

UNITED | Kansas Town Halls
WE .



2022 REPORT

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Kansas' economy stands to grow 10-15% by 2025 if women's participation in the workforce is increased.

*—McKinsey Global
Institute*



LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

Listening is by far the most powerful yet overlooked way to make meaningful change. Making assumptions is one of the most harmful things we can do when leading a movement and taking action to improve lives. We must slow down, actively listen and amplify the voices we hear.

Our data shows that women don't often get the opportunity to talk about economic issues. For this reason, I have made listening a key step in our three-part formula for change. It's incredibly simple, yet deeply effective: (1) Research, (2) Solutions and (3) Results.

This year we listened to hundreds of women in Kansas about their socioeconomic challenges. This report provides a summary of our findings, identifying opportunities for impact to increase equity and grow Kansas' economy through more women in the workforce. I'm grateful to the countless women who spoke with us. Thanks to these Kansas women's voices, we are amplifying concerns and advocating for change, creating a model that can be replicated and scaled.

Before any solutions can be pursued, we must know everything we can about the issues women in Kansas are facing. Our actions are always rooted in facts and data — not assumptions.

For us, research is two-fold. First, we partner to conduct quantitative research that leads to comprehensive reports, like the [2021 Status of Women in Kansas report](#) that we commissioned with the University of Kansas. Next, we formalize our listening with qualitative research by meeting women where they are and creating safe spaces for honest conversations. This is where hosting a three-month traveling listening session called the Kansas Town Halls came into play.



Research.

Appoint.

Educate.

Empower.



Our goal for the Kansas Town Halls is to embed those voices and experiences into the Solution phase of the formula, which is nonpartisan policy reform at the city, county, and state level, as well as effective workplace policies. We asked questions to help reveal the greatest workplace and entrepreneurship barriers Kansas women are facing, including childcare, paid family leave, broadband access and more.

One of my favorite byproducts of our conversations is the validation the women feel. You are not alone. You are not the only one struggling with childcare. You are not the only one thinking about caring for aging parents as you fall asleep. While we are all different, many are deeply impacted by the same issues. That's why our work is nonpartisan and focused on all women. Regardless of political beliefs, we are all intimately connected by daily issues that need to – and can – be changed. I hope you utilize the findings in this report to impact gender equity in your workplaces and communities.

Today we see our work positively impacting hundreds of thousands of women and families. But our successes wouldn't exist without direct input from the people whom we serve: women.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Doyle".

Wendy Doyle,
President & CEO

Research
+
Solutions
=
Results

Kansas Women's Economic Development Task Force

Alise Martiny

Greater Kansas City Building & Construction Trades Council

April Henry

Kansas Board of Regents

Brenda Bandy

Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition

Senator

Carolyn McGinn

Kansas State Senator

Cassie Bicknell

Mariner Wealth Advisors

Christina Long

Create Campaign

Dana Nanninga

USD 457 Board of Education

Dornella Leal

Kansas Counties Association

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade

Every

Emily Snyder

IBEW Local 124

Dr. Glenda

Overstreet-Vaughn

Kansas People of Color

Glenda Washington

Greater Topeka Partnership

Hannah Larrick

Veterans United Home Loans

Mayor Jade

Piros de Carvalho

Kansas Office of Broadband Development & Mayor of Hutchinson

Jessica Hunt

Patterson Family Foundation

Joni Cobb

Center for American Entrepreneurship

Joy Broils

Hustle & Ground

Julie Turnipseed

Anderson County Development Agency

Karyn Page

Global Trade & Workforce Development Executive

Kathy Larson

Ash Grove Cement Company

Katie Whisman

Katie Whisman Consulting

Katrina Abraham

GKC Chamber

Kelli Cobb

Cattle Rancher

Lara Krug

Kansas City Chiefs

Lauren Driskoll

City of Salina

Lisse Regehr

Thrive Allen County

Molly Haase

Advent Health

Nancy Daniels

Kansas Extension

Paula Landoll-Smith

Landoll Enterprises

Racquel Thiessen

Kansas Leadership Center

Councilwomen Sara Caylor

City of Ottawa

Shanna Adamic

Cerner Charitable Foundation

Sherriene Jones-Sontag

Kansas Chamber

Sierra Bonn

Let's Go Full Steam Ahead

Strategic Partner:



The League of Kansas Municipalities is a membership association that advocates on behalf of cities, offers training and guidance to city-appointed and elected officials, and has a clear purpose of strengthening Kansas communities. Since 1910, the League has been a resource for cities across Kansas and has acted as a body to share ideas, facilitate communication between members, and provide information on best practices in city operations.

Thank you to our Funding Partners:



Bicknell Family Foundation

Hinkle Law Firm, LLC

Thank you to our Community Partners:

Fort Hays State University
Garden City Community College
Wichita State University
Pittsburg State University

Special thank you to Nicole Alexander Co. for leading the Kansas Town Hall listening initiative and report.



INTRODUCTION

With leadership from the Kansas Women's Economic Development Task Force and in strategic partnership with The League of Kansas Municipalities, United WE invited women and allies from across the state to participate in seven town hall discussions from June to August 2022. In total, 536 people turned out for these discussions. At each Town Hall, United WE collected both qualitative and quantitative data through discussion, surveys, and anonymous polling. Attendees represented diverse industries, areas and backgrounds and came together to discuss issues related to women's economic and civic participation and advancement.

AREAS OF FOCUS:

- Broadband Access
- Childcare
- Civic Engagement
- Entrepreneurship
- Healthcare
- Mentorship & Sponsorship
- Occupational Licensing
- Paid Family Leave and Family-Friendly Policies
- Pay Equity and Financial Stability
- Workplace Culture

► **WE MET WITH WOMEN FROM ACROSS KANSAS.**

▶ **MANY WOMEN** STEPPED UP TO SHARE THEIR STORY.

Sessions were free, open to the public, and included moderated breakout sessions led by community and business leaders. Complimentary professional childcare (ages 0+), lunch, and a \$10 gift card for participation were provided.

In 2021, United WE announced findings from ongoing research on the Status of Women in Kansas. United WE commissioned the study with the University of Kansas Institute for Policy & Social Research in an effort to analyze women's progress to better identify areas of concern and potential policy insights for women of all ages. Some of the key demographics are included throughout this report.

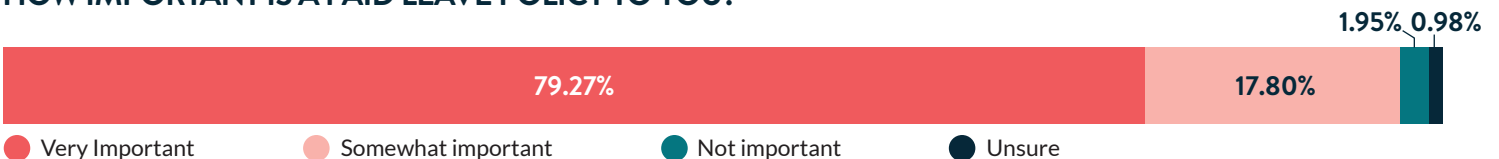


▶ **AND THEY SHARED WHAT MATTERS TO THEM.**

ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR CARING FOR CHILDREN?



HOW IMPORTANT IS A PAID LEAVE POLICY TO YOU?



HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FINANCIAL INSTITUTION?

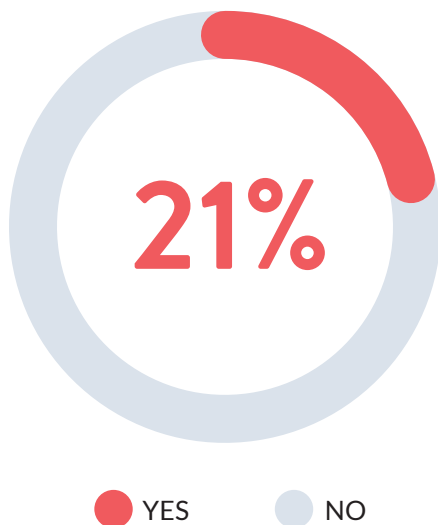


KEY FINDINGS

BROADBAND ACCESS

- Access to affordable and reliable internet affects women's ability to work from home, own and run businesses, and access telehealth and mental healthcare services.
- Broadband access affects opportunities for continuing education and additional training and certifications needed to advance in the workforce.
- Internet access is limited in rural areas and there is often only one or two providers available, which results in higher costs for users.
- Despite the perception that broadband is more accessible in urban and higher populated areas, many are still without reliable and affordable access.

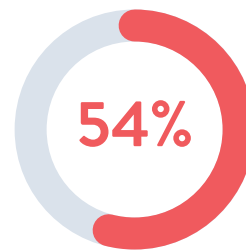
Have you experienced challenges accessing broadband?





CHILDCARE

- Childcare costs are unaffordable.
- For many women the cost of care equals or surpasses their monthly income, making it hard to justify staying in the workforce.
- Access to childcare services for children with special or different needs is difficult to obtain.
- The supply of licensed childcare providers does not meet the demand.
- State licensing requirements and processing times create barriers for new providers.
- Licensed childcare facilities in rural areas often don't accommodate non-traditional work hours.
- Social norms often dictate that women take on the responsibility for planning or providing care for family members - both childcare and eldercare.
- Staff shortages occur because of barriers for workers, including low wages and certification requirements.



Are you responsible for caring for children?

● YES

● NO

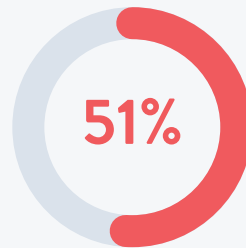
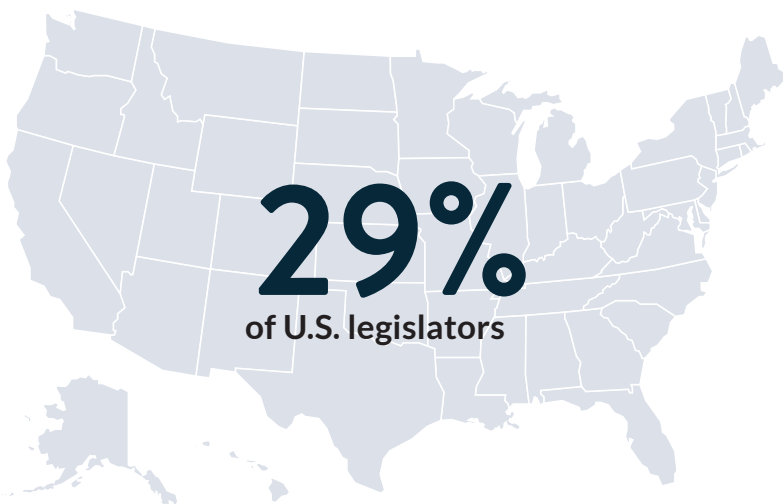
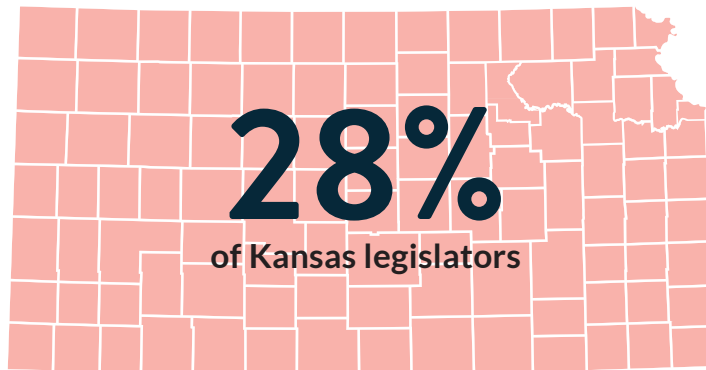
According to the 2021 Status of Women in Kansas report:

- Infant care at daycare centers in Kansas is **1.3 times more expensive** than in-state college tuition.
- Kansas infant care costs are **29 percent of female median earnings**, one of the highest percentages in the U.S.
- Kansas has **twice the number of children under 5 per available licensed childcare slots**.
- Kansas has a **higher share of children under the age of 18** than the U.S.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- A lack of interest in entering the current political climate prevents women from running for office.
- A lack of awareness, training and ongoing support or mentorship also prevent women from more civic engagement opportunities.
- Following the Kansas Town Hall series, 110 women indicated that they are interested in learning more about the Appointments Project® and serving in a civic leadership role.

According to the [2021 Status of Women in Kansas report](#), women comprise only about 28% of state legislators in Kansas and 29% in the U.S.



Have you ever considered running for office?

● YES ● NO

UNITED WE . | 

Through our [Appointments Project®](#) program, we advocate for women and help them secure appointments on civic boards and commissions.

We know the importance of asking women to lead.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Women cited reasons such as flexibility with children and the need for additional income as reasons for starting their own full-time or part-time businesses.
- Women indicated that access to health insurance was a barrier to starting their own businesses. Business owners indicated that spouses having coverage enabled them to take this step.
- Women lack individual relationships with banking institutions, which affects their ability to access capital when forming businesses and limits their awareness of important financial information and resources to grow and sustain businesses.
- Women indicated that limited business resources, connections and networks have negatively impacted their business endeavors.

According to the 2021 Status of Women in Kansas report, *women have lower rates of self-employment in Kansas* compared with the U.S. and are less likely to own a business in Kansas.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FINANCIAL INSTITUTION?

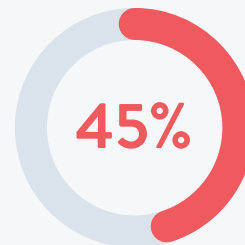


HEALTHCARE

- Access to affordable health insurance is critical for women evaluating job opportunities.
- Employer-provided health insurance dictates many women’s career choices (i.e., women will stay in a job even with lower wages to ensure family coverage).
- Women often prioritize the health of family members over their own mental or physical needs, including completing annual exams.
- Women utilize and benefit from access to telehealth services. Leveraging this relatively new technology allowed women to access care without barriers such as childcare and location or transportation, along with simplifying access for those with disabilities.
- Telehealth also supports women business owners—like therapists—by expanding their ability to provide services.
- While convenient, the use of telehealth is not accessible for those with limited access to broadband and/or a strong internet connection. This issue is more prevalent in rural parts of the state.
- Home healthcare and eldercare options are lacking, especially in rural parts of the state.
- There is a high degree of distrust of health insurance companies.

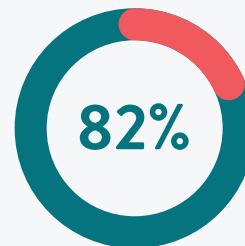


According to the [2021 Status of Women in Kansas report](#), the percentage of women accessing preventative health screenings of mammograms and pap tests *is lower in Kansas than in the U.S.*



Do you utilize telehealth to receive healthcare services?

● YES ● NO



Do you think your health insurance company cares for you and your health?

● YES ● NO

HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST YOUR INSURANCE COMPANY?





MENTORSHIP & SPONSORSHIP

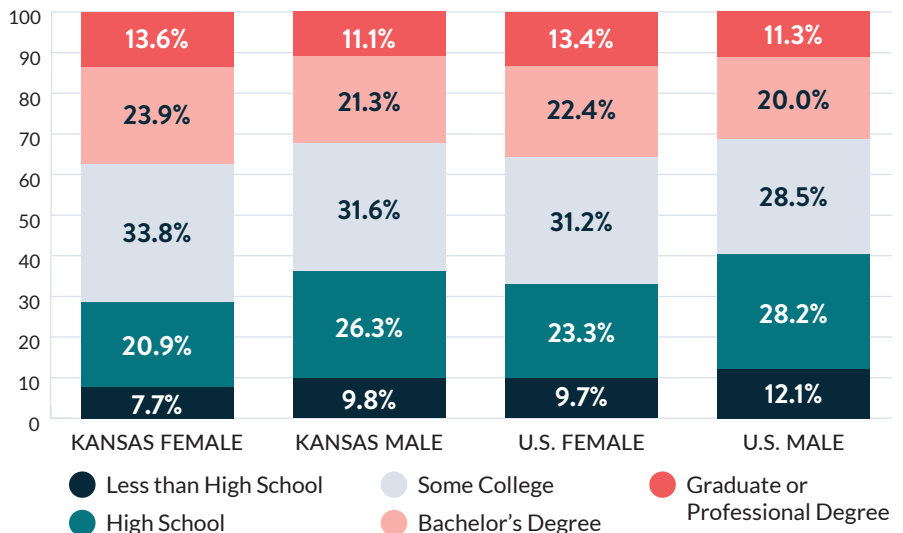
- Many women lack mentors or sponsors to help guide them through their careers, including discussions on negotiating salary or paid family leave in the workplace.
- A lack of support has negatively impacted women in the public sector, along with those serving as elected officials.
- A lack of women-focused networking and mentorship opportunities was cited as a critical need in rural communities which face unique challenges and opportunities but is also a concern statewide.

OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING

- Women in Kansas are more likely to work in fields requiring occupational licensing, such as cosmetology, dental, education, nursing, and therapy.
- Occupational licensing barriers are affecting individuals and business owners alike with delays to begin providing a service in critical areas such as therapists and in-home daycares.
- Educational and licensing requirements are impacting women in immigrant and refugee communities.

According to the 2021 Status of Women in Kansas report, women have higher levels of educational attainment than men in Kansas and the U.S., yet Kansas has significantly fewer women working in management compared with the U.S.

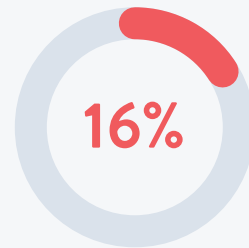
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF ADULTS AGE 25–64
by gender, 2015–2019



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015–2019 American Community Survey

PAID FAMILY LEAVE & FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

- Many Kansas employers do not offer paid family leave.
- Women without access to paid family leave are forced to use paid time off (PTO) or sick leave to care for family members.
- With limited paid family leave policies and programs offering pay for caregivers, women are negatively impacted financially and in career growth and stability when taking time off or missing work to care for aging family members.
- Many women who have PTO prioritize medical care for family members over their own medical care.
- Like childcare, women struggle to balance careers while also being responsible for eldercare.
- Women in hourly jobs or shift work can be penalized for taking off work to care for family, children, and themselves.
- Family-friendly work policies are a key talent attraction and retention tool for women.



Are you responsible for both eldercare and caring for children?

● YES ● NO

HOW IMPORTANT IS A PAID LEAVE POLICY TO YOU?



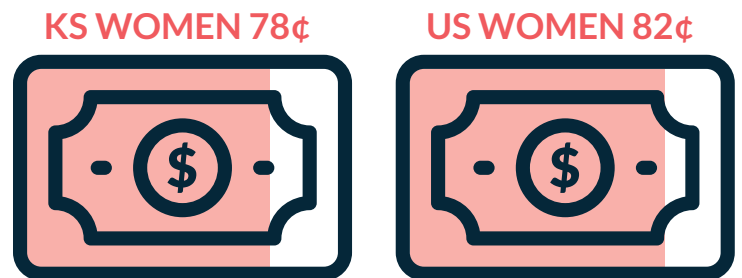


PAY EQUITY AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

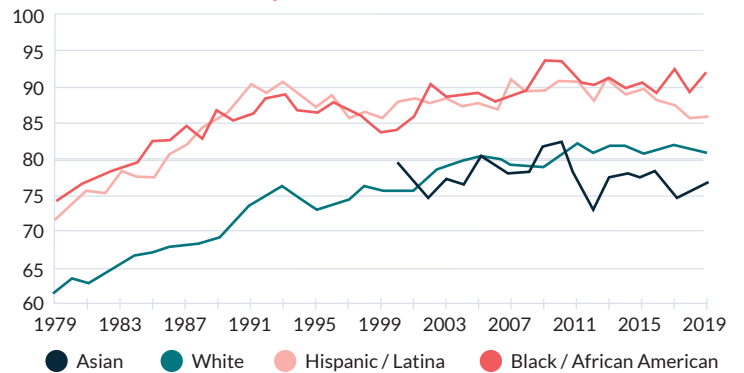
- Women face the compounding challenges of lower earnings and having to take time off to care for children/family members.
- When women step out of the workforce entirely to care for children and/or aging family members, their lifetime earnings are impacted.
- Many Kansas companies do not offer retirement matching programs, which affects women’s ability to save over a lifetime for retirement.

According to the 2021 Status of Women in Kansas report, women working full-time, year-round in the U.S. earn 82 cents for every dollar of male earnings. **Women in Kansas earn only 78 cents.**

In addition, when comparing women and men earnings by race, the gap between Black or Hispanic women and men is smaller than that of Asian and White women. Black or Hispanic women earn 91.5% and 85.9% respectively compared to men of their same race, while Asian and White women earn 76.7% and 81.1%, respectively compared to men of their same race.



WOMEN’S EARNINGS AS A PERCENTAGE OF MEN’S by race, 1979–2019

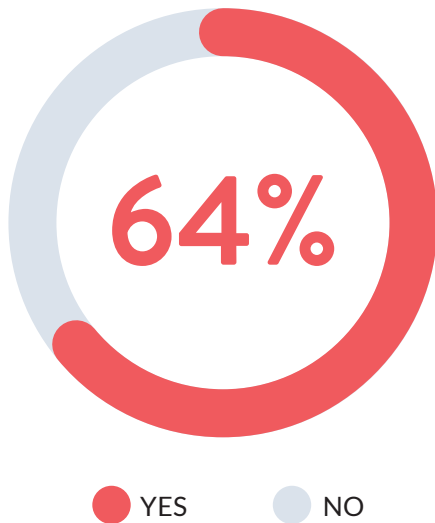


*Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

WORKPLACE CULTURE

- Many women have either worked in a toxic environment and/or experienced negative behaviors in the workplace.
- Training is needed for women in all stages of a career to learn how to address and overcome what many consider “normal” behaviors, such as harassment, discrimination, racism, and gender bias.

Have you experienced negative behaviors (harassment, discrimination, racism, gender bias, etc.) and/or a toxic culture in your workplace?



OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

Since 1991, United WE has invested wisely in the success of women of all ages. We envision a world where all women are empowered to strengthen America's economy and democracy. United WE tackles barriers to women's economic growth and unlocks women's economic potential through research, policy solutions and civic engagement.

Drawing on the key findings from the Kansas town halls as well as data from the [2021 Status of Women in Kansas report](#), seven key areas emerged as the top barriers for Kansas women to fully participate in the workforce.

Addressing the following opportunities for impact within these seven areas will further efforts to recruit and retain Kansas women in the workforce and grow the state's economy to its full potential. Our findings show many opportunities for collaborations with other partners, and there is no one-size-fits-all policy solution to reduce these barriers. Elected officials, businesses, funders, nonprofits and citizens must continue to explore and emphasize a multi-solution, collaborative approach for the strength of the Kansas economy.

BROADBAND ACCESS:

Access to affordable, reliable broadband internet

- Share findings from town halls with Kansas' new Director of Broadband that address broadband accessibility, especially in rural communities.
- Broadband access is a big issue, particularly in rural Kansas. In order to succeed economically, women — and students — need reliable connectivity.
- There is a current expansion of broadband happening in the state with federal dollars handed down for infrastructure purposes. Broadband access is a big issue for the state's policymakers, however, the cost of laying the groundwork for such areas is high and another barrier.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

Access to capital for women entrepreneurs

- Share town hall findings with the Kansas Bankers Association to encourage stronger relationships between women and their banking institutions.
- Share town hall findings with nonprofit organizations and businesses providing resources to future women entrepreneurs on women's capital needs.

CHILDCARE:

Access to affordable, quality childcare

- Childcare Tax Credit: The Child Day Care Services Tax Credit allows any income or privilege taxpayer to claim the child day care services tax credit and permits taxpayers to claim 50% of expenditures paid to an organization providing childcare to the taxpayer's employees beginning in tax year 2021 (and 30% in all subsequent years). The former law limited the credit to corporation income taxpayers and did not permit the credit for payments made to organizations.
- Evaluate city, county and state regulations regarding staffing ratios of caregiver to children.
- Work with the childcare industry and policymakers to find sustainable solutions to paying the childcare workforce higher wages.
- Women's Entrepreneur Childcare Project: The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation has invested in United WE to enable a multi-pronged project related to eliminating barriers to childcare. As part of this project, United WE will:
 - » conduct a state-by-state childcare licensing research study (including Kansas),
 - » conduct a nationwide survey of mothers who are entrepreneurs,
 - » create a Women's Entrepreneur Childcare Task Force, and
 - » collaborate with women entrepreneurs to advocate for policy change, particularly in Kansas.



OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING:

Reduce barriers to professional licensing

- United WE will study the outcomes associated with reduced occupational licensing. United WE advocated for the recent Kansas bipartisan regulatory reform that removes a major occupational licensing barrier for eyebrow threaders. Senate Bill 348 (threading bill) exempts hair threaders from a cosmetology license, costing more than \$15,000 and 1,000 hours of training.
- Identify additional areas to reduce barriers to occupational licensing for other areas of economic impact.
- Explore licensing as it relates to childcare worker education and standards.

PAY EQUITY AND FINANCIAL STABILITY:

Promote equal pay for equal work

- Pay equity is an issue in the state that needs to be addressed. United WE will work with the business community to educate employers on how banning salary history on employment applications can create more equity. United WE will also work with policymakers to ban salary history requirements on state employment applications.
- Share United WE's [pay equity best practice guidelines](#) with elected officials and businesses across Kansas to promote equal pay for equal work.
- **Work and Save Program:** A framework for savings program housed outside of employment centers, for example, in government entities. Programs such as this make it easier for women, particularly women who are in highly mobile professions or who are entrepreneurs. The more women start saving and the earlier they start saving, the less likely they are to have financial hardships later in life and the more likely they are to close the savings gap with their male counterparts.

HEALTHCARE:

Access to affordable, quality healthcare

- Telehealth: In 2021 there was a special interim committee on telehealth, which brought legislation to the full legislature in 2022 to ensure quality care telemedicine practices. That bill—the telemedicine act—died during session but could be brought back up for consideration. (HB 2552)
- Pharmacist Point of Care: Allows pharmacists to test and treat common conditions (flu, UTIs, strep) at their pharmacy without having to go to the doctor's office. Saves time, travel, and expenses for families.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE & FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES:

Access to paid family leave

- United WE advocates for 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave at 100% pay for all part-time and full-time workers.
- Women in our town halls cited the pressures of overlapping eldercare and childcare responsibilities. This shows how important paid leave and family-friendly policies are for Kansans.
- The Kansas State government, executive branch, and judicial branch have all extended paid-family leave policies over the last year. We're on the right path, but could do more, as childcare is a massive barrier for women in the economic workforce. United WE will work with the Kansas Chamber and business community to discuss further opportunities for businesses to provide paid family and medical leave.

TOWN HALLS

OVERVIEW

United WE's Kansas Women's Economic Development Task Force launched in early May and led the charge for seven town halls that took place from June to August 2022. After welcoming remarks from United WE and local partners, participants were invited to join small discussion groups as part of a semi-structured interview led by facilitators. Participants and facilitators then convened for a large group discussion that included moderated questions and anonymous polling. Sessions were open to the public, and complimentary professional childcare, lunch, and a \$10 gift card for participation were provided.

LOCATIONS

TOPEKA

The Beacon

June 23, 2022 | 11:30a – 1p

102 Participants

HAYS

Fort Hays State University

June 28, 2022 | 11:30a – 1p

48 Participants

GARDEN CITY

Garden City Community College

June 29, 2022 | 11:30a – 1p

49 Participants

WICHITA

Wichita State University

July 14, 2022 | 11:30a – 1p

72 Participants

CHANUTE

Ash Grove Training Center

August 3, 2022 | 8:45a – 9:30a

12 Participants

PITTSBURG

Pittsburg State University

August 3, 2022 | 11:30a – 1p

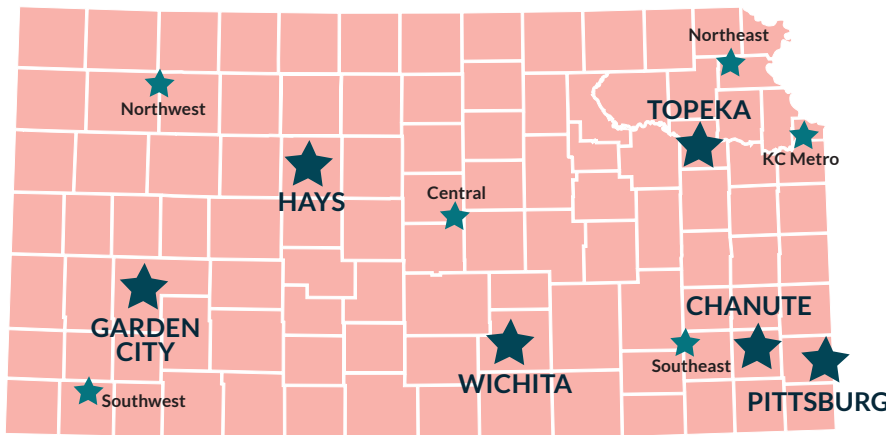
90 Participants

STATEWIDE

Virtual

August 24, 2022 | 12p – 1p

163 Participants



LEGEND

- ★ Town Hall Location
- ★ Regions Represented by Participants

STATEWIDE (virtual) ★

STATEWIDE VIRTUAL - what region of the state are you joining from?





FEEDBACK

The small group and large group facilitated discussions in the town halls led to valuable feedback and insights about the challenges and barriers women in Kansas are facing. Below, we highlight key remarks that were heard in multiple communities.

...our concerns and experiences are common and widespread.

— Garden City participant

...I like hearing about the issues others face in the community.

— Garden City participant

...It was very good to hear the other voices.

— Garden City participant

...I never knew how much women are impacted in the workforce.

— Chanute participant

...I loved women coming together to discuss important issues!

— Pittsburg participant

...I liked learning there are other women like me in southeast Kansas.

— Pittsburg participant

...We're all in the same boat!

— Pittsburg participant

...I loved hearing the many perspectives and personal stories.

— Pittsburg participant

...It's nice to feel heard. I can't wait to be involved more in the future.

— Garden City participant

...No matter what status or position we women are in, we are all experiencing the same struggles.

— Hays participant

...I'm excited to see the results of this effort and see what real change we can make across the state of Kansas to benefit our women and families.

— Statewide participant

...Thank you for making this opportunity to share and hear experiences across the state!

— Statewide participant



BROADBAND ACCESS

Women discussed the cost and limited choices when it came to internet providers in various parts of the state. For women working from home, they talked about having no choice but to pay higher internet fees to ensure coverage and quality. In some areas of the state, women indicated that broadband coverage is good when you are in the city or metro area but lacking as you get outside of that. In other areas of the state, women commented about the gaps in coverage even within large metro areas.

...In the city, broadband is good, outside the metro it is bad.

— Topeka participant

...Broadband internet in Kansas equals access for women to the digital economy.

— Topeka participant

...I think the farther west you are, the harder it is because there are just simply no providers.

— Hays participant

...I didn't have a choice (but to pay more for internet service). I have to be able to work from home.

— Hays participant

...I was surprised at the challenges that I ran into with getting internet access at a location that's in the center of a metro area.

— Wichita participant

...It never ceases to amaze me as I work with people that there is this assumption that everybody has access to the internet. And that's not the case, even in this day and age.

— Wichita participant



CHILDCARE

The topic that spurred the most passionate conversation at each town hall was childcare – the high cost of it, the inability to access it, the way it pushed women out of the workforce, how it prevents women from pursuing career growth, the unprofitable business model for owners, the low wages for workers, and the fact that it has been an issue for decades. Women discussed the social norms that women take the primary responsibility for the logistics and coordination of care, schooling, activities, and medical needs of children.

...The entire childcare situation is disheartening. The employees in this space are crucial and need to be paid better. The cost of care is hard for many to afford and becomes a luxury to those of us who can afford the cost.
– Statewide participant

...36 years ago, I left the workforce for several years due to childcare costs. It has been an issue for a long time.
– Statewide participant

...Childcare has always been an issue. I'm glad we're all talking about it now.
– Hays participant

...I hear parents talk about the expenses of daycare. I hear daycare directors/owners talk about not finding employees. I hear employees talking about the low pay. Something is broken. All parties seem unhappy.
– Statewide participant

The prohibitive cost for parents, caregivers and even employers

Women discussed how covering the high cost of daycare surpassed mortgage costs and often did not merit them returning to work.

...My daycare is more expensive than my mortgage.

– Hays participant

...I left the workforce after I had my second child and didn't return until after my fourth child went to preschool because it was too expensive to pay for childcare.

– Statewide participant

...I know if I have another child, I won't be able to keep my job due to childcare expenses.

– Hays participant

...I knew childcare costs were bad, but I didn't know they were that bad.

– Pittsburg participant

...When my job had childcare on site, it was amazing! But they had to get rid of it because it was too expensive for the company.

– Garden City participant

...My family would have lost money after childcare with my previous income – thus stay-at-home mom until my youngest is in school.

– Statewide participant

The waitlists and limited access/availability/hours

Women shared stories of paying significant fees to join waitlists and even scheduling their pregnancies around when they can get their child a spot at a daycare facility. Accessing daycare for nontraditional hours in rural areas is challenging for parents who commute to work in nearby metro areas.

...We had to spend more than \$400 just to get on the childcare waitlist that was more than a year long.

– Wichita participant

...I was 12 weeks pregnant when I got on the childcare center waitlist. They called me when he was four to tell me his spot had opened up. That was before the pandemic.

– Pittsburg participant

...I have to use all my PTO to care for my child throughout the year because I can't get consistent childcare.

– Wichita participant

...Johnson County is better than most and I'm still struggling to find infant care. Due in 6 weeks and on 7 waitlists.

– Statewide participant

...The amount of families who are family planning around childcare availability and the cost of care is sad.

– Statewide participant



Childcare when school is not in session

Participants discussed the difficulty in finding care during the summer months. Price was also a factor in accessing summer programs, especially for single moms and families with multiple children. Even if families can afford it, women commented on how the logistics and transportation to summer programming make it prohibitive.

...Don't forget about young teens. There are not enough options for childcare for young teens throughout the summer.

– Wichita participant

...The cost of before and after-school care can be as much as full-day childcare.

– Statewide participant

...During the summers, I was fortunate to have flexibility with my work and could drop down to 50% time to cover my childcare needs.

– Statewide participant

The business model and regulatory hurdles for owners, as well as low wages for workers

One attendee shared her story of leaving her job to start an in-home daycare and maneuvering the licensing process through the state. She said it is hard to figure out the timing aspect of the process because you must be ready for the inspection once you apply but waiting means going longer without pay. Women discussed access to benefits and insurance for business owners and employees as another barrier.

...I am starting an in-home daycare. I can only take 10 kids based on my license, but my waitlist is already 30 kids – and that is just from word-of-mouth.

– Pittsburg participant

...I wanted to stay home with my kids, so I opened my own daycare, but it cost more to run the daycare than I made.

– Garden City participant

...I wanted to go into Early Childhood Education and then figured out what they were paid and went a different route.

– Statewide participant



A compounding issue for those caring for children with special needs

At every town hall, women shared the compounding effect of childcare issues when caring for children with special needs and children in foster care. This includes availability and cost of care.

...It is very difficult to find childcare for my daughter with special needs.

– Wichita participant

...There is no childcare center for my 15-year-old with special needs.

– Pittsburg participant

...Childcare and summer activity availability for children with special needs is extremely difficult to find.

– Statewide participant

...I have a son who is now 27 and is autistic. As a single mom, for many of the early years of my career, I had to miss work to pick him up from daycare and was not able to grow and take on new responsibilities for this very reason as I wasn't always considered a reliable employee for having daycare issues. Had I had reliable care, I can't imagine where I would be now.

– Statewide participant



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

At the town halls, United WE shared data from research it funded about women’s representation on Kansas municipal boards and commissions from the University of Kansas Institute for Leadership Studies. The report entitled *[Kansas Municipalities and Gender Balance](#)* showed that Kansas women are underrepresented on civic boards and commissions, especially on “power boards” that have a direct influence on policy-making and financial resource allocation such as planning and zoning boards.

Comments from attendees covered the political climate and lack of support or mentors for women serving as elected officials or in the public sector.

...No (I have not considered running for elected office) and in the current political climate would not now.

— Statewide participant

...As a two-term school board member and now a second-term city commissioner, a mentor would have been wonderful. Nothing exists for women in public service/ elected office.

— Statewide participant



ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Women talked about receiving very little to no support from others when starting businesses and access to affordable benefits being a barrier to getting started. Women are lacking in meaningful relationships with banking institutions – indicating that relationships are most commonly transactional in nature. One key driver for women to start their own businesses was flexibility. Additional income was the main reason for those who operate part-time businesses.

...I got laughed at when I tried to get capital from financial institutions for my business, so I had to open several credit cards.

– Garden City participant

...I started my own business to supplement my income because I was making so little at my full-time job.

– Garden City participant

...The banks don't take women business owners seriously.

– Wichita participant

...I started my own business, so I had the flexibility to spend time with my daughters.

– Pittsburg participant

...If there were a way for me to get insurance, I would probably work on my own. I've had a side ad agency business off and on. But the reason that I haven't been able to take it full-time is because of the lack of insurance coverage.

– Hays participant

...I started my own business in January. Capital is a big struggle.

– Topeka participant



HEALTHCARE

The healthcare discussion among attendees covered everything from telehealth and annual checkups to access to coverage and trust of insurance providers. Participants from rural areas also talked about the difficulty in accessing resources such as home healthcare.

The high cost of health insurance for business owners and individuals

One attendee talked about the decrease in her paycheck due to the increasing cost of health insurance. One attendee that is starting her own (daycare) business said that she and her husband don't have health insurance because of the high cost for business owners.

...We've really, especially in rural communities, struggled because so many of our small businesses can't pay for health insurance for their employees. But those employees are making too much to receive Medicaid but not enough to receive affordable healthcare. And so, we're seeing a huge issue where people are not covered, and they cannot afford coverage.

— Pittsburg participant

...I would not have been able to open my business if my spouse didn't have health insurance.

— Wichita participant

How women access healthcare services for themselves and their family

Women discussed juggling schedules and missing work to make appointments work for children and other family members, which often results in not prioritizing or making their own appointments. Cost is also a consideration for women, despite having health insurance.

...I have no time. All my time goes towards making sure my kids go into the doctor's when they need it.

— Garden City participant

...I make sure they (family members) get in and that's it. You kind of don't prioritize yourself.

— Pittsburg participant

...You get all the kids done and then you feel bad because you miss so much work for all your kids' appointments that I wait.

— Pittsburg participant

...I have to shop for healthcare for myself for the first time ever...and it is scary.

— Statewide participant



How healthcare options drive employment and career options for women

Women discussed employment opportunities with healthcare benefits being limited and often being forced to turn down better job opportunities due to the lack of or higher cost of insurance at other companies.

...We know that one of the biggest drivers, both with our staff, but also in our community, about whether or not something will work for them, and whether or not they will take a job or not, is the health insurance.

— Pittsburg participant

...At 34, I got my first job with health insurance.

— Hays participant

...Because medical insurance is so needed, I don't feel like I can make a job change since I have that now even though I'd like a better opportunity.

— Statewide participant

...I've worked in nonprofits for probably 20-plus years. Health insurance was not an option that was typically offered. The vast majority are women that work there. At the last one I worked for, there was some discussion for several years about bringing in health insurance. We were having a hard time attracting people. And someone actually said, why do we need to offer it when everyone's husbands have health insurance?

— Hays participant

The benefits of telehealth

For those who are able to access telehealth services, women indicated how helpful it is for scheduling and childcare coverage issues, along with minimizing drive time to access medical appointments for those in rural areas. In addition, it broadens access to services such as mental healthcare for women and families.

...I love telehealth. I will continue to use it where applicable.

— Statewide participant

...I live in a rural community and if you're going to go to the doctor, you're going to drive unless it's very basic services. But my doctor's office offers telehealth, which is nice. I could just call, literally from my desk, and take 15 minutes to call the doctor.

— Garden City participant

...Telehealth made a big difference for access to healthcare while facing childcare issues. Trying to work around my husband's work schedule to get medical care makes it very difficult.

— Statewide participant

...It's \$100 for me just to step into his (doctor's) office. And so telehealth from a financial standpoint, when it's appropriate, is fantastic to me.

— Topeka participant

The distrust of health insurance companies

Some women expressed concerns and distrust in health insurance companies.

...Insurance is a business of numbers, not relationships.

— Statewide participant

...Healthcare: definitely no. They only "care" about their customers when it comes to approving/denying services and how much they are willing to pay.

— Statewide participant

...As a healthcare subscriber, I do not think they have my best interest at heart.

— Statewide participant



MENTORSHIP & SPONSORSHIP

The positive impact that mentors and sponsors provide for women was shared throughout town hall sessions. Attendees noted that this was most impactful as they navigated workplaces and grew their careers. For those women who had not experienced this support individually, they shared their efforts and desires to fill this gap for other women going forward.

Women discussed the lack of networking and connectivity for females, especially in rural areas.

There are groups of men that meet for coffee which leads to relationship building and business opportunities, which limits women's ability to grow in their profession and business. This is not uncommon for women in rural areas especially.

One participant talked about the unique opportunity to serve on an all-female water crew – a first in their town's history – and the pride and support she and her female colleagues receive from their male supervisor. He ordered a special sign to tout "Women at Work" and encourages them to get their certifications and keep improving themselves.

...I have not had a mentor or sponsor. As a result, I try to do what I can for younger women.

– Statewide participant

...Mentorship didn't exist when I started in the workplace in the 1980s.

– Statewide participant

...I've had informal mentorships and sponsorships.

They helped me learn, challenged me to think critically, and advocated for me within the organization.

– Statewide participant

...I have had both throughout my career and I really attribute my career growth to some great mentors and a great sponsor.

I am now trying to do that for others. I firmly believe finding a good mentor can help you throughout your career.

– Statewide participant

...As a city administrator, I wish that I had a female mentor or even someone I could just trust to share my stress with. It's hard to have a trusted friend while balancing this role.

– Statewide participant

...Culturally, women don't advocate for themselves.

We need to train young women how to do that.

– Pittsburg participant



OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING

Women discussed the hardship that occupational licensing presents for both the individual practitioner, who must wait months to receive a license, along with business owners who are trying to provide services for patients and clients. Women also discussed the immigrant and refugee population and the need to recognize degrees and professions from other countries to provide paths to employment opportunities when relocating to communities in Kansas.

...The licensing policy in Kansas is pretty restricted. And if we could figure out how to streamline that, compared to other states around us, that would help us attract teachers.

— Garden City participant

...We have lots of therapists that we've hired that when we can get them to come to Kansas, getting their license from another state moved over is so difficult. And getting the license for a new therapist who just graduated can take up to six months, so there are some barriers there that not only impact our business but impact the services that we can provide.

— Hays participant

...One problem that we've had in southwest Kansas is trying to find opportunities for continuing education (for medical professionals) and the majority of the time now, the employer does not pay for that. So, you have the expense of traveling somewhere that does offer that opportunity for that education, you have the cost of your hotel, the registration of the seminar and the time off from work. So that's been somewhat prohibitive. They're (medical professionals) getting harder to find because the requirements keep going up and up to keep their licensure or their registration.

— Garden City participant

...I work in healthcare and occupational licensing is a big deal. For example, social workers have a lot they must complete.

— Statewide participant

PAID FAMILY LEAVE & FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

Women discussed the benefits of family-friendly work policies such as employers allowing women to bring infant children to work and the availability of flexible schedules, especially for single moms. One woman shared her experience of being a single mom and living in an area without any family support and having to work multiple jobs with no time off available. When her children would get sick, she would have to decide how sick they really were because she couldn't leave her job to pick up or take care of a sick kid. Women also discussed FMLA and how different it is between companies when it comes to parental leave.

...The company I work for doesn't offer paid maternity leave. I didn't know so many other companies didn't offer it either.

— Chanute participant

...That's a huge benefit for me right now. I'm pregnant and get paid maternity leave, at my last job I would have had to use PTO and short-term disability.

— Statewide participant

...At my last employer, there wouldn't have been flexibility or benefits that would benefit outside of just me, for example starting a family and things like that. So that was the biggest selling point for me changing jobs was the benefits.

— Statewide participant

...Family-friendly workplaces make a difference – paid leave, childcare, and lactation rooms.

— Topeka participant

Family-Friendly Policies help women caring for aging family members

When it comes to caring for aging family members, women discussed the social norms and expectations within family units that daughters/women take care of aging parents instead of sons/men. Many women shared their experiences of being “sandwiched” by caring for children and aging family members. With these responsibilities, women discussed how this affects them financially – not having access to financial support when providing care – and in the workplace – taking time off work and being negatively perceived at work or limited in their career growth.

...I know I will be responsible for caring for my mother; however, my brother will not be.

— Statewide participant

...I have been doing it for 20 years – a week after my son was born, my mother became ill. She's passed now, but I care for my father. I have always been “sandwiched.”

— Statewide participant

...I didn't have any children, but I had elderly parents that I had to take care of. And I had to take quite a bit of leave to take care of them both and I got a lot of criticism and flack for that.

— Hays participant





PAY EQUITY AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

Several attendees shared experiences of pay disparity among male colleagues, despite similar roles and prior experience. One female shared her experience of making \$25,000 less than her male counterpart, who has similar responsibilities.

...Salaries should be transparent. It's a big factor in pay equity.

— Topeka participant

...Sexism is the biggest barrier to equal pay.

— Hays participant

...So many women feel the income difference. It's nice to see support for each other.

— Garden City participant

...I had no idea about the disparities in pay equity even here in Pittsburg.

— Pittsburg participant

...They hired me because I was twice as qualified as anyone else, but I was still paid less.

— Garden City participant

...Thankfully, I did have a male mentor who advocated for me and brought me up to level pay to the men in the room with less education and experience than me.

— Statewide participant



WORKPLACE CULTURE

The response to the question from town hall attendees about if they have experienced negative behaviors (harassment, discrimination, racism, gender bias, etc.) and/or toxic cultures in workplaces consistently received a room full of hands raised at each town hall. One woman talked about her experience being asked to get coffee, take notes, and make copies because she was the only female in the room during meetings.

...They would say very derogatory things to me like 'sweetie', 'honey', 'Oh, you're such a good girl, good job'. And I didn't know if I was a dog or a two-year-old.

— Garden City participant

...We need a voice in the workplace.

— Garden City participant

...A male supervisor told me I would never be in his position because people don't respond well to women leaders.

— Wichita participant

...I have not recognized certain obstacles because I considered them "normal".

— Pittsburg participant

...Don't make decisions about me without me.

— Topeka participant

...I worked in restaurants for about 20 years, and it's a toxic environment. It's gotten better, but there's sexism and sexual comments, which you kind of just have to let roll off your back. But there are some subtle things that you don't know whether or not it's appropriate. And sometimes you have to pick your battles.

— Pittsburg participant

...Working in a male-dominated space has taught me to take up space.

— Pittsburg participant

KANSAS WOMEN’S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE



Alise Martiny

Business Manager/Financial Secretary, Greater Kansas City Building and Construction Trades Council

Alise Martiny has worked in the construction industry for over 40 years. She was elected in 2012 as the first woman to hold Business Manager/Financial Secretary for the Greater Kansas City Building and Construction Trades Council. Alise is on her sixth term as an officer in her local union. She also serves on the Health and Welfare Trust Fund and Pension Plans, and as delegates for the Tri-County Labor Council, Kansas City Labor Council, the Missouri State Building and Trades, and a delegate for her local union at all State Conferences and National Conventions. She currently serves on several community boards including Kansas City, Missouri Construction Workforce Board, Kansas City, Kansas Contract Fairness Board, Kansas Apprenticeship Council, Kansas Workforce Partnership Board, Greater Kansas City United Way Board, Truman Medical Center, and was appointed by Governor Kelly to serve on the first Sparks Taskforce. Alise also recently completed her term on the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City Economic Advisory Council.



April Henry

Director, Workforce Development, Kansas Board of Regents

April has been with the Board of Regents since 2013 and has worked on various initiatives and projects including Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas (AO-K), Excel in CTE (SB155), House Bill 2506, AO-K TANF Scholarship, Special Collections, Tiered/Non-tiered course designation, Program Alignment, New Program proposals, Program Modifications, Military Articulation, Transfer and Articulation, and state and federal funds including Carl D. Perkins. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Washburn University and a Master of Business Education from Emporia State University.



Brenda Bandy

Co-Executive Director, Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition

Brenda Bandy is the Co-Executive Director of the Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition (KBC) and oversees the KBC’s programs which include work with employers, childcare providers, families, public health, hospitals, and community organizations. She is an active member representative of the US Breastfeeding Committee since 2011 and served on their Board of Directors. Brenda is an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant and a retired La Leche League Leader of 20 years. She has a passion for bringing people together to remove barriers that stand in the way of families thriving in Kansas.



Carolyn McGinn

State Senator, 31st District of Kansas

Carolyn McGinn is a 4th generation resident of the 31st District. As an elected representative, at both the County and State levels, Carolyn has strived to balance rural and urban needs. She first became active in local politics through grassroots landowners' rights advocacy and Sedgwick Public Schools, where her children attended. She ran for and won a seat on the Sedgwick County Commission in 1998 and was re-elected in 2002. She was elected to the Kansas State Senate in 2004 and re-elected in 2008 and 2012. She graduated from Valley Center High School and achieved a business degree from Wichita State University before earning a master's degree in Environmental Studies from Friends University.



Cassie Bicknell

Community Impact Manager, Mariner Wealth Advisors

Cassie Bicknell is the Community Impact Manager for Mariner Wealth Advisors, bringing over 10 years of experience in foundation development. Through her current role, she is tasked with managing the company's foundation and driving community engagement efforts to over 70 offices across the U.S. She is passionate about finding unique ways to address needs and assist non-profits in achieving goals. Cassie actively serves on numerous boards including the Bicknell Legacy Foundation, Salvation Army, Communities in Schools, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the RJB Women's Giving Circle.



Christina Long

Founding President/CEO of Create Campaign, Inc.

Christina Long is an entrepreneur and community-builder who is passionate about diversity, inclusion and economic development through entrepreneurship. Long is a native of Wichita, a Wichita State University graduate, and the owner of CML Collective, LLC, an inclusive communication and design firm. She is also the Founding President/CEO of Create Campaign, Inc., a tax-exempt nonprofit she established to help urban entrepreneurs in Kansas to launch, innovate and grow. Long leads the Wichita Urban E-Community, has served on the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce's board of directors and is an author of her debut book, "For the Greater Success."



Dana Nanninga

Community Advocate and Vice President, USD 457 Board of Education

Dana Nanninga is currently serving as the Vice President of the Garden City USD 457 Board of Education and is an active community advocate. She is a graduate of the University of Kansas and served in the Peace Corps.



Dornella Leal

Operations and Finance Director, Kansas Counties Association

Dornella Leal is the Kansas Association of Counties Operations & Finance Director. Dornella served in the United States Marine Corps. Her career has been primarily in public service, working with the City and County of Denver and then with the State of Kansas. Dornella currently serves as treasurer for the Knights of Honor Motorcycle Association; an association supporting Veteran and First Responders. She is a graduate of Friends University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in Computer Information Systems and a master's degree in Global Leadership and Management.



Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade

Sr. Economic Development Manager, Evergy

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade is a Sr. Economic Development Manager with Evergy where she is responsible for attracting new companies, retaining, and expanding new businesses and making strategic partner investments to improve the quality of life in the communities she serves. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for Team Kansas, Leadership Wichita, The Kansas African American Museum, Real Men Real Heroes, Wichita Symphony Orchestra, Workforce Alliance-Local Workforce Development Board, and The United Way of the Plains. She received a dual degree in Political Science and Psychology from Kansas State University, a Master of Business Law from Friends University and completed the International Economic Development Council's Economic Development Institute from The University of Oklahoma.



Emily Snyder

IBEW Local 124

Emily Snyder is a proud member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 124 which serves the Kansas City metro area and its surrounding counties. Within her local, she is a very active member of RENEW and enjoys engaging with a new generation of electrical workers and the next generation of leaders. Emily volunteers her time with Heartland Women in Trades, where she sits on the Executive Board as Vice-President. There, she furthers the mission of HWIT by offering knowledge and skill to empower union tradeswomen to become independent and successful through education, mentoring and creating opportunities for women in the trades.



Dr. Glenda Overstreet-Vaughn

Founder, Kansas People of Color Political Think Tank and Action Coalition

Dr. Glenda Overstreet Vaughn is the Founder of the Kansas People of Color Political Think Tank and Action Coalition in partnership with the Kansas Democratic Party African American Caucus. She is a board member of the Center for Peace and Justice working on community policing efforts. She is the former Legislative Oversight Chair for the Shawnee County Democrats and a graduate fellow of the Kansas Democratic Party. She currently serves as the Topeka (KS) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated Governmental and Legislative Affairs Chair. After serving as President of the Topeka Branch NAACP and the Kansas State NAACP, she also served as lobbyist and continues her support by serving as the Political Affairs Committee Chair for the Kansas State NAACP. For three years, she served on the Accreditation Review Committee for the Kansas State Department of Education.



Glenda Washington

Chief Equity and Opportunity Officer, Greater Topeka Partnership

Glenda Washington serves as the Chief Equity and Opportunity Officer at the Greater Topeka Partnership. She oversees entrepreneurial and minority business development programs for Shawnee County. She is also responsible for managing the Topeka/Shawnee County First Opportunity Fund, LLC, a microloan program for entrepreneurs. Glenda is currently participating in the Economic Development Fellowship program as an ACCE Fellow for Inclusive Economic Growth. She was recently appointed to the Board of Directors for the KFMC Health Improvement Partners and the Capper Foundation Board of Directors. She is also participating on the Racial Impact Analysis Workgroup with the Shawnee County Health Department. Glenda received a Bachelor of Science in Workforce, Education, and Development from Southern Illinois University, a Bachelor of Science in Business Management and a Master’s in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix.



Hannah Larrick

External Affairs Manager, Veterans United Home Loans

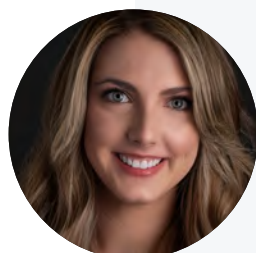
Hannah Larrick is an External Affairs Manager at Veterans United Home Loans. In her role, she works with state regulators in all 50 states, members of Congress, and federal financial regulators. In addition, she closely tracks policy and regulatory issues impacting members of the veteran community and their ability to purchase a home. Previously she worked for U.S. Senator Roy Blunt in both his D.C. office and Mid-Missouri state offices. Hannah is a Mizzou graduate holding degrees in Biology and Spanish.



Mayor Jade Piros de Carvalho

Director of the Office of Broadband Development, State of Kansas, and Mayor of the City of Hutchinson

Jade Piros de Carvalho was appointed in 2022 to serve as the new Director of the Office of Broadband Development for the State of Kansas. In this role, she directs the Department of Commerce’s efforts to drive growth and expansion of broadband throughout the state. Additionally, Piros de Carvalho brings nine years of local government experience as an elected official currently serving a third term as mayor for the city of Hutchinson. During nine years on city council, she has championed efforts to broaden substance misuse treatment options, increase city-led diversity, equity and inclusion programming, fund housing and neighborhood organizing initiatives, solve childcare shortages, and revise development regulations to increase investment and business growth. Jade holds a bachelor’s degree from Wichita State University and master’s in public affairs (MPA) degree with an emphasis on public policy from the University of Missouri.



Jessica Hunt

Vice President of Programs and Strategy, Patterson Family Foundation

As Vice President of Programs and Strategy for the Patterson Family Foundation, Jessica is a member of the senior leadership team responsible for guiding the organization to achieve its vision of thriving rural communities. Under the direction of the President, Jessica oversees development of the Foundation’s strategy and day-to-day operations. In 2021, Jessica managed a charitable program budget of approximately \$25M that impacted more than 100 rural counties in Kansas and northwestern Missouri.



Joni Cobb

Board Chair, Center for American Entrepreneurship

Joni Cobb is the Board Chair for the Center for American Entrepreneurship (CAE), a nonpartisan research, policy, and advocacy organization based in Washington, DC. Joni previously served as the Founding President & CEO at Pipeline Entrepreneurs. During her 14-year tenure, Pipeline Entrepreneurs produced significant financial impact – creating over \$1.39B in revenues, raising over \$608M in outside capital, conducting business in over 85 countries and creating over 2,700 jobs. Joni earned her law degree from Washington University in St. Louis and a BA in Economics and Political Science from the University of Missouri.



Joy Broils

Founder, Hustle & Ground

Joy is the Founder of Hustle & Ground, a product-based company with products designed for the “on the go” and the “at rest” lifestyles. Many of the Hustle & Ground products are developed by the Hustle & Ground team, while others are designed and sourced from local entrepreneur partners in the Kansas City area. Joy earned a Juris Doctorate from Mercer Law School in Macon, Georgia, and a Bachelor of Science in Management and English with a minor in Humanities from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts.



Julie Turnipseed

Director of Economic Development, Anderson County

Julie Turnipseed has worked as a non-profit professional for the past 35 years. Her primary work has been in Downtown Revitalization. Working with small business owners to make their dreams of becoming successful entrepreneurs a reality has been her passion. Julie is currently working as the Director of Economic Development in Anderson County in southeast Kansas. Julie is also a certified Main Street Manager through the National Main Street America program. She has consulted in many small communities and worked with several non-profit organizations.



Karyn Page

Global Trade & Workforce Development Executive

Karyn Page has a contagious enthusiasm and pioneering vision that inspires stakeholder collaboration, harnesses the strengths of team members, and secures relationships to execute on big ideas. Most recently, Page worked as Vice President of Innovation at Envision, Inc., and served as the president and CEO of Kansas Global Trade Center, Inc. for more than 16 years prior to that. Currently, she is the Chair of the Committee on Academic Programs, Student Success, and Faculty for the Dean’s Advisory Board of the W. Frank Barton School of Business at Wichita State University. She also sits on the Board of Directors for the Wichita Chamber of Commerce and Osborne Inc., an employee-owned rural Kansas manufacturer. Page received a Global MBA from Georgetown University in Washington, DC and ESADE in Barcelona, Spain. She graduated from Wichita State University with a Bachelor of Business Administration.



Kathy Larson

Purchasing Manager, Ash Grove Cement Company

Kathy Larson recently joined Ash Grove Cement Company as the Purchasing Manager for their Chanute location. Ash Grove, a CRH Company, is a leader and pioneer in the cement industry. Kathy has 18 years of various business management experience, including managing a mental health counseling facility, managing a small family-owned business, starting and owning her own business, and 10 years in aerospace management. She also served on the board for Chanute’s local Main Street organization.



Katie Whisman

CEO/Chief Strategist, Katie Whisman Consulting

Katie proudly served the citizens of Kansas for nearly 18 years with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation and was a highly respected criminal investigator. For the last six years of her law enforcement career, she served as the Executive Officer to the Director and managed the Office of Governmental Affairs. She also oversaw statewide special projects – most notably the Kansas Sexual Assault Kit Initiative. She formed a development of training and policy reform to improve the criminal justice system’s response to sexual violence. After a distinguished career in public service, she started Katie Whisman Consulting, LLC, which is a boutique contract lobbying and government affairs firm in Topeka that specializes in public policy issues and related appropriations.



Katrina Abraham

Government Affairs Strategist, KC Chamber

Katrina Abraham joined the KC Chamber in 2022 and works on the Public Affairs team focusing on the state of Kansas. Previously, Katrina worked in federal and state politics in Kansas serving on the finance teams and as senior leadership for multiple political campaigns. She also spent six years in the Kansas Senate Majority Leader’s Office and served as Chief of Staff during the last two years. Katrina is a proud graduate of the University of Kansas with a degree in Political Science.



Kelli Cobb

Co-owner, HC Cattle Company

Kelli Cobb is the co-owner of HC Cattle Company, a direct farm-to-consumer beef producer and sales ranching operation in Southeast Kansas. HC Cattle’s main consumer is an urban/suburban dweller who has become interested in knowing where their food comes from, who is raising it and what types of animal husbandry methods are being used. Kelli previously was a co-owner of a temporary nurse staffing agency in rural Kansas. During those years Kelli came into contact with almost every rural hospital and nursing home in western and central Kansas. Kelli has worked in business management, training, and sales development since she graduated from Missouri State University with degrees in Communications and Marketing.



Lara Krug

Chief Marketing Officer and EVP of Marketing, Kansas City Chiefs

In 2021, Lara joined as the first Chief Marketing Officer and EVP of Marketing at the Kansas City Chiefs. While overseeing all aspects of marketing in the U.S. including brand strategy, fan development, content & production, events and community impact, she is also responsible for the internationalization of the club in Germany and Mexico. Chosen as one of the Most Powerful Women in Sports by AdWeek in 2021, Lara believes in the impact that sports can have on fans, new and old, in Kansas City and around the world and the endless opportunities that can come to life when creativity is at the heart of the ideas. She believes in the power of diversity of people, backgrounds and thought and continues to advocate for change throughout the industry.



Lauren Driscoll

Community and Development Services Director City of Salina

Lauren Driscoll is the Community and Development Services Director for the City of Salina, which handles planning, zoning, building and property maintenance matters. Additionally, the Department addresses civil rights issues related to fair housing, equal opportunity employment, and ADA compliance. Currently, Lauren is serving her second elected term on the National Board of Directors for the American Planning Association and was appointed Treasurer of the Board in 2022. Lauren graduated from Grand Valley State University in Michigan with a B.A. in Public Administration with an emphasis in city and regional planning and is a certified City and Regional Planner with the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP).



Lisse Regehr

President and CEO, Thrive Allen County

Lisse Regehr is the President and CEO of Thrive Allen County, a nonprofit organization that works to improve quality of life and economic conditions in Allen County, Kansas. Thrive Allen County is a countywide organization that has been instrumental in the development of 43 miles of new trails and routes within the past decade; lowering the uninsured rate in Allen County from 21% in 2013 to 9% in 2018; the implementation of public and safety-net transportation for Allen County residents; the creation of a free, rural bike-share program replicated throughout the nation; and overseeing the statewide Kansas CARES program that assists uninsured residents throughout Kansas apply for affordable health insurance. During Regehr's leadership, Thrive served as the administrator for Allen County's SPARK and ARPA funds, as well as the administrator for the Community Development Block Grants for several communities throughout southeast Kansas. In addition, Regehr co-created Thrive Kansas, which exists to build capacity in rural Kansas communities to better quality of life and bring about rural revitalization efforts.



Molly Haase

Director of Advocacy, AdventHealth

Molly Haase serves as the Director of Advocacy at AdventHealth in Kansas City, which includes three hospitals: Shawnee Mission, South Overland Park, and Ottawa. In her role, she is responsible for government relations, including the implementation of local, state, and federal public policy agendas. She helps execute AdventHealth’s community engagement strategy by working closely with local Chambers of Commerce, supporting AdventHealth’s community benefit activities, and building strong relationships with key stakeholders to further AdventHealth’s mission. Molly serves as Co-Chair of the Leawood Chamber of Commerce Legislative Task Force and is a graduate of Leadership Overland Park. Before joining AdventHealth in 2019, Molly spent 17 years working for Members of Congress on Capitol Hill and in Kansas. She has a degree in Strategic Communications from the University of Kansas School of Journalism.



Nancy Daniels

Community Vitality Specialist, K-State Research and Extension

Nancy Daniels is a Community Vitality Specialist for K-State Research and Extension. She works with communities statewide in appreciating their assets and building on their possibilities. Over the last five years, Daniels taught grant writing to nearly 2,000 individuals in nearly every county of Kansas, which resulted in 36% of participants reporting writing more than \$28 million in *successful* grants to help their communities. She earned a bachelor’s degree from Washburn University and a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Kansas.



Paula Landoll-Smith

Marketing Director, Landoll Company

Paula Landoll-Smith is a proud resident of Marysville and the marketing director for the Landoll Company. She is involved in many different activities in her hometown as well as across the state of Kansas including the Kansas State Fair Board Chair, The Kansas Chamber Board, JAG of Kansas, Stormont Vail Foundation, as well as many others. One of Paula’s main goals is to make Kansas a better place to live, work and play for all ages, genders, and ethnicities.



Racquel Thiessen

Director of Community Partnerships, Kansas Leadership Center

As Director of Community Partnerships at the Kansas Leadership Center, Racquel Thiessen works to support and strengthen the network of local leadership programs throughout the state that collaborate with KLC. She was an elected official for 12 years and understands the challenges of exercising leadership while working from a position of authority on community issues. Racquel is an adjunct faculty member for Wichita State University and still enjoys serving in her home community of Newton as a board member of the Newton Healthcare Corporation and member of the Central Kansas Community Foundation's scholarship selection committee.



Sara Caylor

Councilwoman, City of Ottawa

Sara Caylor was elected to the Ottawa City Commission in April 2011. Subsequently, she has been reelected to serve two additional four-year terms in April 2015 and November 2020. In four instances, she has been elected to serve as Ottawa's Mayor in 2013, 2016, 2017 and 2021. Sara is actively involved in community, city, and state organizations involved in municipal policy and leadership. Born and raised in Ottawa, Sara is proud to call the community of Ottawa home. She holds a Bachelor of Social Work from Washburn University and a Master of Social Work from Washburn University.



Shanna Adamic

Director of Philanthropy and Community and Executive Director, Cerner Charitable Foundation

Shanna oversees Cerner's corporate philanthropic vision as Director of Philanthropy and Community and the Executive Director of Cerner Charitable Foundation. She is committed to providing equitable access to healthcare for children and reducing disparities in communities around the world. With Shanna's leadership, the foundation is delivering health and wellness programs to 36,000 students in 235 schools across the U.S. and global partnerships with organizations addressing the social determinants of health. Additionally in 2021, the foundation granted \$2.8M in medical grants to nearly 1,000 children around the world. Through her roles as a corporate and philanthropy leader, Shanna has nearly 20 years of philanthropic experience.



Sherriene Jones-Sontag

Vice President of Communications, Kansas Chamber

A native of Kansas, Sherriene Jones-Sontag is the Kansas Chamber's Vice President of Communications. She guides the strategy of the Chamber's internal and external communications, marketing, and media outreach. Sherriene brings a broad-based experience in the communications and public relations fields, particularly related to public policy. Before joining the Chamber, she served as the Deputy Executive Director of the Kansas Lottery where she oversaw marketing, sales, public affairs and research, and led the agency's legislative efforts. She also served in communications and press secretary roles, including as Communications Director for former Kansas Governor Sam Brownback and previously worked more than 10 years as a broadcast journalist. Jones-Sontag received her undergraduate degree from Ohio University.



Sierra Bonn

Founder, Let's Go Full Steam Ahead

Sierra Marie Bonn is a passionate Kansan who advocates for supporting local businesses and growing our economy through the empowerment of our current and future workforce. She serves the state through her involvement with the Miss America Organization and works to make the world a better place as the founder of "Let's Go Full STEAM Ahead!" a non-profit focused on empowering the next generation of innovators through STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) education and engagement. She is the Assistant Director for Corporate Relations at the WSU Foundation, stepping into the role after studying Engineering Technology at Wichita State.