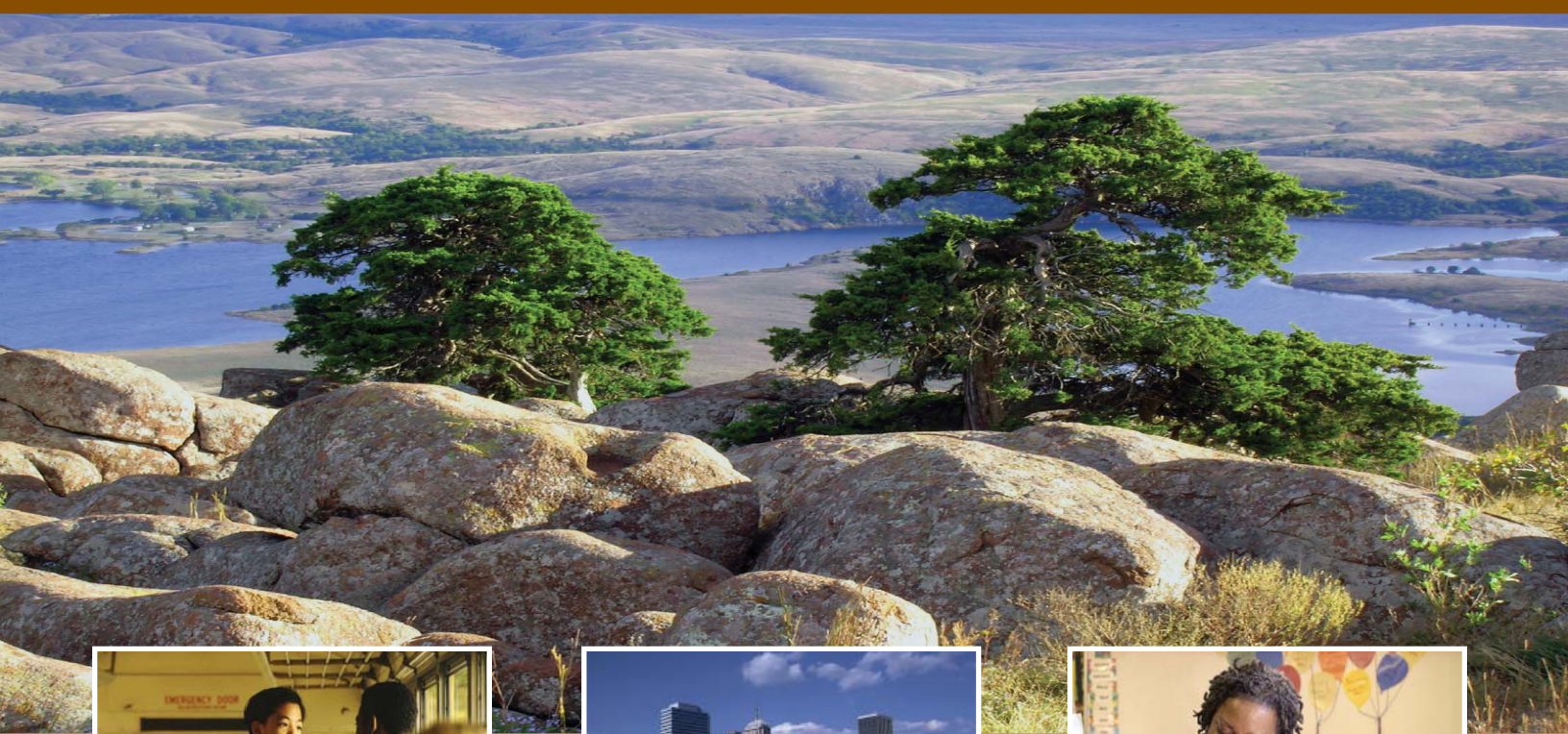


Partnerships, Prosperity and Progress

Comprehensive Regional Approaches to Advancing Oklahoma's Local Communities



OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

January 2008

An Introduction to the COGs



Governor Brad Henry

"By fostering collaboration, progress and aspiration, Oklahoma's eleven Regional Councils of Governments effectively meet community needs statewide. Working regionally, the COGs provide strategic planning, program management and development assistance that is essential to enabling our local governments and communities to be competitive elements in the national and global economy."



U.S. Senator Jim Inhofe

"The Oklahoma Regional Councils provide valuable planning and technical assistance to help communities build local capacity to focus on long-term economic and social challenges. This is especially important for the small, rural communities of Oklahoma that lack the resources to maintain the professional and technical capacity needed to develop and implement comprehensive solutions to those challenges."



U.S. Congressman Frank Lucas

"Successful economic development requires all parties to be on the same page at the local, state and federal levels. The Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils and its 11 member COGs help keep us all focused on the same goal – creating jobs and bringing economic development to our communities. They are an important part of our efforts to make our communities better places to live and work."



U.S. Congressman Dan Boren

"Residents throughout Oklahoma depend on and benefit from the vision, leadership and efforts of the state's eleven COGs. Whether financing start-up businesses or business expansions, coordinating essential water and wastewater services, developing strategies for disaster mitigation and rural fire safety, building more affordable homes for our residents, or working with various partner organizations to build a skilled work force, COG programs are meeting vital community needs across the state."



U.S. Congressman Tom Cole

"I believe the COGs are working to make a difference in Oklahoma. They provide a valuable service through encouraging local governments to work together to solve problems that cross multiple jurisdictional boundaries. The councils also make sure that cities and counties in each region receive critical resources and grant funds that will make life better for Oklahomans."



STATEWIDE REGIONAL COUNCIL IMPACT: RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Our 11 regional councils collectively generate an impressive **Return on Investment of \$48 for every \$1 in local government dues** for our annual operations and programs
- Since 2002, we have administered over **5,600 projects involving over \$335 million** in direct federal spending and hundreds of millions more in leveraged state, local, private and philanthropic investments
- Our regional councils have helped secure **nearly \$212 million in EDA public works and economic adjustment investments** for local job creation and retention initiatives in distressed areas of the state
- Within the past five years, our regional councils have **lent nearly \$1 million through our business development loan funds**, leveraging an additional \$700,000 in private investments for entrepreneurs and companies
- We have helped **over 45,000 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) clients** and managed almost \$31 million in workforce training funds in the past five years
- During the past five years, our COGs have administered **over \$88 million in Area Agency on Aging programs serving over 247,000 clients**
- We ensured all of Oklahoma's local communities are eligible for federal first responder grants by complying with the new training and planning requirements of the new **National Incident Management System (NIMS)**

Regional Approaches to Serving Local Citizen Needs

A grandmother needs to visit her doctor to have her insulin level checked. A teenage baby sitter calls 9-1-1 to report his young charge is choking on a marble. A father with young children, hopeful to maintain his small business and not up-root his family with a move to the city for work, secures a loan to purchase much needed equipment. A soccer team has a new field, ending an hour-long drive for practice and games. What do they have in common? All of them benefitted from the work of Oklahoma's regional councils of governments.

STATEWIDE CONNECTIONS

- 11 COGs serve Oklahoma's 77 counties, 629 municipal governments and the state's 3.5 million residents
- Our COGs are governed by policy boards with majority control by local government officials, along with representatives of the business, educational, community and non-profit sectors. Collectively, some 362 individuals serve on our boards and over 900 others serve in various advisory committee or task force capacities
- All eleven COGs administer CDBG programs for their local governments. We also manage rural economic action plans, rural fire defense programs, undertake state infrastructure capital improvement planning, manage wireless E 9-1-1 fund distribution, serve as census depositories and help local governments meet federal requirements for all-hazards mitigation and homeland security preparedness planning
- Two of our COGs are federally recognized Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and many of our COGs manage comprehensive GIS databases and conduct economic profiles, special needs projects and a variety of other services

As members of the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils (OARC), our statewide network of 11 regional councils provides numerous services – professional, technical and supportive program services – that benefit Oklahomans of all age and residence on a daily basis. We are emissaries for local governments within our diverse regions, advocating at the state and federal levels.

Our regional councils provide a broad range of services to local governments within our multi-jurisdictional regions. Traditionally, our services have focused on planning, program management and technical assistance related to community and economic development, infrastructure development and resource management.

Today, we are taking a leadership role on a variety of important issues, such as homeland security, hazard mitigation, rural fire defense, environmental stewardship and brownfields redevelopment, transportation planning, business and workforce development and human services, such as housing aid and elder care. Various state grant programs provide us with the resources and flexibility to plan and implement an array of services, such as capital improvement planning and rural fire defense planning.

Our regional councils serve local governments and community leaders by gathering and disseminating pertinent information. We keep local officials informed of federal and state programs, including complex environmental rules, funding opportunities and performance requirements.



We conduct, sponsor and assist with special training workshops, town hall meetings and public hearings. We respond to information inquiries, facilitate information exchanges and maintain libraries of data, planning documents and fundraising applications.

Whether working statewide through the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils, partnering with neighboring regions and governments or working individually, our regional councils are implementing a diverse portfolio of programs and initiatives to advance the economic and community interests of the state.

GENESIS OF REGIONAL SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL PROBLEMS

In 1970, Oklahoma's governor established 11 sub-state planning districts. Subsequently, the local governments served by the planning districts created the 11 COGs using the sub-state planning district boundaries. By coordinating regional approaches and solutions applicable at the local level, our regional councils of governments have become highly successful vehicles for change.

Throughout the past 40 years, our regional councils have evolved from conduits for regional planning and grant administration to catalysts of change in all aspects of life throughout the state. Today's regional councils provide an invaluable statewide network that remains committed to the legislature's original vision for effective and efficient program delivery and planning that spans local government boundaries.

As we evolve, we continue to offer professional staff capacity and expertise not available at the local level. We are a vital statewide delivery system that convenes local governments of all size and location to identify and solve complex problems as well as pursue new opportunities. State and federal officials rely on our proven capacity and skill as a highly professional, accountable, efficient and cost-effective network that can reach local governments, deliver quality programs and foster local cooperation at the sub-state regional level.

Local jurisdictions within our regions depend on us to package and secure financing for projects of all size and complexity; they also count on us to help manage complicated federal and state programs.

As conveners of local governments on sub-state and statewide levels, we provide neutral forums for dialogue, strategic planning and cooperation among diverse local officials and other stakeholders. This often overlooked but essential function is simply not available in any other context. Our holistic approach assures program flexibility and local accountability unique to our structure and mission.



Our COG Functions Include:

- Foster regional collaboration among local governments, business interests and community representatives, as well as coordinate intergovernmental partnerships among federal, state and local officials
- Craft comprehensive regional development strategies that result in local job creation and wealth creation initiatives
- Prepare locally-driven metropolitan transportation plans and investment programs, as well as deliver quality and affordable regional public transportation services
- Translate local plans and projects into reality by helping secure financing, navigate complex state and federal requirements and maintain project financing in an accountable and transparent manner
- Offer gap financing, start-up assistance and expansion capital to entrepreneurs and businesses struggling to secure traditional bank financing
- Help local communities comply with federal and state terrorism and emergency preparedness requirements, as well as provide leadership and coordination services to help address rural fire protection needs
- Deliver and administer essential human service programs, such as housing ownership and rehabilitation, elder care and youth development services
- Secure and leverage resources to build and upgrade basic public infrastructure, while remaining strong stewards of the state's diverse and changing environment

The breadth and scope of our regional councils are wide and far reaching. We work with local governments and communities in all corners of the state. We help our elders receive medical services, get regular hot meals and participate in social activities. We protect our communities through an extensive rural fire protection program, and help our municipalities secure much-needed first responder equipment and training.

Our strongest asset is our ability to respond to local needs through regional approaches that transcend our individual COG boundaries and bundle resources from various local, state, federal and private entities.

We test our waters to make sure they are safe for drinking. We monitor our air to be sure we meet federal clean air requirements. We help our local governments develop strategies to recruit new businesses and industries to our regions, creating more jobs and income opportunities across the state. We work extensively in distressed regions to help local leaders develop and implement strategies and programs to alleviate poverty and generate local wealth.

But there is much more to the collective menu of programs and services that our regional councils provide. Our strongest asset is our ability to respond to local needs through regional approaches that transcend

our individual COG boundaries and bundle resources from various local, state, federal and private entities. Our work benefits and enhances the lives of residents across the state on a daily basis. Our partnerships with local governments and the citizens of Oklahoma are what make us strong.

**COOPERATING REGIONALLY,
MAKING STRIDES LOCALLY**

Our commitment to regional collaboration has enabled remarkable progress on several fronts. To make our regions more economically competitive, we have formulated and enacted comprehensive development strategies. We have expanded and improved our infrastructure to provide our regions with better transportation and safer, more accessible water. We have formed business development programs that not only provide much needed capital, but also provide essential technical assistance. Our work has created and retained jobs, built new roads and bridges, secured resources for business parks, hospitals and schools, and provided a host of social service programs to our needy residents.

By better understanding our regions' diverse characteristics, we have increased our capacity for community enhancement. We work with our local governments to secure resources and provide services needed to increase opportunities for community and economic success. All 11 regional councils help our local partners secure federal community development block grants (CDBG) through the Oklahoma Department of Commerce small cities program, providing them with resources to meet various needs.



Local, state and federal officials at the 2005 groundbreaking for the reconstruction of the I-40 Crosstown, one of the most important road projects in ACOG's region



We conduct state infrastructure capital improvement planning. Many of our regions effectively meet the varied needs of thousands of elderly across the state. And we have demonstrated our dedication to regional prosperity by focusing on environmental stewardship and emergency management, particularly protection against fires in rural areas.

ADVANCING OKLAHOMA'S FUTURE

Although we have accomplished much in our 40 years, we are not resting on our laurels. With a sustaining commitment to strategic planning, regional engagement and intergovernmental cooperation as effective mechanisms for promoting local government and community enrichment, we continue to seek innovative approaches to further advance the community, economic and social goals of our regions.

Over the coming years, Oklahoma will be challenged in many ways, and our citizens will look to their local governments for guidance and answers during tough economic times. Local governments, often stretched financially and lacking the multitude of resources (staff, expertise, equipment, funds) needed to respond to rising needs, will look to our regional councils for help in crafting solutions.

We have stood the test of time and will be prepared to work together with local governments and citizens to meet these demands head on. We will expand our partnerships and programs to provide resources to help businesses grow, to bring new resources to distressed communities and to help local governments build their professional and organizational capacities.

PROJECT ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

Many local governments lack the capacity – staff, technical and financial – to successfully apply for and manage federal and state programs. Our regional councils make efficient use of limited staffing and planning resources to provide valuable assistance by packaging grant proposals and applications, acting as liaisons with funding entities and often administering the grant dollars after funds are awarded.

During 2005 and 2006, we administered more than 1,400 state and federal grant programs and projects totaling nearly \$46 million in direct spending and over \$173 million in leveraged funds. Since 2002 we have managed more than 5,600 projects valued at more than \$335 million in federal spending alone. These funds have been prudently managed, thereby serving a variety of needs throughout our regions.

In addition, our regional councils have helped countless communities and organizations apply for and receive millions of dollars in additional federal, state, private and philanthropic funding assistance.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR RESULTS

The 11 regional councils in Oklahoma have crafted partnerships with each other and a host of organizations – local, tribal, regional, state and national – that have resulted in programs and services that benefit all of our state's communities and citizens. Partnerships undertaken by our regions include:

- Serving as an Environmental Protection Agency designated water quality management agency to conduct surface water quality modeling and review discharge allocations for its municipalities

- Joining forces with the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to sponsor an Air Quality Alert program to provide information to the general population about air quality
- Collaborating with tribal governments to leverage funds to enhance fire fighter and first responder trucks and equipment
- Working with various public safety stakeholders to coordinate homeland security efforts, including working with the Oklahoma Department of Homeland Security to implement the National Incident Management System (NIMS)
- Working with local governments to recruit a major assembly plant to a region
- Planning and coordinating a regional public transportation system
- Creating strategic alliances with over 100 public and private entities, including colleges and universi-

ties, economic development districts and workforce boards, to create programs that assure a competitive workforce

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Ten of Oklahoma's regional councils receive modest planning grants from the U. S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). This funding, which averages \$50,000 annually per regional council, serves as essential seed money for our organizations to work with our local and regional partners to develop and implement comprehensive economic development strategies (CEDS) that serve as blueprints for action throughout our regions. Without this investment from EDA, our communities would not be eligible for EDA grants – vital to their growth and stability – for such things as public infrastructure and facilities that support private sector jobs and industry, while also improving the quality of life for our residents.

The planning grant assistance we receive from EDA is critical to our ability to promote regional approaches to local community and economic development. We use these funds to leverage resources from other federal and state agencies as well as various private entities. Over nearly four decades we have used our modest planning grants to obtain over \$212 million in EDA project support for various public works, economic adjustment and technical assistance initiatives tied to local job creation and retention efforts.

USING REAP TO DEVELOP STRONG REGIONS

The Rural Economic Action Program (REAP) assists smaller communities that lack sufficient fiscal capacity with local development projects. Established in 1996 by the Oklahoma Legislature, the program works with the state's 11 regional councils to fund projects in communities with populations of less than





7,000 residents (communities of less than 1,500 are given funding priority). In 2007, our regional councils received REAP funds totaling \$15.5 million and used the funds to finance streets, water and sewer projects, equip fire departments and senior centers and a multitude of other infrastructure projects.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE, ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS

In a unique partnership with the state, the 11 regional councils share \$500,000 annually to inventory capital improvement needs for cities and towns that generally fall under low to moderate income guidelines. These Capital Improvement Plan funds pay for equipment and staffing to inventory and map every piece of infrastructure, such as water lines and roads, allowing local governments to make informed decisions and investments.

An important role the COGs provide to our members is to secure Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds that provide communities with vital resources for a host of projects. Provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and managed by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, this flexible funding program is used to finance a variety of public infrastructure and economic improvements. CDBG funds have helped our regional councils work with local governments to build and repair sewer and water systems, construct community centers, senior citizens centers and fire stations, and purchase ambulances and fire trucks.

SERVING AS STEWARDS OF OKLAHOMA'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Our regional councils are working to preserve and protect our natural resources. We are partnering with a multitude of organizations around the state to develop programs that clean our air, assure our water is safe to drink and help us conserve energy. Two of our regional councils are involved in clean air

campaigns; one recently opened Oklahoma's third public-access ethanol fueling site; the same COG also received a national award for bringing E85 ethanol fuel to the state.

PLANNING AND COORDINATING TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

Two of our regional councils serve as Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), federally-designated entities chartered to lead the transportation planning and investment decision-making processes for the nation's metropolitan areas. Within the Tulsa and Oklahoma City metropolitan regions, the two COGs work with local officials and other transportation stakeholders to develop strategies for enhancing the efficiency, coordination and expansion of transportation systems and services. As MPOs, our COGs also serve as important liaisons with federal and state transportation officials.

"As a former state senator, I represented a district with three COGs. I have always been impressed with



the work COGs were able to accomplish throughout their regions – resulting in positive change for communities and citizens. Their knowledge of their regions and the broad range of programs they coordinate and manage is a testament of their importance

to Oklahoma's future. The COGs bring opportunity to the local towns and counties that they might not otherwise have received."

**- Trish Weedn, Executive Director
Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils**



SAFEGUARDING OUR COMMUNITIES: RURAL FIRE PROGRAMS & HOMELAND SECURITY PREPAREDNESS

In a state where the average annual cost for suppressing fires has topped \$1 billion annually in four of the past seven years, Oklahoma's firefighters are stretched. In 2006 alone, almost 17,000 rural fires destroyed or heavily damaged 750 homes and businesses. While some 16,000 of the fires were caused by lightning, more astonishing is that 548 fires started on the same day.

Preventing and putting out fires is a costly business, and our regional councils are working diligently to build strong rural fire departments, complete with skilled firefighters and reliable equipment. Funded by the Oklahoma Legislature through the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, each COG receives \$75,000 annually for rural fire coordinators to assist all of the 900-plus, mostly volunteer, fire departments throughout the state to inventory and secure new equipment, and assist them in seeking additional

grants from various state and federal agencies and coordinate training.

Since 2005, our regional councils have received and administered \$7.5 million in state funds, allowing rural fire departments to buy much-needed trucks and equipment. We also help distribute \$5,200 from the state for program operating expenses of the volunteer fire departments. This program has been vital to the ability for local governments to respond to fires and emergencies in a timely manner.

With \$550,000 from the state divided among the regional councils, we assist all local jurisdictions to meet the National Incident Management System (NIMS) requirements to ensure they are eligible for vital U.S. Department of Homeland Security assistance. We work with each local government to complete required documentation regarding first responders' abilities, conduct a resource survey of each community's emergency response equipment, gather appropriate contact information and coordinate training.



"The eleven Oklahoma COGs have created critical regional economic opportunities by fostering locally-driven and performance-focused initiatives. The Austin regional office of the U.S. Economic Development Administration is proud to be a partner with the COGs in their economic development initiatives. EDA has made strong investments in Oklahoma — investments not possible without the professional guidance from the COGs, including their economic analyses, demographic information, technical assistance, links to local grass-roots organizations and strong working relationships with elected officials at all levels of government."

**- Pedro Garza, Regional Director, Austin Regional Office
U.S. Economic Development Administration**

Regional Council Case Studies

ABANDONED HOUSING COMPLEX COMES ALIVE AS A COMMUNITY SOCCER COMPLEX

ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH CENTRAL OKLAHOMA GOVERNMENTS

Once a run-down apartment complex, a nine-acre brownfield site in Frederick is being completely turned around, and soon the local community will have access to two soccer fields, an eight-lane running track and a community activity center. Soon the site will be alive with the sounds of young children and adults playing soccer – a big change from a dilapidated and abandoned nine-building apartment complex.

After five units of the Lakeview Apartment complex were destroyed by fire, it was allowed to deteriorate and scavengers removed all usable material. Tillman County acquired the site and assessed it for hazardous contaminants; the results found that asbestos coupled with the severe deterioration required removal of all existing structures.

Several agencies partnered to clean-up the site: ASCOG, the Oklahoma Land Reclamation Program, the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, Oklahoma Department of Central Services, Oklahoma Department of Labor, Tillman County Commissioners, Frederick school system and the City of Frederick.

With remediation completed, construction of the soccer fields and multi-lane running track and a community activity center are now being planned with the assistance of the U.S. Soccer Foundation. The Foundation has paid for design and engineering blueprints for the new facility. Upon completion, the new complex will be available to youth and adult soccer leagues, school athletics and professional exhibition games.

This project encompasses the essential brownfields program objective to remediate an existing contaminated site and reutilize the site in a way that benefits the community and the entire region.



(from left) Above is a picture of the run down apartment complex, the site where the complex used to stand and a map of the proposed soccer fields and community center.

TRANSPORTATION ADVANCEMENTS FOR TOMORROW ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA GOVERNMENTS

With the population of the Oklahoma City MSA expected to grow by nearly 36 percent to 1.47 million people by the year 2025, moving people around the region safely and efficiently is a priority for the Association for Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG).

As the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the region, ACOG coordinates the transportation planning and project prioritization process for the six counties and 40 cities and towns within the MSA. To remain competitive in today's global economy, ACOG recognizes that multi-modal transportation planning and road maintenance are critical to the region's future.

ACOG developed the 2030 Oklahoma City Area Regional Transportation Study Plan to guide the region through the complexities of the state-wide transportation planning process, including many layers of decision-making and multiple stakeholders.

ACOG and the plan emphasize maintaining and preserving current infrastructure, as well as expanding multimodal transportation facilities to more efficiently meet transportation demand.

But the COG's transportation arm extends beyond planning. In 2006, the COG helped local governments within its region obligate \$15 million for transportation improvements such as bridge enhancements and repair, intersection modifications, sidewalks, signalization and street widening projects.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES BY BUILDING HOMES

CENTRAL OKLAHOMA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

More than \$13 million has been secured and invested by the Central Oklahoma Economic Development District (COEDD) and its housing affiliate to help more than 270 families achieve the American dream of homeownership and housing rehabilitation since 2003.

Recognizing that safe and affordable housing is one of the cornerstones for a vibrant regional economy, COEDD started working in the early 1990s to address the pressing issue of diminishing housing stock and the lack of an effective housing organization within its service region.

Formed in 1992, COEDD's Community Housing Association for Rehabilitation Measures and Effective Development (CHARMED) is a not-for-profit organization that provides down payment assistance, home repair, new construction, grant administration and environmental review.

As a federally-recognized community housing development organization, CHARMED uses its grant funds to build and sell homes to eligible families, while returning revenues generated to the program for additional housing stock. Proceeds in 2007 will bring in nearly \$120,000, allowing the organization to maintain its operations, homebuyer education programs and capacity building initiatives.

The regional council has also tapped into Oklahoma's Affordable Housing Tax Credits Program to build and maintain affordable rental housing units for low-income households.



American Woodmark Plant



LEVERAGING MODEST GRANTS TO BRING ECONOMIC GROWTH

EASTERN OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

To secure funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), local communities and grantees must have an approved Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) outlining regional priorities and approaches for local development.

More than merely a plan, the CEDS document is the key tool used to leverage vital federal gap financing and seed capital for costly infrastructure and economic development projects, such as water and sewer treatment facilities and lines, access roads, rail spurs and intermodal transfer stations, business incubators and industrial parks.

All of these public services are often overlooked, but all are essential for supporting private sector growth efforts.

In the past eight years, the Eastern Oklahoma Development District has leveraged its regional CEDS into more than \$4.42 million in EDA investments for five different projects. These EDA grants were essential to match \$11.32 million in other public funds, while generating \$143.5 million in private investments and creating more than 1,640 quality jobs in this distressed region.

The work of the Eastern Oklahoma Development District and its many partners reinforce the fact that economic development is a team sport, requiring professional expertise, extensive coordination and an understanding of the different roles and strengths that



each organization and player brings to the table. With the leadership of the COG, EDA invested:

- \$1 million, matched by a \$4.5 million in state assistance, to build a state-of-the-art facility for the Indian Capital Technology Center that offers classes in building trades, nursing and the health and business fields
- \$420,000 to help create more than 400 new jobs at a new 350,000 square foot manufacturing plant for Therma-Tru Doors, a firm specializing in entry and patio doors
- \$1.5 million to secure another \$10 million in private funds to restore the historic Three Forks Harbor into a mixed-use development project for recreational boating, sport fishing, hiking and biking – an essential part of the region's economy
- \$1 million to help build the infrastructure and services needed for Dal-Tile, a ceramic tile manufacturer, to open a facility in the region, ultimately generating \$96 million in private investments and creating 600 new jobs within the region
- \$500,000 to help locate a factory in the region for major cabinet manufacturer American Woodmark, which attracted over \$15 million in private investments and generated over 400 jobs

By working regionally to foster partnerships and enhance local expertise, the COG has been better positioned to partner with various federal, state and local government agencies, as well as tribal governments, to pursue regional and local development opportunities. The COG often stays involved in projects from conception to completion, reinforcing the holistic approach of its comprehensive development strategy.

PROMOTING RURAL MOBILITY GRAND GATEWAY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

More than 150,000 residents of the seven counties served by the Grand Gateway Economic Development Association benefit from an innovative and cost effective public transportation system developed by the COG.

Similar to a taxi service, the COG operates Pelivan as a demand-response service that runs public shuttles out of a dispatch center around six local cities for a fare of only \$1.75. For extended service, residents can request an Interconnect, also demand based, to gain access to a regional airport or Greyhound bus station. To promote job access across the region, the COG developed four employee feeder routes to an industrial park that provides 4,500 jobs.

During 2006 and 2007, the Pelivan ridership increased 12 percent. They project an increase of 26 percent in 2008. While senior citizens made up 80 percent of the riders ten years ago, they now comprise about half of all riders. This continual increase in use is raising the association's demand for buses. Currently, the Pelivan fleet is 30 buses.

Pelivan also provides increased mobility for the workforce within the region, an attractive incentive for businesses to locate in northeast Oklahoma. Gatorade and Google saw the system as a way to access a larger, regional workforce, and both companies are planning facilities in the area.

The Pelivan program's flexibility allowed the fleet to service one specific community in a time of dire need. Flooding in Miami destroyed 600 homes, and Pelivan temporarily suspended its regular services and mobilized instead to join the disaster relief effort. The fleet helped evacuate Miami residents quickly and efficiently on the only open road in town.



A RIVER AND A PLAN: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING A NATURAL RESOURCE

INDIAN NATIONS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

In a metropolitan area like Tulsa, urban planning transcends city and county boundaries and requires coordinated pooling of human, financial and physical resources among cities and counties to assure efficient and effective solutions.



For 40 years, cities and counties in Northeastern Oklahoma have been cooperating through the Indian Nations Council of Governments (INCOG), nationally one of the largest and most comprehensive regional service providers.

Using public input, INCOG develops and maintains a master plan for future development of the metropolitan area. This comprehensive plan is continually updated to reflect changing needs. As part of this plan, INCOG took the lead on a regional planning priority – developing the Arkansas River Corridor. Efforts to clean this once polluted river have en-

hanced public support for river development as part of an overall regional development strategy.

The COG sponsored the first two phases of an extensive study of the river corridor known as the Arkansas River Corridor Master Plan. Phase I looked at the existing conditions of the river and collected wide-ranging, public input from throughout the Tulsa region to craft a citizen-based vision for the river.

Overseen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Phase II resulted in conceptual plans for seven key development sites, including ecological restoration and natural habitat preservation projects, cultural attractions, low water dams, and ample retail opportunities. Currently underway, the third phase is focused on collecting environmental field data.

The plan has already generated congressional support as the recently approved Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), sponsored by Senator James Inhofe (R-OK), authorizes \$50 million for flood control, ecosystem restoration and recreation projects. A major sales tax initiative to garner the necessary support for accomplishing the overall plan recently was turned down by voters by a narrow margin. This has not thwarted the efforts of Tulsa City and County leaders who have developed a process to identify priority projects that can be undertaken in the short-term to keep implementation efforts moving forward.

The near-term improvements include construction of two additional low water dams and major improvements to the Zink Lake dam, thus creating approximately 11 miles of river/lakes in the corridor. Plan elements also include extensive parks, trails and playgrounds, and development of vibrant mixed-use centers at several riverfront locations. River recreational uses such as rowing and kayaking, connectivity to adjacent downtowns and neighborhoods, and environmental and ecological improvements are also anticipated.

WORKFORCE PROGRAMS JUMP-START THE ECONOMY KIAMICHI ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA

With a 67 percent job placement rate, the Kiamichi Economic Development District (KEDDO) in southeastern Oklahoma is working fiercely to build a strong workforce. Helping residents acquire better jobs and job skills that lead to meaningful careers while also assisting businesses to find skilled employees is a major focus of KEDDO. In fact, KEDDO's role in workforce enhancement has yielded positive results on the region's economy.

Serving close to 25,000 clients between 2002 and 2007, and administering about \$15 million in subcontracts in the same time period, KEDDO is recognized as a key player in providing solutions to the region's workforce challenges. KEDDO and the Southeast Workforce Investment Board (WIB) have partnered to aggressively promote business services; KEDDO is the service provider and the fiscal agent for the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program. Together, they work with the state agencies, tribes, technology centers, neighboring WIBS, private training providers and other regional councils – even extending beyond state borders since workforce issues are often border neutral – to build skills of potential employees and help businesses meet their employment needs. KEDDO and Southeast WIB project nearly 2,700 jobs will be created by 2012.

Compounding the need for students to acquire basic job skills, KEDDO also understands the need for students to develop “soft skills” – working well with colleagues, calling supervisors when sick, proper attire and other practices. Launched in 2007, the Soft Skills Customer Service Training program by the Southeast Business Services Team, of which KEDDO is a partner, has provided training to more than 350 youth and nontraditional students throughout KEDDO's region.

KEDDO and the Southeast WIB were awarded with a Best Practice Award from the Governor for demonstrating expertise in working regionally and collaborating with various partners.



HELPING RURAL COMMUNITIES ACCESS THE INTERNET NORTHERN OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

When the Northern Oklahoma Development Authority (NODA) moved into its current office space in 1995, the Internet was just a blip on the virtual horizon and locating an office in an area lacking Net access was normal. Today, rural area and businesses cannot compete in the global marketplace without affordable, reliable and high-speed access to the Internet.

As the Internet evolved into the communication phenomenon it is now, NODA's leadership quickly realized they needed to expand their technological capacity. And they knew bringing their communities up to speed if they, and the region, were to be competitive in the rapidly shifting world economy was imperative.

Through a system of cells, primarily located on grain elevators, NODA's internet company NODANET, provides broadband service to 10 towns and the City of Enid spread out over 2,500 square miles. NODANET also provides dial-up and high-speed dial-up in the toll-free dialing area around Enid.

NODANET serves over 400 customers: 100 wireless and over 320 dial-up. The revenue generated – about \$75,000 a year – is put back into operating costs and system upgrades. NODANET supplies the equipment to the customer and charges a monthly fee, ranging between \$29 and \$100, for the lines.

While most urban settings almost view broadband and Internet services as an entitlement, the leaders of NODA realized that they must be innovative, entrepreneurial and risk-takers to make sure their rural region was not left further behind in the information technology age. As a result, rural residents now have another outlet for pursuing business opportunities, staying connected to family and friends, and opening new gateways for life-long learning and education.

PROMOTING ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION OKLAHOMA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Agriculture and the oil and gas industry have driven economic productivity in northwest Oklahoma for generations. The recent introduction of new industries into the region brought new demands for infrastructure. Serving the eight counties of the panhandle area and northwest Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Economic Development Authority (OEDA) plays a central role in connecting private sector interests with public funding opportunities to promote regional growth.

For years, ranchers and pumpers have driven over the old gypsum hills to their cattle and wells, never stopping to think about the hills being an income source. Understanding the importance of value-added production, as Harrison Gypsum began mining in the region, it built a plant that used the mined gypsum to create gypsum products for market, both nationally and internationally.

Trucks were used to transport the products to market, but as demand grew, it was clear that rail was needed to move the product more efficiently. Harrison Gypsum worked with OEDA to secure funding for a rail spur into their plant to accommodate this increased demand.

Working with various partners – High Plains Resource Conservation and Development, the Woodward County Commissioners, Northwestern Electric Co-operative Inc. and the Oklahoma Department of

Commerce – the rail spur was completed and Harrison Gypsum has increased employment levels both at the mine and in the plant.

Additionally, the rail spur is available to other industries in the region as a loading point for their products. Consequently, other companies, such as RedGold Cedar, are developing products that can be transported by rail. This project helps local businesses tap into new markets and reduce shipping costs, reduces air pollution from trucks, makes local roads safer for cars and pedestrians, reduces local road maintenance costs and created 27 jobs.

HEATING AND COOLING SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY SOUTHERN OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The senior citizens in Oklahoma are guaranteed to have heat in the winter and cool air in the summer through the Southern Oklahoma Development Association's (SODA) "The Heat is On" and "Fanfare" programs which have been providing seniors in need with heaters, air conditioners and fans since 1996.

With funding primarily from fundraisers and community donations (including a \$5,000 annual donation from one citizen), more than 1,200 fans, 150 air conditioners and 650 electric heaters have been distributed to needy seniors. While most of the heaters are electric, they have provided some gas heaters which the Oklahoma Natural Gas Company installs at no cost. SODA employees install the air conditioners on a volunteer basis. The program is promoted by doctors' offices, home health care facilities and senior citizen homes.



SAVING LIVES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

SOUTH WESTERN OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

With over 25,000 9-1-1 calls received in 2007, connecting first responders to those in need is a priority for the South Western Oklahoma Development Authority.

As communication technology and emergency and medical services become more and more sophisticated, 9-1-1 emergency notification and dispatching must keep pace. SWODA has been working diligently to keep regional 9-1-1 services state of the art across its highly rural region. The COG began upgrading to an Enhanced 9-1-1 (E 9-1-1) system in 2001 with grant support from the Oklahoma Corporation Commission.

In cooperation with six of its eight member counties, the COG created the Southwest Oklahoma Regional 9-1-1 Association. This association makes the E 9-1-1 service upgrade affordable to the entire region by pooling limited locally-generated resources to increase purchasing power while minimizing the operating costs for the system. With an additional \$592,000 in grants, the participating counties contracted the project administration for each county-wide E 9-1-1 upgrade to the South Western Oklahoma Development Authority.

Overall, E 9-1-1 technology makes emergency telephone service more effective in rural areas and small communities throughout southwestern Oklahoma by linking telephone numbers to a specific physical address. As calls arrive, the dispatcher can visually locate callers on a computer screen without requiring the caller to even speak.

Another element of the 9-1-1 service upgrade addresses emergency service for wireless callers. Nationally, 40 percent of 9-1-1 calls come from cell phones. Two upgrade phases are necessary to immediately identify the location of a wireless caller. Phase I information provides the dispatcher with the caller's callback number and the nearest cell site location information. In addition to this initial information, Phase II information provides the caller's exact location by latitude and longitude.

Currently, the E 9-1-1 system, including wireless pin-pointing, is operational in Custer, Harmon and Kiowa counties. The COG is finishing data collection and collaborating with wireless and landline phone service providers to have the last three counties operational by June 2008.



As communication technology and emergency and medical services become more and more sophisticated, 9-1-1 emergency notification and dispatching must keep pace. SWODA has been working diligently to keep regional 9-1-1 services state of the art across its highly rural region.

OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION

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CENTRAL OKLAHOMA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

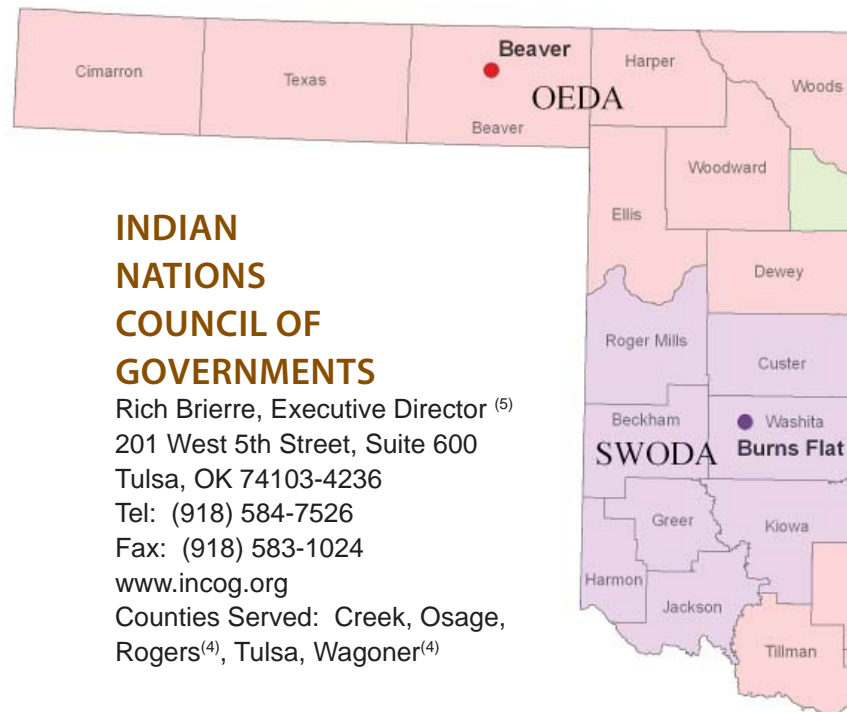
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Harper, Texas, Woods, Woodward

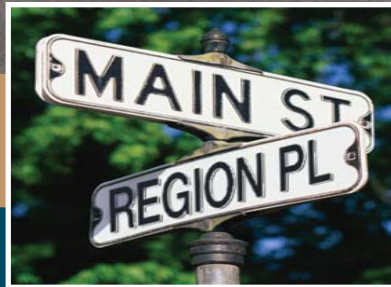
⁽¹⁾ Zach Taylor passed away January 4, 2008; he was executive director during the period covered in this report.

⁽²⁾ Grady and McClain counties are within the ASCOG service area; both counties are also part of the ACOG Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation concerns.

⁽³⁾ Bruce Mahaffey retired as executive director in December 2007 and was the executive director during the period covered in this report.

⁽⁴⁾ Rogers County is a member of GGEDA and INCOG. Wagoner County is a member of EODD and INCOG; INCOG is the MPO for the Tulsa region, which extends into Rogers and Wagoner Counties.

⁽⁵⁾ Jerry Lasker retired as executive director in December 2007 and was executive director during the period covered in this report.



IN MEMORIAM
Zach D. Taylor, Jr.
February 15, 1947 – January 4, 2008
Executive Director
Association of Central Oklahoma Governments
1978 – 2008

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