RENO COUNTY ENTREPRENEUR ECOSYSTEM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK







2025-2029



PREPARED BY

ABOUT US

With the vision of providing an inclusive local system that inspires and supports innovators for a thriving economy in Reno County, the Entrepreneurship Task Force December formed in 2017 to understand the collective resources and challenges that drive or stifle the local entrepreneurial spirit and culture. After writing the original 2020-2024 Reno County Entrepreneurship Action Plan, the Task Force shifted into a more formal structure as the Reno County Entrepreneur Ecosystem Partnership (RCEEP) that is in effect today.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

StartUp Hutch, in collaboration with multiple partners and agencies in Reno County, has developed a 5year strategic framework for the Reno County Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Partnership (RCEEP). This plan is designed to strengthen the local economic ecosystem, foster innovation, and support entrepreneurs and businesses throughout their journey. By addressing needs and leveraging local assets, RCEEP aims to create an inclusive economy that benefits the entire community.

Over the next five years, RCEEP will focus on five strategic areas: **Navigation, Existing Business Expansion, Youth & Under Resourced Startups, Collaborative Entrepreneurial Supports,** and **Business Transitions.** These priorities are interconnected and vital to Reno County's economic health. In pursuing these goals, RCEEP is committed to incorporating transparency, promoting diversity, meeting entrepreneurs where they are, and leveraging Reno County's resources and assets. Key initiatives include:

- **Navigation**: Expand mentorship and connections, utilize Entrepreneurial Navigators, and advocate for public policy improvements.
- **Existing Business Expansion:** Scale up the Mastermind program and strengthen partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce to support established businesses.
- Youth & Under Resourced Startups: Expand the Youth Entrepreneurship Program by adding one new school annually.
- **Collaborative Entrepreneurial Supports:** Build public-private-philanthropic partnerships and enhance strategic communication efforts.
- **Business Transitions:** Promote earlier planning (three years in advance) and offer business classes for accessing loans and grants.

RCEEP also prioritizes equity by striving for representation in its client base that reflects the demographics of Reno County. Additionally, RCEEP aims to achieve a 5% annual increase in funding, expand youth entrepreneurship programs, and allocate more dollars through loan programs with matched funding to empower startups.

This strategic plan represents a collaborative vision for the future of entrepreneurship in Reno County. Through these efforts, RCEEP seeks to build a thriving, inclusive ecosystem where innovators and businesses can succeed.

VISION

Hutchinson and Reno County, KS, provide an inclusive ecosystem that inspires and supports innovators for a thriving economy

MISSION

Partners working to cultivate and celebrate the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation in Hutchinson and Reno County, KS, to strengthen and grow the economic ecosystem



Ensure all processes are transparent to enhance incentives and maximize the return on investment



Utilize the diversity of businesses and people in the entrepreneurial ecosystem

Meet People Where They're At

Understand that each entrepreneur is at different points in the process and has unique barriers to overcome

Leverage Natural Resources and Assets

Promote the use of physical and environmental resources available in Reno County as well as the human and intellectual assets in the community

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

OUR LEGACY OF INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP by John Green

Like the veins of salt that run wide and deep beneath Hutchinson, entrepreneurship is key to the community's foundation and continues to contribute to its success.

Many of the county's original entrepreneurs are recognized names, though a lot of what they created has disappeared from the city's skyline. However, new entrepreneurs have stepped up to keep some legacy businesses alive as the latest generation introduces new offerings to the community.

Among the city's earliest entrepreneurs was Emerson Carey (pictured below), who at 15 moved to Kansas with his family. Self-driven he learned to work with horses to earn room and board and attend school in Hutchinson.

In 1882, he joined a coal, hide, and building material delivery business. Within two years, through the aid of a financial backer, he launched his own coal and hide business, eventually landing regional and municipal coal contracts.

Always an innovator, Carey discovered he could use coal waste to generate steam to compress ammonia to chill water and make ice. He built an ice plant that supplied railroad refrigerator cars and a neighboring cold storage warehouse.

A few years later, he started using waste steam from his ice plant to evaporate brine into salt, joining the industry 14 years after Ben Blanchard discovered the mineral below South Hutchinson.



In 1923, at age 60, Carey, and his son Howard, started one of his most lasting legacies, Hutchinson's first rock salt mine, which today is Hutchinson Salt.

Carey also collaborated with others on ventures over the years.

He teamed with meat retailer Charles S. Winchester to start Winchester Packing, a beef and pork plant on South Main that today is a Tyson Prepared Foods plant.

He and James Lee Dick founded the Hutchinson Bag Company to make bags for salt and flour. Now called Hubco, it is under its sixth owner. Company president Trey McPherson – whose grandfather also owned it – joined four other employees in the current ownership group.

Another innovator with a lasting impact here was Henry Krause, who invented the one-way disc plow in 1916 in a farm shop in Meade.

The implement, designed to leave more soil on the surface to fight wind erosion, was the nation's first conservation tillage tool. When neighbors saw the plow at work, they asked for one. When he outgrew his western Kansas location, Krause purchased the Twin Wheel Windmill factor in Hutchinson in 1928.

In 2011, with Krause's grandson, Steve Krause, at the helm, France-based Kuhn Manufacturing bought the company, renaming it Kuhn-Krause. It still employs about 200 today.

Collins Bus arose in the region from another transplant.

Don Collins moved his company that converted vans into small school buses from Kansas City, Mo., to South Hutchinson in 1972.

Collins Industries became the largest Type A school bus maker in the U.S. in the '90s.

The company became privately held by an investment group in 2006, and in January 2024, Collins Bus was sold to Indiana-based Forest River.



Another success story was that of the Dillon family, which grew the area's first "cash and carry" grocery store into part of the world's largest grocery chain.

John S. Dillon opened that first grocery (pictured on the left) in 1913. His three sons, John, Ray and Clyde, eventually joined the business, adding stores and innovation. By the time Ray Dillon Sr. retired in 1979, the company consisted of more than 200 supermarkets, 300 convenience stores, and 18 department stores across 11 states. It merged with The Kroger Company in 1983.

On a smaller scale, Henry Smith started a fruit and vegetable market on South Main in 1933. Longtime employee Earl Barnes and his wife, Irene, purchased Smith's Market in 1965. Since 2005, Earl's son, Chris Barnes, and his wife, Gail, have owned it, restoring the building to its original, more nostalgic look. Another gem is a meat market that's operated since 1946 in a storefront on Sixth Avenue.

Howard Jackson and Bernard King, who worked for J.S. Dillon & Sons in Wichita, saw a need and moved here to start Jackson Food Locker. In 1960, Howard's son, Bill, bought the business from his parents. He operated it for 35 years before selling it in 1995 to Michael and Robin Jackson.

Entrepreneurs Andrew and Jeni Bryan took over the business in 2008.

Some of the more iconic local businesses are restaurants that have served Hutchinson for years, while some of the newest include a pair of microbreweries.

The Anchor Inn, for example, traces its beginnings to a tavern Mexican immigrant Antonio Flores took over after retiring from the railroad. His wife, Lus, started cooking Mexican food instead of hamburgers on a grill by the front door.

Their son, Tony, and his wife Rachel joined in 1976 and added a full kitchen. Many of the Flores family have worked in the establishment with their children taking over daily management.



A drive-through opened in 1995, followed by restaurants in Salina and Great Bend. Antonio's great-grandson, Aaron Flores-Hill, opened his own restaurant, the Anchor Grill, in 2015.

Others are R&B Drive-In, founded in 1948 by Melvin Robinson and his nephew, Larry Burgess, and Roy's Hickory Pit BBQ, started in 1969, but operated for the past 42 years by the Mike and Ann Armstrong family.

Kirk and Julia Johnson took over R&B in 2016 and Roy's in July of 2024.

There are at least a dozen minority-owned restaurants in Hutchinson, some that have been around nearly as long as the Anchor.

That includes Bernard's Restaurant and Catering, which Samual and Tollette Bernard opened in 1981. The couple, who actually started catering in the 1950s, turned it over to their daughter, Susie Barnard-Gress, who closed the restaurant but continues to offer catering.

Other examples of minority-owned businesses include Hair By Design, a salon where Laura Boone, a stylist for almost 40 years, started working 2000 and then bought from her teacher in 2006, and Shemeka Green Photography, which Green runs out of her home when she's not working as a private-staff LPN, selling real estate with Reality Executives or caring for her school-age daughter.

The impact of entrepreneurs has supported growth throughout the county. Other examples include a Buhler-based high-speed internet provider and a specialized ag equipment manufacturing in Haven.

IdeaTek was started by Buhler resident Daniel Friesen and several high school classmates as a computer repair business. While his partners pursued other interests after high school, Friesen continued it, eventually buying a failing DSL internet provider to create the first fiber-to-home service in Buhler, according to the company's website.

Friesen sold the business in 2015, but then he and new investors formed IdeaTek Telecom to provide high-speed internet to underserved rural communities. Since then, with the aid of federal funding, it has deployed some 4,500 miles of fiber internet cable, serving customers in about 50 Kansas communities, and employs about 160 people.

Delmar Kincaid founded Haven-based Kincaid Equipment Manufacturing in 1967, developing specialized equipment for seed research, mostly for universities. Kinkaid's daughter, Kimberley Kincaid-Warner, and son-in-law, Todd Warner, took over the business in 2019, ensuring its place in Haven. In 2021, they acquired Seed Research Equipment Solutions (SRES) to pairs its GPS software and innovative planter control packages with their equipment.



Also contributing to the region's economy and development were businesses started by Amish and Mennonite families who settled in the county.

Eli Yoder was reportedly the first Old Amish Mennonite to homestead in Reno County. When the Missouri Pacific Railroad cut across his farm in 1886, Yoder built a general store and a post office on land split off from the rest.

That became the village of Yoder, which now boasts about two dozen businesses, including a meat market, several woodworking and furniture businesses, and a more than century-old hardware store. When the naval air base was built near Yoder in 1943, several displaced families relocated toward Partridge, and some opened businesses along U.S. 50. The Pleasantview area today has more than a dozen small businesses.

They included Tobe Stutzman's cabinet shop, which opened in 1949, and a greenhouse Ervin and Emma Stutzman started in 1956. The cabinet shop, which expanded into windows, became Pleasantview Home Improvement. Stutzman's Greenhouse bought by Ervin's cousin Ben Miller in 1985, today encompasses 24 acres, with retail locations around the state.

Examples of other successful family-founded businesses in the county are numerous, including some swallowed by larger corporations, like Shears Contracting and The Hutchinson News.

Others, like Woodwork Manufacturing, Bornholdt Plantland, and J&J Drainage, have remained local. Some that contributed to the city's wealth and landscape, but didn't survive changing economies or the death of their founders included Rorabaugh-Wiley's Dry Goods, Kelly and Larabee mills, Frank Colladay Hardware, Wilbeck Machine, and Doskocil Foods.

Besides companies with significant payrolls or footprints, they've been hundreds of entrepreneurs starting and maintaining small businesses in town, from barbers to builders, lawn care to engine repair, and clothing retailers to welders.

OUR PROGRESS

• 2017-2019

RESEARCH & PLANNING

What started as a small group conversation about incubators turned into a Task Force that spent a year and a half researching peer cities, conducting a survey, running experiments, hosting a town hall, and analyzing Reno County's strengths and gaps to develop a five-year action plan.

2020 ACTIVATION

Upon securing funding to execute the Action Plan, the Quest Center for Entrepreneurs rebranded as StartUp Hutch, and Jackson Swearer was hired as the Entrepreneur Navigator. New education and networking events began online and in-person.

2021

EVALUATION

To assess the impact of the initial changes in the ecosystem and entrepreneurs' needs following the pandemic, RCEEP updated the strengths and gaps assessment and conducted a new survey, informing revisions to the five-year action plan.

• 2023

DIAGNOSIS & ENGAGEMENT

RCEEP partnered with the Kansas Leadership Center and Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation on Heartland Together, an initiative to advance local entrepreneurship in the region. We held a Diagnosis event in which diverse partners evaluated the current local support system around entrepreneurs. 20 individuals then participated in a 3-day Flagship program to provide leadership development to help participants see themselves in the context of an entrepreneurial ecosystem to exercise leadership in that system, and to more effectively connect with their network and resources.

<u> 2022</u>

REFOCUS & STRENGTHEN

Entrepreneur engagement reaffirmed the directions to strengthen collaboration among partners and navigation of resources, improve the narrative around innovation and access in the county, and create diverse opportunities for connections and creative capital, starting with youth.

2024

EXPAND & ENHANCE

Inspired by the Heartland Together experience and action projects, as well as additional data, RCEEP reassessed the framing of the leverage points in the system, leading to this next five-year action plan.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the last five years, RCEEP has worked to address gaps in entrepreneurship support, including navigation, advocacy, capital access, strategic communication, and mentoring. Through partnerships with local communities and organizations, innovative strategies, and a focus on inclusivity, RCEEP helped transform the local entrepreneurship landscape by supporting startups, removing barriers, and catalyzing economic growth.

Collaboration and Navigation: The hiring of an Entrepreneur Navigator in 2020 expanded connections between entrepreneurs and key resources, such as funding, mentors, and city planning. By leveraging public, private, and philanthropic partnerships, StartUp Hutch significantly increased funding and capacity, resulting in over \$5 million in economic activity.

Strategic Communications: A rebranding in 2020 positioned StartUp Hutch as a central player in the ecosystem, while new tracking systems and storytelling initiatives, such as "The HotSeat" podcast, highlighted local entrepreneurial successes. Regular events and training sessions have fostered entrepreneur connections and attracted new participants to the ecosystem.

Mentoring: Mentorship programs have expanded through partnerships with SCORE and NetWork Kansas, which focused on diverse mentors and dynamic educational opportunities. Initiatives like the JUMP! Program and peer mentoring models have provided essential support to entrepreneurs of all backgrounds, including youth and underserved populations.

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DEMOGRAPHICS

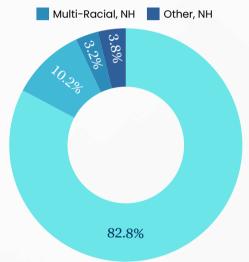
Total Population: 60,946 **Annual Growth Rate:** -0.3%

3.2% Unemployment Rate (2024)

Race/Ethnicity

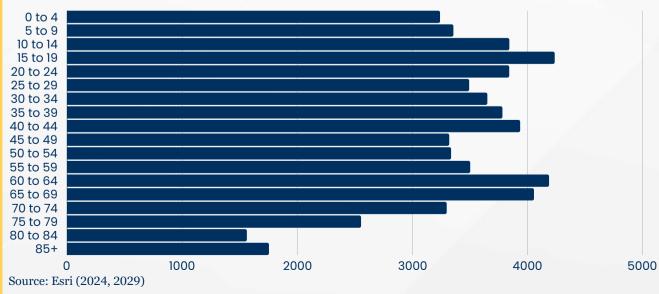
While nearly 83% of the population is White, the Hispanic / Latino population makes up slightly more than 10% of the population.

The median age of the population is 3.4 years higher than the state median age and is expected to rise from 41.3 to 42.2 in 2029.



White, NH Hispanic / Latino

Population by Age Group



ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

Median Disposable Income*

Reno County

Kansas

\$58,360

\$50,169

Source: Esri (2024)



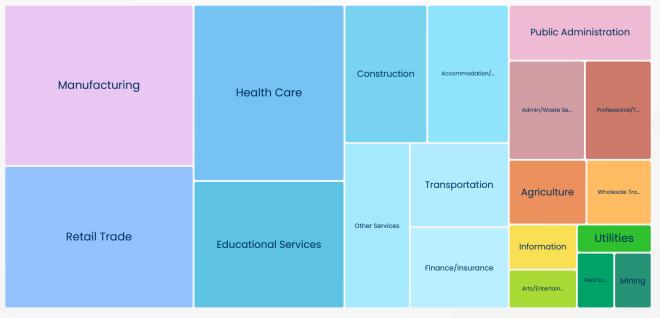
Source: Esri (2024)

Economic Dependency Ratio

For every 100 workers, there are 112 dependent individuals (Those less than 16 years of age, unemployed, or above 65 years of age and not working)

Kansas Economic Dependency Ratio: 97

Labor Force by Industry



*Median Disposable Income is the Household Income minus mandatory expenses, such as federal, state, and local taxes. Source: American Community Survey (2018-2022)



	Industry	Consumer Spending (2024)	Forecasted Demand (2029)	Projected Spending Growth	
	Apparel & Services	\$41,468,655	\$46,802,706	\$5,334,051	
	Computer	\$4,479,954	\$5,055,989	\$576,035	
	Entertainment & Recreation	\$74,909,189	\$84,529,540	\$9,620,351	
	Food	\$198,518,610	\$224,035,449	\$25,516,839	
Source: Esri & MRI-Simmons (2024)					

GOALS AND ACTION STEPS

StartUp Hutch engaged multiple stakeholders, including 24 individuals from various organizations and the StartUp Hutch Board of Directors. The workgroups and stakeholder interviews from these engagements instructed the development of the goals and action steps for the next five years.

The goals in this document are separated by leverage points to improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Reno County. These goals and leverage points are:

- 1. **Navigation**: Reduce risk/barriers to entry by meeting people where they are on their entrepreneurial journey by facilitating safety, diversity, and resource availability.
- 2. **Existing Business Expansion:** Creating onramps for existing businesses to access coaching & connections to successfully expand (building, equipment technology, or inventory) resulting in positive economic growth.
- 3. Youth & Under Resourced Startups: Increase and strengthen community partnerships to attract and activate entrepreneurial mindsets and participation amongst our youth and all potential entrepreneurs.
- 4. **Collaborative Entrepreneurial Supports:** Create a connected ecosystem that empowers and advocates for growth within strategic pillars and target sectors.
- 5.**Business Transitions:** Help coordinate the sale and purchase process for existing businesses.

Each goal has a series of action steps to help guide the work over the next five years. Short-term action steps should be completed within 3 years while long-term action steps should be completed between 3 to 5 years. Action steps are briefly described to define the purpose of the proposed initiative. Every goal has a series of measurable outputs that helps to evaluate the overall success of the strategic framework.

GOAL 1: NAVIGATION

Reduce risk/barriers of entry by meeting entrepreneurs where they are, providing safe, diverse, and readily available resources

Short-Term Action Steps

Action Steps	Purpose
1.1 Strengthen the diversity, capacity, and outreach of the Entrepreneur Navigators at StartUp Hutch, Reno County's entrepreneur support organization (ESO)	Enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of entrepreneurial support in Reno County to promote economic growth with a broader spectrum of entrepreneurs
1.2 Continue existing and create innovative new programming that connects potential and current entrepreneurs and business leaders through education, networking, and peer mentorship	Cultivate a dynamic and collaborative entrepreneurial ecosystem by promoting lifelong learning and strengthening peer support

Long-Term Action Steps

- Host community events to gather and showcase potential entrepreneurs and others interested in support local entrepreneurs and share stories across local media sources
- Strengthen relationships and resource knowledge of ecosystem partners who act as entry points or trust points for diverse entrepreneurs and small business owners, and operationalize certain requirements, data collection, and interventions
- Continue to advocate for policy, systems, and environment changes that improve the health, resilience, diversity, and accessibility of the local entrepreneur ecosystem

- # of clients met with
 - by industry type
 - by demographics
 - by location
- # of program participants

GOAL 2: EXISTING BUSINESS EXPANSION

Create onramps for existing businesses to gain targeted support, mentorship, and resources for expansion (facilities, equipment, technology, and inventory), fostering measurable economic growth.

Short-Term Action Steps

Action Steps	Purpose
2.1 Partner with the Hutchinson Chamber of Commerce to reach existing businesses	Leverage established networks and resources to connect local businesses and provide targeted support for growth and expansion
2.2 Reduce the sense of isolation of entrepreneurs by supporting people as they choose among competing values and building connections among entrepreneurial peers	Create a supportive and connected entrepreneurial community that enhances decision-making, resilience, and growth

Long-Term Action Steps

Develop and implement Downtown Master Plans for Hutchinson, Buhler, Haven, and Nickerson that
foster collaboration, remove barriers to revitalization while preserving historic character, enhance
placemaking around local and tourist destinations, and incentivize the productive use of Downtown
spaces while discouraging blight and underutilization.

- % of \$ loaned to existing businesses
- # of jobs created by loans to existing businesses
- # of participants in programs targeting existing businesses

GOAL 3: YOUTH & UNDER RESOURCED STARTUPS

Increase and strengthen community partnerships to attract and activate entrepreneurial mindsets and participation amongst our youth and all potential entrepreneurs.

Short-Term Action Steps

Action Steps	Purpose
3.1 Continue to host the local Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge competition, expanding partnerships and participation with Reno County schools and youth programs	Inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs while strengthening community collaboration to foster an entrepreneurial mindset among youth
3.2 Create a roadmap with specific steps to diverse backgrounds and levels of understanding entrepreneurship and take into consideration that many in our community do not have the stability or resources to go "all-in" to start a business at once	Create an inclusive and accessible framework that provides tailored guidance and support for individuals from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of entrepreneurial understanding

Long-Term Action Steps

• Leverage youth programs such as Hutch Chamber's Career Quest, Boys & Girls Clubs of Hutchinson's Up Next, Rise Up Reno Prevention Network's Leadership Program, Hutchinson NAACP Youth, and virtual school students to spark an entrepreneurial mindset and empower youth to design and implement programs that address their needs and aspirations

- # of new schools each year in YEC
- # of youth programs partnered with
- % of loans to new startups

GOAL 4: COLLABORATIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORTS

Create a connected ecosystem that empowers and advocates for growth within strategic pillars and target sectors.

Short-Term Action Steps

Action Steps	Purpose
4.1 Create and execute plans for immediate and long-term collaborative and sustainable funding sources as part of a holistic economic development strategy that includes a strong entrepreneur ecosystem as a key strategy for local economic growth	Ensure the financial sustainability and growth of the entrepreneurial ecosystem while integrating it into broader economic development efforts in Reno County
4.2 Continue and expand marketing and communications to establish Reno County as an inclusive ecosystem that inspires and supports innovators for a thriving economy	Promote awareness, inclusivity, and engagement within the entrepreneurial ecosystem to attract and support innovators

Long-Term Action Steps

- Build, teach, and connect a decentralized network of tradespeople, laborers, and small-scale developers to identify community development projects, raise capital, plan, design, build, and manage
- Ensure all entities deliver a consistent, welcoming message to entrepreneurs at every stage or entry point, foster collaboration to make on-ramps more inclusive and equitable in resource distribution, and develop a resource guide for entrepreneurs available both electronically and physically.

- Average of matched dollars raised each year (compared with 2020-2024)
- # clients met with (see goal 1)
- Amount of loans each year

GOAL 5: BUSINESS TRANSITIONS

Help coordinate process of sale and purchase of business transitions

Short-Term Action Steps

Action Steps	Purpose
5.1 Enourage certain business classes for completion in loan and grant application processes	Equip entrepreneurs with the skills needed for successful business transitions while ensuring responsible use of financial resources
5.2 Develop a communications plan around informing business owners that they need to start getting their business and books in order at least three years before they intend to sell	Ensure business owners are well-prepared for a successful transition by encouraging earlier planning and proactive management of their business finances

Long-Term Action Steps

• Generate creative outreach strategies to potential buyers, including hosting business transition lunches at churches and educating teenagers so they converse with their parents about the opportunities

- % of loans going to buyers
- # of businesses with new transition plan
- # of transitions helped with

EVALUATING SUCCESS

StartUp Hutch engaged multiple stakeholders, including 24 individuals from various organizations and the StartUp Hutch Board of Directors. The workgroups and stakeholder interviews from these engagements instructed the development of the goals and action steps for the next five years.

1. Clients met with are representative of the 18+ population in Reno County, KS

- a. 86.7% White; 3.2% Black/African American; 5.8% Multi-racial; 8.2% Hispanic/Latino
- b. 51% male; 49% female
- c.39.9% from zip code 67501; 39.3% from zip code 67502; 20.8% from other zip codes in Reno County
- 2. Youth Entrepreneurship Programs increase by 1 school each year.
- 3. Average 5% increase in year-to-year funding raised
- 4. Number of dollars loaned out and associated matching amounts

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

Partners who contributed to the development of the 2025-2029 framework:

Christopher Acker, StartUp Hutch Sarah Blake, Hutchinson Community Foundation Elaine Carter Candace Davidson, Reno County Health Department & City of Buhler Seth Dewey, Mirror, Inc. Sarah Diamond, Downtown Hutch Denice Gilliland, Hutch Rec Jitana Graf, City of Haven Dave Inskeep, Joe McGuire Insurance Joel Iwashige, Common Thriving Ron Hirst, Reno County Commission Lauren Meadows, Buhler Community Foundation Johannah Moore, Peoples Bank & Trust Abby Stockebrand, CrossAlign Consulting Lauren Storm, Greater Hutch Jackson Swearer, StartUp Hutch Aubrey Abbott Patterson, Hutchinson Community Foundation David Patterson, Luminous Neon Lance Patterson, Boys & Girls Club of Hutchinson Peggy Reubke, City of Nickerson Carla Smith, Rise Up Reno Prevention Network Debra Teufel, Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce & Greater Hutch Esmeralda Tovar-Mora, Hutch in Harmony Matt Williams, City of Hutchinson

2024 RCEEP Partners

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Heartland Together Participants

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Daniel Friesen Ron Hirst Scott Cooley Jim Seitnater Dave Dukart Dave Mullins Nick Baldetti Dr. Carter File Rep. Jason Probst Lacie Janzen Lacy Stauffacher Natalie Santonil Steven Wilkinson Russ Reinert Ryan Hvitlok Chelsey Dawson Greg Woodyard Connie Johnson Lloyd Armstrong Jeni Bryan



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