



*GREEN RIVER AREA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT*  
*2017 - 2021 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*

2021 UPDATE



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## TBD



ABOVE: An aerial view of the Beaver Dam Amphitheater's socially distanced concert seating. CREDIT: Will Troutman

COVER: Jessica Martin, a pharmacy manager for Walmart, administers a COVID-19 vaccine to Owensboro High School dean of instruction Tara Howard. CREDIT: Photo by Christie Netherton, Messenger-Inquirer

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# PUBLIC & PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

- **ConnectGRADD Incorporated:** Partnership between Watch Communications and local governments to bring high-speed broadband to the GRADD area.
- **GRADD Board of Directors:** Establishes functional advisory committees as necessary to advise and conduct research to coordinate public and private actions.
- **GRADD CEDS Strategy Committee:** Works to prepare the annual CEDS by guiding the direction, identifying problems and strategies, and offering real-world perspectives on the economy.
- **GRADD Hazard Mitigation Council:** Maintains and updates GRADD's seven-county Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- **GRADD Regional Transportation Committee:** Provides a forum for elected officials and the public to work together in solving regional transportation problems.
- **GRADD Water Management Council:** Works in conjunction with city and county officials, public water suppliers, the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority, and the Kentucky Division of Water to devise the long-range GRADD Water Management Plan.
- **Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation:** Works to attract new employers, grow existing primary employers, market industrial sites, and assist businesses with retention and expansion.
- **Green River Area Council on Aging:** Identifies the needs of the elderly and plans to meet those needs through a system of in-home and community-based services.
- **Green River Economic Development Corporation:** Oversees GRADD's loan fund pool and develops regional collaboration of economic development efforts.
- **Green River Housing Corporation:** Develops homeowner rehabilitation and homebuyer programs for low-to-moderate-income households. Constructs rentals for the senior population, and provides assistance to the near-homeless.
- **Green River Regional Health Council:** Works to improve the health and quality of life of residents through education, motivation, and evaluation.
- **Green River Regional Industrial Development Authority:** Works to recruit industry and manages the development of Bluegrass Crossings Business Centre, an industrial park co-sponsored by Daviess, Hancock, McLean, Ohio, and Muhlenberg Counties.
- **Green River Workforce Development Board:** Works in partnership with local elected officials to improve the region's employment training system to strengthen the workforce.
- **Hancock County Industrial Foundation:** Works with state officials to develop incentive programs to attract and develop industry in Hancock County.
- **Henderson Chamber of Commerce:** Works to advance the business community of Henderson County.
- **Henderson Economic Development:** Committed to helping business succeed and grow in Northwest Kentucky, particularly in Henderson County.
- **Ohio County Economic Development Alliance:** Works to attract new business, assist in the retention and expansion of existing businesses, develop a competitive and productive workforce and foster entrepreneurship in Ohio County.
- **Union County First:** Works closely with the local business community, local schools, Henderson Community College, and GRADD to strengthen Union County's workforce.
- **Webster County Economic Development Council & Webster County Industrial Development Authority:** Work together to promote industrial and economic growth in Webster County.
- **West Kentucky Coalition:** Works to provide a unified voice for regional pride, prosperity, and progress for the Western Kentucky region.
- **West Kentucky Regional Industry Development Authority:** An interlocal agreement among Henderson, McLean, Union, and Webster Counties established as a regional authority to oversee further development of Four Star Industrial Park.

# STEADY-STATE RESILIENCY INITIATIVE

## WESTERN KENTUCKY REGIONAL TRAINING CENTER

The Webster County Fiscal Court and Union County Fiscal Court have partnered with Madisonville Community College and Henderson Community College to establish the Western Kentucky Regional Training Center (WKRTC), a new workforce training center that will offer commercial driver's license (CDL), utility lineman, and diesel mechanic certification programs. Webster County and Union County were awarded a \$357,000 grant from the Delta Regional Authority and a \$472,000 Community Development Block Grant from the Kentucky Department for Local Government to purchase an existing property in Webster County to house the program. One of the primary goals



Webster Co. Judge Executive Steve Henry (left) & Union Co. Judge Executive Adam O'Nan (right) accept a CDBG for the Western Kentucky Regional Training Center project from Governor Andy Beshear (center).

of the project is to provide local options for job reskilling to residents displaced by the coal industry decline. Shrinking demand for coal due to an abundance of cheap natural gas and increasing availability of cleaner fuel alternatives have led to mine closures and reduced employment in the coal industry across the country, including in the Western Coal Field

region of Kentucky, which includes the Green River Area Development District. The number of coal mines in GRADD counties halved from fourteen in 2015 to seven in 2019<sup>1</sup>. By the end of 2020, only two coal mines remained in the GRADD region. The site that will become the Western Kentucky Regional Training Center was formerly used by the Dotiki Mine, which ceased operations in 2019. The close of the Dotiki Mine marked the end of coal mining in Webster County, where the industry had supported the local economy for over one hundred years.

Mine closures and layoffs have had devastating impacts on coal mining communities. Typically located far from major population and economic centers, many coal communities have very low industry diversity. Major layoffs and mine closures significantly impact the flow of income through local economies in coal towns, which negatively affects businesses within the coal value chain, including retail, food services, and other industries that provide goods and services within coal mining communities. The long-term effects of a mine closure or major layoff for a coal community include high unemployment, reduced earnings, and population loss.<sup>2</sup>

Another primary goal of the project is to address issues with attracting and retaining skilled workers. Madisonville Community College and Henderson Community College will provide training to local individuals in certification areas with extremely high demand. A focus group conducted by Madisonville Community College in 2017 with ten companies revealed a strong preference by the companies for local trained

individuals. With a shortage of local workers with the CDL and lineman training, many companies have resorted to hiring individuals outside of the area. However, these workers often stay only long enough to gain the experience needed to qualify for jobs back home, creating a continuous deficit of skilled and experienced employees for local companies.

Madisonville Community College currently offers utility lineman training and CDL training at their main campus in Hopkins County, but both programs have long wait lists and limited capacity to increase cohort size. The Western Kentucky Regional Training Center will result in more workers trained in a shorter period. The stronger and larger workforce created by this program will help to diversify the local economy as it shifts away from overreliance on the coal industry.



Future site of the Western Kentucky Regional Training Center

### SOURCES

1. Division of Mine Safety, Annual Report. 2015-2019.
2. Managing Coal Mine Closure: Achieving a Just Transition for All." World Bank Group. November 2018

# STEADY-STATE RESILIENCY INITIATIVE

## HIRE TO OPERATE PROJECT

In late 2020, GRADD applied for and received a \$150,000 investment from the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) to support the Hire to Operate (H2O) project. The H2O project utilizes DRA funding to support the Kentucky Rural Water Association's (KRWA) Registered Apprenticeship Program. Apprentices are trained to become certified Water/Wastewater Systems Operation Specialists through Related Technical Instruction and on-the-job training. The H2O program's goals are to develop the required skills to meet progressing technology standards and to create a talent pipeline for local utilities to replenish the aging pool of qualified operators. The investment is projected to train ten individuals in Henderson, McLean, Union, and Webster counties.

KRWA's Registered Apprenticeship Program began in the fall of 2019 in response to the growing demand for skilled operators as more and more operators are reaching retirement age. Kentucky is facing a shortage of certified Systems Operation Specialists. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Water Sector Workforce, roughly 33% of the water sector workforce, nationally, is eligible to retire in the next ten years.

Applicants to the program must be currently employed by a water or wastewater system, be eighteen years old or older, have a high school diploma or GED, be physically capable to perform the essential functions of the apprenticeship program, and must pass drug screening and background checks. Both the water and wastewater operations specialist programs are two years long. The curriculums are designed to enhance and prepare the apprentice to be fully qualified in multiple aspects of water and wastewater operations. Apprentices have the option to take classes from a variety of sources including KRWA, online, colleges, and others. All classes must be approved by the KRWA Apprenticeship Training Committee before receiving credit.

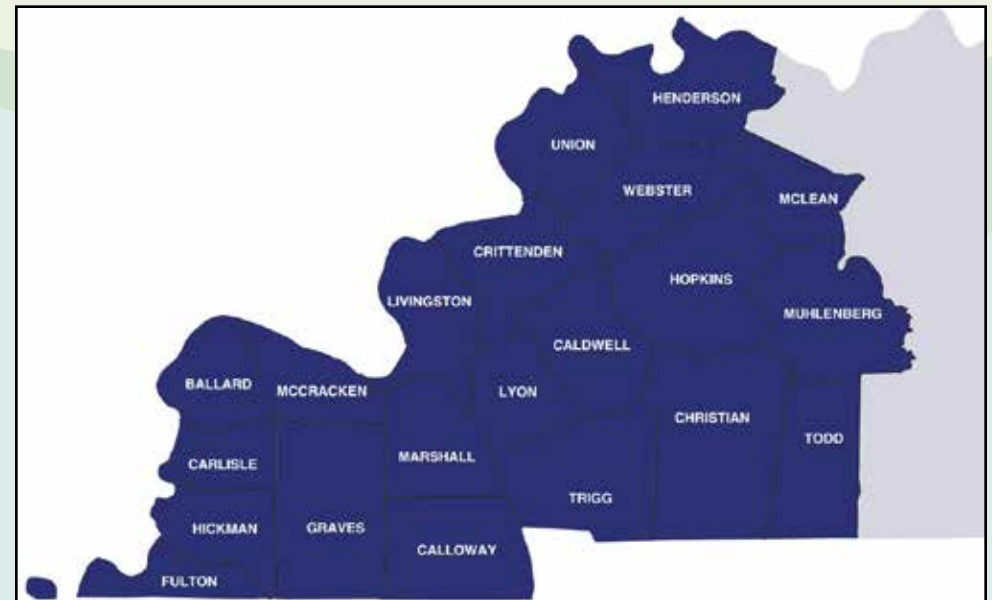
The apprenticeship program supplements experience with structured educational goals. Students receive additional mentoring throughout the two-year program where their progress is tracked and benchmarked. The combination of experience coupled with a planned education curriculum accelerates the apprentice to fill operator positions at all levels of system classification. The apprenticeship program will create a talent pipeline to replace Kentucky's aging workforce.

The H2O project assists local water and wastewater utility

companies with the cost and implementation of enrolling employees to participate in KRWA Registered Apprenticeship Programs. The H2O program will benefit both local utility employees and communities by making water/wastewater employees more skilled and resilient to economic shock, and by providing communities with water and wastewater operators who have the necessary skills to ensure safe and sanitary water and wastewater service.

There are twenty-seven water and/or wastewater providers within Kentucky's DRA counties and many are interconnected, meaning they purchase and sell water to and from each other. Strengthening the workforce at a single utility can have a regional ripple effect that will benefit the surrounding utilities and communities. While this project is designed to aid utilities in Henderson, Mclean, Union, and Webster counties, the resulting impact will be felt throughout the Delta region of Kentucky and beyond.

### KENTUCKY DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY COUNTIES



*CREDIT: Delta Regional Authority, Map Room, Kentucky Service Area*

# RESPONSIVE RESILIENCY INITIATIVES

## COVID-19 FUNDING

In March 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was signed into law. The CARES Act is the largest spending measure to be enacted to date, authorizing \$2.2 trillion in total funding. Funds were allocated to a variety of response initiatives to mitigate the health crisis and the economic impact of temporary closures. For individual households, the first stimulus payment came from this package to help stimulate the economy. Local healthcare providers also received CARES Act funds to continue their operations and to better prepare for handling the pandemic. Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) were allocated to every city and county across the United States. In the GRADD region, they were used to purchase personal protective equipment for government and public use, cleaning supplies, one-time small business grants, utility relief grants through the fire department, and first responder payroll. Some jurisdictions also used CRF to modify public buildings to facilitate social distancing, including drive-thru windows and lockboxes for utility payments, sanitary flooring, and permanent plexiglass.

GRADD, along with Kentucky's fourteen other Area Development Districts (ADDs), submitted a joint application to the Economic Development Administration for CARES funds to write and create Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plans. The purpose of these plans was to address the region's response to the negative economic impacts caused by the pandemic. GRADD has completed their plan and conjointly launched an online hub for grant opportunities to help spread awareness of available recovery assistance.

In July 2020, the U.S. Economic

Development Administration (EDA) awarded the Green River Area Development District \$3.3 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds for a COVID-19 Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program. The EDA received \$1.5 billion from the CARES Act to disperse for economic development assistance projects designed to aid communities impacted by the pandemic. GRADD's COVID-19 RLF program makes below market rate loans to businesses within its seven-county region to aid in recovery and provide targeted assistance for small and disadvantaged businesses who were impacted by the pandemic. The funds provide an immediate, flexible, and accessible source



*A Keen Sense of Clean owner Marshall Coleman (center) accepts a check for an RLF loan from GRADD Executive Director Joanna Shake (left) and Economic Development Specialist Gina Boaz (right).*

of financing for small businesses, including start-ups, that have few private resources available. Small businesses, especially start-ups, are often unable to secure loans from private lenders and are, therefore, more at risk during this economic shock. As of July 2021, the GRADD Board of

Directors have approved 25 loans, totaling \$1,958,325 in aid provided and resulting in 254 jobs created or retained.

A second round of stimulus relief was authorized in January 2021 by the Consolidated Appropriations Act. In March 2021, the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan (ARP) was enacted. The ARP built on and improved upon the CARES Act in many ways. Relief efforts authorized by ARP included another round of stimulus checks and the second major round of funding for the local governments in the form of the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund. The U.S. Economic Development Administration set aside \$3 billion from their ARP allocation to create six relief programs. \$300 million of this set-aside was earmarked for coal communities, which will be especially important to the GRADD region, as most GRADD counties have experienced severe economic impacts over the past several years that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 economic crisis.

On April 7, 2021, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear signed into law Senate Bill 36, which appropriated \$250 million in Federal Funds from the American Rescue Plan to the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority (KIA) for the Drinking Water and Wastewater Grant Program. \$150 million of the funds were divided amongst Kentucky's 120 counties according to population. Per KIA's recommendation, GRADD staff facilitated county wide meetings with utility owners and elected officials to discuss potential SB 36 projects and funding needed. There were 33 projects submitted for SB 36 funding within the GRADD region totaling \$8,698,286.

# RESPONSIVE RESILIENCY INITIATIVES

## TOURISM & COVID-19

Of all industries impacted by the COVID pandemic, tourism was one of the hardest hit. Large crowds in close quarters – a common theme in the tourism industry – were discouraged to prevent the spread of the virus. Since tourism events draw in people from various locations across regions, states, and the country, the risk of these events turning into super-spreaders was high. Events both large and small were cancelled throughout 2020 and early 2021. Some hosted virtual alternatives to satiate people for the year.

All major tourism events were cancelled in 2020, including ROMP, the Providence Coal Festival, Jerusalem Ridge Bluegrass Celebration, the Annual Battle of Sacramento, the Sturgis Bike Rally, and the W.C. Handy Blues and Barbecue Festival. ROMP, hosted by the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Museum, normally brings about 25,000 people to Daviess County and between \$1.6 to \$2.2 million to the local economy. Even small tourism events have large impacts on city and local economies. The Battle of Sacramento in McLean County and its related fundraisers usually bring \$22,000 of economic activity. With the cancellation of these events, communities across the GRADD region faced over a year's worth of lost tourism revenue.

The Beaver Dam Amphitheater regularly draws in large crowds from within the region and from around the country to its regular summer concerts featuring famous singers and bands. Most of the regular 2020 show season was cancelled. Three concerts were held as drive-ins, and one was held at the Amphitheater. It was conducted with social distancing in mind. Each group of attendees had a box to stay in after arriving and passing temperature checks.



*Socially-distanced outdoor concert seating at the Beaver Dam Amphitheater. CREDIT: Will Troutman, Beaver Dam Amphitheater Facebook page*

Concession items could be ordered and delivered directly to tables. The Amphitheater saw a 78% decrease in annual income from 2019 to 2020 due to Covid and pandemic-related actions.

Outdoor recreation is the one type of tourism that thrived. As restrictions closed entertainment venues and retail destinations, people turned to outdoor activities. Stores involved in the sale of hunting, trapping, and fishing supplies in the GRADD region saw a significant increase in business. Some of these businesses even expanded buildings and merchandise inventory to keep up with the demand. In Webster County, Deer Creek Lodge kept busy as hunters flocked to the rural setting. A local producer of deer attractants and local meat processors thrived as demand for these products and services skyrocketed.

Jeffreys Cliffs in Hancock County opened to the public in 2020. The pandemic initially delayed the opening, but local leaders decided in June that the facility would be a safe recreational opportunity during COVID-19 due to being outdoors, and that opening the facility to the public could provide residents with an outlet to alleviate stress and other mental health concerns caused by the pandemic and quarantine. In the early days of the 230-acre nature preserve, so many people visited that there was not enough parking. Outdoor activities like hiking, hunting, and fishing held the added benefit of involving little to no contact with other people, making them the perfect activity for social distancing.

After major vaccine rollouts in the first half of 2021, many major tourism events were back on the schedule with continued social distancing and modifications, as well as mask requirements for unvaccinated visitors.



*Morgan's Cave Rock Shelter, part of Jeffreys Cliffs. CREDIT: <https://jeffreycliffs.org/>*

# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Manufacturing is the region's largest industry with over 18,000 employees.<sup>1</sup> However, industry employers often struggle to fill open positions with employees who have the necessary technical skills and credentials. Several initiatives have been implemented across the GRADD region to increase the skilled workforce available to existing and potential new industries.

The KY FAME program was created as a partnership between regional manufacturers and community colleges to provide career pathway, apprentice-style technical education programs. The two local chapters, Greater Owensboro (GO) FAME and Henderson Community College (HCC) FAME, have implemented programs through Owensboro Community and Technical College and HCC. Both programs offer an Advanced Manufacturing Technician track, and GO FAME also offers a Computerized Manufacturing Machining track. Students train in classes on two days of the week and work at a paired sponsor company for three days of the week. Upon graduation, students earn an associate degree and are on track to either enter the company as a full-time employee or to pursue an engineering or other bachelor-level degree.

GO FAME has also created GO CAREERS, a business administration program, to supplement to workforce for other growing industries in the region. COVID-19 has caused some disruptions to the FAME program. Moving classes online has been a challenge for some students, and some sponsor companies have limited the number of students they will sponsor. However, both HCC FAME and GO FAME are still allowing students some time on campus to



*HCC FAME students in 2020. CREDIT: Henderson Community College Facebook page*

complete hands-on training, and labs and both programs are continuing to operate.

The GO FEMALES program was developed by a collaborative partnership of local and state industry, workforce, and educational partners to provide technical training to underserved populations in the manufacturing workforce. By engaging non-traditional populations, GO FEMALES addresses the increasing need for skilled technicians and gender and socioeconomic disparities in career and wage advancement.

Owensboro Community and Technical College launched the first GO FEMALES cohort in 2019 in partnership with UniFirst Corporation, a uniform and workwear manufacturer with a large distribution center in Daviess County. Twenty female incumbent workers from UniFirst were selected to participate in the cohort. UniFirst supports the GO FEMALES initiative by paying participants full-time wages and benefits throughout the program, while providing eight hours a week of educational leave to attend

classes.

The Green River Workforce Development Board and the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet, using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds, provide GO FEMALES employee funds for training and required supplies. Funding is crucial to continue the efforts to advance women and other underserved populations in manufacturing. The GO FEMALES program provides working adults unprecedented access to education by eliminating financial and accessibility barriers. Classes are held on-site, and lab training equipment is set up near UniFirst's actual production equipment. Offering instructional delivery at the worksite minimizes time away from production and maximizes worker participation and skill attainment.

The Kimberly-Clark Corporation is undergoing a multi-million-dollar project to replace their current obsolete Distributive Control System with the newest technologies available. The company's manufacturing plant in Daviess County employs 357 employees, many of which need extensive training to become proficient with the new system.

With Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds, the Green River Workforce Development Board (GRWDB) assisted with the cost to provide training in the new technology to twenty-three employees through Owensboro Community and Technical College. This training program provided significant benefits both to the Kimberly-Clark Corporation and to the individual employees who participated. Kimberly-Clark was able



# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

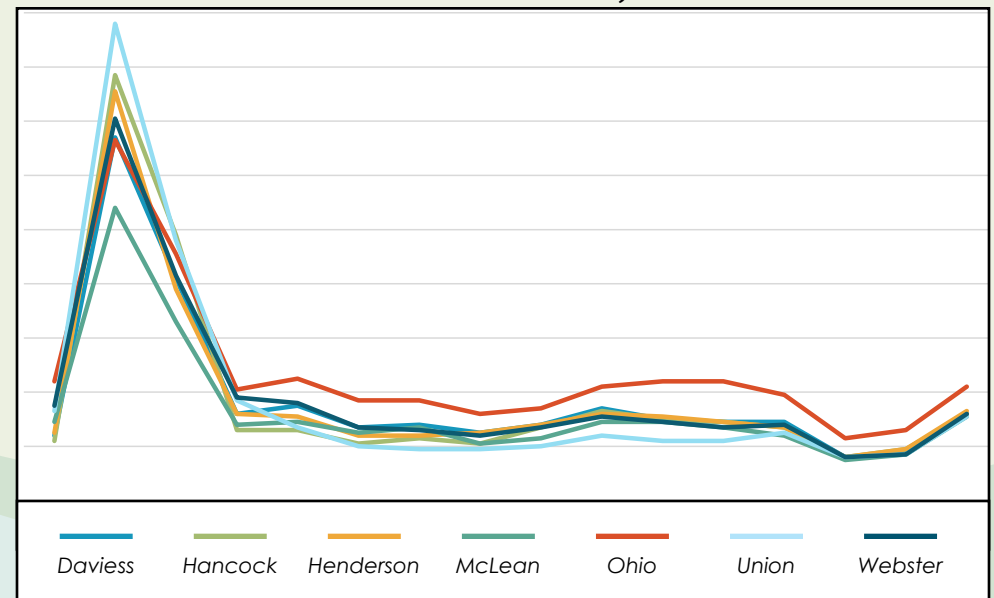
to transition to the new system quickly and easily with employees who had the technical skills needed to operate in, and the employees who participated in the training gained transferable skills that have made them more competitive and resilient to changes in the manufacturing industry.

Career EDGE, a web-based platform to deliver virtual career services to job seekers, was implemented by the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet in April 2020. Career EDGE consists of eighteen interactive modules with built-in virtual coaching, including a job interview simulator, resume and job application builder, guidance in developing a personal brand, and essential life skills curriculum to support career seekers in preparation for finding a job or advancing employment. This program helps job seekers to better prepare for job searching with remote access. During the pandemic, Career EDGE has built systems and implemented technologies to serve job seekers, employers, and staff 100% remotely.

The unemployment rate in Kentucky skyrocketed during the summer of 2020, jumping from 4.2% in February to 16.6% in April as businesses began to feel the impact of social distancing and required closures.<sup>2</sup> State and local workforce development leaders began developing programs to help workers impacted by the pandemic. The Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet applied for and received a \$6 million National Dislocated Worker grant through the U.S. Department of Labor. From this allocation, the GRWDB applied for and received \$543,315 to develop a program to provide temporary jobs as well as career and training services to workers who have been displaced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By late 2020, Kentucky's unemployment rate had dropped, but was still higher than pre-pandemic levels. While mask mandates and social distancing requirements remained, most businesses had reopened and large scale efforts to provide financial aid to businesses had been somewhat successful. However, the drop in the unemployment rate can also at least partially be attributed to lower labor force participation.<sup>3</sup> After reaching a post-pandemic low in April 2021, the unemployment rate in the GRADD region had slowly begun to rise again, possibly due in part to relaxed mask mandates, reopenings of businesses and crowded summer events, and the Delta variant strain of the virus.

MONTHLY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY COUNTY, NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED  
MARCH 2020 THROUGH JUNE 2021<sup>2</sup>



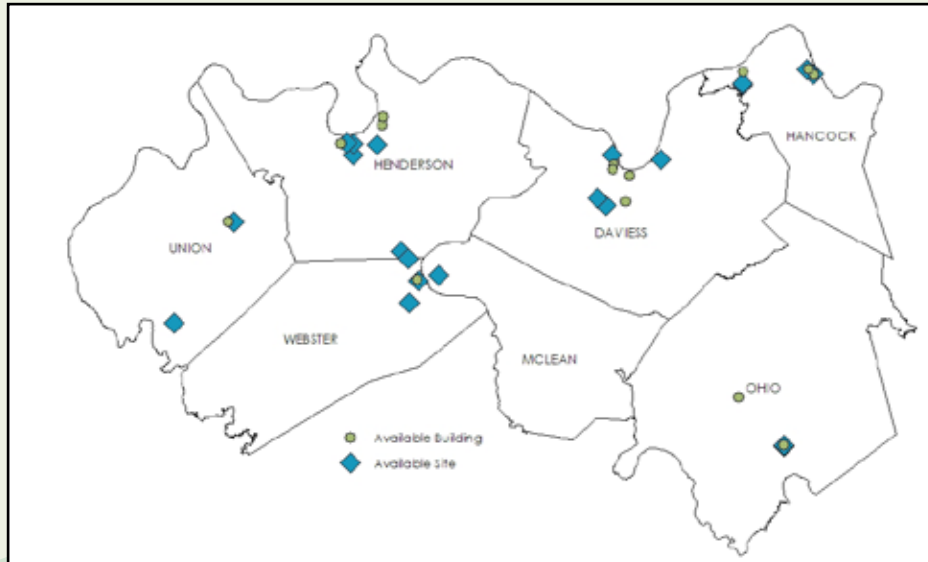
### SOURCES

1. United States Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Industry by Sex for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over
2. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages
3. Congressional Research Service: Unemployment Rates During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

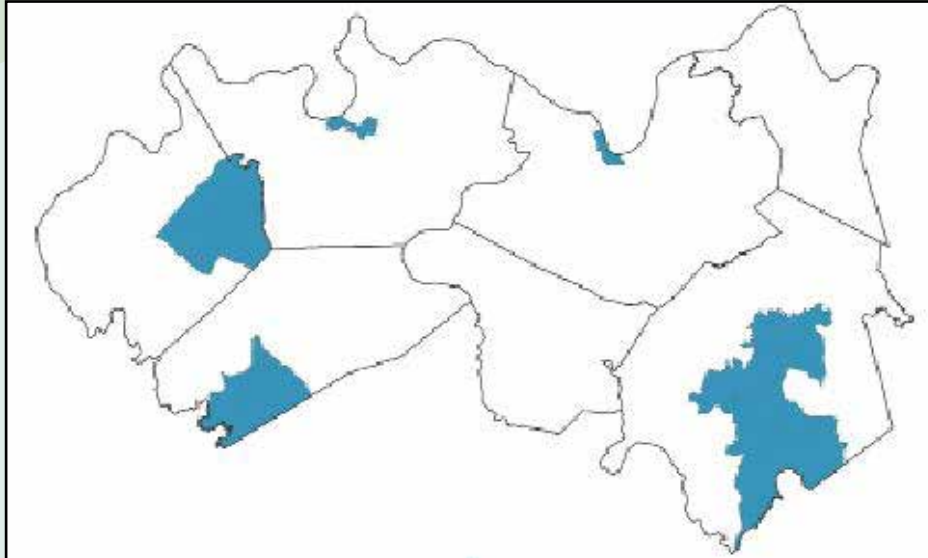
# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT & OPPORTUNITY ZONES

### AVAILABLE INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS & SITES



### OPPORTUNITY ZONES



Expansion of the manufacturing industry requires extensive land and resources to attract companies to a location. According to the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development, there are 29 industrial sites and buildings available for industrial development in the GRADD region. Fifteen of these sites are shovel-ready and four are build-ready. Shovel-ready sites have some site prep work done, some utilities available, and some transportation available. Build-ready sites have extensive site prep work completed, utilities available, and preliminary sketches of potential buildings.

Seven Kentucky Opportunity Zones were established in the GRADD region by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service in 2018: one in Henderson, Union, and Webster Counties and two each in Daviess and Ohio Counties<sup>5 5</sup>. The purpose of an Opportunity Zone is to encourage long-term private investment in low-income urban and rural communities by offering significant tax incentives to investors.

Investments in Opportunity Zones are made through *Qualified Opportunity Funds (QOFs)* - investment vehicles organized as a corporations or partnerships for the purpose of investing at least 90% of their assets in *Qualified Opportunity Zone property*. Qualified Opportunity Zone property includes partnership interests in businesses that operate in a Qualified Opportunity Zone, stock ownership in businesses that conduct most or all operations within a Qualified Opportunity Zone, or business property (like real estate) located within a Qualified Opportunity Zone. Business property investments must either be new use for the qualified property or double the basis of the building(s) on the qualified property within 30 months).

GRADD has identified several projects within Opportunity Zones that will improve base infrastructure and further incentivize investments in those Opportunity Zones. These projects include the Job Corps Sanitary Sewer Project (KIA Project Number **SX21225035**), the Providence Sanitary Sewer Upgrades Project (KIA Project Number **SX21233025**), and the Ravine Sewer Upgrade (KIA Project Number **SX21059027**). More information about this projects can be found in the WRIS portal.

# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## EDUCATION

There are two four-year colleges in the GRADD region: Kentucky Wesleyan and Brescia University, both of which are in Owensboro. Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green is about forty-five minutes south of Beaver Dam and also has a regional campus in Owensboro. Murray State University also operates a regional campus in Henderson and in nearby Madisonville. Less than half an hour north of Henderson, two colleges in Evansville, Indiana offer out-of-state university options at the University of Evansville and the University of Southern Indiana. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System operates two campuses in the GRADD region - Owensboro Community and Technical College and Henderson Community College - and Madisonville Community College in neighboring Hopkins County.

The percentage of residents over 25 years old with a bachelor's degree or higher in the GRADD region is 18.4%, ranging in individual counties from 10.0% in Webster County to 22.9% in Daviess County. These rates are significantly lower than the U.S. percentage of graduates (32.1%) and the state percentage (24.2%). However, 9.5% of GRADD residents 25 and older have an associate's degree, which is higher than the state rate (9.3%) and much higher than the national rate (8.5%). These statistics likely reflect a greater regional need for employees with technical education.

K-12 schools in the region emphasize college and career readiness. Several programs to help increase educational performance and attainment have been implemented in the region, with a special focus on STEM programs.

- Project Lead the Way is a national nonprofit organization that develops STEM curricula

for elementary, middle, and high school students and is designed to encourage students to pursue careers in STEM fields.

- The Early College Academy in Daviess County allows students from two high schools to complete dual-credit courses at Owensboro Community and Technical College to earn an associate's degree upon graduation from high school.
- The Owensboro Innovation Academy is an alternative school which accepts students from both the city and county school districts and focuses on STEM subjects. Students may choose to focus on computer science, engineering, or biomedicine courses and are also required to complete entrepreneurship courses, community service, and internships.
- In 2020, the Delta Regional Authority awarded \$245,000 to the Webster County Fiscal Court to purchase new training equipment for the Webster County Area Technology Center (ATC). The ATC provides both academic education and technical training to high school students in programs like manufacturing, industrial maintenance, and computer-aided design (CAD). The grant will allow the ATC to purchase much needed updated equipment to ensure graduates have the skills needed to operate the industry standard in machinery and technology.

K-12 schools and secondary education institutions have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In November 2020, all school districts in Kentucky were mandated to operate fully through distance learning. Many challenges to this system quickly became

apparent, including lack of childcare for working parents and guardians, food insecurity among students, and broadband availability.



*A class at Spottsville Elementary School in Henderson learns in-person and socially distanced with masks. CREDIT: Henderson County Schools Twitter, @HendersonSchool*

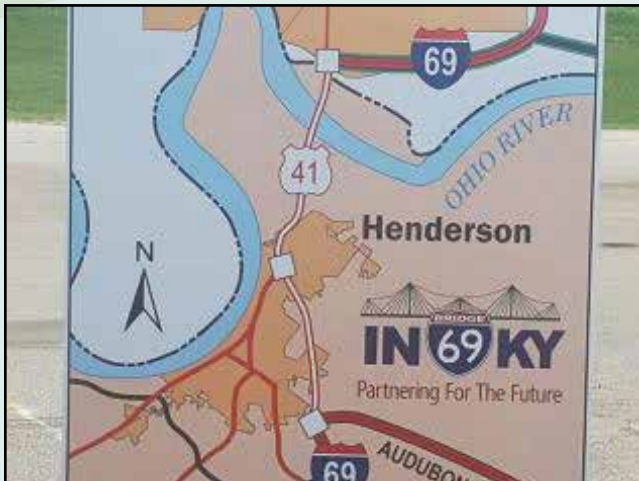
Some facilities, including the YMCA and Cliff Hagan Boys and Girls Club, offered childcare during school hours. Free lunches were provided to all students to combat food insecurity, including a drive-thru pick up option during the 100% distance learning period. Wifi hotspots were provided in some districts, and in other districts, wifi-enabled school buses were stationed throughout the community to allow students and their families access to broadband. However, these solutions were not ideal and did not address the root issue - the region needs better broadband access. For the 2021 school year, most schools had returned to in-person learning with mask and social distance requirements and many had hired supplemental instruction specialists with CARES funds to help students catch up from last year.

# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## TRANSPORTATION

GRADD's transportation network has significantly improved over the years and continues to develop. Over the past ten years, the region has completed the I-69 designation of the Pennyrile Parkway from Henderson to I-24, the I-165 Spur designation of the Natcher Parkway from Owensboro to Bowling Green, the Wendell Ford Expressway (Bypass) designation as US 60 through Owensboro, and the US 60 Bypass extension in Owensboro. During the summer of 2019, a \$2.5 million project was completed on US 60 near the Union and Henderson County line. The project raised the road in its lowest places to help prevent future flooding of the road.

A bi-state plan to build a bridge connecting the Indiana and Kentucky I-69 segments has been prioritized by both states. The bridge would connect Henderson, KY to Evansville, IN and would increase interstate traffic in the GRADD area. The bridge would complete the Kentucky portion of I-69.



Sign showing the proposed plan for the Indiana/Kentucky I-69 Bridge

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers 2021 Infrastructure Report Card, 10% of Kentucky's roads are in poor condition. As of 2020, 7.2% of bridges on Kentucky's highway system were recorded to be in poor condition<sup>2</sup>, but only 5.9% of bridges in GRADD counties were in poor condition<sup>3</sup>.

Several GRADD counties are top state agricultural producers, so the ability to transport product quickly and efficiently is essential to the economy. The region is also located 60 miles from Pike County, IN and 300 miles from Texas County, MO, which the U.S. Census Bureau determined were the median and mean center of population in 2010. Because of its location, the region sees heavy traffic from distributors transporting goods.

Door-to-door public transportation for people with disabilities is provided throughout all seven counties at low or no cost by the Green River Intra-Transit System (GRITS). Medicaid-eligible clients without vehicles are provided transportation to approved Medicaid appointments at no cost. Fee-per mile service is available to the general public to anyone for any purpose. Fixed-route public transportation is available in Owensboro and Henderson through the Owensboro Transit System (OTS) and the Henderson Area Rapid Transit (HART). OTS and HART do not operate on Sundays. Fixed-route public transportation isn't available anywhere else in the region, limiting resources and opportunities for rural residents.

Henderson and Owensboro have riverports that are certified Foreign Trade Zones and have access to road and rail traffic. Having access to river transportation is a huge

advantage, as barges are able to carry more cargo using less fuel than other methods of transportation. The ports are connected by the Ohio River to the Mississippi River System, which is one of the largest and most important trade networks in the U.S.

In 2018, the Owensboro Riverport Authority received an \$11.5 million BUILD grant to widen and improve KY 331 and Rinaldo Road. KY 311 is the connecting road from US 60 to the Owensboro Riverport, and Rinaldo Road provides access at the Riverport. This project will improve safety and accessibility to the Owensboro Riverport.



Aerial view of the Owensboro Riverport Authority CREDIT: Owensboro Economic Development, Flickr photostream

### SOURCES

1. American Society of Civil Engineers, 2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure
2. U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, Bridge Condition by Highway System 2020
3. U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, Bridge Condition by County 2020

# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## INFRASTRUCTURE

GRADD has made improving water and sewer infrastructure a top priority. One of the largest obstacles to infrastructure projects is the high cost associated with major water and sewer projects. The Kentucky Infrastructure Authority (KIA) works to develop water and sewer infrastructure throughout the state by helping communities secure the funding needed to complete projects. KIA works with the Area Development Districts to maintain the [Water Resource Information System \(WRIS\)](#), an online database of identified projects under the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act. The WRIS portal is critical in helping communities identify and prioritize their water and sewer needs and develop their projects and find funding assistance. The WRIS portal also contains mapping and general information about water and wastewater systems throughout the state, which can also be a helpful tool in identifying needs and developing projects.

Infrastructure projects in the GRADD region have been very successful. Recently completed major infrastructure projects include the Friendly Village Subdivision Project in Daviess County and the McLean County Regional Water Plant Project. Another significant project currently in the construction phase is the Sebree Sanitary Sewer Project.

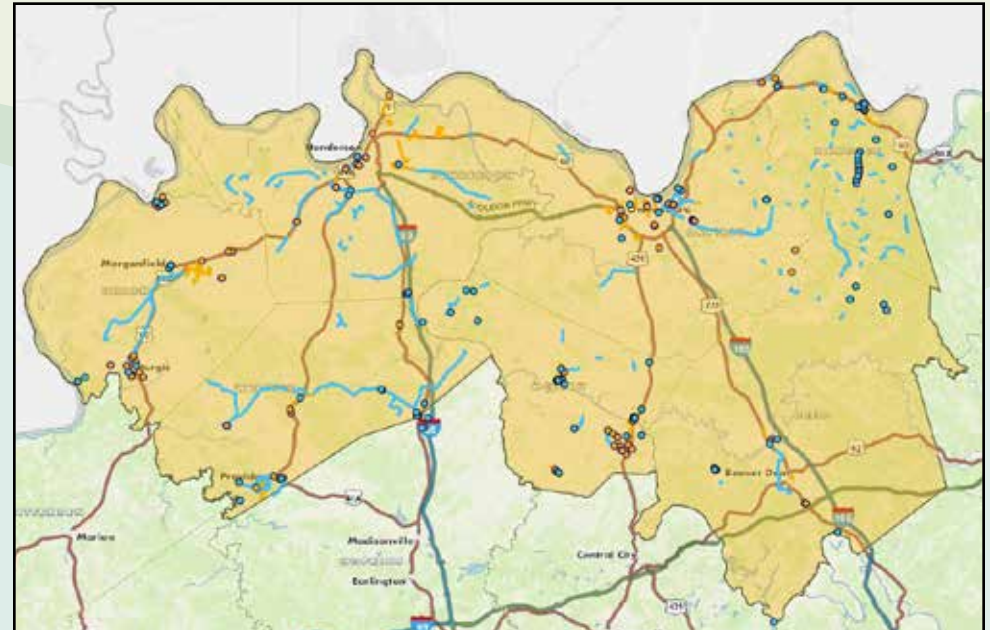
The Friendly Village Subdivision Project involved the abandonment of a failing package plant serving 69 single family homes in the Friendly Village Subdivision, as well as approximately 25 nearby mobile homes. The project replaced the package plant with a new pump station and force main to redirect wastewater to the Regional Water Resource Agency (RWRA) sewer collection system approximately five miles away.

The McLean County Regional Water Plant Project was a massive undertaking to consolidate several independent water systems in McLean County. The project included construction of a new water treatment plant, purchase of the existing plant in Calhoun, construction of interconnects to Sacramento and Island, boring across the Green River between Island and Livermore, installation of a new pump station, and installation of five new master meters. In 2018, the project received the H2O Award for Outstanding Drinking Water Project.

The Sebree Sanitary Sewer Replacement Project was awarded Community Development Block Grant funds in 2018 to replace approximately 8,900 LF of existing 8-inch clay pipe and appurtenances. The existing 8-inch pipe is failing and is in need of replacement due to the inflow and infiltration emitted through these lines. During a rain event

the existing wastewater flow increases from 130,000 gallons per day to approximately 2,500,000 million gallons per day. This project also includes the replacement of an existing retaining wall that is failing. This project in Sebree is also utilizing both Kentucky Infrastructure Authority State Revolving Fund A loan funds and Cleaner Water Grant Funds (SB 36) allocated to Webster County. The project is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2022.

These projects are only a few of many recent important infrastructure improvements made possible in the GRADD region by federal and state funding sources administered by the Kentucky Department for Local Government, including Community Development Block Grants, and KIA loans and planning assistance. [The KIA WRIS Infrastructure Planning Dashboard](#) shows 129 water and 76 wastewater projects pending or approved in the Green River Area Development District. Additionally, the tool shows twenty water and fifteen wastewater projects currently under construction.



Map of projects in WRIS portal CREDIT: KIA Water & Wastewater Infrastructure Planning Dashboard

# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

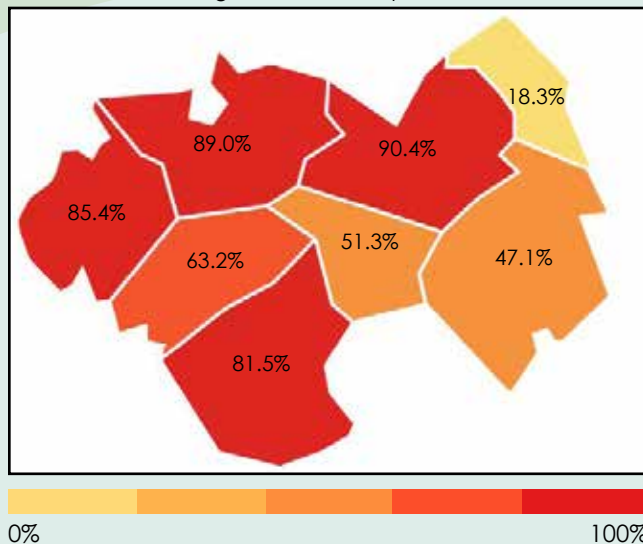
## BROADBAND

### The State of Broadband

The greatest need for economic development in the region is better broadband access. According to U.S. News's 2021 Best States rankings, Kentucky ranks 17th (up from 40th in 2020) among all states for how well and how fast residents can access the internet based on data from the Census Bureau and the Federal Communications Commission.<sup>1</sup> Because GRADD is primarily rural, there are many areas where internet access is inadequate or even completely unavailable. Even large companies sometimes struggle to get adequate internet service delivered. Internet service is a vital component to business and everyday life. One of GRADD's primary goals is to identify and pursue projects to improve broadband access in the region.

### FIXED BROADBAND AVAILABILITY<sup>2</sup>

Percent of population with access to fixed broadband service at 25/3 mbps (FCC minimum definition of broadband) or higher advertised speeds



### ConnectGRADD

ConnectGRADD is a partnership between GRADD and Watch Communications with a goal of providing high speed internet to rural areas in the seven GRADD counties and neighboring Hopkins County. ConnectGRADD currently provides service at download speeds of two megabits per second (Mbps) to 20 Mbps to about approximately 1,300 rural households. The Federal Communications Commission has identified 25 Mbps as the benchmark for adequate service speed. The organization is working to improve service, but the process will not be quick. In 2020, Henderson County was awarded \$339,320 from the Delta Regional Authority to upgrade three broadband communication stations to provide download speeds of 10 Mbps to 50 Mbps to currently unserved or underserved rural residents of Henderson County. The project will use three sites on the existing ConnectGRADD network where services are currently offered but speeds are limited. This project will bring an additional 7,121 businesses and households into ConnectGRADD's coverage area.

### KentuckyWired

KentuckyWired is a state-funded project to construct over 3,000 miles of high-speed, high-capacity fiber optic cable in every Kentucky county. One major goal of the project is to have 700 to 800 Kentucky government entities connected to the network and with a five-fold increase in broadband speed. Beginning in 2015, the project was originally scheduled to be completed by late 2018 but has faced significant delays. Currently, the project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2021.

As of June 2021, fiber optic cable construction was 98% completed, with remaining portions in Western Kentucky in progress. A major obstacle to expanding broadband capabilities in rural Kentucky is the large cost to install the necessary infrastructure in areas that would have few customers. The significant investment and low expected payoff discourage Internet Service Providers (ISPs) from locating in the area. The KentuckyWired project is a "middle-mile" initiative to provide the necessary infrastructure and encourage ISPs to connect to the network and bring faster, more reliable internet to rural areas.

### Impact of Expanded Broadband

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the crucial role that high-speed internet access plays in daily life. In a time of social distancing, people need broadband to work from home, access health care services, apply for public assistance, order groceries or prescriptions—and connect with classrooms. It is vital that every business and home have reliable broadband internet access. In rural areas, including much of GRADD, broadband availability is poor or literally non-existent. Without adequate broadband, these populations are severely disadvantaged. In 2021 and beyond, internet infrastructure is as critical to the economic and physical health of the GRADD region as other, more traditional forms of public infrastructure. Projects that support enhanced broadband capabilities are vital.

#### SOURCES

- [1. https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/infrastructure/internet-access](https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/infrastructure/internet-access)
- [2. https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/](https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/)

# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## HOUSING & COMMUNITY FACILITIES

One of the most significant housing concerns throughout the region is a lack of moderately-priced single family homes for sale. Over 23% of households are spending 30.0% or more of their monthly income on housing expenses.<sup>1</sup> For households earning less than \$20,000 annually, 76.0% are spending 30.0% or more of their income on housing expenses.<sup>1</sup>

Other priorities include expanding apartment availability near major employers and developing mid-range housing options in downtown areas for young professionals. Particularly in rural areas, walkability levels are low. Development of sidewalks from neighborhoods to destinations like grocery stores, schools, and retail shops is important to ensure that neighborhoods are safe and that residents are able to easily access important facilities.

Community services are an important factor to quality of life. Community development projects enhance the services that a city or county can provide to residents. Leveraging existing funds with grant funding allows GRADD communities to develop quality recreational

opportunities and enhanced public safety initiatives. With better facilities, communities are able to improve the quality of life of residents and retain and attract skilled workers who in turn will help the economy grow.

Several large community projects have



Horse Fork Creek Park in Daviess County's new inclusive playground. CREDIT: Ross Leigh, Daviess County Parks Director. Accessed via WBKR. <https://wbkr.com/see-new-horse-fork-creek-park-playground-spray-park-opens-saturday/>

recently been funded through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. In 2019, CDBG awarded funds to begin construction of a new public library in Lewisport, which was completed and opened to the public in July 2021. CDBG also awarded funds that year for the renovation of the Livermore Fire Station in McLean County.

The region has invested significant resources into many other important community development projects, including park renovations, recreational trail development, police and firefighting equipment, and emergency communications technology. One of the most significant recent community projects is the Jeffreys Cliffs project in Hancock County. The Jeffreys Cliffs Conservation and

Recreation Area opened to the public in June 2020 after several years of development and collaboration between the Hancock County Fiscal Court, the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Board, and the Hancock County Heritage Commission. The area is a 230-acre sandstone plateau formation with nearly five miles of hiking trails and some of the largest rock shelters in Kentucky, including Morgan's Cave.

Other projects, including the Horse Fork Creek Park Inclusive Playground project and the Beech Grove Fire Department Tanker Truck Purchase Project, have received significant grant funding. Funding programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Recreational Trails Program, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant, the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security, and the Kentucky 911 Services Board make community projects possible that better the lives of GRADD residents.



Livermore Fire Station progress. CREDIT: Livermore/Eastern District Fire Department Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/LivermoreEasternDistFireDept/>



Completed Lewisport Library branch of the Hancock County Public Library System. CREDIT: Hancock County Public Library <https://hcplky.org/lewisport-library/>

### SOURCES

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Housing Financial Characteristics.

# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## AGRICULTURE

### GRADD Agriculture

Agriculture remains an important part of Kentucky's economy, including the Green River region. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture (most recent data available), GRADD counties had 3,733 farms containing approximately 1,736 square miles of farmland. The market value of products sold by GRADD farms totaled over \$872.5 million and net income of GRADD farms totaled nearly \$323.8 million.

All GRADD counties except Hancock rank in the top 20 Kentucky counties for market value of agricultural products sold. Agricultural sales from Daviess, Henderson, McLean, Ohio, Union, and Webster Counties make up 14% of Kentucky's total agriculture sales. Daviess and McLean Counties have the top overall agricultural sales in the Green River area and rank 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in the state, respectively.

### GRADD COUNTIES IN THE TOP 5 KENTUCKY PRODUCERS, BY PRODUCT

#### SOYBEANS

|           |                 |                     |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Daviess   | 1 <sup>st</sup> | 5.6 million bushels |
| Henderson | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 4.6 million bushels |
| Union     | 5 <sup>th</sup> | 4.3 million bushels |

#### BROILERS

|         |                 |                       |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| McLean  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 29.3 million broilers |
| Webster | 4 <sup>th</sup> | 23.0 million broilers |
| Ohio    | 5 <sup>th</sup> | 19.5 million broilers |

#### CORN

|         |                 |                      |
|---------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Union   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 14.7 million bushels |
| Daviess | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 13.2 million bushels |

#### TOBACCO

|         |                 |                    |
|---------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Daviess | 4 <sup>th</sup> | 7.1 million pounds |
|---------|-----------------|--------------------|



Soybean farm in Union County

### MARKET VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS SOLD BY COUNTY

|                              | COUNTY    | COUNTY RANK (OF 120) | SALES (\$1,000) |
|------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|
| CROPS                        | Daviess   | 2                    | 119,690         |
|                              | Union     | 5                    | 100,706         |
|                              | Henderson | 6                    | 86,857          |
|                              | McLean    | 11                   | 56,751          |
|                              | Webster   | 12                   | 53,150          |
|                              | Ohio      | 26                   | 37,715          |
|                              | Hancock   | 67                   | 8,335           |
| LIVESTOCK/POULTRY & PRODUCTS | McLean    | 4                    | 134,087         |
|                              | Ohio      | 7                    | 98,054          |
|                              | Webster   | 9                    | 88,732          |
|                              | Daviess   | 14                   | 66,189          |
|                              | Henderson | 63                   | 10,840          |
|                              | Union     | 69                   | 8,147           |
|                              | Hancock   | 86                   | 3,263           |
| TOTAL                        | McLean    | 5                    | 190,838         |
|                              | Daviess   | 6                    | 185,879         |
|                              | Webster   | 10                   | 141,882         |
|                              | Ohio      | 11                   | 135,769         |
|                              | Union     | 16                   | 108,853         |
|                              | Henderson | 20                   | 97,697          |
|                              | Hancock   | 77                   | 11,597          |



# SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT Analysis is an identification of competitive assets to a region, as well as factors that could hinder economic development. A SWOT Analysis is a helpful tool to determine what features a region has implemented or needs to implement to strengthen and grow their economy.

**Strengths** are a region's competitive advantages, including things like a skilled workforce or strong broadband capabilities.

**Opportunities** are factors that may help the region's economy to progress, such as the potential for a new industry in the region.

**Weaknesses** are a region's competitive disadvantages, including things like low education or inadequate broadband.

**Threats** are factors that may cause the region's economy to decline, such as a large employer considering leaving the region.

- Availability of regional broadband internet infrastructure
- Strong transportation network
- Low energy costs
- Higher education options
- *Strong community college programs for workforce development*



STRENGTHS

- Low post-secondary degree attainment
- Lack of jobs for advanced degree holders
- Little entrepreneurship



WEAKNESSES

- Development of new and innovative technologies
- Development of I-69 and Interstate spurs
- *Legislative policy & financial support for better broadband*
- *Enhanced opportunity for local tourism*

OPPORTUNITIES



- Decreasing state coal severance funds
- Broadband coverage deficiencies in many GRADD counties
- Lack of employment opportunities for college graduates
- Poor health in the region
- COVID-19

THREATS



# INNOVATION INDEX

A region's capacity for innovation is important to its economic growth and resilience. The [StatsAmerica Innovation 2.0 Tool](#) is an interactive online tool which assesses a region's innovation inputs and outputs and assigns an index level to each county and economic development district based on how they compare to other regions. The Innovation 2.0 tool measures three innovation inputs (Human Capital and Knowledge Creation, Business Dynamics, and Business Profile) and two innovation outputs (Employment and Productivity and Economic Well-Being). Based on data from each of the other indexes, the tool also establishes an overall capacity for innovation (Headline Index). The data used to determine the rankings is from 2016 (Innovation 2.0 Tool's most recent data).

## INNOVATION INPUTS

### Human Capital and Knowledge Index

Includes factors that affect a region's ability to engage in innovative activities (i.e., population growth of people aged 25-44, educational attainment, technology diffusion, and STEM education and occupations)

### Business Profile Index

Includes factors that show a region's local business conditions and the resources it has available to entrepreneurs and businesses (i.e., broadband connectivity, number of small and large businesses, proportion of high-tech firms to the national proportion, and statistics about proprietors)

### Business Dynamic Index

Includes factors that measure a region's competitiveness (i.e., entry/exit of businesses, formation of new businesses, and venture capital spending)

## INNOVATION OUTPUTS

### Employment and Productivity index

Includes factors that show economic growth, regional desirability, or direct outcomes of innovative activity (i.e., job growth to population growth ratio, industry performance, gross domestic product, and patents)

### Economic Well-Being Index

Includes factors that measure a region's standard of living as a result of innovative activity (i.e., per capita personal income growth, growth in wage/salary earnings per worker, income inequality, poverty rate, and unemployment rate)

## HEADLINE INDEX

OVERALL CAPACITY FOR INNOVATION

## GRADD INNOVATION INDEX

|                       | GRADD | Daviess | Hancock | Henderson | McLean | Ohio | Union | Webster |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|---------|-----------|--------|------|-------|---------|
| Very High             |       |         |         |           |        |      |       |         |
| High                  |       |         |         |           |        |      |       |         |
| Normal                |       |         |         |           |        |      |       |         |
| Low                   |       |         |         |           |        |      |       |         |
| Very Low              |       |         |         |           |        |      |       |         |
| <b>Headline Index</b> |       |         |         |           |        |      |       |         |

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## GOAL 1: IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

OBJECTIVE A: INCREASE KINDERGARTEN READINESS

OBJECTIVE B: RAISE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

OBJECTIVE C: INCREASE BACHELOR'S DEGREE ATTAINMENT

OBJECTIVE D: INCREASE ASSOCIATE DEGREE AND/OR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

### PROGRESS

- The percentage of GRADD residents 25 and older with an associate degree has increased 0.9% since 2015.
- Hancock County, Webster County, Daviess County, and McLean County have increased associate degree attainment at a greater rate than the state (see Table 1.1).
- Four out of eight public school districts in the region have raised their high school graduation rate (see table 1.2).

### WHY IS THIS OUR GOAL?

Education is a major factor in enhancing a region's human capital. Increased education raises the workforce's knowledge and skills and increases the workforce's productivity. Higher levels of education in a region typically correlate with a higher GDP and better quality of life. The 2017 GRADD CEDS Committee identified four objectives to meet to improve educational attainment, from kindergarten readiness to bachelor's degree attainment. Early and K-12 education are important foundations for higher education or technical school. Graduates of higher education bring different and valuable skills and help diversify the economy.

| REGION        | 2015 | 2019 | % CHANGE |
|---------------|------|------|----------|
| Daviess       | 8.7  | 10.2 | +1.5     |
| Hancock       | 7.9  | 10.0 | +2.1     |
| Henderson     | 9.0  | 9.7  | +0.7     |
| McLean        | 8.3  | 9.3  | +1.0     |
| Ohio          | 7.5  | 6.6  | -0.9     |
| Union         | 9.8  | 8.8  | -1.0     |
| Webster       | 7.5  | 9.2  | +1.7     |
| GRADD         | 8.6  | 9.5  | +0.9     |
| Kentucky      | 7.5  | 8.3  | +0.8     |
| United States | 8.1  | 8.5  | +0.4     |

| SCHOOL DISTRICT       | '15-'16<br>SCHOOL YEAR | '19-'20<br>SCHOOL YEAR | %<br>CHANGE |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Daviess County        | 91.1%                  | 90.5%                  | -0.6        |
| Hancock County        | 91.5%                  | 92.8%                  | +1.3        |
| Henderson County      | 91.1%                  | 90.5%                  | -0.6        |
| McLean County         | 92.4%                  | 96.5%                  | +4.1        |
| Ohio County           | 90.1%                  | 91.1%                  | +1.0        |
| Owensboro Independent | 86.3%                  | 88.5%                  | +2.2        |
| Union County          | 90.4%                  | 95.9%                  | +5.5        |
| Webster County        | 93.5%                  | 86.7%                  | -6.8        |

Kentucky Department of Education, School Report Card

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## GOAL 2: IMPROVE CAREER READINESS

OBJECTIVE A: ENCOURAGE CONTINUING EDUCATION AND WORKER “UPSKILLING”

OBJECTIVE B: ENCOURAGE JOB RETRAINING FOR DISPLACED WORKERS

### PROGRESS

- As of September 2021, there are 87 people enrolled in occupational skills training or On-The-Job training.
- As of September 2021, there are eight apprentices enrolled in the Hire to Operate (H2O) program.
- As of September 2021, there are 41 people enrolled in the National Dislocated Worker Grant, which was designed to pair temporary employees with employers and non-profit agencies impacted by COVID-19.

### WHY IS THIS OUR GOAL?

Workforce development is a key factor in making GRADD more resilient. The region needs more skilled individuals to attract more industries and businesses. By establishing and promoting programs that teach critical technical skills, the region will create a workforce that draws in manufacturing companies with positions that pay well; raising the overall quality of life for residents. These programs also ensure that workers are able to withstand the effects of economic change and layoffs, as they can transfer their knowledge from one job to another.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## GOAL 3: IMPROVE BROADBAND QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY

OBJECTIVE A: PURSUE UPGRADE TO CONNECT GRADD NETWORK

OBJECTIVE B: PURSUE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS, SUCH AS KENTUCKY WIRED

### PROGRESS

- The KentuckyWired network was completed in March 2021.
- \$300 million of the Kentucky State Fiscal Recovery Fund portion of American Rescue Plan Act funds will be allocated to expanding broadband.
- Expansion of Owensboro Municipal Utility's internet service throughout the city, with customers having risen from 1,690 in August 2020 to 2,523 in August 2021.

### WHY IS THIS OUR GOAL?

Internet infrastructure is vital to a region's capacity for growth. It impacts both economic factors and quality of life factors. GRADD has made huge strides in improving broadband services, but adequate internet and cell service is still not available in all areas of the region.

Without fast and reliable internet, local small businesses are unable to use online services and cannot compete with larger businesses with better connections. Lack of strong internet infrastructure makes it harder to market the region to new industries and potential investors. Residents may be unable to work remotely and may be forced to travel long distances for work or school. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the ever-increasing need for widespread improved broadband capabilities as students, business owners, and employees migrated online.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## GOAL 4: ENCOURAGE OPENNESS TO DIVERSITY

OBJECTIVE A: ACKNOWLEDGE CHANGING ECONOMIC REALITIES

OBJECTIVE B: PROMOTE ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSE POPULATIONS

### PROGRESS

- Owensboro Public Schools has taken the following actions:
  - Identified the need for focus on addressing the inequities in minority population, and hired new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Director.
  - Hired a new English Language Student Services Coordinator to better ensure communication to families is translated to a number of languages representing students.
  - In the process of revamping district website and communication methods to better reach families, including the ability to easily translate to other languages.
  - Applied for a Kentucky Department of Education grant to fund a "Grow-Your-Own" initiative to target students of color who may want to teach someday and partnered with Kentucky Wesleyan College on the project.
  - Partnered with Owensboro Community and Technical College and the Owensboro Black Expo to identify a cohort of juniors and seniors of color to focus on college readiness skills.
  - Joined forces with businesses to publicly support making Owensboro a welcoming community through a full-page ad in Messenger-Inquirer.
  - All schools are receiving training in cultural responsiveness, trauma informed care, and youth mental health first aid, incorporating additional information that will emphasize the needs of diverse populations.
- Owensboro Community & Technical College hired a new diversity director.
- Kentucky Wesleyan College hired a new coordinator of equity and inclusion.
- Daviess County Public Schools hired a new district coordinator for Diversity, Equity, and Poverty.
- City of Henderson became the 11th Kentucky city to pass a Fairness Ordinance.
- Development and continuation of cultural events, including the Owensboro Multicultural Festival, the Henderson Diversity Parade, and the Owensboro Black Expo.

### WHY IS THIS OUR GOAL?

Quality of life and cultural factors are incredibly important to a region's ability to attract and retain young entrepreneurs and skilled workers, especially young college graduates. College graduates are increasingly diverse, as is the general population in the United States.

Acknowledging these changing economic realities and promoting acceptance of diversity in the community are vital to economic prosperity. Creation of a vibrant and welcoming community is necessary to attract and retain skilled young workers. Diverse regions also benefit from unique placemaking and businesses, enhancing the region's overall resiliency and diversity of industry.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## GOAL 5: FOSTER ENTREPRENEURIAL EFFORTS

OBJECTIVE A: SUPPORT AND CREATE BUSINESS INCUBATORS

OBJECTIVE B: ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURIALISM IN YOUNG PEOPLE

### PROGRESS

COVID & regular RLF loans

Breaking the Cycle [https://www.messenger-inquirer.com/news/breaking-the-cycle-to-host-block-party/article\\_53aa23c6-2c96-5f42-961f-d1bfc5acc33c.html/?&logged\\_out=1](https://www.messenger-inquirer.com/news/breaking-the-cycle-to-host-block-party/article_53aa23c6-2c96-5f42-961f-d1bfc5acc33c.html/?&logged_out=1)

Chamber Young Professionals

### WHY IS THIS OUR GOAL?

Entrepreneurs create new businesses, goods, or services, which are vital for the creation of new jobs and growing and developing a region's local economy. Entrepreneurship drives a region's innovative capacity and creates wealth for both individuals and the community. Businesses, goods, and services established through entrepreneurship have a ripple effect on the local economy, wherein the entrepreneurial endeavor paves the way for related businesses and sectors to enter a market. Entrepreneurship also supports the growth of local small businesses and placemaking, and can contribute to the region's economic diversity.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## GOAL 6: INCREASE REGIONAL COMMUNICATION

OBJECTIVE A: INCREASE AWARENESS OF OTHER COUNTIES' OFFERINGS AND FOSTER COMMUNICATION AMONG COUNTIES

### PROGRESS

Daviess County/Ohio County bluegrass tourism efforts

Union County/Webster County partnering on WKRTC

West Kentucky Coalition

### WHY IS THIS OUR GOAL?

GRADD has two urban cities, Henderson and Owensboro, with populations over 25,000 and four other smaller cities with a population of over 2,500. The remaining 21 cities are more rural. Of the region's population, 53.35 percent live in rural areas and 46.65 percent live in urban areas. It is important for overall economic growth to benefit both urban and rural residents.

To bring about comprehensive growth, counties and cities must make collaboration and communication priorities. Cooperative efforts to market the region as a whole allows cities and counties to leverage nearby resources to attract new industries and investments. Additionally, county collaboration on events could expand the tourism industry by marketing each county's resources as a unique and attractive culture.



# STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## GOAL 7: COLLABORATE TO MARKET THE REGION

OBJECTIVE A: CREATE AN ECONOMIC DATABASE

OBJECTIVE B: CREATE A QUALITY OF LIFE DATABASE

### PROGRESS

WRIS portal

Team Kentucky Economic Dev website (interactive)

Bluegrass, Blues, & BBQ (Kentucky Tourism)

### WHY IS THIS OUR GOAL?

A collaborative approach to marketing a region has several benefits, whether the collaboration is on a local, regional, or state level. Collaborative marketing results in a comprehensive approach that leverages all assets in a region to make the region as a whole more desirable. This approach is a useful tool in attracting new industries, new residents, and tourists to a region. Cities and counties in close proximity can rely on one another's assets in marketing to potential investors

# EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Unemployment

DATA TO COME

Per capita income

DATA TO COME

Number of minority/women owned businesses

DATA TO COME

# EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

High school graduation rate  
DATA TO COME

Composite ACT score  
DATA TO COME

Post-secondary attainment  
DATA TO COME

# COUNTY DATA - TBD

## POPULATION

2020 Census<sup>1</sup>

Change Since 2010<sup>2</sup>

## INCOME

Per Capita Income<sup>1</sup>

Median Household Income<sup>1</sup>

Living Wage<sup>3</sup>

Poverty Rate<sup>1</sup>

## EDUCATION

Attainment for Population 25 Years and Older<sup>1</sup>

## WORKFORCE

Real GDP<sup>1</sup>

Labor Force<sup>1</sup>

Unemployment<sup>4</sup>

## COUNTY PRIORITIES

## HOUSING

Median Home Value<sup>1</sup>

Total Housing Units<sup>1</sup>

Vacancy Rate<sup>1</sup>

Owner/Renter Occupied Housing<sup>1</sup>

## LARGEST INDUSTRIES