



Texas Midwest Community Network  
TEXAS MIDWEST COMMUNITY NETWORK

*~ Communities Working Together to Accomplish  
What One Community Cannot Do Alone ~*



# PROGRAM OF WORK FISCAL YEAR **2020-2021**

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## **Preface**

Every organization needs a plan which sets direction and establishes priorities. A plan defines the organization's view of success and prioritizes the activities that will make this view a reality. Therefore, the drafting of this document aims to focus the Texas Midwest Community Network's (TMCN) energies in such a way that creates a sense of continuity. In doing so, goals will be met, programs will be completed and the activities of the Network become measurable in such a way that communicates value to the communities for whom it serves.

Having a program of work is also one of the best marketing tools to promote both TMCN's ability to be effective and the select communities that are being sought. The plan is the means to move planning into action and give direction to TMCN which will also convey to those outside the organization what we are and are not about. While the items of focus listed in this plan are the primary guide for the activities, it is intended to be flexible enough to take advantage of those rare opportunities that may present themselves.

Above all, the program of work should uphold the mission of the TMCN organization. The program is only as effective as our leadership's dedication to its implementation. It is possible to be busy, but not accomplish anything or to be busy accomplishing tasks that do not meet the mission. Therefore, TMCN benefits from the building of a plan of work to annually certify its activities as justifiable and worthy to dedicate its precious resources.

## **About the Texas Midwest Community Network**

Texas Midwest Community Network (TMCN) was founded in 1994 to provide a means by which communities in the region could work together to accomplish what one community could not do alone. The Mission of the organization therefore is to promote a regional approach to provide the resources and awareness for its members to achieve economic and community growth. Programs and activities sponsored by TMCN are therefore designed to accomplish the goals outlined in this Mission Statement.

The TMCN started as a group of community leaders getting together in July of 1993 to brainstorm about strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the area around Abilene. Quickly it grew into a core of committed volunteers who wanted to see something good happen for the region. The initial 1993 July gathering, the Big Country Development Forum, was sponsored by Abilene Reporter News, Abilene Chamber of Commerce and West Texas Utilities (WTU) and was attended by representatives from fifteen area communities.

Originally, a task force of eleven volunteers and five advisers began meeting regularly after development forum and established a plan of action to determine if the concept of a regional organization was something others in the region would like to see happen.

In January and February of 1994 area meetings were held in Haskell, Comanche, Breckenridge, Ballinger and Sweetwater. Community leaders were identified in as many communities in the region as possible

and invited to attend the meetings and interact about what was needed for the region. The information gathered at the area meetings was reviewed by the task force and a plan was developed to move forward with a regional organization.

In the meantime, Texas Rural Communities (TRC), Inc. in Austin offered financial support to cover basic administrative costs. TRC, Inc. is a non-governmental office that makes a long-term commitment to assisting rural communities through independent and cooperative ventures.

A mission statement was then developed and bylaws were adopted naming the new regional organization TEXAS MIDWEST COMMUNITY NETWORK. The original task force turned into a steering committee adding three more volunteers from the area meetings.



During May and June additional area meetings were held in Stamford, Colorado City, Brownwood, Bronte and Albany to begin introducing the organization to community representatives. On June 14, 1994 a press conference was held at the historic depot building in Abilene to educate the media representatives and officially launch the membership drive for TMCN.

## The Texas Midwest Community Network



Texas Midwest Community Network is comprised of fifty-four member communities located in thirty-two counties in West Central Texas. TMCN is committed to improving the quality of rural life through programming which assists its members in creating and sustaining a viable local economy. Membership in TMCN is comprised of communities in the west central Texas region in which each member community is represented by a voting delegate or alternate.

### Strengths and Challenges

The Texas Midwest Community Network works to promote the unique strengths of the west central Texas regional communities and develop opportunities that improve the challenges of sustaining and enhancing the rural way of life in the region. The following represents just a few of the greatest strengths of our network and our most important challenges.

1. **Leadership** – Leadership has significant importance to the health and vitality of a community. Member communities have been successful in attracting knowledgeable and highly skilled leadership which has translated into active and engaging TMCN participation. However, active ways to support and develop these leaders must be identified and encouraged. Networking is critical so that these leaders can be



exposed to new ideas and people in order to expand their vision of possibilities. Through this engagement, leaders can understand that it is more important to know where to find the answers than to know them themselves.

2. **Programming** – Bringing valuable and timely resources to the membership is at the forefront of TMCN’s mission and focus. Through expanding collaborations with state and local organizations and experts in various fields, TMCN has been able to provide quality programming at regular networking meetings and seminars so that member communities take away information which is easily transferable in their own circle of influence. However, due to the diversity across the region, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find consensus on the types of programming of most interest to the majority of community interests and needs. Identifying each member community’s needs and resources may be a good first step for TMCN to gain a deeper understanding of its membership as well as a better understanding on how to address their needs and utilization of resources.



3. **Community Engagement** – TMCN has seen a significant growth in membership since its founding in 1994 which now stretches across 32 counties in West Central Texas. Attendance at quarterly meetings typically represent 50-75% of this membership and 100% at the Annual Conference in October. While the attendance at these events had previously been perceived as only open to community assigned delegates and/or alternates, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 enabled TMCN to utilize and host meetings online which increased participation across all community leadership groups. With the focus of TMCN on building strong and sustainable communities, it is imperative to continue to emphasize the “community” membership concept in encouraging leaders from all industries and interests within a community to attend offered meetings, seminars and workshops. TMCN has also realized an increase in community engagement through social media posts and targeted tourism marketing.



4. **Texas Midwest Travel Guide** – Since its first publication in 1992, the Texas Midwest Travel Guide has been a premier regional marketing publication which promotes member communities and provide significant funding for TMCN operations and programming. While proceeds have remained relatively constant over the past several years, TMCN has been challenged by somewhat considerable overhead and a long-range continuity plan. Active evaluation of current best practices would provide a more efficient focus of resources and potential outcomes to benefit the organization and its membership.



## Reasons for Involvement in TMCN

Marketing  
Value to Community  
Most Productive & Better Format  
Regionalism  
Value Collaboration  
Access to State & National Resources  
Care for Neighbors  
Stay in Touch with Clients/Regions  
Leadership TMCN

Be Part of a Solution  
Economic Development  
Networking  
Political Voice  
Education & Training  
Mentorship  
Tourism  
Common Issues

## Involvement Importance

Continued Learning & Collaboration  
Vehicle to Better Own Community  
Enables Leaders to Do a Better Job  
Economies & Healthcare are Co-Dependent  
Access to Scarce Resources – TMCN Fills Gap  
Career Growth  
Regional Knowledge & Connection

Offers Services & Perspective  
Merges Business & Community  
Voices for Progress  
Networking  
Learn Best Practices  
Training & Education

## Program of Work

The program of work for fiscal year 2020-2021 will include the following items.

### Member Resource/Program Development



A variety of public programs are available to help assist member communities such as organizations and individuals who serve within the 30-county region. Most community and business leaders find the task of identifying relevant programs that might serve them a very challenging task. Therefore, summarizing and disseminating these programs through regular meetings, email communications, website and social media have been found to be beneficial for the TMCN membership. Meaningful programming has been another organizational focus to create and enhance community among individuals within member cities. Such current programming includes General Membership Meeting, Regional Networking Luncheons, Elected Officials Seminars, Chamber Best Practices Workshops and Grant Writing Workshops. Additional programming will be evaluated as the need presents itself amongst the membership.

## Advertising/Marketing

In an effort to maximize the limited resources available to the organization, advertising will follow the mission approved by the Board of Directors. Publications and/or opportunities that demonstrate an ability to create a presence within the region and across the state will be awarded organizational resources to help accomplish the stated goals. Examples of these opportunities include but are not limited to the West Texas Legislative Forum, Texas Forts Trail, and Texas Downtown Association as well as the organization's annual Texas Midwest Guide publication. In addition to advertising, the development of additional printed materials will be undertaken to promote the organization's resources to potential members and partners.



## Web/Social Media Development



Websites, social media platforms and listserv opportunities offer the highest potential for delivering resources and marketing information for members, partners and interested visitors to engage. Online publishing can consist of a wide range of topics including: membership, leadership, economic development, calendar of events, legislative outreach and resource links. With the recent redevelopment of the organization's website in 2019 and increased engagement through social media and email marketing, on-going commitment to timely notification has become increasingly important to the membership. The redeveloped website was built in a content management format which enables staff to update content on a regular basis rather than waiting for the webmaster to provide updates. Opportunities now exist for advertising opportunities for member communities and partners.

## Speaking Opportunities

TMCN benefits from an informed membership and engagement with its partners as it works to educate its citizens with a better understanding of what the organization can do. Each year, several opportunities are offered in which to promote the organization through speaking opportunities for civic clubs, chamber banquets and special events. These opportunities provide a more personal platform in which communicate the benefit and need of the organization and how it is designed to function as a mechanism for growth and sustainability.



## Legislative Awareness/Engagement



Legislative awareness is the knowing of the process by which laws are created at the local, state and federal level of government. This awareness is referred to as the public policy process and is the starting point for engagement and advocacy. TMCN seeks to provide a platform to bring its member's issues before legislators and provide insight to find workable solutions to these issues. It also seeks to create a bridge

between community leaders and legislators to better understand the legislative process and be an advocate for their respective representatives. Each year, TMCN hosts and/or sponsors legislative events for these purposes and include the Texas Day at the Capital (during state legislative sessions) and the Lawmakers Lunch (on off years) as well as extending invitations to regional legislators and their staff to attend TMCN meetings and functions.

## Economic Development

Economic development is a strategy that is aimed at utilizing various resources to create and maintain economic sustainability within a region. Often, this process focuses on issues that promote the development of industry and other businesses which serve the needs of the community and, in turn, encourages residents of the community to remain in the area rather than relocating to more populated areas.

The ED Alliance was created as an activity of TMCN to enhance regional economic development programs by strengthening its competitive advantage through education and networking opportunities with fellow economic development professionals and business and industry leaders.



In 2018, the Rural Economic Development Strategies Certification Program (REDS) was developed and launched. The program's focus is to provide practical, hands-on and interactive training and education to meet the needs of our regional economic development professionals. Sessions are

taught by economic development experts within the region including university professors, workforce specialists and skilled marketing practitioners as well recognized statewide professionals. Attendees are encouraged to expand their ability to recognize community assets, create long and short-term goals, encourage collaborations and network with other regional representatives in the economic development industry. Training consists of four daylong sessions over an eighteen-month to two-year period. Each session focuses on a specific area of expertise: Creating a Foundation for Your Economic Development Program; Developing a Dynamic Economic Development Marketing Strategy; Maximizing Your Economic Development Resources; and, Implementing a High Impact Economic Development Program. Following the completion of the Program, participants will receive their Certified REDS Professional designation (CREDSP). The



Program was put on hold in 2020 due to the COVID Pandemic and a Committee was established to reorganize for a relaunch in the Fall of 2020 or early 2021.

## Collaboration

The Texas Midwest Community Network maintains relationships with several organizations that support our mission. These partnerships span from local agencies to state-wide organizations. The following is a list of the entities the Texas Midwest Community Network works to maintain.

### Marketing Partners



The organization's Marketing Partner Program has directly impacted its sphere of influence, organizational outreach potential and reputation. TMCN seeks to identify and recognize entities that have an interest in the economic growth and quality of life throughout the Texas Midwest region. TMCN provides a platform for partners to bring programs and/or activities of key interest to the TMCN membership through presentations at meetings and program specific workshops. In turn, partners receive recognition at all TMCN events, on the TMCN website including a link and/or promotional video on the Partner Page and in the annual statewide distributed Texas Midwest Guide. Partners have also hosted member meetings/workshops as well as special programs including Leadership TMCN and REDS.

### Industry Partners

**West Central Texas Council of Governments** The Texas Midwest Community Network offices with the West Central Texas Council of Governments (WCTCOG) and works closely with the WCTCOG to provide information and co-sponsor events beneficial to its membership. The organization leases space from the WCTCOG, regularly engages staff in current programming opportunities, participates in the economic development committee and attends annual meetings.



**Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas** The Texas Midwest Community Network also works with the local workforce board to enhance opportunities for our member business community through such programs as the Governor's Small Business Forum. The organization is also serves on the Workforce Innovation Fund Committee, a new federal grant program to fund to design program strategies including innovative approaches.



**America's SBDC** Recognizing the opportunities available within a strong local economy, Texas Midwest partners with regional SBDC Offices to provide comprehensive assistance for economic development professionals who work with their small business owners and entrepreneurs. Statistics show that businesses who partner with America's SBDCs get started, create jobs, access capital, grow sales and prosper.



**Abilene Chamber and Convention & Visitors Bureau** The Abilene Chamber was one of the catalysts for the formation of TMCN in 1993 and this partnership for regionalism has continued throughout the years. TMCN works with this organization to enhance member meetings by utilizing its resources not only for speakers but for location and venue suggestions for seminars and workshops. TMCN staff serves on the Convention & Visitors Bureau Board of Directors.



**Texas Department of Agriculture** The Office of Rural Affairs has long been a tremendous supporter of TMCN and continues to work with this organization in developing programs and providing a conduit to other state agencies and programs. One such program is GO TEXAN which seeks to represent Texas agri-business on state, national and international levels by building recognition for the GO TEXAN mark and helping consumers find Texas products.



**Texas Economic Development Council** The Texas Economic Development Council (TEDC) is an Austin-based, statewide, non-profit professional association dedicated to the development of economic and employment opportunities in Texas. The TEDC is a one-stop shop for ideas, information, and influence. The organization is the largest state association of economic development professionals, volunteers, and elected officials. The members share a common goal – bringing new investment and jobs to Texas.



**Texas Governor's Office of Economic Development & Tourism/Rural Development** Texas' commitment to economic development has led the Office of the Governor to create a strong team of allies within various state agencies as well as local economic development partners in communities across the state. The Governor's Office Rural Development Initiative embodies several objectives to assist rural communities and small businesses to create and retain jobs through business development and community strategic planning assistance. Through various partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies, the office promotes agricultural diversification, small town revitalization, and market development both domestically and internationally.



**Texas Rural Funders Collaborative** In July 2017 a group of funders came together to consider how they might collaborate to bring additional attention and resources to rural Texas. The Texas Rural Funders Collaborative (TRFC) is made up of private foundations, community foundations, and health-conversation foundations. All-together the participating funders represent a variety of interests. They support the work that many rural practitioners dedicate themselves to every single day. It is their hope that by working together and with other people representing a diversity of expertise that we have the opportunity to take a cross-sectoral approach to honor, preserve and strengthen rural life in Texas. The belief is that the health of our state depends upon the success of ALL our communities and that urban and rural areas are inexplicably linked. Throughout, it has been a priority for them to approach this work from an asset, rather than deficit, perspective; we are eager to share what *is* working in rural communities as what is not. In May 2018, Texas Midwest Community Network was asked to join the group's Rural Advisory Council to assist them



in identifying the needs and successful programs of rural West Central Texas. The Council is being led by Rick Rhodes, former TMCN President and Director of the Office of Rural Development at the Texas Department of Agriculture. TMCN represents the Network on the Rural Practitioner Panel and co-sponsored a gathering in Abilene in December 2019 to discuss broadband accessibility needs in terms of education, telemedicine, economic development, and local non-profits. While still working together, the Practitioners Group established themselves as an Alliance in 2020 and currently consists of TMCN, the Association of Rural Communities in Texas (ARCIT), Texas Forest Forrester Country Partnership, Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals (TORCH), and Texas Rural Leadership Program (TRLP). Additional regional practitioner groups have been approached and/or are being identified to join the Alliance – including the High Ground of Texas – to ensure statewide representation.

## Measurability

Taking account of activities is essential. While it is not possible to fully and exactly measure the effectiveness of all activities, it does provide a base of reference by which the organization can gauge itself on an annual basis. The ultimate measure of success is member participation and engagement in meetings, seminars and programming. At the end of each fiscal year, the Texas Midwest Community Network evaluates its performance and reports on its progress on the items listed herein this Program of Work and additional activities taken on by the organization throughout the year.

## Texas Midwest Community Network Board and Staff

### Board of Directors

Erin Corbell (Brady)	President
Ray Tipton (Brownwood)	Vice-President
Darwin Archer (Cisco)	Secretary-Treasurer/At Large Director
Lauren Bush (Seymour)	Immediate Past President
Vacant	Director
Linda Molina (Snyder)	Director
Jeff Hinkson (Strawn)	Director
Julie Johncox (Abilene)	HUB City Representative
Shannon Scott (San Angelo)	HUB City Representative
Gail Lawrence (TSTC)	At Large Director
Kirk Canada (Hendrick)	At Large Director
Will Dugger (Jacob & Martin)	At Large Director

### Staff

Kathy Keane	Executive Director
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# **Texas Midwest Community Network Annual Calendar**

General Membership Meeting – Last Thursday in January, April & July

Annual Conference – Last Wednesday in October

REDS Training Sessions – Second Thursday in March, June, September & December

Dinner & Conversation – Second Monday in May

Lawmakers Luncheon – Second Thursday in May

*NOTE: Events in 2020 were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; Board voted in June to move events to a virtual format for the remainder of the year and to re-evaluate in 2021.*