

Covid-19 Resiliency Plan



Planning & Scoping

Goals & Objectives

The future success of our region relies on identifying, learning from, and planning for events that carry the potential to destabilize community growth. This endeavor requires a commitment to proactive solutions. With this, the goal of the economic resiliency plan must utilize past and current events with which to inform our strategic choices for the future. Related objectives will therefore demonstrate a focus on analyzing the impact of disasters and major disruptors, reviewing current recovery efforts, and to adopt comprehensive and resilient mitigation policies which structure this goal.

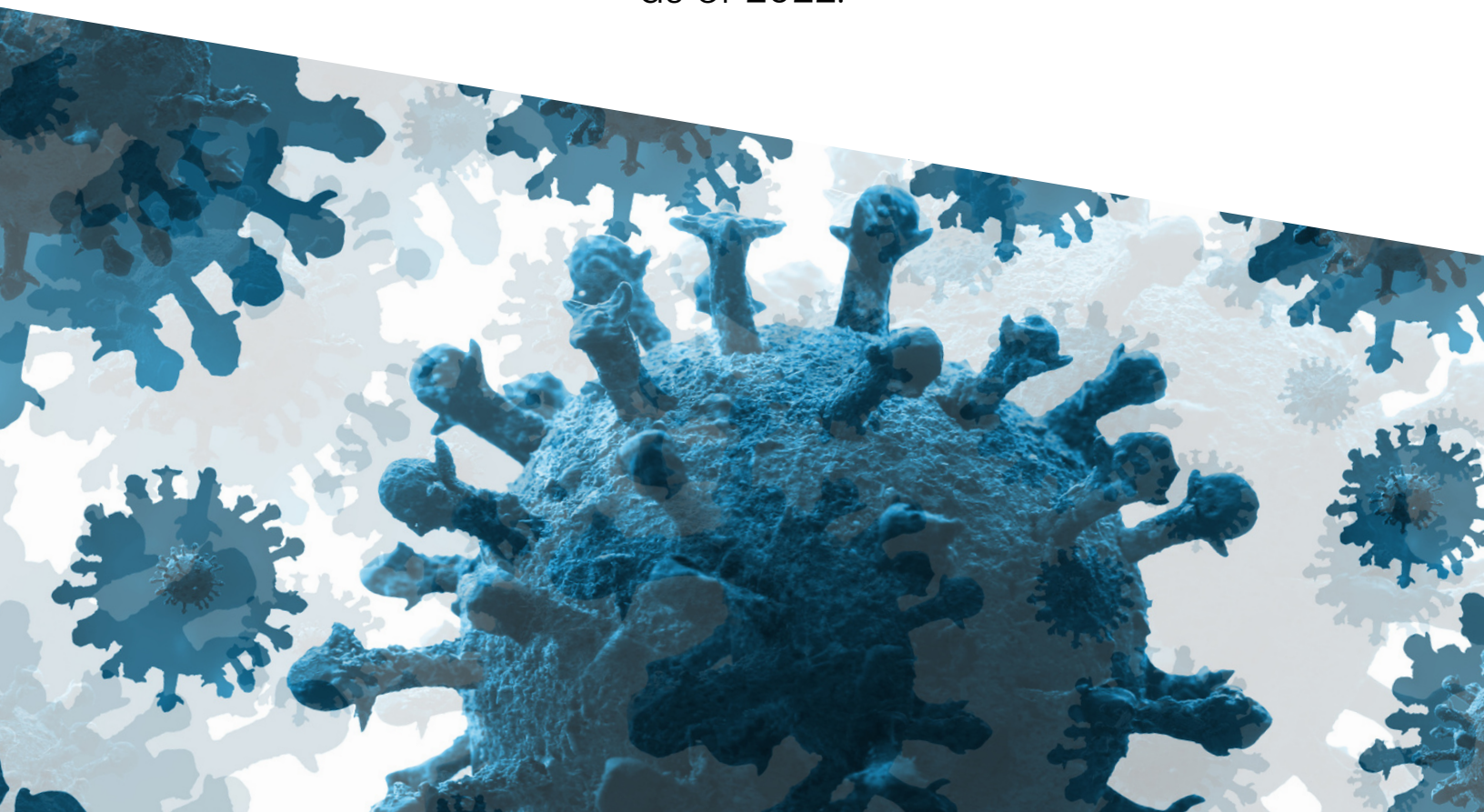
Key Elements

Resiliency is an objective which requires commitment and vigilance at every step of the process. This means that the pursuit of resiliency must consider key elements in order to define and organize these steps. Key elements of economic resiliency include:

- Identify economic performance measures
- Identify potential threats, disasters, and major disruptors to economic activities
- Incorporating the current strategies outlined by county Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMPs)
- Develop network of resiliency-oriented partners
- Generation and adoption of actionable steady-state and responsive policies related to the prevention, survivability, and recovery from major disruptions

Overview of COVID-19

In addition to the direct threat on human life, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been far reaching. Its effects manifested at international, national, state, and local levels. This includes an overall reduction in the capacity for many economic sectors. Business and leisure travel as well as community events saw sharp reductions. With many ill and in quarantine, workforce efficacy also saw steep declines. This in turn produced strains on supply lines and commerce. Recovery from these effects are still present challenges as of 2022.





Challenges and Issues

The current challenges to pandemic response identified since the onset of COVID-19 are both complex and persistent. Moreover, these challenges have proven to be wide-ranging, from sectors in healthcare and commerce, to general welfare, and the legislative capacity for ad-hoc response. A robust economic resiliency plan must therefore consider each in order to better prepare for shocks.

Medical infrastructure was one of the first recognized issues. While the local region did not suffer patient overflows to the extent that many densely-populated regions faced, our healthcare systems require special attention. Shortages were observed in hospital testing supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), and staffing, while effective communication between hospitals, public health officials, elected officials, and the wider population remained strained. These challenges directly affect the longevity and severity of both the COVID-19 pandemic and all future viral outbreaks.

Issues in commercial activity soon followed. At the local level, this meant that individuals saw layoffs and decreased earnings. Some local businesses were forced to permanently close their doors. At broader levels of observation, supply chain structures failed to meet consumer demand. Delays and shortages helped to initially shape a climate for an ensuing market inflation while economic models were unprepared for how to respond.

These issues culminated in deeply-seated problems for maintaining social welfare. The hardest hit demographic was low and moderate income (LMI) households through decreased access to utilities, housing, food, and healthcare. The resiliency plan must put these families at the forefront of their efforts through precarity management and support.

Legislative capacity is potentially the toughest challenge if proactive solutions are sought. While many of the above factors have clearer potential for developing steady-state and responsive initiatives, the capability of executive authority stands under asynchronous and multilevel legal landscapes. Both response time and the presence of funding will therefore be highly nuanced. Planning for practical prevention, survivability, and recovery policies must employ a comprehensive understanding of recent events.



Plan Organization

The organization of the Economic Resiliency Plan centers on four central activities. These include research and development, economic impact analysis, strategic planning for disaster recovery, and plan approval. Research and development will focus on gathering and analyzing data as well as the regional planning commission's role in COVID-19 recovery efforts. Economic impact analysis shall consider how various economic disruptors influence the MKRC region. Strategic planning will involve both pre- and post-disaster management. Finally, the approval process concerns plan drafting, public review of the draft, and board approval.

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- Economic Impact to MKRC's region
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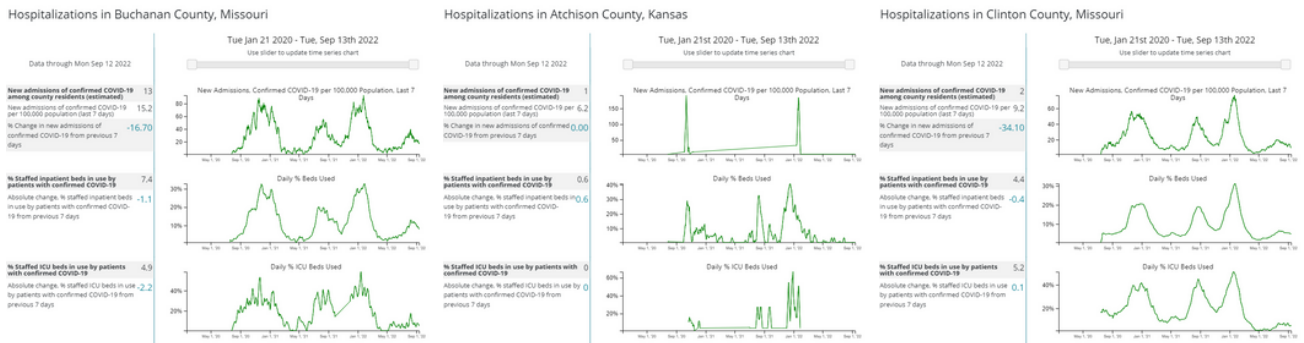
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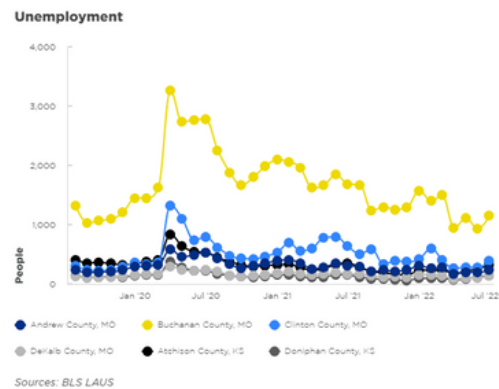
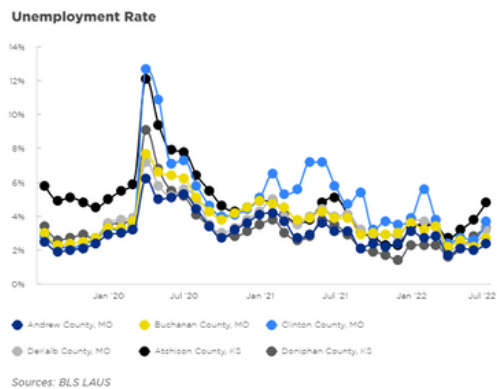
Research & Development



Gather and Analyze Data



The Mo-Kan area is served by three hospitals in Atchison, KS, St. Joseph, MO and Cameron, MO. These are located in the three southernmost counties of Atchison, Buchanan, and Clinton. Hospitalization rates for Doniphan, DeKalb, and Andrew Counties were recorded by the CDC in Buchanan County. Hospitals in Chillicothe and Maryville also serve the northwest district of Missouri. Compared to the KC Area which had 495 dedicated ICU beds, the northwest region only had 35 with 24 of those in St. Joseph. Cameron Regional Medical Center had 5 dedicated ICU beds while Amberwell Atchison had 21. As such, many critical cases of Covid-19 were sent to the KC Area for treatment. An Emergency Declaration and Order was issued in St. Joseph on March 16, 2020 through June 15, 2020 with businesses closing down intermediately throughout to avoid overcapacity in the local hospitals. The CDC data shows spikes in hospitalizations across the Mo-Kan area in October–November 2020, July–August 2021, and December–January 2022.



The unemployment rate spiked nationwide and locally in April 2020. Though the higher population in Buchanan County shows the difference in community size of the Mo-Kan region, the unemployment rate remained relatively similar across the six counties. Clinton County stands out as having a more tumultuous road to recovery through 2021 while Atchison County seems to have started higher than the most, recovered well, but is trending towards its pre-Covid numbers in recent months. Government incentives and local efforts to drive employment through recovery have positively affected the area.

RPC Role in COVID-19 Recovery

Mo-Kan Regional Council has utilized revolving loan funds (RLF) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding to build a stronger economic environment. The RLF program has helped new businesses open to replace businesses lost during the pandemic. Mo-Kan aided in the beginning of a Main Street organization to connect businesses to one another and to resources as they become available. Through networking, we better serve our communities and allow them to work together more efficiently.

Continued use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) through our area communities and state has continued to aid in recovery. Mo-Kan has assisted communities in applying for ARPA funds to improve their water infrastructure, broadband access, and community revitalization. Through analysis of community needs and the negative impacts of the pandemic, these funds are serving their intended purpose of helping our area build back better so our economy and communities can be prepared for future crisis events.

It is Mo-Kan's belief that by aiding our counties in continued identification of priorities, we can better prepare them for future funding opportunities and community improvements. Our role is to provide vital data to identify needs and funding sources so that communities are prepared to act upon opportunities when they arise and have the strongest support for their case. By aiding counties, cities, and industries, we can support each of our communities on several levels to build a more resilient and cohesive region in northwestern Missouri and northeastern Kansas.



The image features a dark background with a grid of orange lines. A large, semi-transparent orange arrow points from the left towards the right, containing the text 'Economic Impact' in white. To the right of the arrow is a 3D globe of the Earth with white latitude and longitude lines. Below the globe, a bar chart is visible with orange bars and a dashed red trend line. The x-axis of the chart is labeled with the years '2014' and '2015'. The y-axis has numerical labels '0.0', '0.5', and '1.0'. At the bottom of the image, there is a decorative border consisting of a series of orange chevrons pointing to the right.

Economic Impact

Introduction

The top employment industries in the Mo-Kan area are Manufacturing, Health Care & Education, and Retail Services. With interstates crossing in Cameron, St. Joseph, and Atchison, and the continued, historic prominence of the railroad and river in St. Joseph and Atchison, the Mo-Kan area has a strong freight infrastructure to empower the Manufacturing industry. With three hospitals and three colleges along with local school districts, Health Care & Education is a major employer in the area. The strength of local entrepreneurship in historic downtowns matched with big box stores and fast food franchises serving the transient population through the area, retail appears as a surprising third largest industry. Each of these industries were majorly impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic as shelter in place orders prevented gatherings in these often crowded workspaces.

Access to PPE and cleaning supplies was a crucial first step to allow for safe visits for the public and workspace environments for employees. In November 2020, the St. Joseph Community Improvement District applied for funding through the Buchanan County CARES Act to purchase Antimicrobial Copper Surface wraps for downtown businesses door handles, allowing for safer visits from the public.

Before these protective measures could be implemented, many businesses shifted their storefront focus to curbside pick ups, delivery services, and online shopping, diversifying their business services while also adding new challenges. These adaptations require high speed internet to businesses and consumers, a need that has been prioritized by the ARPA).

Though not listed among the top industries, as a historic region, our area relies heavily on tourism to draw in new consumers. The pandemic drastically affected tourism as experiences which relied on interior spaces were prohibited and restricted. Local event venues for the performing arts as well as museums, which are plentiful in our region, were forced to cut back on spending while providing the safest conditions to draw their audiences back. Most of these organizations are non-profit, meaning their budgeting was already tightly managed.

Budget cuts and the inability to draw large attendance to make up the loss has been difficult for the tourist industry. The Missouri Department of Tourism reports that the number of visitors to the state has reduced by 6.6 million in 2020 and an additional 3.3 million in 2021. Though those numbers are steadily improving, the number of tourist industry jobs that were lost during the pandemic has not improved as organizations continue to cut spending to make up for lost revenue.

Funding opportunities which arose from the pandemic have focused on improving infrastructure so that these industries can continue to thrive in an environment where the safety of the public is a higher priority than profit. Through improving the safety of spaces, smaller businesses and tourist destination can open to the public. Through technological advancements, businesses can make up for lost visitation with online sales. Improving shipping infrastructure allows for manufacturing and small business sales to deliver safely to a wider audience.

Economic Impact to MKRC's Region

In all four of Mo-Kan's Missouri Counties, Manufacturing, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Retail were the top three industries of 2019. In Kansas, the addition of Educational Services outpaced Retail, though Manufacturing and Health Care are still in the top three. Manufacturing, which was the number one industry in Andrew County, saw a 9% decrease in employees from 2019-2020 and was replaced as the top industry in that county by Health Care which saw a 7% increase. In Buchanan County, both Manufacturing and Health Care saw a 7% decrease while Retail saw a 1% increase. In Clinton County, Health Care was reduced by 19% while Manufacturing increased by 14%. Retail decreased by 1% in the county. In DeKalb County, Manufacturing decreased by 32% while Health Care increased by 3% and Retail decreased by 28%. In Atchison County, Education Services was the top industry, though it saw a decrease of 4% from 2019-2020. Both Manufacturing and Health Care decreased by 18%. In Doniphan County, both Health Care and Manufacturing saw an increase of 12% while their third highest industry, Education Services, saw a decrease of 30%. As the data indicates, the pandemic has had a negative impact on the top industries in the region, mostly due to a workforce which is unable to conduct business safely and effectively during a health crisis. Though the economy of the region has been affected, the data also shows opportunities to assist these industries in creating safer and more resilient workplace environments to retain staff and reduce the impact of a disaster to productivity.



Strategic Planning for Disaster Recovery



Introduction

The content of the Covid Resiliency Plan parallels the scope and purpose of the Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMPs) developed by Mo-Kan Regional Council for its four service counties in the State of Missouri. Hazard Mitigation Plans focus on minimizing and mitigating the loss of lives and properties in a natural disaster event. Through preparation, counties can qualify for funding post disaster to better prepare for future disaster events. Whereas the implementation of each HMP currently draws focus to traditional vulnerabilities (i.e., those from regional meteorological or geological events), it is expected that future updates to these plans will require additional risk assessments geared toward mitigating the effects of viral outbreak and its associated economic disruptions.

In Clinton County's HMP, an emphasis is placed on the value of achieving growth "through sustainable policies, principles, and practices" which may "decrease the impact of [...] hazards", "decrease the cost of the next disaster", and "increase [...] economic resilience to disasters". Clinton County's goals, too, draw attention to the strengthening of critical infrastructure as key to harm reduction. To achieve pandemic resiliency goals and objectives, Mo-Kan's strategic planning efforts shall focus on identifying potential actionable methods available for both pre- and post-disaster pandemic initiatives. In keeping with the spirit of each county's HMP, this plan strategy shall also be aligned to reduce or eliminate long-term risk.

Through the collaboration of community stakeholders to identify risks and plan for potential disasters, Mo-Kan can collect data and help allocate funds to the most beneficial areas to improve the economy and living conditions of our communities. With proper planning and information gathering, by learning from previous disasters, the organization can prepare a community for future events and make the best use of funds to build a more resilient infrastructure to prevent future hardships.



Pre-Disaster

Following an analysis of the challenges and issues, the recent role of RPCs, and the observed economic impacts of COVID-19 as identified throughout the above sections, various opportunities are identified with which pre-disaster strategic planning may be achieved for pandemic resilience. Two components of effective mitigation were realized early in the previous pandemic. These include a necessity to acquire large quantities of PPE and cleaning supplies as well as achieving widespread internet access. Both of these are elements of hazard mitigation which may be implemented prior to the onset of future pandemics.

Although access to PPE and cleaning supplies were critical to counter a surge in infectivity for in-person productivity, their procurement takes time and coordination. The future procurement of PPE may be possible through a concerted effort involving the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS).

The internet was useful as a stopgap measure for both business and the general public before the widespread availability of PPE. Funding for broadband internet access was prioritized by the ARPA in order to bolster regional capacity. Future funding should likewise consider the importance of growth and the maintenance of digital infrastructure.

With these opportunities identified, Mo-Kan's direct role during a pre-disaster phase concerns the sustained administration of grants or other funding related to steady-state initiatives suited to pandemic mitigation and should strive to focus on new avenues for interagency communication and cooperation. The creation of an organized response network of resiliency-oriented partners — including state, local, commercial, and medical entities — may be useful in implementing this strategy.

Post-Disaster

After a disaster is declared, Mo-Kan will be instrumental in the responsive distribution of relief funding. In keeping with the spirit of county HMP strategies to protect the “lives, property, and livelihoods of all citizens” with a focus on those areas designated “hazard prone”, the data collected following the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that funding will be best allocated to aid in precarity management and institutions of tourism, arts, and culture.

As the pandemic has shown, to maintain economic stability and public safety, it is crucial that businesses be able to operate as safely as possible during a national crisis. If the pre-disaster methods have been followed, then the distribution of PPE and use of broadband infrastructure can help businesses continue safely and thrive in a pandemic environment. Remaining in close contact with endangered industries which rely on public engagement and interaction is crucial for post-disaster care. While post-disaster funding opportunities are not a guaranteed continual service, it is imperative that Mo-Kan remain vigilant of funding opportunities that are made available and distribute information about those opportunities to critically affected industries.

Dedicated funding opportunities exist for natural disasters through SEMA and FEMA with participation in developing an HMP. After a disaster occurs, these opportunities open up for mitigation actions specified in an HMP, proving that a county is making an effort to prepare for future disasters and mitigate potential losses. A similar system should be set in place for future pandemics, to assure that businesses who prepared for such a disaster can implement planned mitigation actions and build a stronger infrastructure in the face of future pandemic events.

Mo-Kan remains dedicated to economic development and community revitalization through administration of funding resources to our communities. By providing access to funding opportunities and resources, we can help maintain physical and economical health in the face of disasters and pandemics and build more resilient communities. Improved infrastructure and communication assures that the economy is maintained through disastrous events. Mo-Kan can help communities organize and maintain a response network to assure they are prepared for future pandemics.