

# Rural Opportunity Zones (ROZ)

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

*JANUARY 2026*



**KANSAS**  
COMMERCE

# Rural Opportunity Zones (ROZ)

The Rural Opportunity Zone (ROZ) program was introduced in 2012. As one of Commerce's workforce recruitment tools, the goal of the program is to attract residents to rural areas where population losses have been the steepest. It includes two individual financial incentives that are funded through a single appropriation of \$5 million. Each incentive has eligibility requirements, which were developed with community and other stakeholder input. The program was initially limited to 50 counties, but since has expanded to include 95 counties. The program consists of two components: (1) a state income tax credit; and (2) student loan repayment assistance. Currently:

- **95 eligible counties** offer the income tax credit component
- **72 eligible counties** offer student loan repayment assistance
- **41 counties** are funding student loans
- **8 cities** offer city sponsorship

In 2024, the eligibility requirements were updated by Lt. Governor Toland to support the goal of recruiting our Kansas youth to return to their rural hometowns after completing college or technical school. Those that return home to work and live are eligible to participate in this program. Additionally, anyone who has completed a residency, internship or student teaching program are eligible to stay in the rural community where they completed this requirement.

## STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE

The student loan repayment assistance component of ROZ aims to help rural businesses and communities recruit people with a higher education degree to fill open positions within the area. By partnering with business and county sponsors, Kansas offers \$3,000 per year for five years to apply toward student loans of eligible individuals. If an individual's loan balance is less than \$15,000, they receive 20 percent of the loan balance paid each year. For example, a person with \$10,000 in student loan debt would receive \$2,000 per year for five years. As of June 2025, ROZ student loan assistance is available in those counties with a population under 15,000 per the 2020 census.

To qualify for student loan repayment assistance, an applicant must:

- Establish domicile in a ROZ county on or after the date on which the county opted into the student loan program
- Have an associate, bachelor's or postgraduate degree prior to moving to a ROZ county
- Have an outstanding student loan balance in applicant's name
- Have a local matching sponsor. An applicant must have a sponsor to receive funding for the program

## STATE INCOME TAX CREDIT

The five-year state income tax credit aims to relieve some of the costs associated with an interstate move, such as registering and insuring an automobile or paying required deposits for rent and utilities. The tax credit component of the ROZ program provides a credit for 100% of the participant's state income tax liability for up to five years.

To qualify for the state income tax credit, the applicant must:

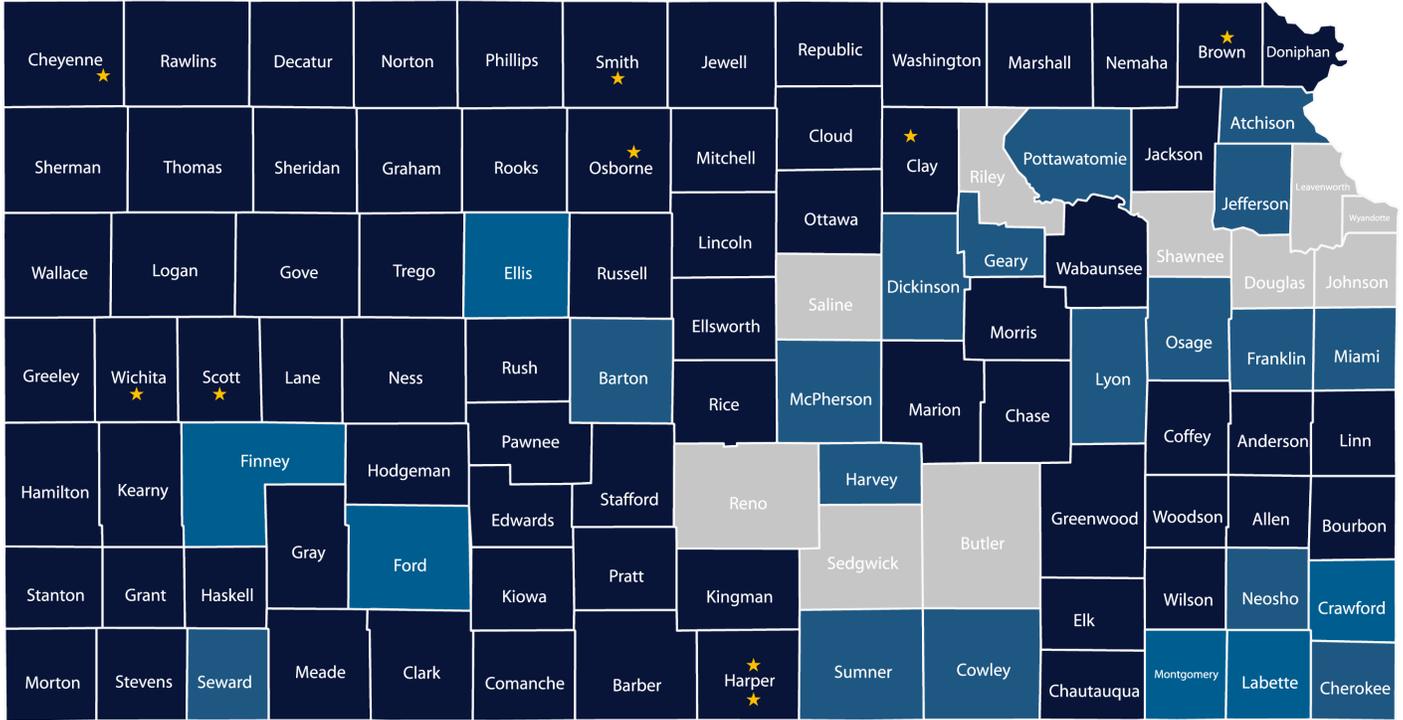
- Establish domicile in a ROZ county on or after the date the county was included in the program
- Have lived outside the state of Kansas for at least five years prior to establishing domicile in the ROZ county
- Earned less than \$10,000 in Kansas-source income in each of the five years immediately prior to establishing domicile in the ROZ county
- Reside in the county from January 1 to December 31 of the year the credit is requested

While the program has been utilized to recruit individuals to rural communities across the state, it has offset only a small fraction of overall rural out-migration statewide. Additionally, it is possible that some participants may have relocated without the incentive. For these reasons, Commerce will not seek an extension of the ROZ program.

ROZ FINANCIAL STATISTICS 2012 - 2024

TAX YEAR	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
FILERS	104	259	342	420	492	524	503	497	481	445	468	597	609
CREDIT ALLOWED	\$263,660	\$575,331	\$968,896	\$1,289,433	\$1,344,639	\$1,731,122	\$1,929,079	\$1,960,796	\$1,810,423	\$1,648,850	\$1,696,675	\$2,354,161	\$2,253,280

TOTAL CREDIT ALLOWED - \$19,826,345



4,531

TOTAL APPLICATIONS

2,378

STUDENT LOAN PARTICIPANTS ALL TIME

278

CURRENTLY ACTIVE

721

RECEIVED FULL BENEFITS

593

WITHDREW - NEVER FUNDED\*

115

WITHDREW - PAID LOANS OFF EARLY

529

DISQUALIFIED

111

WAITING FOR SPONSOR

41

COUNTIES FUNDING STUDENT LOANS

\*Eligible applications withdrawn from the ROZ program due to lack of available funding in the county or applicant moved from the eligible county.



915 SW Harrison St., Suite 250  
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1505  
785.296.3481 | [kansascommerce.gov](http://kansascommerce.gov)

Learn more about Rural Opportunity Zones via our Transparency Database:

