

## REAP MILESTONES: 10+ YEARS OF COOPERATION

### **Brief History**

In 1997 twenty-seven (27) cities signed the first Intergovernmental Agreements forming the South Central Regional Council of Governments. In 1998 the council adopted the name Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP) while adopting a structure for operations under official Bylaws, assessments, and a one-year work plan, including contracting with the Hugo Wall School at Wichita State University for staffing. In 1999 REAP revised its bylaws to open membership up to counties. In 2006 REAP re-developed its Bylaws and created a new Interlocal Agreement that was officially approved by the Office of Kansas Attorney General. REAP also established a tax identification number, financial policies, and independent bank accounts. Today, REAP is comprised of thirty-four (34) city and county governments in a nine county region.

### **Major Initiatives**

*Affordable Airfares:* The region has been involved in the issue of affordable airfares since 1999 when there was the Air Service Task Force and in 2001 REAP engaged the region to participate in the Travel Bank program to leverage the market for a single low-fare carrier. Although that program had some limited success it was apparent that a more comprehensive program would be needed and in 2006 REAP took the lead with the development of the Kansas Affordable Airfares Program (KAAP). Since 2006 REAP, as directed by the State of Kansas, has administered the five-year, \$25 million program, to provide more air flight options, more competition for air travel, and affordable air fares for Kansas.

*Workforce Development:* In 1999 REAP called for the establishment of local control in the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, recognizing REAP as the appointing authority for the Local Workforce Investment Board. The Economic Development Committee was assigned the task to serve as the Local Elected Officials Board for Local Area IV. In 2003 REAP took official action to become the grant recipient for Workforce Investment Act funds and designated the Workforce Alliance as sub-recipient. A revised Chief Elected Officials Board (CEOB) agreement was drafted and approved by Butler, Harper, Sedgwick and Sumner counties.

*Water Related Issues:* In 2000 REAP established a working group to study the issue of water, cultivating in 2004 when REAP approved the creation of the South Central Kansas Water Coalition to provide a vehicle for cities and counties to work collaboratively on common issues, concerns and challenges relating to water supply and water quality. Following three years of work on various issues REAP determined that it would be best served by establishing a Water Resources Committee in 2007 as a standing committee to carry out the purposes for which the Coalition was created. In addition, REAP determined that the WRC would be self-sufficient with independent assessments and membership.

*Website and Information:* REAP initially launched a website in 2000. This site provided some data and member information but was limited in its content, so in 2007 REAP hired 360Wichita to oversee the design and development of a new website that improved access to allow for agendas, changes in membership, updates on information, accomplishments, etc.

*Regional Summits:* REAP tries to act proactively in activities to bring regional actors to speak about common issues. In 2001, 2002, and 2004 REAP held summits on developing success in regional economic development. In 2005 REAP invited Dr. Joe Aistrup to keynote the summit at which he highlighted the economic factors that create regional economies and the differences between the regional economies that comprise the state. Since 2006, REAP has partnered with Visioneering Wichita to conduct an annual leadership summit that attracts business and governmental leaders from throughout South Central Kansas to discuss “Our Economic Future.”

REAP has also been involved in other meaningful summits, like in 1999 when it co-sponsored the *2000 Tourism and Meetings Summit*, and in 2002 when REAP was involved in the planning for the 2003 Aviation Festival.

*Wichita MSA:* REAP weighed in on a substantive issue in 2001 when REAP acted to prevent new regulations from the Office of Management and Budget that removed Harvey County from the Wichita Metropolitan Statistical Area. The issue was resolved in August of 2002.

*Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition:* In 2003 REAP was involved in the formation of the Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition (GWEDC) in an attempt to expand the scope of regional economic development. REAP has continued its relationship with the GWEDC by sitting on its Board. In addition, REAP has helped to initiate regional dialogues on economic development and GWEDC relationships.

### **Legislative Accomplishments**

The first legislative action taken by REAP came in 1998, when members took a six-city, 13-hour bus tour through south central Kansas to raise awareness about REAP and its 1999 legislative priorities. Those 1999 legislative priorities were the first REAP Legislative Agenda. Since that time REAP has adopted a yearly legislative platform while working to cultivate relationships with area legislatures to gain favorable outcomes for the region and State of Kansas.

Issues that REAP has weighed in on include:

- First Agenda in 1999: Siting of diagnostic center in the region, Star Bonds, and Boeing Investment Act
- Establish local control in the implementation of WIA (2000)
- Governance and financing of the Equus Beds Groundwater Management District (2001)
- Seek designation of Metropolitan Statistical Area for the region (2001)
- WIA state set-aside funds (2003)
- Vote of Sedgwick County citizens for regional event center in downtown Wichita (2005)
- Enhance access to state parks (2005, 2006, 2007)
- Low cost commercial air service from Mid-Continent Airport (KAAP in 2006)
- Local Authority for Casino vote (2007)
- Research and development on composites (2007)
- Aviation research at NIAR (2007)
- Manufacturing-based, business-driven technical education (2007)
- Other issues on agendas: Parity in electric rates (2000); EDIF funding (2000, 2002); Pollution in the lower Arkansas River basin (2001, 2002); Designation of Metropolitan Planning Organization (2001, 2002); Expansion of passenger rail service in South Central Kansas (2001, 2002); Economic stimulus package for South Central Kansas (2002); Investments in tourism and Regulations to increase the protection of the Equus Beds aquifer (2003); Strengthen home rule authority (2003, 2004, 2005, 2006); 1999 Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2003, 2004, 2007, 2008); Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction (LAVTR), Cowley County lake study funding, and Implementation of destination-based sales taxes (2004); Preserve the existing exemptions under the Kansas Open Records Act and the Kansas Open Meetings Act (2005); Maintain authority of local governments to use eminent domain for economic development, Oppose adoption of TABOR, and Create a legislative scorecard (2006); and Blighted properties (2007)