



Participants in Community and Economic Development

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Introduction

Access to economic opportunities—new businesses, new jobs and continued investment in the long-term growth of the local economy—is an essential part of local economic vitality, enabling communities to “stay on the map” by providing basic services and enhancing quality of life for their residents. The practices of community development and economic development are targeted at creating the conditions for success and pursuing viable avenues for growth and economic prosperity.

The goal of this fact sheet is threefold. First, it will provide a basic overview of the different dimensions of development: mission, geography and administrative authority. Second, it will describe six different geographic scales at which community and economic development entities operate across Oklahoma. Finally, it provides a brief profile or vignette of a real-world community and economic development entity at each geographic scale: who they are, what they do and what their primary goals are. The listed categories and vignettes are not meant to serve as an exhaustive delineation of all community and economic development activity in Oklahoma. Rather, the categories highlight the diversity of organizations engaged in helping Oklahoma’s economy grow and flourish.

How do Development Entities Differ?

Before highlighting the various entities involved in community development and economic development in Oklahoma, three different dimensions of development must be emphasized.

Differences in Mission

While often used interchangeably, community development and economic development are not the same. Economic development is the more straightforward of the two, comprising any and all efforts to attract, retain and expand local businesses, leading to more jobs and better wages. Economic development practitioners may pursue a wide variety of approaches—“shoot anything that flies; claim anything that falls” (Rubin, 1988)—but the fundamental goal of economic development is to create wealth for residents and secure sustainable, long-term growth for the community as a whole.

Community development refers to the efforts to build and improve community assets in order to enhance local quality of life. Examples include investments in raising school quality, building and maintaining parks and other infrastructure, and renovating historic buildings in the downtown business district.

In isolation, these activities do not lead to long-term increases in jobs or businesses. For instance, the creation of a system of jogging trails does not, on its own, increase household incomes or create any new businesses. However, these sorts of community development activities help to set the stage for local growth, creating the conditions for economic development to be a success. Thus, while improvements to education, parks and recreation and downtown vitality are not long-term job creators on their own, they help to unlock the possibility of job creation and economic opportunity by making the community a more appealing and attractive destination for investment.

In line with Deller (2020), this fact sheet reconciles the differences between community development and economic development by positioning both under the umbrella term of *community economic development*, which refers to all efforts that seek to enhance the economic opportunities and well-being of community residents. While the entities described below each differ by mission and approach, they nonetheless fit under the description of community economic development (CED), the term used throughout the remainder of this fact sheet.

Differences in Geographic Scope

A second distinction pertains to the different levels of geographic scope and administrative authority among CED entities. Depending on its location, a given parcel of land may pertain to multiple CED organizations, each with a different geographic focus or domain. Figure 1 illustrates how a hypothetical address in Durant’s downtown business district—say 220 West Main Street (currently occupied by a bank)—may be claimed by at least six different CED organizations given their geographic boundaries.

However, there are a few caveats to be aware of. Although every square mile of land in the United States is part of a county, the majority of land in the country is *not* part of an incorporated municipality. This means that the first two geographic scales discussed below—hyperlocal districts and municipalities—only operate in areas with sufficient population and density. Also, while Oklahoma’s 39 tribal nations collectively lead the United States in terms of investments into community improvement and economic vitality, much of Oklahoma’s land area is not affiliated with a tribal jurisdiction or designation. Thus, the geographic scope of a “tribal CED entity” (see below) is only meaningful to around half of the state.

Not all geographies nest within one another. Counties fit neatly within states, but municipalities do not always fit

perfectly into counties. For example, a majority of the city of Clinton is located in Custer County, but a small portion of it belongs to Washita County. Similarly, counties and tribal jurisdictions are not mutually exclusive: the entirety of Okmulgee County is located in the Creek Nation, but the land in Hughes County is divided between the Creek Nation and Choctaw Nation.

Differences in Administrative Authority

Finally, the scope of administrative authority – the coercive power (or “teeth”) to pursue development objectives – is not consistent across geographic levels of CED activity. While county governments have the authority to collect voter approved taxes for CED, a county economic development organization may not have that authority. For example, the Johnston County Industrial Authority is a non-profit organization that shares its county’s name but not its ability to enforce the law. They are still an integral participant in facilitating growth and development in the region, but they are simply not equipped with the same authority that other CED entities might enjoy.

Inherent to these differences is the tradeoff between authority and autonomy. In a democratic system of government, the most powerful entities are typically the most accountable. Thus, while a municipality may have the power to tax its residents to accomplish an objective, it may also be hampered from moving nimbly between objectives due to the procedural requirements for transparency and the slower pace of bureaucratic activity. Conversely, a private or nonprofit CED entity may be limited in terms of authority – only having the ability to discipline dues-paying members – but it will still be free to unilaterally pursue its agenda, impeded only by the desires of its board of directors within the bylaws and policies of the organization.

In sum, making sense of the various CED entities in Oklahoma requires an understanding of how they are different. Some only pursue new jobs and employers (economic development), while others focus on amenities, vibrancy and quality of life (community development). Some entities focus on smaller areas, perhaps encompassing only a few city blocks and other entities may be responsible for CED across a larger region (or the entire state). Lastly, while some CED entities may have the authority to collect taxes in order to fulfill their aspirations, others may be limited, instead serving their role as a coordinator, a fundraiser and an overall “booster” for their area. Individuals and groups aiming to participate in community economic development will benefit from a knowledge of this imperfect alignment between the scope, geographic boundaries and jurisdictional authority of CED entities.

Who Participates in Development?

This section highlights a variety of CED entities, representing different geographic scales and development approaches. While not an exhaustive list, it delineates the general landscape of CED in communities and regions throughout Oklahoma. Each level includes a brief profile of a real entity engaged in community economic development at that geographic scale (profiles are located at the end of the fact sheet). Profile information was gathered from publicly available websites and personal communication.

Hyperlocal Entities (Portion of a Community)

The term hyperlocal is often used to describe a small district, neighborhood or geographical area within a larger community. In the context of development, a hyperlocal focus may be preferable because the smaller area is a higher priority than other parts of the community. For example, the Main Street Program – a widely adopted economic revitalization strategy across the rural U.S. – concentrates its efforts more narrowly on a community’s “downtown” business district based on the assumption that revitalizing a community’s downtown core will have a higher impact than focusing on big-box stores and businesses in shopping malls (Faulk, 2006). Other examples of CED entities at the hyperlocal scale include community development corporations, tax-increment financing (TIF) districts, business improvement districts and neighborhood beautification associations.

Town or Municipality Entities (Entire Community)

The role of local government is to collect and use tax revenue to maintain and improve local infrastructure and community services. Much of the work undertaken by municipal government can be considered community development, even if it is not explicitly referred to as such. These activities provide a baseline quality of life but do not focus on growth or business development.

To complement the efforts of municipal government, local chambers of commerce exist to serve existing businesses and elevate the ease of conducting business within a city or town. Chamber operations are funded by collecting fees from dues-paying members, allowing them to be as big (or small) as the member base they serve. As such, they are ubiquitous across urban and rural Oklahoma and are an important contributor to community and economic development in towns and cities throughout the state. Some communities have an economic development unit to complement or substitute for the chamber of commerce, but such cases are a minority (especially in rural areas).

County Entities (Several Communities)

County governments are the local sub-unit of state government, given authority to provide basic government services like public safety and roads. County commissioners have the authority to implement an economic development program for their county (Lansford, 2020), which usually takes the form of a non-profit economic development authority. These entities are comprised of local stakeholders – community leaders, business owners, property developers and generally interested parties – who convene to discuss opportunities and threats to development in the county.

Each county also has a Cooperative Extension office with at least one educator who has a finger on the pulse of CED activity in the county. Extension educators (or agents) balance a variety of demands – including agriculture, natural resources, family and consumer sciences and the 4-H youth development program – and their embeddedness within the community provides them with a wealth of knowledge about local development projects and opportunities.

Regional Entities (Multiple Counties)

Unlike political geography, economic geography is fuzzy. Local economies do not correspond perfectly with administrative lines drawn on a map, but rather, with the loosely coherent market for labor and specialized goods in a given locale. Therefore, a regional scale is especially suited for economic development. To think strategically about what is best for the

workers and households in a given area, one must ignore city and county borders and instead focus on the wider region. While a county- or municipal-centric focus may engender competition and rivalry, approaching CED from a regional perspective fosters collaboration and cooperation, striving to grow together.

The most common type of regional CED entity in Oklahoma is the council of government (COG). Oklahoma has eleven COGs, each made up of at least four counties (see OARC, 2022). The purpose of a COG is to “deal with the problems and planning needs that cross the boundaries of individual local governments or that require regional attention.” COGs have no regulatory power over cities or other local governments in the region and decisions by COGs are not binding on member governments. However, cities and counties in COG regions will often voluntarily comply with the directives of the COG because they see regional cooperation as in their best interest.

Tribal Entities (Multiple Counties and/or Regions)

With over 16% of its population identifying as American Indian in the 2020 Census, Oklahoma is home to the largest percentage of Native American population in the 48 contiguous United States (Alaska has the largest share at 22%). Tribal nations are a unique geographic entity, smaller than the state, but often larger than a single region (for example, the Choctaw Nation reservation is slightly larger than the Commonwealth of Massachusetts).

Each tribal nation approaches community and economic development differently. Some tribes have dedicated departments with full-time CED staff; other tribal nations may lack the resources to operate a full-time CED effort, focusing instead on internal operations, such as casinos or travel plazas. Ultimately, tribal CED entities can be a powerful ally for any community they partner with, providing stability and an important perspective to the development process (see Duty, 2022 for a good example of this type of partnership).

State or National Entities (Entire State or Multiple States)

At the top of the hierarchy of CED entities in Oklahoma is the State of Oklahoma itself. The state’s Department of Commerce is the preeminent institution that guides the direction of development in the state and sets the stage for Oklahoma’s economic future. The principal stated goal of Oklahoma’s Department of Commerce is to streamline the process for growth and development by removing regulatory barriers and “red tape.” The state’s national reputation is distinguished by this goal, and Oklahoma continues to be recognized as a leader in its low costs and business-friendliness. However, the ease of doing business is not the only important economic development metric and the Department of Commerce has recently worked to shore up the state’s nationally low standing in terms of workforce and quality of life.

At the state level, CED is a “big picture” activity, still requiring cooperation and buy-in from smaller local entities. The Oklahoma Department of Commerce does wield a degree of authority over smaller CED entities through their control of the flow of funds and grants. However, local entities are ultimately in control of the direction they choose to pursue, deciding whether to follow the pathway and vision that the state government has articulated.

Urban vs. Rural Differences

Regarding CED in Oklahoma, one important caveat should be acknowledged: there are significant resource and capacity disparities for economic development in rural and urban areas. The Tulsa Regional Chamber has a dedicated economic development department with nine full time employees and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber’s dedicated economic development department has eleven full time employees. In contrast, larger non-metropolitan cities (like Shawnee or Ardmore) will typically have fewer than ten total chamber employees, with only 2-4 in a dedicated economic development role (see vignette about Shawnee Forward below). Small non-metropolitan towns may not have a single full-time employee in a dedicated economic development role. A similar pattern is true within the state’s Cooperative Extension service, as there are currently no county educators or area specialists with a focus on economic or community development.

This is a consequential imbalance in that it generates a negative feedback loop for rural communities. A shortage of dedicated economic development personnel leads to missed opportunities and a lack of growth, which in turn further reduces economic development staff sizes. As such, rural areas require additional opportunities – for hiring personnel, funding initiatives and increasing administrative capacity – if they are to stay competitive within the state.

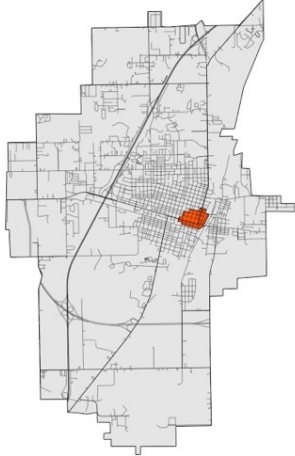
Conclusion

There are many entities that engage in CED that are not listed in this document. Churches, hospitals, universities, and other institutions frequently engage in CED to benefit communities and community members. However, this fact sheet provides a starting point for understanding the various types of CED efforts happening throughout the state.

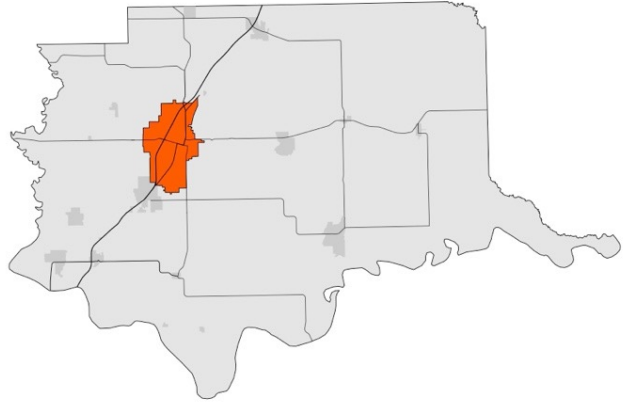
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Business District
Main Street Durant



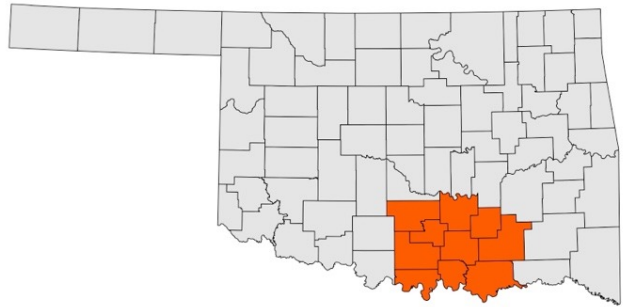
Municipality
Durant Industrial Authority



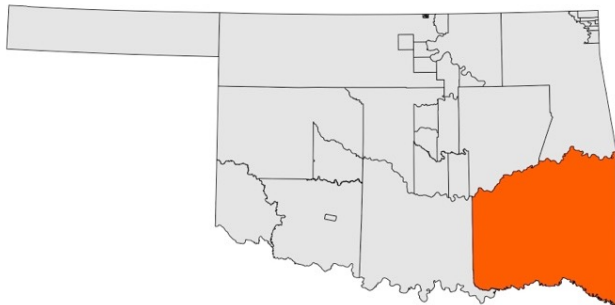
County
Bryan County Economic Development



Regional
Southern Oklahoma Development Association



Tribal
Choctaw Nation Business & Economic Development



State
Oklahoma Department of Commerce



Figure 1. Geographic Scales Applicable to a Business Located in Downtown Durant, OK

Hyperlocal Profile: Main Street Perry

Personnel size:

- 1 full-time employee. 11 volunteer members of board of directors.

Geographic extent:

- The central business district of Perry, OK, corresponding with the area in a 2-3 block radius outward from the Noble County Courthouse square.

Primary Goal:

- From their website: "building a thriving downtown through the collaboration of community and commerce...supporting the experiences, quality of life and historic preservation in the heart of Perry."

Example(s) of CED activities:

- Planning and facilitating community events, grant writing, providing technical assistance and training to business owner.

Municipal Profile: Shawnee Forward

Personnel size:

- 4 full-time employee, 2 part-time employees and 15 volunteer board members.

Geographic extent:

- City of Shawnee, OK (plus businesses and economic activity in outlying/adjacent communities).

Primary Goal:

- "Shawnee Forward exists to lead and empower a diverse community through collaborative economic growth, workforce development, and educational enrichment, to improve the quality of life and opportunities for the greater Shawnee area" (email from Greater Shawnee CEO).

Example(s) of CED activities:

- Promoting Shawnee businesses, promoting the Shawnee area as a place to do business, conducting market and regional research (including work to establish Shawnee as the #1 City in Oklahoma for Women Owned Businesses).

County Profile: Johnston County Industrial Authority

Personnel size:

- Zero full-time employees; 9 volunteer board members and 2 ad hoc (non-voting) members.

Geographic extent:

- Johnston County, Oklahoma.

Primary Goal:

- Johnston County Industrial Authority (JCIA) "takes a team approach to economic and community development" by bringing stakeholders in the county to the table to create "a vibrant and sustainable future for Johnston County."

Example(s) of CED activities:

- For years, the JCIA has championed a Business Frontage/Business Site Improvement Grant program. Johnston County businesses can apply for up to \$5,000 to upgrade their business facade or signage. Four to five businesses are selected each year and they must pay back at least half within one year.

Regional Profile: Grand Gateway Council of Governments

Personnel size:

- 60 full-time and 5 part-time employees; 44 Board Members representing towns, cities, counties and tribal governments in the region.

Geographic extent:

- The Northeast Oklahoma region, comprising Craig, Delaware, Mayes, Nowata, Ottawa, Rogers and Washington Counties.

Primary Goal:

- Designated by the federal government in 1966 as an official Economic Development District, the primary goal of the Grand Gateway Economic Development Association (GGEDA) is to foster economic development and improve quality of living standards in our region by partnering with federal and state agencies to deliver grant funds to the local level.

Example(s) of CED activities:

- Administration of public infrastructure projects throughout the GGEDA District; awarding and administering state funds through a Rural Economic Action Plan for communities under 5,000; obtaining and administering state and federal funds for a Rail Spur to Claremore Industrial Park.

Tribal Profile: Grow Choctaw

Personnel size:

- The Economic Development team has 4 full-time associates, the Small Business Development team consists of 14 full time associates, and there are 2 additional full-time associates that work in tourism-related development.

Geographic extent:

- The Choctaw Nation reservation encompasses eight whole counties and parts of five counties in Southeastern Oklahoma.

Primary Goal:

- The primary goal of economic development and tourism is to supplement local efforts to attract investment, create jobs, and attract visitors.
- The primary goal of small business development is to assist Choctaw members to start and grow their entrepreneurial dreams.

Example(s) of CED activities:

- Advising of prospective entrepreneurs on marketing, product development, customer acquisition, business plan writing, bookkeeping, etc.; operation of co-work centers in Durant and Idabel (called "Chahtapreneur Centers") that provide office and meeting space for small businesses away from the owners' homes; boosting economic development efforts of communities inside the tribal boundaries, helping their efforts to be more regionally competitive.

State Profile: Oklahoma Department of Commerce

Personnel size:

- Between 25-30 employees and staff, working across a variety of focus areas, including: site selection, aerospace & defense, film & music, and regional development.

Geographic extent:

- Entire state of Oklahoma.

Primary Goal:

- From official website: "Our job is to bring jobs, investment, and economic prosperity to the state of Oklahoma. Through dynamic partnerships and innovative collaborations with companies, universities, not-for-profit organizations, and government leaders, we are building a business environment that supports business growth and shared community prosperity."

Example(s) of CED activities:

- Combine the site selection process with tax incentive packages to recruit firms to locate in the state; coordinate the efforts of all Main Street Programs in the state; administer state and federal funds (such as community development block grants); collect and provide GIS data to support site selection and incentives designations.

The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Education Everywhere for Everyone

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education

for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.

- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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