



Dreams. Drive. Dedication.

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

INNOVATION
-CENTER-

A Message From the CEO

SCOTT SPROUL, PRESIDENT AND CEO

It is exciting and rewarding to lead the Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center, Inc. in its **mission to increase the population, add to the quality of life for residents, and foster economic innovation in our region.** This last year has seen many changes for the Innovation Center resulting in progress for the region.

In February 2022 the Innovation Center Board approved funding for the expansion of a program with Goodland Tech, Inc. This program worked to revamp the crypto program at Northwest Kansas Technical College and resulted in yearly admissions to the program jumping from an average of six students per year to over 50 students in one year.

The Innovation Center has continued to work on workforce challenges for the region. **ConnectNWK continues to be a great resource** for both employers and job seekers with 134 employers and 146 job seekers using the site, resulting in 71 jobs filled by the end of 2022. In May the Innovation Center launched a pilot program for workforce recruitment. This program is open to 24 counties in the region and offers up to \$60,000 in incentives to be allocated and administered according to personalized plans developed by each county.

Adding workforce to the region can compound some of the struggles the area is experiencing with childcare. Recognizing the **vital role early childcare plays in the quality of life and economic health of our communities** the Innovation Center added a childcare director to its staff in July. Dana helps communities explore viable solutions to their childcare needs and helps childcare facilities navigate the many local and state resources available to providers.

Another challenge for the Innovation Center region is the lack of affordable, viable housing. This past year, Innovation Center staff and board members have spent time researching technologies that are either more cost effective, quicker to build, or both. In November the Innovation Center Board approved a loan to build a house with one of those technologies.

The Innovation Center Business Finance Program **continues to provide non-traditional funding to help businesses and entrepreneurs** in the area with financing to purchase an existing business, start a new business, or develop a product. In 2022 the Innovation Center Board approved over \$3 million in loans.

As I reflect on 2022, I am thankful for all the partnerships and engagements over the past year, and am looking forward to **expanding the Innovation Center's reach** and continuing to make a positive impact on our region.



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Serving 26 counties in Northwest Kansas, NWKEICI is a private foundation offering economic and entrepreneurial assistance to businesses and individuals.

CN	RA	DC	NT	PL	SC	JW	RP
SH	TH	SD	GH	RO	OB	MC	CD
WA	LG	GO	TR	EL	RS	LC	OT
						EW	SA



SCOTT SPROUL
PRESIDENT AND CEO



LUCAS GODDARD
PROGRAM DIRECTOR



GRETCHIN STAPLES
RURAL & REMOTE COORDINATOR



MARIA DAHLQUIST
RURAL & REMOTE TECHNICAL LEAD



DANA JO STANTON
CHILDCARE PROGRAM DIRECTOR



MICHELLE PREWO
OFFICE MANAGER

2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Doug Albin, WaKeeney
- Morris Engle, Phillipsburg
- Michelle Foote, Hoxie
- Clare Gustin, Hays
- Mark Lowry, Stockton
- Mike Posson, Norton
- Jenny Russell, Courtland

Finance

Loans

\$3,152,500
in total 2022 lending

\$422,500
4 Childcare Loans

\$480,000
Lending in
manufacturing and
electrical service

\$750,000
Loaned for
MicroFactory in
Hays

\$1,500,000
largest loan

Work Force



ConnectNWK*

188 Jobs
posted to ConnectNWK

134 Different Companies
in Northwest Kansas posting
employment opportunities

143 Members
applying for opportunities
using ConnectNWK

71 Total Jobs Filled
in Northwest Kansas because of
ConnectNWK

107 Summer Internship
opportunities hosted through
ConnectNWK in partnership with
Nex-Generation Round Up for Youth



62 Community Asset Survey Responses

This will communicate ConnectNWK's long-term
goal of connecting people and communities,
not just job seekers and employers

NWK Cares for Kids Program

 \$58,114 support for five childcare centers

 \$55,114 childcare center staff support


 \$3,000 book grants for centers

8 Childcare Coalitions developed in coordination with individuals in Russell, Rawlins, Ellis, Decatur, Graham, Cloud, Rooks, and Cheyenne Counties

34 Community Meetings attended regarding childcare

5 Houses built for use as childcare facilities and directly funded through community loans to the developer



 **CHILDCARE TRACKING** system developed to monitor childcare trends in Northwest Kansas

FACEBOOK GROUP established with over 50 active members Northwest Kansas Childcare Provider Support Group

Early childhood education plays a pivotal role in the quality of life and economic health of a community. Our tomorrows will be brighter with an adequate number of high-quality childcare slots available in Northwest Kansas communities. In 2022, the Northwest Kansas Innovation Center showed their commitment to this concept by hiring a full-time staff person to oversee their early childhood initiatives. Dana Stanton was hired as the NWKEICI Childcare Director in July 2022. Stanton brings 17 years of experience in early childhood education, grant writing, and communication to the new position. She is excited to work with individuals and communities to address childcare needs in Northwest Kansas.

DANA JO STANTON
CHILD CARE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

New initiatives begin

In 2022 the Innovation Center spent a considerable amount of time exploring opportunities to tackle the many challenges communities face in housing.

Due to ever increasing supply costs Innovation Center staff and board members researched many different types of construction technologies such as 3D printing, Structural Insulated Panel (SIP) construction, and Waffle

THREE-DIMENSIONAL PRINTING

STRUCTURAL INSULATED PANELS

WAFFLE CRETE CONSTRUCTION

Crete construction. In November, the Innovation Center Board approved a loan to build a home using the Waffle Crete technology to determine if there are any advantages over a traditional built home.

While looking at the different construction technologies, the lack of workforce and construction trades in the Innovation Center region became a renewed challenge. In the organization's goal of creating opportunities for residents in the region, staff began researching how to create construction trades within the Kansas Department of Corrections. A program like this can create many benefits including a reduction in recidivism, teaching valuable new skills to those in the system, and increasing the number of skilled workforce for the area. In 2023 the Innovation Center will continue working where needed with the Kansas Department of Corrections.

The Innovation Center staff and board members have also embarked on a learning process to better understand the many housing resources available locally and statewide to determine the best options for communities to increase the availability of affordable, viable housing. It was discovered that working with communities to develop individual plans was the most impactful and the Innovation Center will continue to work with communities in 2023.





**Find out how
you can make an
impact in partnership
with the Innovation
Center**

nwkeici.org



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