trendline over the past two years helps put into perspective the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of employment. From March 2020 to April 2020, unemployment in the COEDD region grew by 8,823 people. The total workers unemployed in the region has continued to fall and total unemployed workers in May of 2021 is now at pre-pandemic numbers. Current unemployment compared to March of 2020 (pre-pandemic) is also displayed to illustrate how the economy has recovered and what industries are still salvaging from the pandemic. The top three industries who had the greatest unemployment change and consequently still have the greatest gap from before the pandemic are the Accommodation and Food Services, Retail Trade, and Health Care and Social Assistance industries. Each industry as its own table breakdown that goes into further detail to show what top national industries (6-digit NAICS) that encompass the industry sectors were impacted the most due to the pandemic.

Total Unemployment in COEDD Region

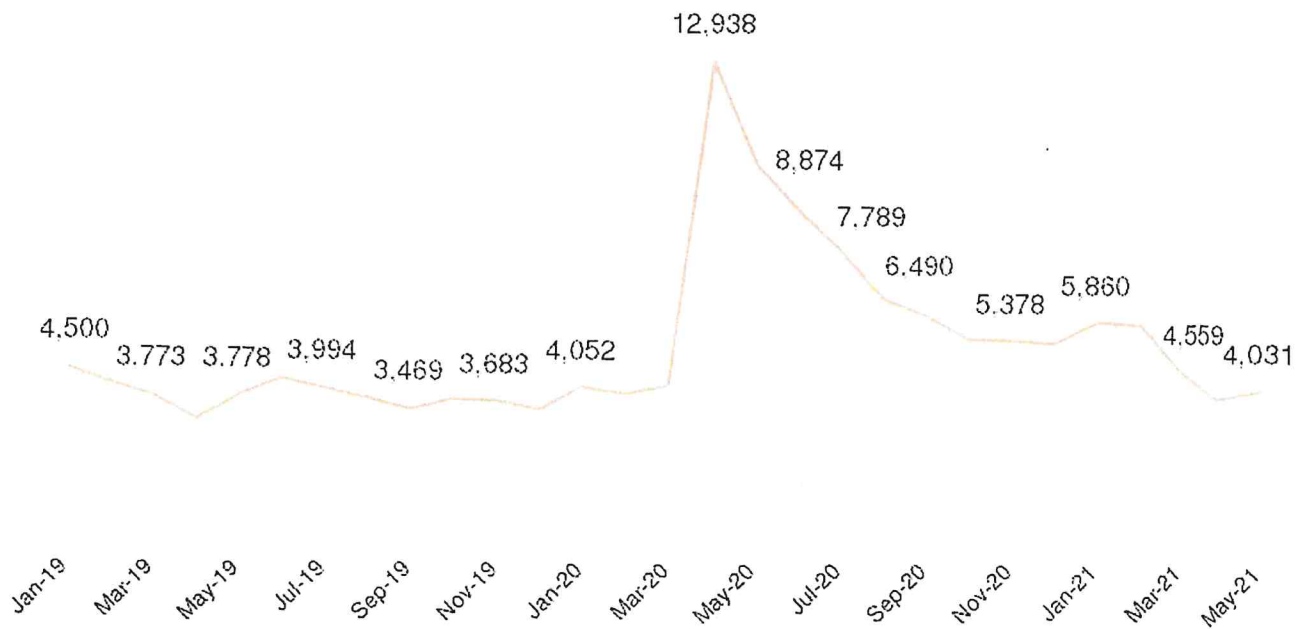


Figure 34: Regional Unemployment, Emsi 202.2

1. Accommodation and Food Services

National Industry (6-Digit NAICS)	Job Change	% Change
Full-Service Restaurants	(282)	(8%)
Limited-Service Restaurants	(79)	(2%)
Hotels and Motels (except Casino Hotels)	(78)	(15%)
Drinking Places	(28)	(14%)
Food Service and Contractors	(17)	(8%)

2. Retail Trade

National Industry (6-Digit NAICS)	Job Change	% Change
Department Stores	(78)	(17%)
All Other General Merchandise Stores	(74)	(10%)
Electronics Stores	(56)	(23%)
Family Clothing Stores	(55)	(26%)
Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores	(47)	(5%)

3. Health Care and Social Assistance

National Industry (6-Digit NAICS)	Job Change	% Change
General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	(125)	(7%)
Home Health Care Services	(87)	(15%)
Child Day Care Services	(57)	(7%)
Offices of Dentists	(24)	(5%)
Assisted Living Facilities for the Elderly	(19)	(58%)

Table 9: Industry Specific Unemployment, Emsi 2021.2

Occupation Impact

The top 10 increased and decreased occupations in terms of total jobs over the course of the pandemic were analyzed to see any potential trends in the region. The Customer Service Representatives occupation gained 141 jobs, the highest out of any occupation in the COEDD region since 2019, representing a 13% increase. Customer Service Representatives largely work remotely and with increased users on online platforms, were crucial for many businesses over the pandemic. Other occupations that saw large gains in employment since 2019 are Cooks, Fast Food gaining 108 jobs and Medical Assistants gaining 88 jobs. As seen, many health and medical occupations (medical assistants, registered nurses, physicians, etc.) increased greatly in the past two years.

Table 10: Regional Occupation Job Increase (5-Digit), Emsi 2021.2

Detailed Occupation (5-digit)	2019 Jobs	2020 Jobs	2021 Jobs (projected)	2019-2021 Job Change	
Customer Service Representatives	1,086	1,216	1,227	141	13%
Cooks, Fast Food	795	903	903	108	14%
Medical Assistants	411	493	498	88	21%
Project Management Specialists and Business Operations Specialists, All Other	330	410	422	92	28%
Registered Nurses	1,499	1,575	1,630	131	9%
Billing and Posting Clerks	214	262	264	50	23%
Physicians, All Other; and Ophthalmologists, Except Pediatric	164	209	211	47	29%
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	823	868	867	45	5%
Postsecondary Teachers	2,937	2,975	3,002	66	2%
Sales and Related Workers, All Other	84	118	121	37	44%

The top occupation that saw the biggest decrease since 2019 was Teaching Assistants, Postsecondary, losing 363 jobs, or 67% of the occupational workforce. Higher Education universities around the country struggled to pull in revenue as many students remained off campus, while at the same time paying high expenses to sanitize and enforce social distancing guidelines. This caused major cutbacks around the country and several universities still are trying to recoup lost revenue. That said, the Cooks, Short Order, occupation lost the second greatest number of jobs at 196, or 56% of the occupation's workers. Short order cooks largely cook for small local restaurants and diners, who struggled significantly during the pandemic. The Retail Salespersons occupation lost the third highest number of jobs at 154. Many retail stores shutdown during lockdown periods accelerating the growing trend of more retailers moving to online platforms.

Table 11: Regional Occupation Job Decrease (5-Digit), Emsi 2021.2

Detailed Occupation (5-digit)	2019 Jobs	2020 Jobs	2021 Jobs (projected)	2019-2021 Job Change	
Teaching Assistants, Postsecondary	542	172	179	(363)	(67%)
Cooks, Short Order	351	155	155	(196)	(56%)
Retail Salespersons	2,666	2,480	2,512	(154)	(6%)
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	1,989	1,812	1,794	(195)	(10%)
Cashiers	2,541	2,364	2,356	(184)	(7%)
Waiters and Waitresses	1,720	1,559	1,592	(128)	(7%)
Bartenders	648	513	514	(134)	(21%)
Fast Food and Counter Workers	2,805	2,689	2,766	(39)	(1%)
Roustabouts, Oil and Gas	323	208	190	(133)	(41%)
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	1,352	1,254	1,264	(88)	(7%)

Remote Jobs

One of the many new developments caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is the rise of remote work or the growing choice for companies to let employees Work-from-Home (WFH). Unique job postings in the COEDD region have been steadily increasing for jobs that have been listed as remote. Already in 2021, roughly 2,850 jobs have been posted that have been identified as remote working, compared to 3,000 jobs posted in total for 2020.

Unique Job Postings for Remote Work

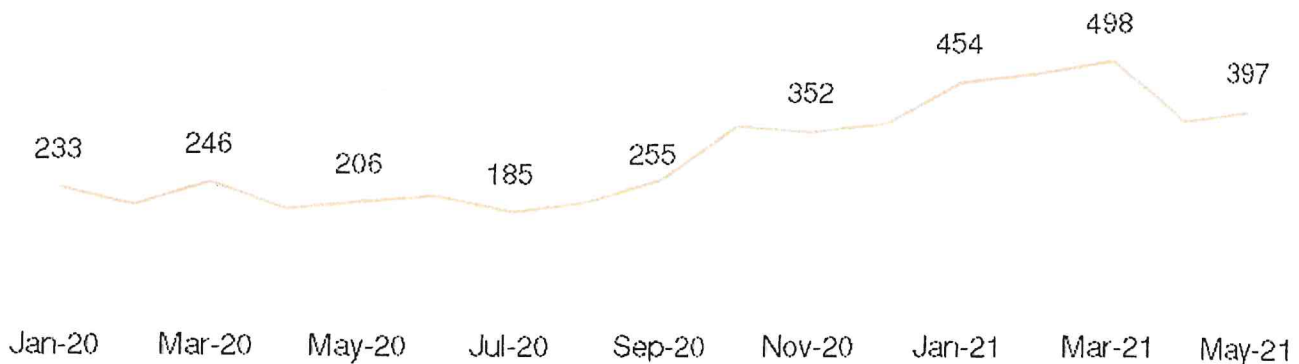


Figure 35: Remote Job Unique Postings in Region, Emsi 2021.2

Tax Analysis

Local and state governments are major players in terms of employment and the overall economy in the United States and the COEDD region. With the pandemic impacting greatly how consumers spend and use their money, sales tax, use tax, and other taxes collected by the local entities were entirely disrupted. The impact of the pandemic is greatly important as the sales and use tax are the single largest source of revenue when considering all Oklahoma governments together. Shown below is the total tax collection in the COEDD region for county sales tax, use tax, and certain NAICS industries (Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation). Also displayed are the sales and use tax rates for each county in the COEDD Region.

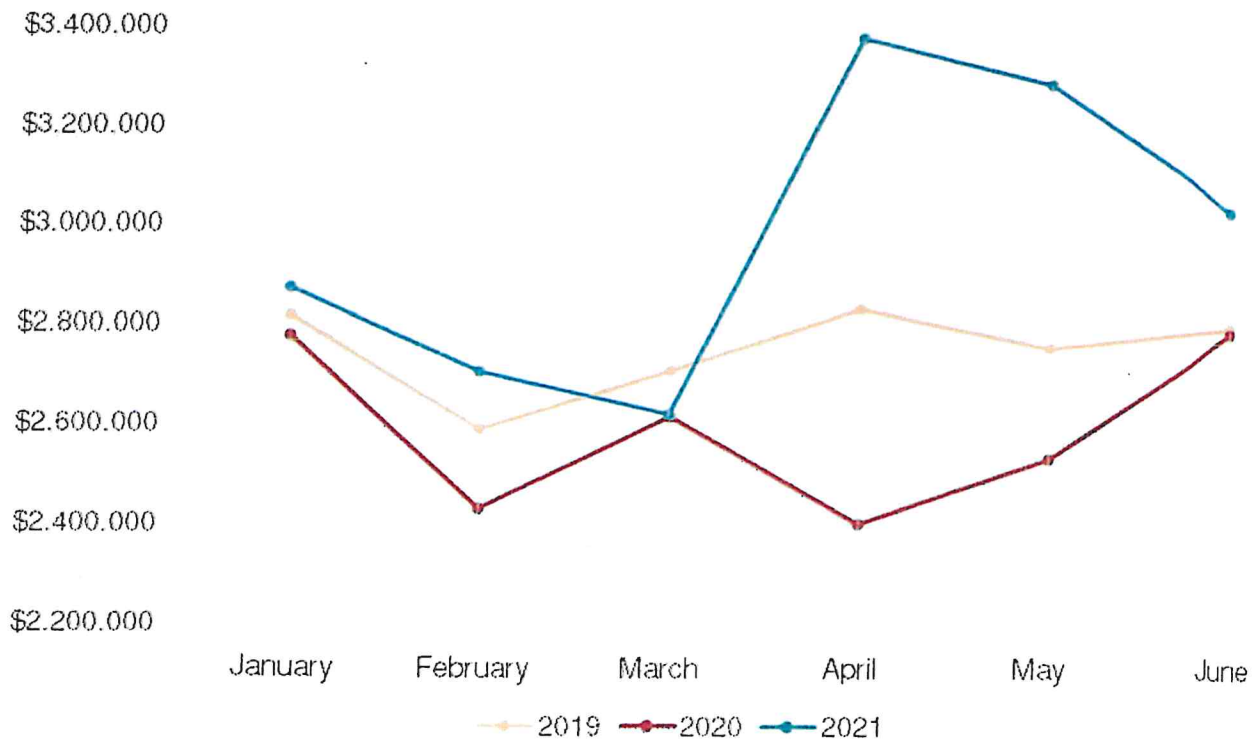
Table 12: Sales and Use Tax Data, Oklahoma Tax Commission

	Sales Tax Rate	Use Tax Rate	Total County Tax Rate
Hughes County	0.94%	0.06%	1.00%
Lincoln County	0.75%	0.25%	1.00%
Okfuskee County	1.81%	0.19%	2.00%
Pawnee County	1.87%	0.13%	2.00%
Payne County	0.75%	0.06%	0.81%
Pottawatomie County	1.25%	0.25%	1.50%
Seminole County	1.15%	0.10%	1.25%

Sales Tax

County sales and use tax collection in the COEDD region is shown over the last three years through January-June. As a majority of our economy is based on consumption goods, the sales tax would seem to be the most vulnerable type of tax to the pandemic as consumption was purposefully and tactically limited. That said, as seen for sales tax, collection dipped in April of 2020, and was significantly lower than past collections for this period. That said, collections continued to bounce back until reaching 2019 numbers in June. One possible explanation for this, is that even with spending limited at retail stores and restaurants (in result of lockdowns and social distancing), grocery and department stores were busy with consumers stocking up on food and home improvement amenities. Many areas around the country saw this relationship, as the influx of people in grocery and department stores "made up" the difference for the lost revenue collection from restaurants and clothing retail. As seen from the 2021 numbers, sales tax collection for the county level has been above the two previous years, including much higher collections in April, May, and June. This could indicate a potential recovery of the COEDD economy.

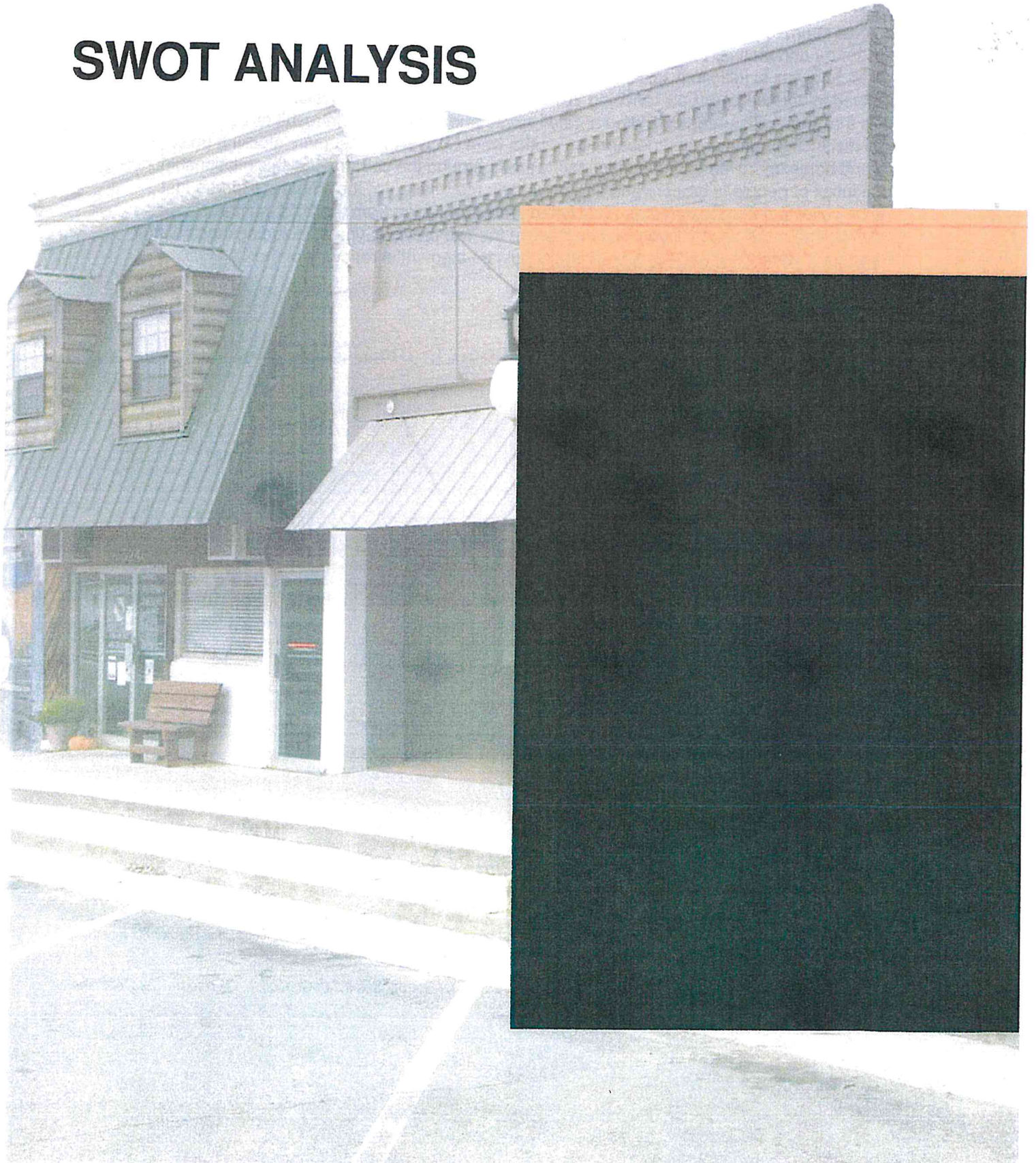
Total County Sales Tax Collection in the COEDD Region



*Sales tax collection represented by actual month of spending, not when collection occurred (1-month after)

Figure 36: Total County Sales Tax Collection, Oklahoma Tax Commission

SWOT ANALYSIS



STRENGTHS

- Education and Training Opportunities
- Skilled Labor Force
- Diversity of Industries
- Infrastructure and Geographic Positioning
- Culture and History

- Advancement in Technology & Telecommunications
- Diversity and History
- ARPA and Other Funding
- Regionalism
- Emerging Industries

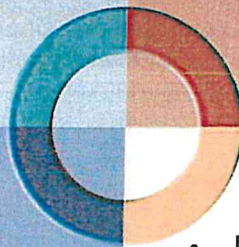
WEAKNESSES

- Funding and Infrastructure
- Attraction and Placemaking
- Political Representation

- Ecommerce and Automation Trends
- Natural Resources
- Healthcare and Emergency Services Coverage
- Population Shifts

OPPORTUNITIES

THREATS



STRENGTHS

The COEDD region boasts several strengths that are worth noting. To meet the goals of the community and the region, it's imperative for the COEDD region to recognize these strengths and leverage them to foster a prosperous future.

Education and Training Opportunities

Undoubtedly one of the most significant strengths of the COEDD Region is the presence of multiple higher education universities as well as the strong standing of Technology Centers. Oklahoma State University (OSU), located in Stillwater, Oklahoma is a nationally recognized university with student enrollment over 25,000. Along with OSU is Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), a private university located in Shawnee, Oklahoma. The availability of higher education is crucial for the area as job earnings have historically trended with education attainment, and higher education attainment for the COEDD Region continues to be below the state and national averages.

In addition to the multiple higher education offerings, the area's network of Technology Centers is another important asset for the region. The COEDD Region is home to three Technology Centers, including Meridian, Gordon

Cooper, and Wes Watkins, each offering courses in full-time career training programs, short courses, online classes, and specialized certifications. Multiple Technology Centers also reside close to the COEDD Region boundaries and serve parts of the region. With the ability to grow and develop a skilled workforce in a time where skilled labor is in increasingly high demand, the tech centers presence brings in national companies looking for skilled labor as well as students and citizens looking to gain more education.

Skilled Labor Force

In addition to the skilled training afforded through the network of Technology Centers, the presence of other industries in the region provides a skilled labor force. These industries include medical, healthcare, trucking and warehousing, manufacturing, and construction. Each industry requires a skilled and talented workforce, and the supply for these types of occupations are growing in the region. A skilled labor force

is critical in retaining high quality jobs, with higher wages and benefits. Higher wages have a multiplying effect in the regional economy, providing workers with more purchasing power to buy other goods and services from regional businesses.

Diversity of Industries

The COVID-19 pandemic hit several regions around the country considerably hard, including those who rely heavily on hospitality and entertainment. The COEDD Region, with an outsized share of jobs in the government and education sectors is representative of a diverse industry mix. That industry mix positions the region well to minimize the effects of nationwide downturns caused by macroeconomic elements or unforeseen events such as a global pandemic. The COEDD region, featuring a concentration of government jobs, health care and social assistance, manufacturing, and construction employment opportunities, will allow the region to remain stable through turbulent



times. A diverse industry mix is also an opportunity for business and industry attraction, and shared resources across labor markets and infrastructure assets.

Infrastructure and Geographic Positioning

A robust multi-modal transportation system allows industry to prosper and citizens more employment opportunities across the COEDD Region. The highway infrastructure system is a strength; the condition of the roads is adequate and form a solid network of primary and secondary roads and access points. In addition, several state highways run through the region and bring in goods and people. Further, the rail network is also particularly strong in the region, with three Class I railroads and three Class III railroads operating in the area. Finally, key water ports lie in close proximity to the district and continue to drive economic and community development. The geographic positioning of the COEDD Region is another significant strength of the region.

Being strategically positioned between the two largest cities in the state (Oklahoma City and Tulsa), the region serves as a bedroom community for many who commute into the larger cities. Located in Oklahoma, the COEDD region is also strategically positioned to be in the central US, with access via trucking and rail to each coast quicker than a noncentralized location. Finally, with much of the region being defined as rural and in areas with low utility costs and taxes, the cost of living is significantly less than nearby cities and regions.

Culture and History

The rich cultural heritage and history of the COEDD region contributes to its unique identity. Part of that culture includes several regional specific events and festivals, putting the area's history on full display. The Balloon Fest, Historic Route 66, and several Museums are specific examples of cultural attractions that bring people to the region. Additionally, a burgeoning music scene and

an abundance of casinos in the region provide more contemporary entertainment options. Oklahoma State University and Stillwater also drive tourism, as each community features many unique businesses and attractions, in addition to world-class collegiate athletics and sporting events.

In addition, the region is home to several tribes where relationships have been built to coexist within the region. The tribal nations undoubtedly represent the spirit of the region and Oklahoma, while also providing a diverse set of views and customs. The region is also home to some of the nation's oldest historically black communities, celebrating the diversity of the region and the opportunity to succeed. Finally, many of the towns have historic downtown areas that have historic buildings and sites. Having the opportunity to embrace the rich history and culture of the area is a unique and robust strength for the region.

WEAKNESSES

While there are many strengths within the COEDD Region, there are also several weaknesses that persist in the region. Weaknesses are presented through a wide lens, from tax collection and political environment to current changes in human interaction.

Funding and Infrastructure

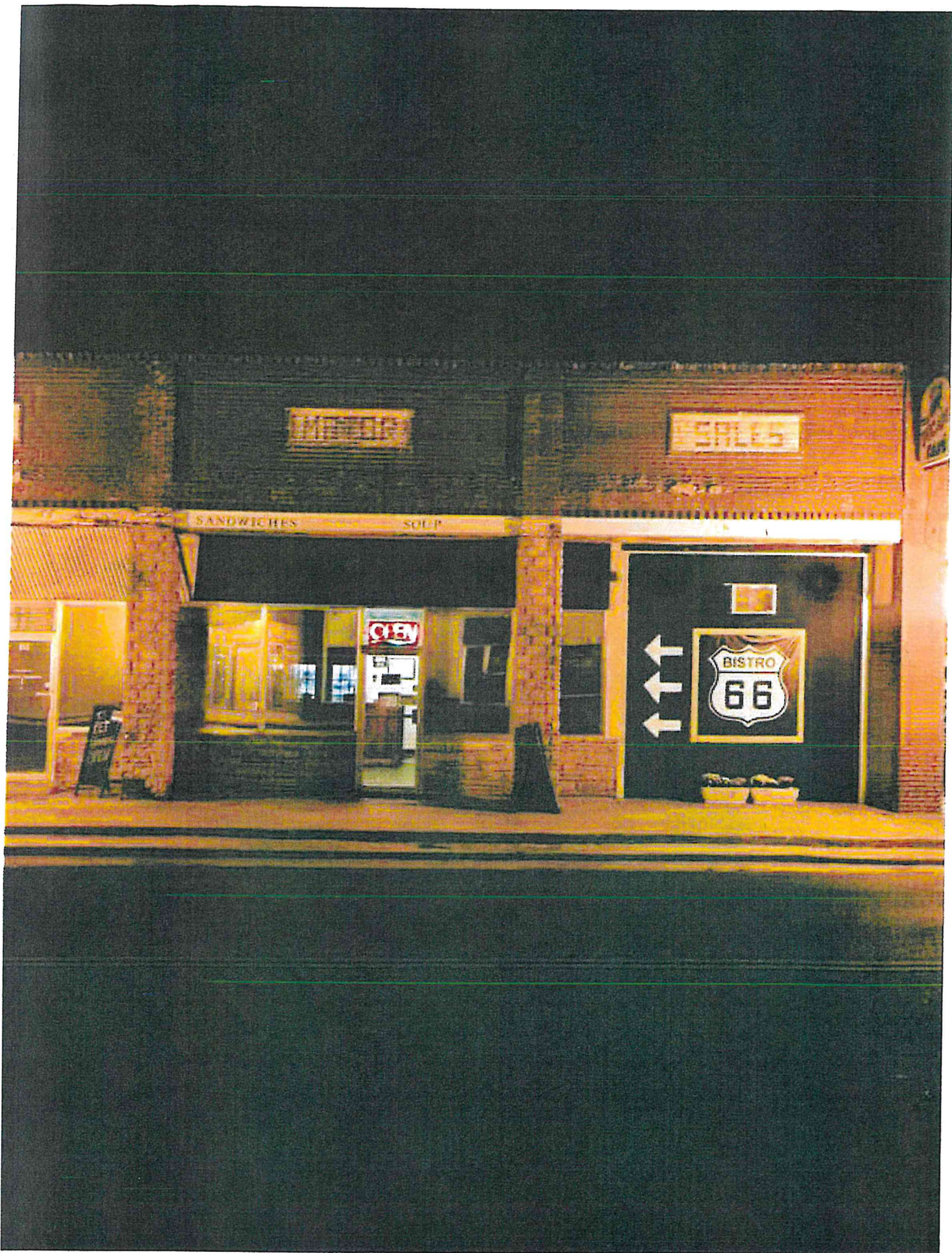
One considerable challenge the COEDD region faces is the inability to collect taxes to sufficiently fund community and economic development projects. Many areas in the region are seeing a decline in population, while also seeing more businesses move online hurting both sales and income taxes. Additionally, Oklahoma is unable to tax income earned by tribal citizens who live and work on their tribe's land. The State also provides several sales tax exemptions and incentives that can impact overall tax collection. The declining tax base and challenges related to tax collection impacts several aspects of the community, including insufficient funding for infrastructure projects like transportation improvements, and high-speed broadband infrastructure and deployment. With access to broadband being critical to post COVID-19 life, the need to upgrade and install new fiber/cable broadband is desperately needed in certain areas in the region.

Attraction and Placemaking

While the COEDD Region consists of several cities with historic downtowns, these downtowns have not seen recent investment, growth, and development. Specifically, one result of years of disinvestment is the increase of blighted properties. Many buildings and structures have gone without repair or investment in several years. The private market has not stepped up to rehab and redevelop these properties because the expense of revamping old structures can be incredibly costly. Several cities are struggling to reinvent their downtown and bring back new businesses and attractions, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Placemaking in these downtown areas cannot be solved overnight, and the addition of one or two new buildings does not solve the issue.

Political Representation

A weakness that impacts the entire region is the declining representation of rural seats and power in the Oklahoma political atmosphere. Urban areas have continued to outpace the growth of many rural counties, as one growing trend is the movement of citizens back into cities. The loss of population shifts the political atmosphere and can impact who gets a seat at the table. For decades the rural population was well represented and had a strong hold of power because rural voters continued to elect those they deemed successful in bringing home improvements and investments. Since Oklahoma's legislature has been subject to term limits of 12 years, there is no opportunity to develop seniority. With reduced representative seniority, power is dwindling, which has direct impacts on where funding goes and what policies are implemented.

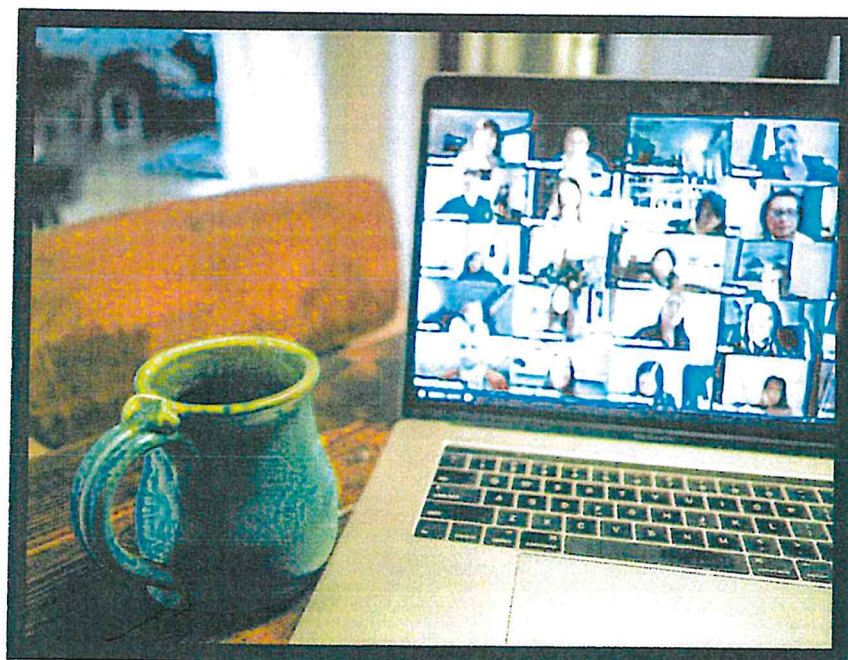


OPPORTUNITIES

Several opportunities exist in the COEDD Region. From new industries and technology to the history and diversity that the region holds, there is a broad range of opportunities that exist and can drive growth for the region.

Advancement in Technology and Telecommunication

One of the rare positive aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic was the advancement of online services and capabilities. Countless jobs have moved online, with many moving permanently online and providing more flexibility and options to workers. The ability to work remotely has increased what jobs are offered in the region and allow for several industries to grow their footprint. Another enormous benefit to online services is hospitals and doctors can work online and provide "Tele-Health". Many rural citizens that otherwise do not have access to a nearby doctor or physician can now be served by any doctor online and receive consistent and reliable service. Additionally, the advancement in online schooling has also provided citizens the ability to seek new education opportunities without having to leave their home.



Diversity and History

As the rich diversity and history is considered a strength for the region, it equally is considered an untapped opportunity moving into the future. Several communities have tapped into their history and culture to provide new attractions for residents and also provide a spark for new downtown growth. One example of this would be the growing trend of providing specific assets to Arts and Culture in downtown plans and comprehensive strategies. Distinctive and local art has been an excellent tool for communities to showcase what diverse populations exist in their regions, while also bolstering downtown attractions and landscape. The COEDD Region has the unique history and ties to the Native American population, as well as having some of the oldest historically black communities. Embracing and showcasing the diversity and history within the COEDD Region is a major opportunity to spark new life and growth in downtown and community areas.

Emerging Industries

The diverse set of industries in the region not only provide stability in terms of jobs, but also to opportunity for new and emerging industries to grow. The Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting, and Transportation and Warehousing industries are examples of industries expected to see significant growth in the next five years. Each industry was severely impacted by the pandemic, with the Transportation and Warehousing sector now

needing hundreds of truck drivers and workers to help with the increased online sales volume as well as warehousing back fill. Other emerging industries specific to the region include the Cannabis sector. The region currently is seeing an influx of business move within its borders and develop grow houses, warehousing/distribution sites, and brick and mortar stores. Finally, the Health Care and Social Assistance industry is seeing rapid growth as the population continues to age, and more nurses and healthcare professionals are needed. These industries, as well as countless more that are projected for growth are major opportunities for the region to strength its economy and capitalize on future trends.

ARPA and Other Funding

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is currently more federal funding available, and coming available, to communities than ever before. This opportunity to win large sums of grant money has caught the attention of every community around the nation as dollars can be used for a wide range of projects and activities. Money from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and Main Street America are specifically focused on community projects to help develop and grow communities. The COEDD Region has the ability to apply and win countless dollars as well as receiving money from the state and directly from the federal government on previous emergency acts. The incoming flow of funding is a massive opportunity to upgrade current infrastructure and services, as well as help develop struggling areas and bring

life back to certain downtown areas.

Regionalism

One major opportunity for the COEDD Region is to better its regional efforts. A majority of towns and communities in the region are rural. For this reason, partnering together on regional plans and goals is an excellent way to tie funds together and make a larger impact. Specifically, being effective and efficient in addressing investing funds for long-term benefits, while balancing competition between areas and common goals is a major opportunity for future growth and development. Acting on current funding and potential grants by combining resources and ideas is also an opportunity to address the capacity and funding issues that region currently holds. Several ways to foster stronger regionalism in the area persist, including the potential collaboration between planning districts, and adding new communication channels between city chambers and boards. Planning for the future with a more regional approach could be a way to grow smarter and invest in infrastructure that makes the largest difference. While regionalism cannot solve all of the problems facing the region in the future, it is an excellent opportunity to work towards a common goal and build off each county and cities strength.

THREATS

Threats to the economy, workforce, and community are present in every region around the country. Several threats endure in the COEDD Region, many that are common in rural communities. While threats can be universal and macroeconomic, there are also several unique threats the region that must be addressed in order to grow moving forward.

Population Shifts

Certainly, one of the largest threats identified was the current population shifts in the region and the impacts this has on the workforce and community. Older generations are starting to retire, and as more baby boomers leave the workforce, the institutional knowledge, and skills they hold, leave as well. Additionally, many employers that need to hire skilled labor positions are in tough competition, as the current field of qualified and willing applicants is smaller than the demand. The supply of new and younger workers to fill in for the positions that will be open is needed in order for businesses to stay in the region and ultimately expand and grow. Another threat identified with the changing population shift was the change in how citizens interact and live in the community. There is a perceived diminishing public service culture and a smaller pool of eligible leaders in the community who want to be involved. This also impacts what citizens come to events and support downtown.

With less involved citizens the many volunteer boards and positions that are needed to help run and support the community would no longer be filled. While many citizens still care deeply about the community the threat of losing a culture of involvement and service could have major implications on the region.

Ecommerce and Automation Trends

The growing trend of businesses moving to online platforms, including most notably traditional retail stores, has impacts on the entire community. With more businesses moving online, companies are leaving their brick-and-mortar stores, emptying downtown areas, and threatening the vitality of the community. There is a present need for new businesses to occupy old buildings and spaces in blighted downtown areas, but with online sales booming after the COVID-19 pandemic, storefronts are hard to fill. Additionally, less stores downtown mean less people

who are traveling in the area to work, shop, and eat. The entire ecosystem can be thrown off with just a few stores leaving, and the threat of more businesses moving online brings the question of what struggling downtowns will do to stay alive.

Additionally, another threat with the growth of ecommerce is the movement to more automated services. Whether this be in the food services industry, manufacturing, or other vulnerable positions, the increased focus on automating services is a threat to jobs and occupations in the area. While advancements in technology can bring new jobs, it is also important to recognize what jobs are at stake and which may possible be replaced.

Natural Resources

While the COEDD Region has a generally temperate climate and close to many natural resources, there are still natural resource constraints that threaten the vitality of the area. Specifically, the water

supply is a growing threat to the community as several industries have taken large portions of the supply and years of oil exploration with little consideration of pollution has left some rural areas without suitable drinking water. The fast-growing Cannabis industry is an example of one sector that has a growing need for water. Additionally, while water problems are easily identified and traced, the limited funding available to fix this infrastructure has left some towns having below desirable levels of water quality.

Healthcare and Emergency Services Coverage

A growing concern for the region is the healthcare coverage that is currently available, especially for rural citizens. While telehealth and virtual doctors have increased the range of where service can be held, several areas in the region have inadequate access to pharmacies, primary care providers, hospitals, trauma centers, and low-cost health centers. Referred to as "Healthcare" desserts, rural

counties are at much greater risk of having lower service than their urban counterparts. Additionally, emergency services coverage is lacking significantly in the area, as cities and communities cannot afford their own ambulance and paramedic services. The combination of low population density mixed with a large geographical area, means less taxes to pay for these services over a larger and consequently more expensive space.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The COEDD region has identified those priority needs which will increase competitiveness by leveraging strengths and addressing barriers to growth. Four focus areas were selected with input from the CEDS Task Force:

ATTRACTION & PLACEMAKING

EMERGING INDUSTRIES & OCCUPATIONS

LEADERSHIP & REPRESENTATION

FUNDING & INFRASTRUCTURE

These four focus areas provide a framework for essential elements of the regional economy. The goals and strategies set forth within this framework create a measurable action plan for the advancement of the Central Oklahoma Economic Development District.



ATTRACTION & PLACEMAKING

As the region continues to recover from the pandemic and the ongoing labor market shortage, restoring population and attracting new talent is becoming a major challenge and competition throughout the country. The COEDD Region's goal is to focus on the strong amenities it provides, and work to focus on creating quality places through good design that attracts all kinds of people. COEDD prioritizes this goal as critical to improve quality of life; leverage built and natural assets; enhance arts and culture; develop resilient communities; spur economic investment; and ensure the region remains an attractive location for both talent and business.

Through this goal, COEDD will inspire a variety of projects such as downtown revitalization, adaptive reuse, blight elimination, and increased walkability. Project for Public Spaces defines placemaking as, "Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share; placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution."

Central Oklahoma has a rich cultural heritage and arts community. Festivals, events, museums, and performances draw visitors from around the globe. Events like the FireLake Fireflight Balloon Festival, and attractions including Historic Route 66 and Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art are just a few of the examples that bring visitors into the region. From strong tribal communities to the concentration of historically black communities, the region has unique opportunities to leverage history and diversity in attraction and placemaking.

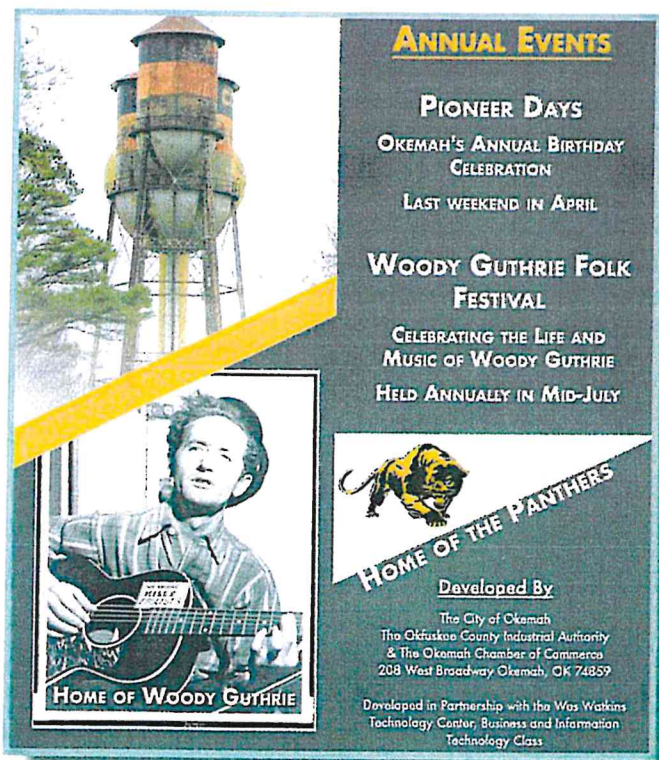
ATTRACTION & PLACEMAKING

Goal 1: Increase quality of life and visitor and resident attraction through placemaking.

Engaging in placemaking with community stakeholders, while keeping what the region holds as a competitive tourism advantage in the forefront, can lead to opportunities for growth. Beyond tourism, placemaking efforts serve to increase quality of life for residents and encourage meaningful social interactions within the community. The attraction of both tourists and residents to these redesigned places will also boost the success of adjacent local businesses. COEDD will assist communities throughout the region in identifying potential funding sources for these efforts.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Assist communities in developing achievable plans.
- Strategy 2: Create feedback loops for continual qualitative and quantitative evaluation.
- Strategy 3: Provide placemaking examples and demonstrations to communities throughout the region.
- Strategy 4: Leverage unique natural and cultural assets for regional marketing and attraction efforts.



PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- County and Municipal Government
- Chambers of Commerce
- Main Street Programs
- Downtown Associations
- Convention and Visitor Bureaus
- Arts organizations
- Nonprofits
- Businesses

See evaluation framework located on page 73.

ATTRACTION & PLACEMAKING

Goal 2: Facilitate the intentional involvement of youth in planning and implementation.

The collaborative nature of placemaking demands involvement. The COEDD region is particularly interested in nurturing the involvement of youth, as this demographic has been identified as critical to engage moving forward in the planning process for the region. Through this goal, COEDD will be able to tap into creative minds and gain perspective on what this generation values most in their community. The goal is to bolster community pride and develop a bond with those involved with the intention of retaining young talent long-term.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Develop and implement outreach plans to engage youth in the region.
- Strategy 2: Gather ideas and input from youth.
- Strategy 3: Solicit feedback from youth participating in placemaking efforts.



PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- County & Municipal Government
- K-12 Schools
- Youth Organizations
- Higher education (vocational-technical schools, colleges, universities)
- Young Professional Organizations

See evaluation framework located on page 74



EMERGING INDUSTRIES & OCCUPATIONS

The COEDD Region holds several specialized industries that promote diversified and unique occupations for its population. That said, capitalizing on the emerging industries in the region can promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and be a catalyst for growth for the entire economy moving forward. As the region's business economy relies on those skills and abilities of the current workforce, supporting the ability to upskill and reskill employees is crucial to the growth of high paying and potentially new jobs in the region. The future workforce relies on several sectors in the area working together towards a common goal, including the private, public, and education spheres collaborating on a joint effort. With a united goal to help incrementally transform the current workforce, the region's economy can thrive in providing a supply of talent and skills to the emerging industries in the area, while boosting the overall economy.

EMERGING INDUSTRIES & OCCUPATIONS

Goal 1: Strengthen the regional workforce through focused education, training, and awareness of programs and career opportunities.

COEDD takes a direct approach to addressing the gap between labor market demands and education. Through close relationships between employers and educators, the region will increase awareness of career opportunities and increase course availability and access to higher education. Soft skills and digital literacy training are prioritized in this goal to ensure that the region's workforce is prepared for long-term and successful employment. Effective and diverse workforce investment boards are essential to implementing this approach.

Many of the most important emerging industries and occupations rely heavily on skills in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). COEDD is dedicated to increase student excitement about STEM learning. The strategies outlined to achieve this goal include pilot programs for early and continued STEM learning; demonstrating what success could look like within a STEM career; and promotion of STEM through marketing its advantages and associated career opportunities.

The region's strong vocational-technical training positions COEDD well for the continued development of in-demand skilled trades workforce. An important step toward success in this strategy will be to increase participation from both employers and potential employees in internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning programs. COEDD will identify barriers to participation and work with stakeholders to address the challenges.

COEDD acknowledges that significant barriers to employment exist, particularly among disadvantaged populations and in the more rural areas of the region. Among these barriers, access to affordable childcare and transportation were identified by stakeholders as essential.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Develop and maintain regional database of relevant programs and resources and evaluate to identify and address gaps.
- Strategy 2: Educate employers, students, and workers about emerging occupations and available programs, resources, and processes.
- Strategy 3: Increase access to and participation in STEM curriculum, apprenticeships, internships, and work-based learning.
- Strategy 4: Increase career-readiness among current and future workers through soft skills and digital literacy training and addressing barriers to employment such as childcare and transportation.

PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- K-12 Schools
- Higher education (vocational-technical schools, colleges, universities)
- Business and industry

See evaluation framework located on page 75

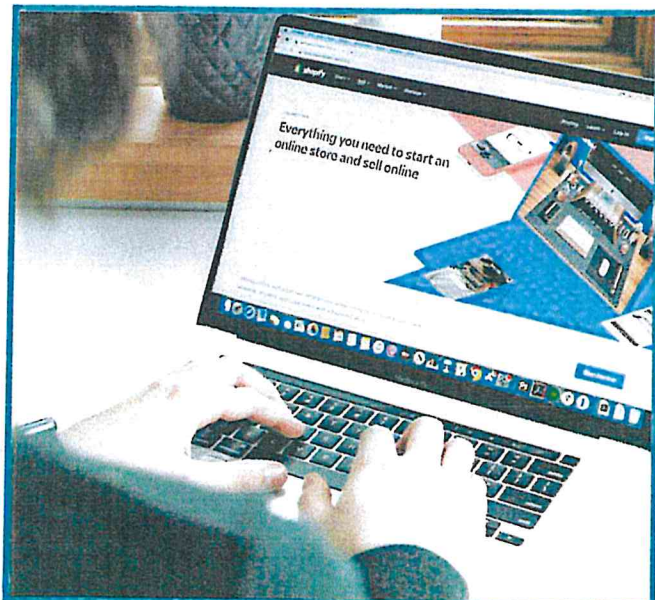
EMERGING INDUSTRIES & OCCUPATIONS

Goal 2: Grow regional business retention, expansion, and recruitment through outreach, support, and access to resources.

The COEDD region is dedicated to business growth, entrepreneurship development, and supporting small businesses. With ecommerce, automation, and other trends, it is increasingly important for regional leaders to be aware and respond to business needs. To identify and address the challenges businesses face, outreach and communication are essential. COEDD will work with regional partners to contact and gather information from businesses, start-ups, and entrepreneurship programs. With this important feedback, COEDD and its partners can better assist businesses with planning and the resources necessary to be successful.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Assist communities in developing business retention and expansion (BRE) strategies and business outreach plans with special consideration for emerging industries and small, minority-owned, woman-owned, and veteran owned businesses.
- Strategy 2: Conduct regional scan of entrepreneurship and innovation programming and resources.
- Strategy 3: Assist businesses in accessing capital and other resources, such as business planning and continuing education.
- Strategy 4: Develop and secure resources for small business marketing assistance and digital literacy programs.



PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- Oklahoma Southeast
- Oklahoma Department of Commerce
- Economic Development Organizations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Main Street Programs
- Downtown Associations
- Convention and Visitor Bureaus
- Local Governments

See evaluation framework located on page 76



LEADERSHIP & REPRESENTATION

To realize its vision, COEDD must engage leaders and promote regional collaboration. Community stakeholders mentioned the need for more involvement and direct ways for citizens to be involved and engaged with community matters. The concern of decreased involvement has threatened several organizations that rely on volunteers while also decreasing the sense of community connectedness and place. While the underlying goal of community programs is to inspire new leaders and create leadership opportunities, in the COEDD Region, programs can also be tailored more specifically for professional development and skill-building. Programs which promote regionalism and increase awareness of funding and grant opportunities, for instance, can be a step in the right direction towards increased engagement and involvement, while promoting a sense of ownership for those in the community.

Shifts in political representation, particularly at state and local levels, was also a key topic of concern among stakeholders. Resources and representation are generally based on population, leaving rural areas at a disadvantage. Resilient communities must demonstrate government efficiency and responsiveness in order to be successful. The COEDD region is focused on advocating for support and funding of regional goals.

LEADERSHIP & REPRESENTATION

Goal 1: Increase engagement with young talent and emerging local leaders.

As the population in the region ages, those retiring from leadership roles take with them institutional knowledge and experience. As part of succession, it is critical to identify and mentor potential new leaders. COEDD recognizes the importance of diverse leadership for innovative and equitable solutions.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Develop list of leadership programs, professional groups, and volunteer opportunities and address gaps that may exist in the region.
- Strategy 2: Promote participation in leadership programs, professional groups, and volunteer opportunities throughout the region.



PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- Elected officials and government staff
- Leadership programs
- Professional groups

See evaluation framework located on page 77

LEADERSHIP & REPRESENTATION

Goal 2: Expand outreach to businesses, communities, and elected officials with an emphasis on awareness of programs, funding opportunities, professional development, and regional collaboration.

Leadership and professional development programs are essential in the ongoing education and training for community leaders. These skill-building programs can engage specific underrepresented populations or be open to the greater community while offering an opportunity to stimulate civic engagement. The social capacity that is added by these programs can benefit not only the local agencies and individuals that attend, but the entire community.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Determine and address professional development needs.
- Strategy 2: Develop engagement plan to improve understanding of civics and increase community involvement.
- Strategy 3: Create and maintain database of relevant programs and funding opportunities.



PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- Economic Development Organizations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Elected officials and government staff
- Industry partners

See evaluation framework located on page 78



FUNDING & INFRASTRUCTURE

To prosper in a contemporary economy, communities need to invest in modern infrastructure. Most notably, a community must make necessary investments and provide residents with equitable access to high-quality broadband. Broadband has become increasingly vital in all facets of life, including business, health, and education. Thankfully, the federal government recognizes this need, and has developed new and recapitalized existing funding sources through various agencies including the Economic Development Agency (EDA) and United State Department of Agriculture (USDA). The COEDD region should make intentional efforts to identify potential funding sources to upgrade traditional and modern infrastructure across the region. This requires a collaborative approach from civic, business, and economic development leaders. Identifying funding sources is the first step, the COEDD region should also consider building capacities in key organizations to successfully apply for competitive grants and build out the administrative support required to best utilize formula-driven funding opportunities. Beyond broadband, the COEDD region should assess the status of traditional infrastructure and the state of current critical government services. Funding is available to address capital needs and shore up tight budgets to ensure government can continue to offer critical services.

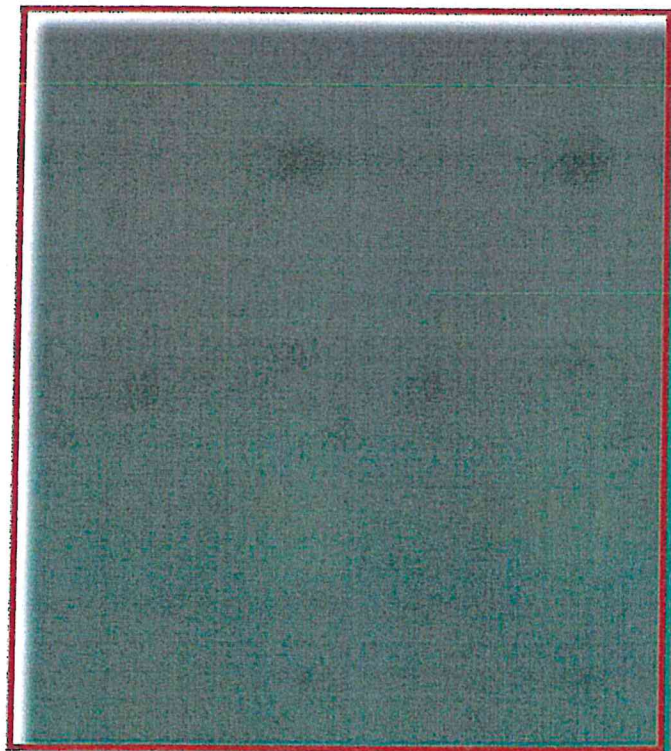
FUNDING & INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal 1: Strengthen regional healthcare services.

Access to healthcare services is critical, yet those in the COEDD Region, especially those in rural areas, are facing a variety of access barriers. Rural residents are particularly prone to access gaps in emergency services, as available and obtainable services need to be accessed in a timely manner. Other barriers also exist in access including financial means to pay for services, means to reach and use services, communication barriers, and quality concerns.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Identify locations, capacity, and services for medical providers, emergency services, and clinics in the region.
- Strategy 2: Evaluate HPSA score and identify most common needs such as urgent care, pharmacies, mental health care, and substance abuse resources
- Strategy 3: Advance Telehealth and Telemedicine with increased broadband infrastructure
- Strategy 4: Increase awareness of healthcare options and wellness programs.



PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- Oklahoma Hospital Association
- Local and Regional Hospitals
- Oklahoma State Health Department
- Oklahoma Healthy Communities
- Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET)
- Telehealth/Telemedicine providers

See evaluation framework located on page 79

FUNDING & INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal 2: Build capacity for the development of public/private partnerships, planning, and leveraging funding.

Local governments and economic development organizations lack the capacity to fully leverage their assets. Public/private partnerships can help to address the issue. According to the Council of Development Finance Agencies, “a public-private partnership (P3) is a contractual arrangement where a government agency contracts with a private partner to renovate, construct, operate, maintain, and/or manage a facility or system that provides a public service.” P3 models are ideal for communities who have insufficient capacity to deliver complex services, such as providing rural communities with broadband access.

The COEDD region sees recent federal funding initiatives as a unique opportunity to leverage public funding to attract private sector funding and partnerships to enhance critical infrastructure such as broadband deployment. In addition to federal funding, COEDD provides and promotes a number of services and funding programs to help businesses and communities prosper, including grant administration assistance, industrial park development funding, small and large business financing packages, and revolving loan funds. The promotion and increased use of these services can help improve local organizations capacities and create new partnerships and opportunities.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Provide education for public officials and staff on infrastructure costs, planning, and prioritization.
- Strategy 2: Create and maintain guide to important programs and local, state, and federal funding opportunities.
- Strategy 3: Promote funding and service opportunities provided by COEDD



PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- Business and Industries
- Financial Institutions
- Local government
- EDA

See evaluation framework located on page 80

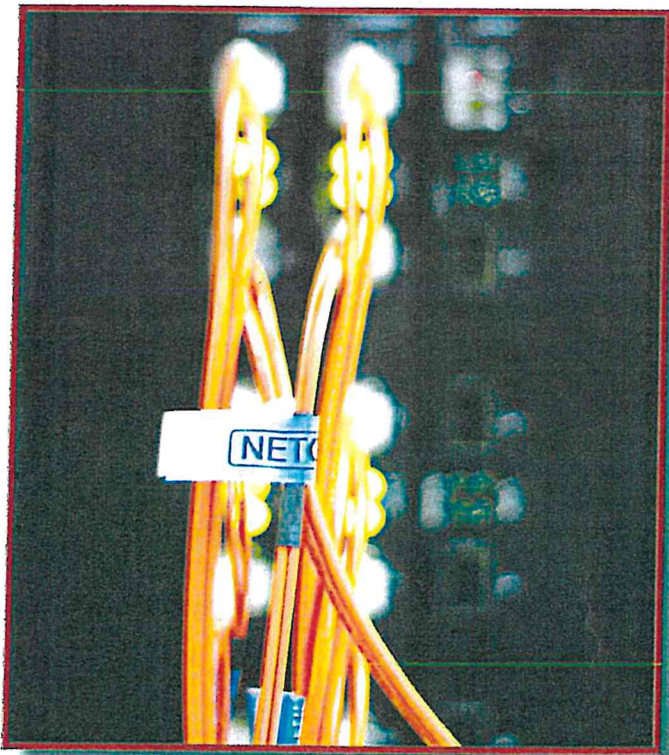
FUNDING & INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal 3: Expand quality broadband service access and affordability throughout the region.

One of the most critical needs in the COEDD region is broadband access. As work, education, healthcare, and other important services have become more virtually integrated, broadband has become essential to quality of life and business operations. In rural areas of the region and among disadvantaged populations, affordability to quality broadband will ensure more equitable access to access to vital services. Broadband is also an important link to communication and connectivity across the region.

COEDD has outlined the following strategies to achieve this goal:

- Strategy 1: Establish collaboration between communities to identify gaps in coverage and develop a regional approach to meet the challenges of broadband expansion.
- Strategy 2: Increase broadband connectivity and affordability across the region, focusing on underserved locations.
- Strategy 3: Increase broadband capacity to meet or exceed standards.



PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- COEDD
- Local government
- Broadband providers
- Rural Electric Coops
- U.S. Economic Development Administration
- Oklahoma Department of Commerce
- Rural Broadband Expansion Council

See evaluation framework located on page 81