



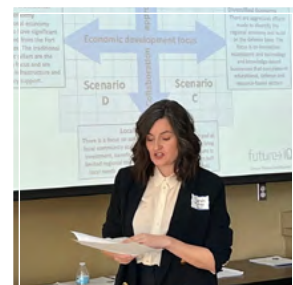
FLINT HILLS REGIONAL COUNCIL (FHRC) SUSTAINABILITY PLAN AND ROADMAP

# FINAL REPORT: KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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FLINT HILLS REGION, KANSAS, USA  
MAY 2023

FLINT HILLS  
REGION





# FLINT HILLS REGIONAL COUNCIL (FHRC) SUSTAINABILITY PLAN AND ROADMAP

## FINAL REPORT - KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS FLINT HILLS REGION, KANSAS, USA MAY 2023

This report summarizes the outcomes from the Flint Hills Regional Council Sustainability Plan and Roadmap planning process, that ran from November 2022 until April 2023. Approximately 300 regional stakeholders have participated in this planning work. This report aims to provide a 5-year Sustainability Plan to ensure the continuation and expansion of Flint Hills Regional Council (FHRC).

More information and the associated data analysis are available on the project portal:  
[lab2.future-iq.com/fhrc-sustainability-plan-and-roadmap/](https://lab2.future-iq.com/fhrc-sustainability-plan-and-roadmap/)



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**FLINT HILLS  
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# »»»»» SNAPSHOT | REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

This report lays out the findings and recommendations from the planning work to develop the Flint Hills Regional Council Sustainability and Roadmap. This report covers the identified future role of the FHRC, suggested key strategic steps, proposed membership and board model, and some organizational strategy. Overall, this work has identified the key strategic actions and approaches needed to achieve the preferred regional future. This report should be read in conjunction with other project reports and survey results.

## Key Insights from this Report



### Significant Desire to Build Collaboration and Diversify the Regional Economy

The planning work has highlighted a strong desire of regional stakeholders to build a collaborative approach, and work together across the region to tackle the big challenges and opportunities. There is a recognition that economic diversification is important, and that the region has the capacity to expand some industry clusters, especially in the realms of education, biotechnology, defense, and tourism.



### Desire to Take an Ambitious View of the Future

There is a clear willingness to think boldly and take an ambitious view of the future. Regional stakeholders perceive the region is well placed to play an important role in the State and National economy and landscape. This is reinforced by the presence of important research institutions, national facilities and a significant strategic military base.



### Desire to Expand the Role of the FHRC

The FHRC is seen as having a unique and important role as a regional convener and advocate. This role is well supported and regarded as a priority function. It also has a critical role to deliver services and bring in funding to address regional needs and opportunities. This approach will also provide a pathway to expand the future revenue and funding streams for the organization.



### Recognition of the Importance of Supporting Fort Riley

Building and maintaining support for Fort Riley is deemed to be a critical role of the FHRC. This includes the understanding of its role in the regional economy and advocating for the sustainment of the Fort's presence in the region.



### Strong Educational and Regional Assets

There is a recognition that the region has strong existing educational assets. This includes the primary Kansas State University campus, and other entities such as the Manhattan Area Technical College and local schools. This is complemented by other regional assets such as a commercial airport, transportation corridors, tourism amenities and engaging main street experiences.



The region has strong assets and unique economic opportunities, which will strengthen the ability to region compete with regional, national, and global markets.

## THE FLINT HILLS REGION

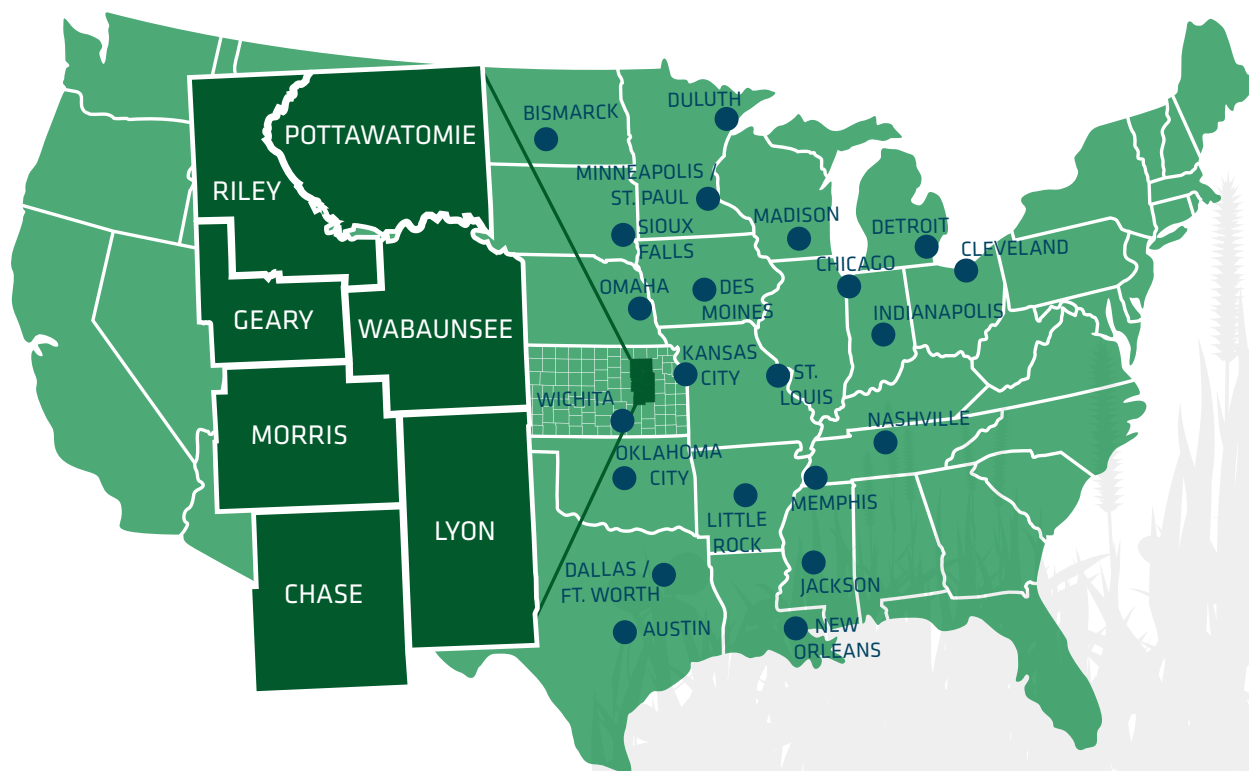
With a regional population base of just over 181,000, the service area of the Flint Hills Regional Council encompasses multiple counties in east-central Kansas. These counties include Chase, Geary, Lyon, Morris, Pottawatomie, Riley, and Wabaunsee. The region covers both urban and rural areas, with diverse landscapes ranging from rolling hills and grasslands to urban centers.

The region is known for its rich agricultural heritage, with farming and ranching playing a significant role in the local economy. Additionally, the area is home to two major economic drivers in the region. Fort Riley, a major United States Army installation, has a substantial impact on the regional economy and population and Kansas State University which is home to a student population of over 19,000.

Some of the key highlights of the region include:

- **The region has experienced modest growth over the past decade**, with the counties of Riley, Geary, and Pottawatomie having increased population while the predominately rural counties have seen population stagnation or decline. This trend is common throughout agricultural midwestern states.
- **The overall regional population is becoming more urban**, centering around the significant employment and population centers in Junction City and Manhattan.
- **The ethnic makeup of the region is changing** with those that identify as Hispanic/Latino having the largest increase within the region's counties since 2010. The largest decrease is found with those identifying as white.
- **The region boasts strength in certain economic indicators** including economic well-being and human capital and knowledge creation. These indices show that educational attainment along with relatively low unemployment are translating into economic strength for the region.

The region is known for its scenic beauty which creates opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. The region is accessible with well-developed transportation infrastructure including major highways, a regional airport, and access to rail.



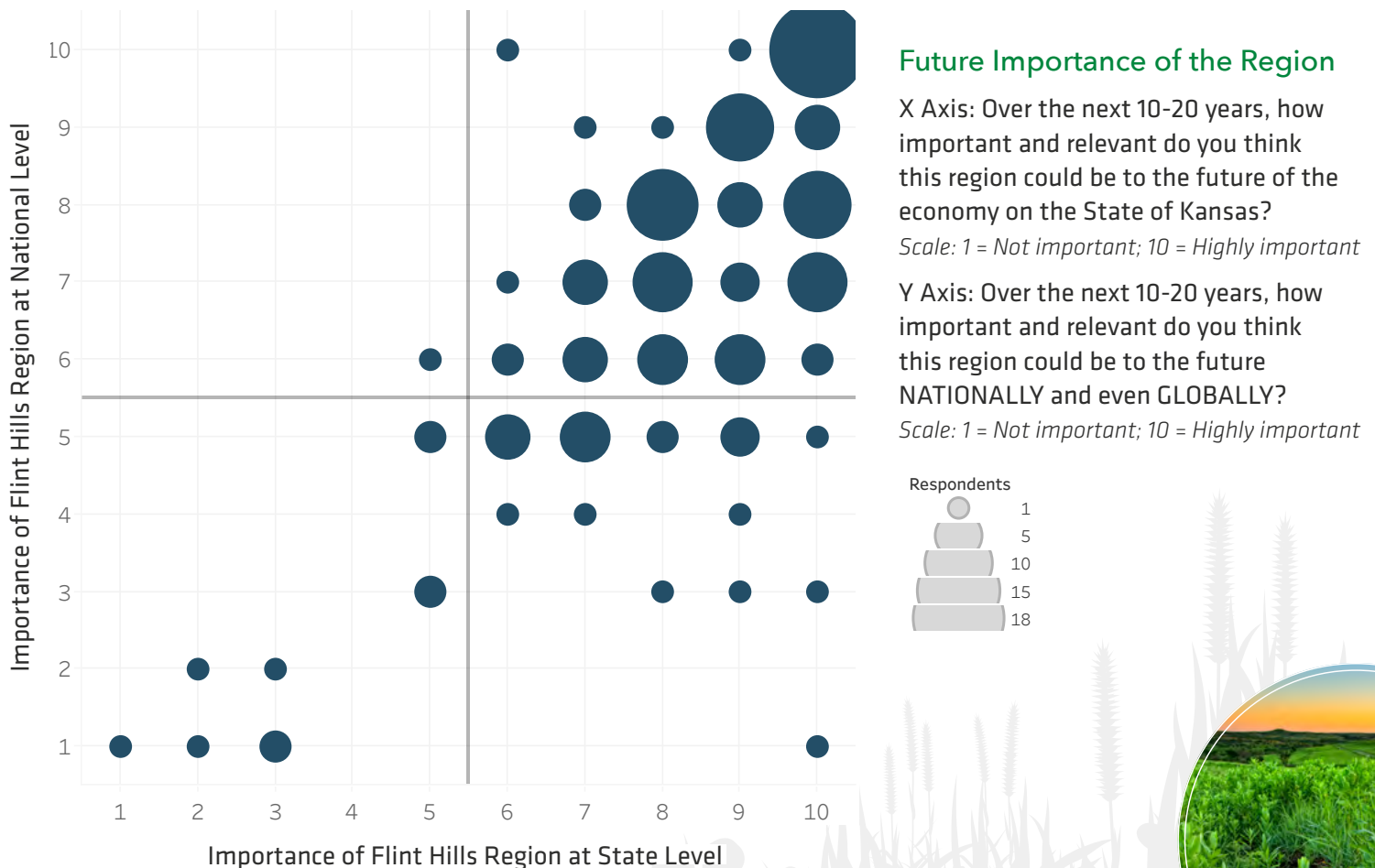
# 1.1 | OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

The FHRC Sustainability Plan and Roadmap planning process was an opportunity for stakeholders to take a 'deep dive' into the future of the Flint Hills region and the future of FHRC through an inclusive and transparent planning process.

The FHRC has been embarking on a planning process through late 2022 and early 2023 to produce a 5-year Sustainability Plan to ensure the continuation and expansion of FHRC. The outcome of the project is a FHRC 5-year Sustainability Plan which will assess the operation and administration of FHRC and prioritize services that FHRC should retain and add that will result in an ongoing and effective partnership with the Ft. Riley US Army Military Base and promote the quality of life and economic progress of the communities, businesses and citizens of the Flint Hills Region, Kansas.

The planning process has been funded by the Dept. of Defense (DoD) Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC). This planning work intends to strengthen and enhance the FHRC's ability to support the Ft. Riley US Army Base's military mission, the soldiers and their families and the surrounding communities.

However, the backdrop is also the future of the Flint Hills Region. This report looks at both the future of the Flint Hills region and the continued role of the FHRC in ensuring that the Flint Hills region is a place which will retain and grow its population. There is a clear perception that the region has significant future importance and relevance. **This offers a compelling rationale to build regional efforts – and should be embraced and leveraged by the FHRC.**







## 1.1 | PROJECT TIMELINE

The planning process ran from November 2022 until the end of April 2023. The planning process explored a series of key themes, including:

- Perceptions about the future of the region
- Exploring the strategic regional proposition
- Identifying a preferred future or vision
- The overarching role of the FHRC
- Developing the strategic roadmap

The FHRC Sustainability Plan and Roadmap planning process timeline and steps were designed to allow significant stakeholder input and included numerous interactions with the Board and key stakeholder groups.

This final report builds on the survey work and Think-Tank studies. More information on these steps can be found on the project portal [lab2.future-iq.com/fhrc-sustainability-plan-and-roadmap/](https://lab2.future-iq.com/fhrc-sustainability-plan-and-roadmap/).

### FHRC SUSTAINABILITY PLAN AND ROADMAP PROCESS





## 1.2 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT METRICS

In total, approximately 300 regional stakeholders contributed to the development of the Sustainability Plan and Roadmap. There has been a combination of in-person workshops, virtual sessions, surveys, and presentations. Key steps in the engagement have included:

The engagement process was designed to build depth of insight, and to allow ample opportunity for the FHRC Board, members, and stakeholders to contribute to and participate in the process.



**Listening Sessions** One-on-one and group listening sessions were held with key stakeholders across the Flint Hills region to ascertain the issues that the region is facing, but also the opportunities that the region offers.



**Project Portal & Branding** Future iQ worked with the core FHRC team to produce a project portal that stakeholders could use to follow the project. This included branding specific to FHRC and the planning process.



**Initial Stakeholder Survey** This survey was distributed and promoted widely across the region and was aimed at exploring perceptions about the future of the region, and the possible future role of the FHRC.



**December 2022 Retreat & Think-Tank Part #1** The first part of the Think-Tank was held during the FHRC December 2022 Board Retreat and explored macro trends and drivers shaping the future.



**January 2023 Think-Tank #2** The second part of the Think-Tank was held in mid-January 2023, and developed a range of plausible scenarios, and identified a preferred regional future.



**Focus Groups** Discussions were held on series of focus group topics in February 2023. These were held in various locations across the region.



**Board and Stakeholder Discussions** Additional discussions and presentations were held with stakeholders and Board members in March and April 2023. These aimed to explore appetite for change and tested ideas for membership models and Board structure.



**Second Survey** A second survey was launched in late April, to test stakeholder interest and support for the proposed roles of the FHRC.



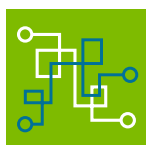
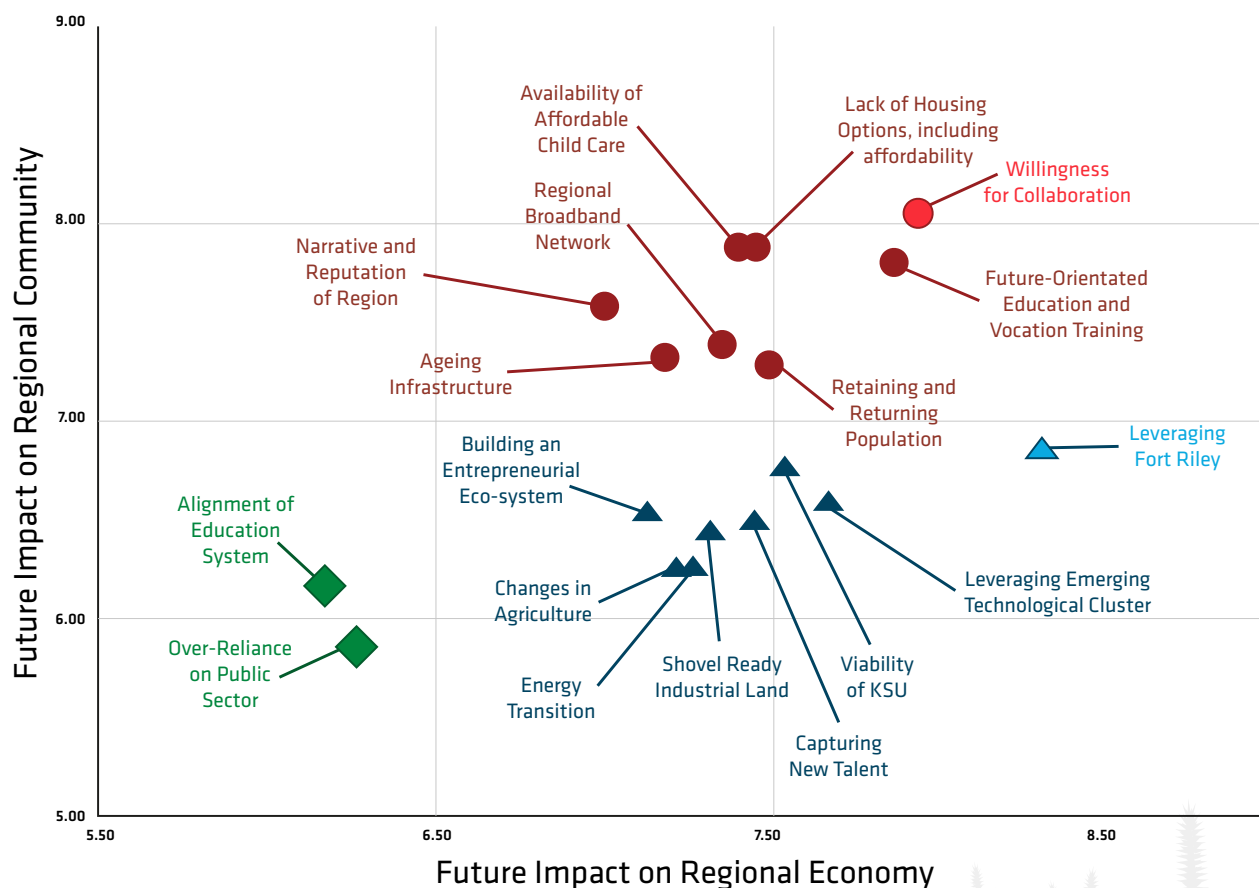


## 1.3 | FORCES SHAPING THE REGIONAL FUTURE

At the regional Think-Tank, in Phase 1 of the planning process, participants explored the forces of change shaping the future of the Midwest and the Flint Hills region, including three key areas of emerging macro trends. Specifically, the key trend areas included:

- Demographics, population and mass urbanization
- Energy, food, water and climate change
- Technology and the speed of change

Many of these key macro trends offer potential ‘tailwinds’ for the Flint Hills region, as it creates its unique value proposition. The trend analysis can be viewed in more detail in the FHRC Think-Tank report and on the project portal. These trends were used to identify key ‘drivers’ that are likely to have the greatest impact on the future of the Flint Hills regional community and economy. These drivers helped shape the subsequent scenario development, and the identification of the preferred future. This framework helped identify the key recommendations for the FHRC, as outlined in this report.



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- The initial survey, and the trends and ‘key driver’ analysis, have shown the region has some significant opportunities, that leverage off the strong existing assets such as Fort Riley, KSU and industrial clusters around technology and biosciences.
- The FHRC has a key role in helping the region organize to grasp the opportunities, and to work collaboratively to tackle the challenges. This collaborative approach is a key value proposition for the FHRC and its future role.

## 2.0 | KEY INSIGHTS FROM STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the planning process, stakeholders were asked to explore the future potential of the region, and what they saw as the optimal role of the FHRC. Key insights that were gathered include:

Stakeholders reinforced the value of having a staff with deep expertise, and the ability to provide a support role in funding and regional approaches.



### The region has something special to offer

There was a consistent view that the Flint Hills region has 'something special' to offer, and has the hallmarks of a renowned region. This was both at the level of a value proposition, where the region has a significant role to play at a State and national level, and as a unique destination that would be appealing to tourists and visitors. This deep affinity with the region, and the sense of significance, underpins the view that the region has something special to offer.



### There is an opportunity to build and diversify the economy

There is an opportunity to build and diversify the regional economy around technology, defense, agriculture, education, and tourism. There was a recognized potential to build strong focused economic and industry clusters. There was also a desire to see the Flint Hills region be part of larger initiatives and decision-making ecosystems.



### People and organizations want to be part of the FHRC

Institutions and communities consistently expressed a desire to part of the FHRC and are willing to come to the table with initiatives and ideas. Examples include:

- KSU - Laboratory of learning, helping local experimentation and creative solutions
- Fort Riley - Institutional support; Intergovernmental support agreements
- Eco.Dev ecosystem - Co-ordinated regional economic development
- Local Communities - Co-ordinated community development work



### There is a desire to strengthen the regional fabric and connectivity

Building and maintaining support for Fort Riley is deemed to be a critical role of the FHRC. This includes the understanding of its role in the regional economy and advocating for the sustainment of the Fort's presence in the region.







## 3.0 | PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABILITY – BEST PRACTICE

Building a sustainable future for the FHRC is a critical topic. Many membership-based models are struggling, as organizational and societal values change. As part of this work, a scan was conducted of best practice by Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs), in terms of how they built financial and organizational sustainability. Across the spectrum of RPOs, both inside and outside of Kansas, the following general themes are cited:



### Broader membership exposes greater revenue generation opportunities.

Limiting membership to specific cities or organizations constrains exposure of services to regional stakeholders. By keeping the broadest possible membership base, opportunities for regional value increases.



### Greater degrees of regional value are tied to greater levels of organizational revenue.

RPOs seek to fill service gaps and leverage their unique position within a geographical location. Being the access point for federal and state grants, providing regional services, or providing necessary local services are all tied to increasing value and revenue.



### Revenue streams originating directly from levies are often a small portion of overall revenue.

Many RPOs receive funding from levies or membership dues. These revenues are generally limited and, alone, limit organizational capacity. Increasing organizational value through new service lines, partnerships, or grant opportunities often provide significant revenue enhancements.



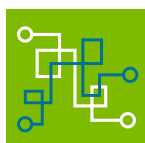
### Exposure to services and outreach enhance organizational value and reputation.

The more that organizations are in their region working, the more opportunities there will be to communicate with stakeholders to understand their needs, offer assistance, and enhance their reputation.



### Use of University Extension partnerships, and groups such as AmeriCorps or Fellows, are noted to bring additional skills and facilitate new revenue streams.

Offering new services may require the use of new staff to facilitate new service lines. Depending on the nature of the services, organizations have taken advantage of fellowships and AmeriCorps service members to execute additional programs.



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- There is a direct correlation between the perceived value that RPOs offer, and their ability to attract broad funding support.
- FHRC has an opportunity to offer a unique value proposition for the region, that has been well supported by stakeholders.



## 4.0 | FUTURE ROLE OF THE FHRC

Exploring models for the FHRC must be grounded in the desired future distilled through the surveys, Think-Tank workshops, focus groups and stakeholder discussions. Through those processes, key priorities were identified for the role of FHRC:



### Regional Convener

There is a potential role as a convener of stakeholders and organizations across the region and to help facilitate collaborative solutions to the region's 'grand challenges'. These include common issues such as housing, childcare, broadband, workforce attraction and retention, infrastructure and regional marketing.



### Regional Advocate

There is the potential to work as an advocate for the region to outside interests such as State legislature and national organizations. This would include promoting the region, ensuring the regional issues and needs are understood by funders and key organizations, and helping connect the region to larger collaborations and initiatives.



### Maintain and Boost Support for Fort Riley

Fort Riley represents a significant portion of GDP impact, and employment. There is a clear role and mandate for the FHRC to maintain and boost regional leadership support for the presence and operation of Fort Riley.



### Attract Funding for Regional Opportunities

The FHRC can act as a 'funding funnel, and help attract external funding, support and resources for region-wide opportunities and initiatives.



### Deliver Specialized Services to Regional Members

The FHRC can develop and deliver specialized services to regional members. This could include grant writing, community and economic development planning, collective procurement services and community betterment.





## 4.1 | PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY - REGIONWIDE CONVENER, FACILITATOR, AND ADVOCATE

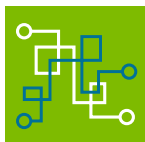
The FHRC benefits greatly from the distinct cross jurisdictional advantage. The ability to be the connector and facilitator creates opportunities for partnership that simply doesn't exist for other organizations. It is well known that partnerships with military bases or universities are significant but so are partnerships with local boards, foundations, and non-profits. By expanding the reach of the FHRC, partnership opportunities, grant funding, and service delivery can meet at one point and help build organizational sustainability.

**PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABILITY:** The roadmap must intentionally seek and build stronger partnerships.

- **Identify potential partners:** The FHRC should identify potential partners that have shared interests or goals.
- **Reach out to potential partners:** Reach out to potential partners and establish communication channels to exchange information and ideas. Convene stakeholders and networking events.
- **Foster collaboration:** The FHRC should foster collaboration among partners by creating opportunities for joint projects and initiatives that benefit the region.
- **Build trust:** The FHRC should work to build trust among partners by being transparent and open in their communication, and by following through on commitments.
- **Leverage existing partnerships:** The FHRC should leverage existing partnerships to establish new ones, by tapping into the networks of their existing partners.
- **Share and communicate the regional vision:** The FHRC should work with partners to share the regional vision of a collaborative and diversified region, and to identify shared priorities and goals.

Some RPOs have more innovative and out-of-the-box partnerships which are often tied to their own local partners or identified regional needs:

- **Non-Profit Organizations:** RPOs often partner with non-profit organizations to implement community development projects, such as affordable housing initiatives, job training programs, and environmental restoration projects (SE CT Housing Alliance).
- **Utility Companies:** RPOs partner with utility companies to develop energy efficiency programs, renewable energy projects, and other initiatives that promote sustainable development (Northern Arizona Council of Governments - NACOG).
- **Fort Riley and Kansas State University** offer the opportunity for creative new partnerships. Both are large institutions that consume resources and contain significant human capital and expertise.
- **Health and Human Services Organizations:** RPOs partner with health and human services organizations to provide access to healthcare, mental health services, and social services to residents of the region (North Central Missouri Regional Council of Governments (NCMRCOG)).



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- It will take more energy to build new partnerships, which is why it is important to shore up current partners first, and then focus on new ones.
- Partnership building can take time and requires sharing resources and ideas. The payoff over time can help position the FHRC as a regional 'thought leader'.

## 4.2 | GRANT FUNNEL STRATEGY - FUNDING FUNNEL FOR REGION-WIDE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

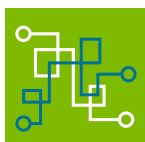
Grant administration is one of the key advantages the FHRC has in generating value for their region and generating organizational revenue. This is because the FHRC serves as the federal and state conduits for aligning political goals with on the ground action. However, a proper grant strategy must be employed to maximize opportunities and increase the likelihood of securing sought after funding.

### PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABILITY:

- **Build an inventory:** Building a needs inventory can help identify areas of need in the region that may be addressed through grant funding. By understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by the region, it is faster to identify grant opportunities that align with those needs.
- **Be the connector and funnel:** Building relationships with other organizations and agencies in the region can help identify potential grant opportunities and establish connections to projects that may be eligible for funding. Unique partnerships can be universities, military bases, school districts, and economic development partners.
- **Know your niche and get good at it:** There are thousands of grants available but it is necessary to find what opportunities align with the region's specific strengths and needs.

The grant environment is constantly changing but there are numerous grant opportunities both at the State and Federal level which remain relatively static and are often the source for additional value to area regions.

- **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG):** The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers CDBG funding to support community development and affordable housing projects. These grants are of high value in terms of regional and organizational value.
- **Economic Development Administration (EDA) Grants:** The EDA provides funding to support economic development projects in economically distressed areas and provides the funding for the EDA Traditional Planning Grant. There have been significant monies supplied to the EDA since the pandemic with shifting priorities based on the grant.
- **Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Grants:** The USDA offers grants to support rural development projects, such as community facilities, housing, and business development.
- **Dept. of Defense (DoD) Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC):** This organization has been a strong supporter of the FHRC and its role. They are likely to continue to offer resources to help protect and enhance the operations of Fort Riley within the region.



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- Developing synergy between value and sustainability is important. CDBG funds are a significant value for local communities and promote organizational sustainability.
- It will be important to have staff in the FHRC who can keep on top of grant opportunities and maximize opportunities when they arise.



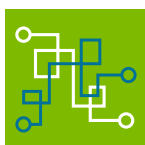


## 4.3 | FORT RILEY STRATEGY - SUPPORT AND LEVERAGE THE ECONOMIC DRIVER

Fort Riley is a key economic driver in the region and provides a significant 'anchor point' to the local economy. The mission of Fort Riley appears to be currently stable and long-term. However, the FHRC has a key role to continue to ensure the location is viable and attractive for the Department of Defense. There is also opportunity to leverage this massive economic driver and deliver two-way benefit.

### PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABILITY:

- **Better understand the spread of economic impact:** Fort Riley clearly has a well-documented economic impact in the immediate area of Manhattan and Junction City. However, there is a greater question about the impact in the region moving further away from the base. It would be valuable to better quantify the impact the base has across the region, and what is the direct economic impact, and the 'ripple effect' to areas further out.
- **Be the connector and funnel:** Fort Riley has embarked on several successful Intergovernmental Support Agreements, that link specialized service delivery to local communities. Examples include the partnership with City of Manhattan to purchase and supply road salt to the Fort, and significantly reduced cost. Another is the archaeological services provided on the base, by Kansas State University. There is considerable potential to expand these types of agreements, which brings greater local economic impact.
- **Leverage economic activity:** There are significant supply chains that serve Fort Riley, which could be examined to see if they offer opportunity for local businesses.
- **Maintain strong community support:** Fort Riley is unique in that a high percentage of discharging personnel remain in the region. This symbiotic relationship between the Fort and the Flint Hills regional community should be nurtured and fostered. It provides a fantastic opportunity to retain new residents and bring skills and families to the region. This also factors into the quality-of-life metrics, and creates an environment that well serves the families and personnel who live within the regional community.



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- The economic impact of Fort Riley is significant and well documented. However, there is an emotional and reputational impact as well, where Fort Riley is a source of pride, and enhances the region's strategic importance.
- As the military evolves, so will the missions, technologies, and operational models. The Flint Hills region would be well served to continue to explore what new and evolving missions could be well suited to Fort Riley's location and continue to advocate for the expansion of the military presence.

## 4.4 | EXPANDED SERVICE DELIVERY - DELIVERY OF SPECIALIZED SERVICES TO REGIONAL MEMBERS

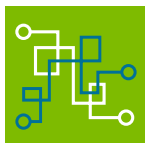
The level of service delivery varies between regional planning organizations. RPOs have used their unique geographical advantage, relationships across various jurisdictions, and professional program/grant administration to find and build the types of services needed in their region. The opportunity for the FHRC will be to identify the needed services, both macro and micro, in the region and then develop the resources to build new service lines.

### PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABILITY:

- **Conduct a Needs Inventory:** The FHRC could conduct a needs assessment to determine whether there is demand for additional services in the region. The assessment could involve surveys, focus groups, or interviews with local government officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders to identify the most pressing needs in the region.
- **Analyze the Market:** The FHRC could analyze the competitive landscape to determine whether there are other organizations providing similar services in the region.
- **Review Financial Resources:** The FHRC could review its financial resources to determine whether it has the capacity to expand its service offerings.
- **Assess Organizational Capacity:** The FHRC could assess its organizational capacity to determine whether it has the necessary staff, expertise, and infrastructure to deliver new services.
- **Consult with Stakeholders:** The FHRC could consult with stakeholders, including local government officials, community leaders, and other organizations in the region, to gather input on the potential benefits and challenges of expanding service offerings.

Some RPOs have more innovative and out-of-the-box service offerings which are often tied to their own local partners or identified regional needs:

- **Procurement Services:** Some RPOs offer procurement services to member jurisdictions, providing a centralized purchasing system that can help reduce costs and streamline procurement processes. Example agencies that provide such services include the Houston Galveston Procurement Program and the Collective Purchasing Program from the Boston MPO.
- **Rural Development Services:** RPOs can focus specifically on serving rural communities, providing specialized services and support to help address the unique challenges facing these areas. This includes offering services like code enforcement, housing inspections, economic development plans, community betterment. Example: ECICOG Keep Iowa Beautiful program



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- You don't know what you don't know. Find out what the region needs, develop an inventory, keep it fresh, and work to fill the gaps.
- FHRC is very positioned to be a resource hub for the region and helping support the smaller communities and organizations. This type of work builds enormous goodwill and long-term organizational collaboration.



## 4.5 | INNOVATION STRATEGY - POTENTIAL INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS

'Out of the box' ideas and concepts for the FHRC were explored by scanning the work in the Think-Tank, Roundtable Discussions, and through researching what other regional organizations are doing. These ideas offer creative ways to boost revenue, while simultaneously building profile through service delivery.



**Procurement:** In both the roundtable discussions and through researching outside organizations a unique service option of joint procurement was discovered. This type of shared procurement is already happening in Fort Riley with 'Intergovernmental Support Agreements'. The concept would be for the FHRC to serve as a coordinating clearing house for procurement services in the region. This service does occur with larger regional organizations, less so with smaller ones, however, the opportunity potentially exists. It would need to be confirmed as a true service need via a needs assessment.



**Rural Development:** It is not uncommon for RPOs to provide planning services or grant management for local projects. However, unique programs like the Keep Iowa Beautiful Program is a different type of service offered to small participating communities. The program, administered by the East Central Iowa Council of Governments and jointly funded by the involved partners, brings in a community coach that assists each community with local projects and initiatives.



**Convening and Event Facilitation:** It was noted in the Think-Tank and roundtable discussions that event planning and facilitation may be a unique offering that the FHRC could consider. This will help position the organization as a key convener and facilitator of big important regional conversations.



**Elected Official Trainings:** Providing localized annual training for new and existing officials, possibly in conjunction with groups like the League of Municipalities.



**Educational Workshops:** Many regional planning organizations do facilitate workshops centered on educating their region on the services and grants that are available to them. Many professional fields including city managers, administrators, and clerks are required to have a certain number of hours dedicated to continuing education. The Eastern Iowa Clerks Conference was facilitated by the regional planning organization and served as a full day conference for networking and education.



**Regional Networking:** Because regions are typically large, it is difficult for professionals to network with one another from one side of a region to another. By having a rotating network event, some regions provide that opportunity to get together, create a small program with a speaker, and provide updates to the entire region.



**Staffing Capacity:** In pursuit of executing new services or grant projects, the use of University Extension staff, or AmeriCorps Volunteers or Fellows is a noted way to increase organizational capacity. In the case of AmeriCorps, volunteers have been used to assist with job training and career development, energy audits, and other needs for regional organizations. Fellowships are typically entry level planners, pursuing or recently graduating with their master's degree.



**Partnerships:** Partnerships are numerous within the industry. It is tied closely with regional stakeholders and the needs of the region. There are two important reasons why these partnerships are important. They provide unique opportunities to show value to the region and they open the organization up to grant and funding opportunities that may be non-traditional for RPOs. Some of the unique services offered by a regional planning entity include Utility Partnerships on energy efficiency and renewable energy projects; Non-profit partnerships providing aging services, transportation services, or housing assistance; Health and human services, and Economic development planning for small communities.





## 4.6 | MEASURING STAKEHOLDER INTEREST FOR FHRC FUTURE ROLES

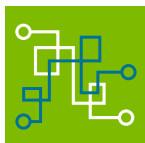
A final step in the planning process involved a second stakeholder survey. This was launched in late April, to test stakeholder interest and support for the proposed roles of the FHRC. The survey was sent to Board members, membership, interested stakeholders and people who had participated in the planning process to date. A total of 67 responses were received.

The survey explored the perceived importance of each of the proposed roles for the FHRC, and asked for ideas and suggestions about the specific activities the FHRC could deliver, which would be most valuable to the region. The results have validated the proposed roles, with each of the five key roles scoring high on importance, with the average weighted average of responses being between 4.1 and 4.4 (on a 1 to 5 importance scale).

1 = Not Important    5 = Very Important

PROPOSED FHRC ROLE & FUNCTION	1	2	3	4	5	Weighted Average
Regional Convener	4%	2%	11%	40%	53%	4.27
Regional Advocate	4%	0%	20%	31%	45%	4.15
Maintain and Boost Support for Fort Riley	4%	6%	11%	28%	51%	4.17
Attract Funding for Regional Opportunities	2%	4%	5%	36%	53%	4.35
Deliver Specialized Services to Regional Members	2%	6%	18%	26%	48%	4.13

The FHRC has considered holding a regional conference in fall 2023, or in early 2024. This event would bring interested regional stakeholders and members together to help explore key issues, share information, and build a regional network. The survey explored the survey participants interest in such a FHRC Regional summit. Overall, the responses were very promising, with nearly 85% saying they were interested to very interested in such an event.



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- The validation survey has reaffirmed the five core roles being recommended for the FHRC. These all scored in a similarly strong manner, suggesting they all have equal validity and potential for the regional impact by the FHRC.
- The FHRC has an opportunity with an initial regional conference to kick-start the regional convener role, and to boost the participation in a revamped FHRC work program.





## »»»»» 5.0 | FUTURE FHRC MEMBERSHIP AND BOARD MODEL

### »»»»» 5.1 | FHRC MEMBERSHIP AND BOARD – KEY INTENTIONS

During the stakeholder and Board discussions held in March 2023, perspectives were explored about the future direction in membership and Board structure. This input was coupled with the research scan that looked at the various alternative models in other Regional Planning Organizations.

The discussions with the existing Board focused on the key intentions and outcomes, that what would be optimal in a future membership and Board model.

#### FHRC MEMBERSHIP – KEY INTENTIONS INCLUDE:

- **Create a bigger membership tent:** The desire is to open the membership model, to allow more organizations, groups, professions, and institutions to be part of the FHRC. This is responding to the very clear interest of other groups to be at the table and involved in these important regional conversations.
- **Bring in new expertise and perspectives:** It was recognized that a lot of new expertise and thinking could be brought to the table. This especially relates to the emerging generations, and the smaller outlying communities in the region. Also, there is some considerable experience and expertise in professional groups involved in economic development and community development work that could help provide important thought-leadership.
- **Shared strategic decision-making:** There is a clear desire to facilitate larger shared regional decision-making, tapping into a broader membership. This will help formulate robust strategic approaches, which build stakeholder alignment and support, and creates enthusiasm and momentum in the region.

#### FHRC BOARD – KEY INTENTIONS INCLUDE:

- **Build ‘bench-depth’ of talent:** There is a need to build a deeper pool of Board candidates who are passionate about the mission of FHRC. This could be accomplished by allowing nominees and alternates or expanding the Board structure to include key groups such as Eco.Dev and Community Development.
- **Purpose-driven approach:** There is a desire to have a Board that is focused on delivering on the newly expanded role of the FHRC and is adept at building collaboration and economic diversification.
- **Adapt a skills-based approach:** The FHRC mission and direction will require significant skills and experience. Part of the Board makeup could be a consideration of having a matching skills base, where the expertise is drawn in from Board members, the membership or core stakeholder groups.

The following section of the report lays out a range of membership and Board models on a wide continuum. They are presented as three main scenarios, to explore potential strengths and weaknesses.



## 5.2 | SCENARIO 1 – STRICTLY COUNTY MEMBERSHIP AND BOARD MODEL

The county-based membership organizational model focuses on a narrower membership base with fees either assessed via a flat rate or based on county population. This model could be somewhat exclusive, as it restricts membership to just Counties and cities. It does allow each local jurisdiction in each county to be included in the county's membership.

### MODEL STRENGTHS:

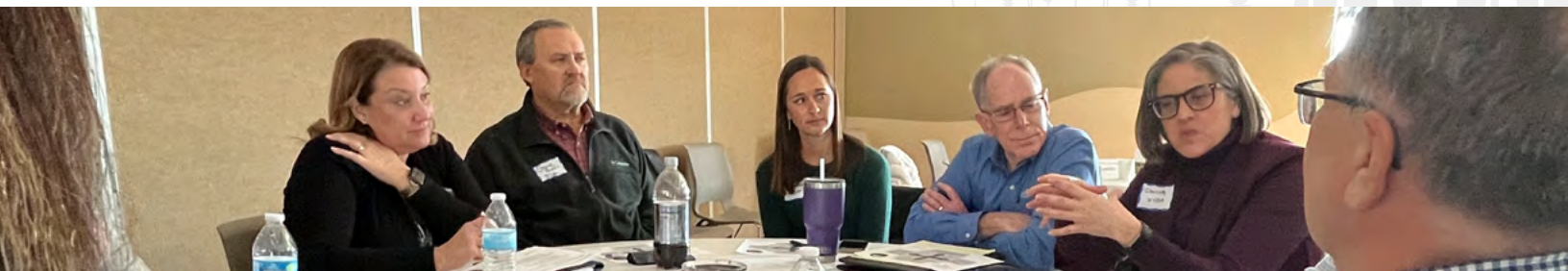
- **Representation:** By having membership based on county members only, each county can have equal representation in the council of government. This ensures that every county has a voice and can participate in decision-making. Coupled with input from other stakeholders, this can provide a reliable model for a regional organization like the FHRC.
- **Shared Interests:** Members will likely share common interests and priorities, such as politics, regional economic development, infrastructure, and transportation. This can help to foster collaboration and cooperation among counties on these topics.
- **Simplified Decision-Making:** Membership based on this approach can simplify decision-making and streamline the decision-making process.

### MODEL WEAKNESSES:

- **Lack of diversity:** There is the potential for this model to not feel inclusive, especially for organizations that cannot join, and have broader geography than County roles, or serve specific professions or sectors.
- **Dependent on support of Counties:** This model is heavily dependent on the support of most or all the Counties.

### BOARD ORGANIZATION:

- In this scenario each county or city has an elected representative, and critical partners are often included as ex-officio members.
- This model decouples general membership with the board. Aligning organizational sustainability with board makeup is key.







## »»»» 5.3 | SCENARIO 2 - TIERED MEMBERSHIP AND BOARD MODEL

A tiered membership model is a structure used by some organizations, including RPOs, to offer different levels of membership to different types of members. In a tiered membership model, there may be recognition of different types of members for the region. Dues or fees may be different depending on the nature of the membership.

### MODEL STRENGTHS:

- **Tailored support:** By offering different levels of membership, the FHRC can provide tailored support to members based on their needs and resources. This can help to ensure that all members can participate in FHRC activities and access the services and resources they need.
- **Greater inclusivity:** A tiered membership model can help to promote greater inclusivity by offering a lower level of membership to smaller municipalities that may have fewer resources to contribute. This can help to ensure that all municipalities in the region are represented in the RPO and have a voice in decision-making. The broadest possible membership and board representation may offer the broadest means to provide value to the region.
- **Increased collaboration:** By offering different levels of membership, the FHRC can encourage collaboration and cooperation between members. Members at different levels may have different expertise or resources that can be leveraged to tackle regional issues more effectively.
- **New types of members:** Area non-profits and businesses would have access to membership at the appropriate level of membership which further enhances regional cooperation and organizational value.

### MODEL WEAKNESSES:

- **Challenging governance and decision-making:** This model may create challenges in decision-making, as there are more voices and interests to serve
- **More complex Board structure:** This would require a more skills-based approach to Board membership, and an expanded sub-committee structure, which would be more complex to manage.

### BOARD ORGANIZATION:

- This model focuses on expanding the board to include new memberships with different levels of involvement in the organization. Full board members, associate members, partner members, or other membership designations would be assigned to a specific entity depending on the nature of the organization.
- Full board members would have the right to vote but associates or partner members would have a seat at the table. This model aligns the types of the organizations to their involvement in the region and organization. Different fee structures could exist for different memberships.

## 5.4 | SCENARIO 3 - WIDE-OPEN MEMBERSHIP AND BOARD MODEL

This model allows for the membership of any entity or organization that fits with the FHRC's mission. It would allow for any public entity or potentially critical stakeholders to be a member and likely maintain representation on the board. This model would not necessarily give each local jurisdiction membership, it would continue to be based on interest from an individual entity who would be a paying member.

### MODEL STRENGTHS:

- **Increased Inclusivity:** An open membership model ensures that all local governments in the region have access to membership, regardless of their size or resources. This could promote a more inclusive and representative decision-making process.
- **Increased collaboration:** By including a wider range of stakeholders, there is greater potential for collaboration and cooperation between the different entities. This can lead to more effective solutions to regional issues and improved service delivery.
- **Improved advocacy:** By including a diverse range of organizations, an open membership can advocate for the region's needs with a 'big voice'. This can help to attract funding and resources from higher levels of government and other organizations, leading to better outcomes for the entire region.



### MODEL WEAKNESSES:

- **Decreased direct representation:** This model moves away from the direct representation via government entities. This might diminish the appeal of the FHRC to the traditional municipalities that have provided support. This could result in an overly large and unwieldy board.
- **Potential mission drift and competition:** This model could also result in mission-drift, where active interest groups may sway the focus of the organization, and over time seek to dominate funding opportunities.

### BOARD ORGANIZATION:

- In this model, membership is open to the public and private entities that reside within the boundaries of the region. This could potentially result in a very large Board, or a smaller elected Board.





## 5.5 | RECOMMENDED FHRC MEMBERSHIP AND BOARD MODEL

In exploring the membership and Board models, it is understood there are many different nuances versions possible. Future iQ recommends that a hybrid organizational and board model be built to build the inclusivity of stakeholders in the region, while retaining some of the robust governance features that exists. This model would most closely reflect the **Scenario 2 - Tiered Membership and Board Model**, but with some specific tweaks and features. Building a broader coalition of partners and members will serve to enhance the regional value for the FHRC.

**EXPANDED MEMBERSHIP.** It is recommended the membership model evolve in the following way:

- **Expand membership options:** A model is developed to allow broader membership for a greater diversity of organizations and groups. This may need to be tiered to reflect different membership options and fees. Members would have priority access to services and support from the FHRC team.
- **Collaborative strategic decision making:** It is suggested that a broader membership could be engaged in a collaborative strategic decision-making in an annual forum, such as a company Annual General Meeting, where shareholders debate and vote on key decisions. This would be an opportunity to elevate the discussion and debate about key regional topics, decisions, and directions.



**EXPANDED BOARD.** It is recommended the Board be expanded in the following ways:

- **County Membership:** Each member county would receive a seat on the board, which could be an elected official or their nominee. This retains the population representative basis and expands the pool of potential talent.
- **Citizen or Expertise Representation:** Each county would have the ability to nominate an additional citizen or local expert representative to the board. This representative may have a desired skillset (industry knowledge, housing, human resources, legal, etc.), represent a specific constituency (mayors, city councilor), or play a key role in the region.
- **Expert members:** Key expertise groups (such as economic development and community development) should be offered seats, to bring that professional network into the FHRC Board.
- **Ex-Officio elevated to Board:** Future iQ recommends continuing to provide status to any major partner deemed to have critical important to the region and the FHRC. This would include Kansas State, the Governors Military Council, and Kansas State University. These could remain as Ex-Officio status or elevated to full Board Membership. This decision may in part be based on the interests of the key partner organization. Inclusion of regional partners as board members is a unique twist for the FHRC but it is not necessarily uncommon for regional governments to include key stakeholders as board members. This is particularly true for partners that provide a key service in the region.

This model creates the ‘biggest tent’ while retaining the representative basis and building additional expertise. This would create a somewhat larger Board, and expanded membership base. Board operations would have to be structured to increase the number of committee’s or working groups.





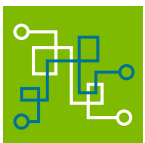
## 6.0 | CONSULTANT INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 | FUNDING STRATEGY

The FHRC has done an outstanding job of building a stronger financial base over the last several years. This has required some tough decision making and refocusing the efforts of the Board and staff. This challenging period is almost over, and the organization can now look to a much stronger and more positive future.

It is recommended the membership model evolve in the following way:

- **Diversify traditional revenue sources:** As has been documented in this report, organizations like the FHRC often have a broad range of revenue. This is ample opportunity to build new sources in the strategies outlines, such as direct service delivery, grant funding funnel models and broader membership.
- **Tap into community funding sources:** The FHRC has traditionally focused on economic development and defense-oriented funding streams. Increasingly there are significant funds in the community foundation world, that are targeting more social or community needs. This realm offers potential, as the FHRC expands its focus to include the wellbeing of the communities and entities across the region.
- **Explore 'out-of-the-box' funding ideas:** There are several potential funding streams associated with the new ideas or novel approaches. These could hold promise and spur some creative thinking.
- **Undertake regional needs assessment:** The FHRC needs to understand what services or grant opportunities and gaps exist in the region. Conducting a needs assessment for the region will highlight gaps that could be moved forward into new service offerings or projects. This will also enhance the view that the FHRC is offering regional value, which in turn will improve the organization.



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- Membership fees have been an important part of the funding model for the FHRC. As the organization evolves, the membership fees should become a relatively smaller portion of the overall funding mix.
- That said, expansion of the membership model might result in a higher total income from membership fees.



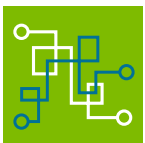


## 6.2 | FHRC STAFF AND FUTURE PLANNING STRATEGY

The FHRC staff will be key in implementing the strategic direct of the organization. They also have a critical role in elaborating on the broad strategic direction and helping covert ideas into implementable actions.

Key recommendations regarding the FHRC staff and planning work include:

- **Leading regional planning work:** The FHRC organization and staff are uniquely positioned to facilitate important regional planning efforts and processes. This is a key strategic role identified for the FHRC, as it works to convene groups in the region and help craft and implement regional strategies. There are several tools that can assist in this important work, such as Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) models and processes. CEDS can be important exercises that deepen collective participation and thinking, and continually renew and refresh regional vision, strategy, and collaboration.
- **Staffing Alignment:** Once regional service needs are better identified, aligning these needs with the capacity to provide services will be key. It is through this alignment, organizational resources can be re-evaluated and potentially expanded to provide for the region. This could include the onboarding of new staff to help provide greater value to the region. The FHRC could represent an attractive employer that is involved in an important purpose-based mission to build regional success.
- **Marketing and promotion:** There is a clear need to better communicate the role and successes of the FHRC. Also, throughout the process, there has been a consistent thread about the need to create and promote a compelling narrative about the Flint Hills region. Ensuring there is embedded skill in communications and marketing will serve the FHRC well as it embarks on more outward facing communication.



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- The current staff at the FHRC are well regarded and appreciated in the regional community.
- Building on this core of committed and skilled professionals should be a priority.

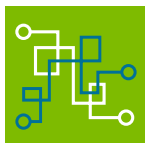


## »»»» 6.3 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Organizations like the FHRC are essentially network-based organizations. The membership joins because they see value and appeal in belonging to the organization and joining in peer-based discussions and decision making. Part of the future strategy of the FHRC should be to embrace and foster the network approach. This a more collaborative approach, than a strictly representative or hierarchical model. In this network approach, how the FHRC engages various stakeholders becomes more important.

Key recommendations regarding the FHRC stakeholder engagement strategy include:

- **Promotion, Reconnection, and Touch Points:** FHRC staff work should work to reinforce relationships with communities in the region. This would include on-site visits promoting the new 5-year plan, discussing the strategy being taken by the FHRC, and indicating how involvement from stakeholders will be needed. The current work that is being done by staff, in terms of outreach and engagement, has been highly appreciated by local stakeholders.
- **Engage stakeholders in local and regional needs assessment:** This is an opportunity to discuss community needs and determine if there are any grant or service needs in the community. This elevates the buy-in and builds the understanding of the value that FHRC can offer.
- **Create regional events to build the network:** There has been discussion about the FHRC hosting regional summits and events. This has been well supported by stakeholders and could be timed to coincide with Board events or retreats. As the membership base expands, these events will be critical to keep connecting the members to the value and the mission of the FHRC.



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- Network building can take time and effort, but it is a task very well suited to the emerging role of the FHRC as a convener and collaboration builder.
- Network building, and stakeholder engagement, will be an essential step in strengthening the support for the FHRC, and enhancing the understanding of its role and value proposition.



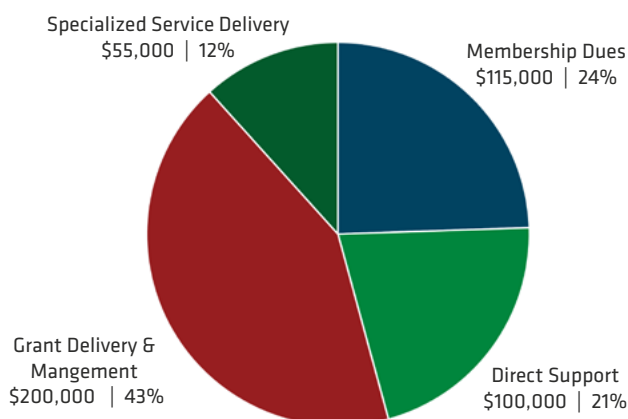
## 6.4 | BUDGET SCENARIOS - HIGH LEVEL ANALYSIS

A key rationale for the FHRC Sustainability Plan and Roadmap was to strengthen the financial resilience and sustainability of the FHRC. The organization has been through some challenging periods, and has now almost repaired the balance sheet, and in a stronger position. The following analysis aims to only demonstrate how a broader revenue and service delivery approach could help better balance the revenue streams and grow the overall income and associated operating budget.

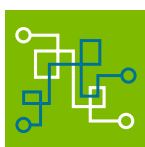
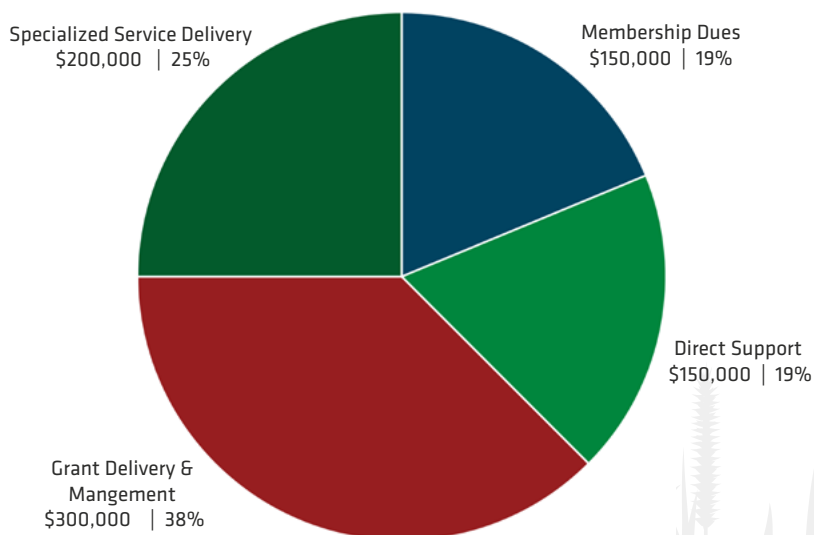
Key elements to note include:

- The 2023 and 2028 figures are indicative only and serve to demonstrate a potential outcome.
- Membership dues represent nearly a quarter of the income in 2023. It is believed these can both be increased through more membership and decrease as a relative percentage of the revenue.
- Specialized service delivery (currently focused on Community Development Block Grants) is an area where there is potential revenue increase. This requires identifying and delivering needed services across the region.
- Grant delivery and management has been a key revenue source, and it is believed this could be increased in total amount and reduced as a percentage of income.
- Direct support, via grants is an important and potential stable revenue stream. The potential for this is strengthened by having an organization with a clear value proposition and purpose, that is supported by stakeholders in the region.

**2023 Projection Example**  
**\$470,000 Budget**



**2028 Projection Example**  
**\$800,000 Budget**



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- The budget figures are projections, aimed at demonstrating how the FHRC could create a more resilient and balanced revenue mix, and reduce the dependency on the membership dues.
- There is currently significant funding in the broader system for effective regional efforts that address the macro priorities of innovation, social improvement, education, and strengthening climate resilience. With the support of regional stakeholders, FHRC is well positioned to attract new funds and deliver new services to the region.



## 7.0 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Future iQ would like to acknowledge the participation of the many stakeholders who took part in the Think-Tank workshops, interviews, listening sessions, focus groups and two surveys. There was a significant commitment made regarding time, energy, and intellect.

### THANK YOU TO ALL THE FLINT HILL REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS IMPORTANT PLANNING PROCESS!

Future iQ acknowledges the substantial work and on the ground support from the Flint Hills Regional Council (FHRC), and the following key groups:

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Pottawatomie County  
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**Matthew Bea**  
City Commissioner

**Pam Bales**  
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**Sharon Haun**  
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#### Ex-Officio Members

**Benjamin Van Becelaere**  
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#### Members

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**Debi Urbanek**  
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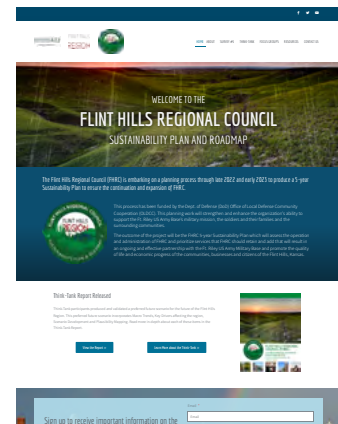
### Flint Hills Regional Council Sustainability Plan and Roadmap - Workshops, Data Visualization and Reports Prepared by Future iQ



**FHRC Think-Tank  
Report**



**FHRC Final Report: Key  
Findings & Recommendations**



**FHRC Project  
Portal**

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FLINT HILLS REGIONAL COUNCIL (FHRC) SUSTAINABILITY PLAN AND ROADMAP

# FINAL REPORT: KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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FLINT HILLS REGION, KANSAS, USA  
MAY 2023

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