

Summary of wKREDA Strategic Planning Session August 29, 2001

On Wednesday, August 29, 2001, thirty-six members of the western Kansas Rural Economic Development Alliance met for an organizational strategic planning session at the Holiday Inn in Hays, Kansas. See the Appendix for a list of attendees and their affiliations. Staff of the Docking Institute of Public at Fort Hays State University facilitated the day-long session. Docking Institute Assistant Director and Sociologist, Brett Zollinger, and Institute Research Scientist and Sociologist, Mike Walker, facilitated the planning session, while Institute Research Associate, Suzann Wassinger, served as recorder.

Mission

Following introductions and an overview of strategic planning rationale, the floor was opened for discussion of the organization's current mission statement.

The mission statement of an organization is a brief declaration that clearly states the purpose of the organization. This mission should guide the overall direction and activities of the organization and be used as a reference point for organizational activities. Management goals and strategies should be consistent with the organization's mission.

Comments were made regarding the applicability of the old mission statement to the current and appropriate overarching organizational emphasis. Most were satisfied with the current mission statement:

“To work together for the common good of Western Kansas.”

Some, however, expressed an interest in a more specific mission. It was suggested that the statement be revised to reflect the economic development emphasis of wKREDA. While others liked the reference to economic development, they also maintained that “common good” is a necessary component to the statement. Participants seemed to agree that the following statement was preferred over the current mission:

“To work together for the economic well-being and common good of Western Kansas.”

The wKREDA bylaws also include three objectives following the mission statement, which guide the group's purpose. While these were not discussed at the planning session, they are important to the group's mission, and are listed here as a frame of reference for the later goals and action steps.

“The purpose and objectives of the western Kansas Rural Economic Development Alliance shall be:

- (a) to promote the exchange of ideas and information among members to enhance their effectiveness in their local organizations and the wKREDA region,
- (b) to provide its members educational, legislative, and recruitment opportunities and other local and regional community and rural development efforts, and
- (c) to revitalize western Kansas through cooperative, community and rural development activities.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

All organizations do some things well and do other things less well. For the organization to act strategically, it must recognize those attributes. It is important for an organization to recognize its strengths in order to build on them, to learn from them and to acknowledge people and processes that are performing well. In a like manner, to be addressed weaknesses must be identified. This reflects the truism that “a problem not recognized will not be solved.”

As a next step in the planning process, participants were divided randomly into four groups to conduct a strengths-weaknesses/opportunities-threats analysis (SWOT). Participants were instructed that strengths and weaknesses refer to characteristics internal to the organization, while opportunities and threats refer to phenomena external to the organization, but which, in some way (as an opportunity or threat) may affect the organization. The groups worked for about one hour developing their lists. When it appeared that each group had exhaustively developed their lists, facilitators requested that each group report their list. Facilitators clarified and recorded comments on flip sheets, and displayed those sheets around the room.

An exhaustive list of internal strengths and weaknesses follows:

STRENGTHS (Internal)

- Quarterly meetings
- Networking among the members
- Legislative public relations efforts
- Dairy recruitment activities
- List Serv
- Education programs wKREDA provides—community development 101 programs in particular
- Respect of others in the organization
- Funding of the organization and collaboration among members
- Internet site—and other valuable resources the group provides
- Diversity of members in the organization
- Vision of what the groups is looking to do in the long term, and what western Kansas could be
- Combined experience of members
- Respect each other—keep prospects in western Kansas—sharing of leads/information

- Mentoring of the younger educational development professionals in wKREDA
- Good public appearance to people outside western Kansas—strong image
- Ability to do own trade shows and not have to rely on state funds
- Grass roots organization
- Passion

WEAKNESSES (Internal)

- Complacency
- Lack of City/County official representation
- The immensity of the geographic space that the organization represents
- Outflow of local wealth
- Lack of outreach/action plan to reach outside of organization
- Lack of membership by leaders in corporations and small business
- Need to “refuel” individuals in wKREDA
- Need to market to selves before market to others—inability to share the vision with non members
- Need more producers within the organization (too few performing too many organizational tasks)
- Stagnant non-growing membership
- Entirely voluntary membership—no paid staff
- Lack of current information (community profiles) at subunit level
- Lack of follow through on plans and goals
- Lack of resources to move organization to a higher level
- Inability of many members to provide funding
- Lack of wKREDA high profile
- Lack of a local awareness of a mission/purpose
- Sense within organization that wKREDA represents bigger communities with money
- Smaller communities do not know what they want to do with economic development
- Cooperation and competition issues—communities/counties not communicating with neighboring communities/counties enough—need more sub regional economic communication
- Inconsistent attendance at meetings on part of smaller groups due to lack of funds
- Organization may be too small to handle all the activities it wants to do—“biting off more than we can chew?”
- Lack of attention to retention
- Not everyone has a computer—electronic communication does not reach everyone
- Fear to acknowledge our differences; there is much diversity in conditions across the 46 county area
- Have not achieved membership from 100% of the counties
- Not enough self-promotion; we should better document our successes
- Need more diversity in business recruitment
- Organizational meetings should always have a purpose; there is sometimes a lack of education and issue-based presentations/discussions

No organization operates in a vacuum, uninfluenced by phenomena external to the organization. It is important for an organization to reflect on characteristics of the environment in which it operates that may provide opportunities for achieving organizational goals. It is also important to recognize environmental conditions that threaten the organization's goals. The following is an exhaustive list of the opportunities and threats identified by participants:

OPPORTUNITIES (External)

- Could network with other groups (agricultural, church, city and county groups, RC&D, and sister organizations in the state)
- Large outlet for press releases
- Untapped leadership in western Kansas
- Quality of life in western Kansas communities (low crime, good schools)
- Subgroups (smaller groups) can band together
- Can promote positive things going on in western Kansas
- Untapped partnering (e.g. KDOT, USDA)
- Clean air, abundance of natural resources
- Lack of population density
- Individual wealth among a segment of the area's population
- Good transportation and utility infrastructure
- Smart, hard-working people
- Good higher educational opportunities—outreaches, colleges, etc.
- Highly educated population

THREATS (External)

- Contacts and links lost as out migration of wealth/education—brain drain
- Dwindling of natural resources
- Lack of education for/in our leadership
- Graying population
- Tax burden
- School closures
- Declining census—decline in population
- Undependable air and ground delivery/transportation services
- Lack of housing (aging/decrepit housing stock)
- Cultural/social inertia; aversion to change
- Low unemployment—labor supply is tight
- Lack of cooperation in/between some communities—for improvement efforts
- High turnover in economic development staff
- Cost of living high in some areas (housing may be cheaper, but transportation cost more expensive—distance)
- Lack of competition in some sectors
- Low paying jobs
- Viewing towns with rose-colored glasses—smaller towns also have big-city problems
- Many communities do not think wKREDA represents them

- Lack of quality and quantity of legislative representation
- Smaller communities do not know what they want to do with economic development—lack of vision
- Change in demographics—growing Hispanic population introduces change that is often resisted
- Hard to recruit professionals to rural remote areas
- People content with status quo
- Overwhelming nature of demographic change (out-migration of youth and aging population)

Goal Identification

Participants were responsible for identifying organizational goals within the context of the mission and the SWOT analysis conducted earlier in the day. Break out groups were used to identify goals for the organization that are achievable within a five year time frame. Break out groups worked for about one hour developing their lists of goals. Facilitators clarified and recorded the goals on tear sheets before the whole group. The initial list of goals included:

GOALS

- To be a better advocate for the region—reaching out to other organizations/parties
- Strengthen membership—increase membership—active members—upgrade membership—100 % county participation
- Diversity in business recruitment
- Promote growth and retention of existing businesses
- Work toward being an organization with a professional staff
- Continue to offer economic development education—provide paths for members to share own expertise
- Increase continuity/ease transition within organization
- Explore labor studies for region
- Increase influence on decision-making
- Organize an annual conference to understand economic trends that western Kansas needs to react to
- More producers within the organization
- Upgrade website to market western Kansas
- Minimize the conflicts between large and small communities in western Kansas
- Improve public relations—website, establish an effective public relations campaign
- Diversify economic information/opportunities—recruitment, retention, entrepreneurial things—agri-tourism opportunities
- Make wKREDA members better at what they do—education within the organization
- Annual wKREDA conference for economic development for western Kansas
- Leadership training for local boards for economic development
- Make meetings more attractive to members—benefits
- Better internal communication—passion

Facilitators were able to formulate five goals from the initial set of goals. Five break out groups were formed, with participants self-directing themselves into a group based on interest/expertise. Each group was charged with developing action steps to reach the goals. Below are the five goals and the action steps that participants were able to develop during the last hour of the planning session.

GOALS AREAS AND ACTION STEPS

Goal 1. Public Relations

wKREDA will expand and improve its public relations efforts to better promote programs and services of wKREDA and western Kansas strengths and successes. As a result of our efforts, state and local legislators and decision makers will better appreciate and represent the concerns and needs of the region. In addition businesses and professionals will appreciate the advantages of living and working in western Kansas. Recognizing the limited resources for public relations efforts, wKREDA will prioritize the target audiences to communicate with, and form strategic alliances with other organizations to help deliver wKREDA's message.

Action Steps:

- ◆ Identify target audiences (e.g. Kansas Association of Counties, etc.) to reach and the best method to reach each audience
- ◆ Develop a speakers bureau to make presentations on wKREDA and economic development
- ◆ Create a presentation that demonstrates the importance of western Kansas to the Kansas economy
- ◆ Submit a report on a regular basis to legislators on grants, loans and tax credits
- ◆ Develop a program that encourages all western Kansas communities to update and keep their information current (KDOCH community profiles and websites)
- ◆ Investigate ways of increasing use of website for promotion of western Kansas as a desirable place to live and do business.
- ◆ Consider spotlighting different western Kansas communities on a rotating basis on web site or in other media

Goal 2. wKREDA Membership.

As a volunteer, grass roots organization, wKREDA's ability to create positive change in Western Kansas is dependent on a strong and active membership. wKREDA will increase the quantity, quality and diversity of its membership. As a result of our efforts, wKREDA membership will: 1) include active participation from the majority of its members; 2) include 100% participation of counties within its service area; 3) include representatives from businesses, manufacturers, financial institutions, higher education institutions, and local governments throughout the region; and 4) reflect the ethnic/cultural diversity of Western Kansas' population. wKREDA recognizes that the desirability of wKREDA membership is directly related to the group's ability to deliver valued services to its members and participating communities. As such, wKREDA will strive to provide services that meet the needs of all members.

Action Steps:

- ◆ Set up committee to develop person-to-person contact for communities who do not have a wKREDA member
- ◆ Identify target membership market.
- ◆ Develop membership campaign materials and recruitment goals.
- ◆ Make presentations to City and County officials to request membership
- ◆ Develop ways to encourage more involvement among new members
- ◆ Organize a wKREDA mentor program (more experienced members mentor new members)
- ◆ Develop a “welcome to wKREDA” package for new members identifying economic development resources and other helpful information
- ◆ Encourage membership from organizations with like goals, and consider joining other organizations with like goals
- ◆ Provide leadership classes to City/County government, Chambers of Commerce, Tourism Groups
- ◆ Rejuvenate existing members by developing a strategy to approach non-participating members to personally invite their involvement on committees

Goal 3. Education

wKREDA will increase educational opportunities for wKREDA members and local economic development officials. As a result of our efforts, wKREDA members will have the knowledge, skills, tools, and resources to: 1) understand and appreciate the evolving economic and community development trends and opportunities in Western Kansas and their local communities; 2) successfully implement economic and community development programs in their local communities; 3) effectively participate in regional economic development partnerships; and 4) grow professionally.

Action Steps:

- ◆ Survey members to determine the perceived need for educational information and topics of interest.
- ◆ Offer an annual “mini institute” on economic and community development
- ◆ Develop a business resource directory and list of expertise
- ◆ Continue offering ED101 course before quarterly meeting
- ◆ Educate members on values of and strategies for business retention and expansion
- ◆ Re-institute having a speaker of note at the business meetings, with specific time limits
- ◆ Educate from within by better communicating how ED101 can benefit members (to include wKREDA functions, core values of the organization, success stories)

Goal 4. Organizational

wKREDA will improve the efficiency of its organization to better achieve its mission. As a result of our efforts, wKREDA will become an organization which: 1) communicates effectively through all its levels; 2) has a strong and deep bench of leadership; 3) achieves established goals; and 4) is forward looking in its approach.

Action Steps:

- ◆ Re-evaluate meeting structure; more networking, encourage carpooling, issues forum in the evening
- ◆ Increase communication; include county commissioners on listserv; encourage listserv representation for all communities in the counties
- ◆ Encourage listserv as a Q and A resource
- ◆ Inventory list of member expertise (NREDA is an example)
- ◆ Use the inventory of expertise to stack committees with expertise
- ◆ Discuss the transition of the Board
- ◆ Review the wKREDA Strategic Plan annually, assessing progress and need for changes.

Goal 5. Business Recruitment

wKREDA will expand and diversify business recruitment efforts and access to economic opportunities within Western Kansas. Many individual communities would not be able to access potential markets alone. Recognizing that different communities have different economic development goals and assets, wKREDA will seek a diversity of types and sizes of businesses in its recruitment efforts. As a result of our collaborative efforts, the economic health of the region will increase.

Action Steps:

- ◆ Perform a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis for the future of various markets in the wKREDA region
- ◆ Maintain existing recruitment efforts
- ◆ Refine recruitment research such as studying all tertiary/related dairy industry and looking into more vertical integration
- ◆ Share examples of individual members' recruitment materials with all of wKREDA.
- ◆ Assist communities at the local level in identifying targeted industries and developing a local plan
- ◆ Identify the producers in our communities and put together teams to identify their needs and recruit based on those needs
- ◆ Document our infrastructure, to determine realistic locations for particular industries
- ◆ Stress planned growth and management of resources
- ◆ Explore ideas for targeted industry including: potatoes, peanuts, cotton, agri-tourism, value added agriculture, sunflowers, organic products, warehouse/distribution, renewable energy, alternative energy, biodegradable products, methane gas, dairy support industry (machine maintenance, veterinarians, pharmaceuticals, service industry, etc.)

Appendix

wKREDA strategic planning participants:

Steve Miller	Sunflower Electric
Rich Kraemer	Insurance Planning, Hays
Scott McGinley	UtiliCorp United
Fred Burgess	Edwards County Economic Development
Mark A Shiles	Grant County Economic Development
Ed Wiltse	Pioneer Electric
Cindy Wallace	Larned Chamber of Commerce & PCEDC
Susan Bittel	FHSU Small Business Development Center
Gina Riedel	Hays Area Chamber of Commerce
Dennis Deines	Western Coop Electric
Stacie Minson	Trego Co/ Trego Co Extension
Patty Richardson	Great Plains Development. Inc.
Alan Oswalt	GCCC Small Business Development Center
Pat Veesart	GCCC Small Business Development Center
Bert Mosier	Sheridan County Development
Don Ballek	KDOCH
Kent Copwell	USDA RD
Amelia Wisiner	Phillips County ED/Chamber
Connil Grafel	Oberlin-Decatur Area EDC
Richard Shank	Southwestern Bell-Hutchinson
Alison Guthrie	Hodgeman County Economic Development
Lynda Yohon	Rural Telephone
Lavern Squier	Ellis Co. Coalition
Sandra Stenzel	Trego Co./Wakeeney Economic Development
Janette Bump	Graham Co. Economic Development
Clare Gustin	Sunflower Electric
Hody Howard	City of Wakeeney
Stan Rice	Pioneer Electric
Larry Berb	Midwest Energy, INC
Snadra Wood	Russell Co. ED
Roger Hrabe	Rooks Co ED
Cathy Drabkin	Docking Institute
Sharla Krenzel	Wichita Co ED
Gary Gore	Great Bend Chamber of Commerce
Carol Meyes	Garden City/ Finney County
Bob Mosier	Kiowa County Development Group, INC Greensburg