

A photograph of two men walking on a sidewalk in front of a brick building. The man on the left is older, with white hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored short-sleeved button-down shirt and blue jeans. The man on the right is younger, with a beard, wearing a black t-shirt with a graphic that says 'KONA' and 'CYCLO CROSS', and khaki shorts. The background shows a brick building with colorful murals and a green awning. The image has a dark overlay.

KANSAS
COMMERCE

**COMMUNITY
SELF-ASSESSMENT
WORKSHOP**

*Designed for community leaders
to help build their community*



A Deep-Dive, Workshop-Style Strategic Exercise (3–4 Hours)

INTRODUCTION

This workshop is designed as a facilitated, strategic exercise for communities of any size. It is intended to guide a structured, honest conversation that results in clear priorities and actionable insights.

The Community Self-Assessment is designed to take approximately **three to four hours** to complete. If that seems too long, feel free to break it up into two gatherings. This tool will walk participants step-by-step through the assessment process, helping communities evaluate strengths, identify challenges, and discuss opportunities for future growth and improvement.

At the conclusion of the assessment, communities can submit their completed results to the Kansas Department of Commerce. The department will work with the community to prepare a detailed analysis of findings and help identify potential next steps, priority projects, technical assistance opportunities, and possible funding sources to support implementation.

There are no right or wrong responses. The assessment should reflect the public's opinion and perception. If certain stakeholder groups, such as elected officials, economic development professionals, or other participants, disagree with a majority response, an explanation should be provided in the narrative sections to add context and clarification.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

Recommended Flow:

- Step 1: Group Formation (Prior to Workshop)
- Step 2: Group Orientation (10 min)
- Step 3: Community Profile (10 min)
 - Sections 1–8 Assessment (2.5-3 hours total)
- Break (10 min)
- Step 4: Final Summary & Priorities (30-45 min)



HOW TO CONDUCT A COMMUNITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

STEP 1: FORM YOUR ASSESSMENT GROUP

A successful community assessment begins with assembling the right group of participants **before the workshop takes place**. The quality of discussion and the usefulness of the final results depend heavily on having a broad range of perspectives represented at the table.

Communities are encouraged to build a group that reflects different backgrounds, experiences, industries, age groups, and viewpoints. Diverse voices often identify challenges and opportunities that may otherwise be overlooked. Strong participation and honest discussion will lead to more meaningful results and better long-term planning.

Your assessment group should include a mix of community stakeholders such as:

- Elected officials
- City/County Administration
- Public Works/Utilities
- Economic Development Professionals
- Business Leaders
- Education Representatives
- Healthcare Representatives
- Nonprofits/Community Leaders
- Residents (diverse perspectives)
- Youth, 15-21-Year-Olds

Recommended Size: 8–15 participants

Participants:

Once your participants have been identified, **select a day and time** that works for the majority of the group. Communities should plan for approximately 3-4 hours to complete the assessment and discussion process.

Choose a meeting location that is comfortable, accessible, and encourages open conversation. A casual, collaborative setting is recommended so all participants feel comfortable sharing perspectives and contributing to the discussion. Seating arrangements that allow participants to easily see and engage with one another are encouraged.

The goal of the workshop is to **ensure that all voices are heard and that the final assessment reflects a broad community perspective** rather than the opinion of a single group or individual.

STEP 2: GROUP ORIENTATION AND EXPECTATIONS

Before beginning the assessment, the group should align on roles, expectations, and how the session will be conducted. This step ensures a productive, respectful, and focused discussion throughout the workshop.

2.1 ASSIGN A FACILITATOR

Begin by selecting a facilitator to guide the session from start to finish.

The facilitator is responsible for:

- Keeping the group on schedule
- Guiding discussion through each section
- Ensuring all participants have a voice
- Encouraging balanced participation
- Keeping the conversation focused on the questions at hand
- Capturing key themes and discussion points

**If you believe an outside facilitator would help encourage open discussion or provide an unbiased perspective, the Kansas Department of Commerce is available to help. Contact our team to discuss scheduling a Commerce staff member to facilitate your community assessment.*

Facilitator Name: _____

2.2 VIBE CHECK

Take a few minutes to think about the experience you want to create. A comfortable, welcoming environment encourages open conversation, creative thinking, and meaningful participation.

- Consider playing light background music before the meeting begins
- Sharing a meal, snacks, or beverages can help participants feel more comfortable and encourages informal conversation before and after the session
- Have everything prepared before participants arrive, including a sign-in sheet, agenda, projector (if needed), worksheets, name tags (if appropriate), pens, markers, sticky notes, and flip charts
- Consider incorporating an icebreaker, table activity, mapping exercise, or hands-on brainstorming activity to encourage participation

Remember, the goal isn't just to hold a meeting. The goal is to create an environment where participants feel welcome, heard, and inspired to contribute to their community's future.

2.3 DEFINE THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this workshop is to:

- Honestly evaluate the community's current conditions
- Identify strengths and weaknesses across key areas
- Build shared understanding among diverse stakeholders
- Establish clear priorities for future action and investment

This is not a technical audit or scoring exercise for perfection. *It is a conversation-based assessment designed to reflect real community perception and experience.*

2.4 CONFIRM WORKSHOP COMMITMENT

By participating, the group agrees to engage fully in the entire 3–4 hour process, including discussion, scoring, and final prioritization.

2.5 SET EXPECTATIONS

All participants agree to the following expectations:

- Every voice matters and should be respected
- All perspectives are valuable, even when they differ
- Discussion should focus on shared understanding, not personal agendas
- Decisions should reflect group consensus whenever possible
- Honest feedback is encouraged over “ideal” answers
- The process is more important than perfect agreement

2.6 ESTABLISH DISCUSSION NORMS

To ensure productive dialogue:

- Speak from experience when possible (examples are encouraged)
- Allow others to finish speaking without interruption
- Keep comments relevant to the category being discussed
- Avoid political or personal conflict
- Focus on community outcomes, not individual positions

2.7 HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

For each section:

- Read the category aloud
- Individually reflect (1–2 minutes)
- Discuss as a group
- Vote on a score (show of hands or consensus)
- Capture key discussion points in narrative fields

Scoring Scale:

1 – Very Weak / Major Gaps

2 – Needs Improvement

3 – Adequate / Functional

4 – Strong

5 – Excellent / Highly Competitive

STEP 3: COMMUNITY PROFILE

Community Name: _____ Population: _____

Primary Economic Drivers: _____

Recent Major Changes (last 5 years):

SECTION 1: PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE (20 MIN)

Focus on current condition and future capacity.

[illegible]

Discussion Prompts:

- What is working well today?
- Where are failures or risks?
- Are systems ready for growth?

Narrative (Why these scores?): _____

Key Takeaways: _____

SECTION 2: PUBLIC SERVICES (15 MIN)

Evaluate reliability, coverage, and responsiveness.

[illegible]

- Where do residents express concerns?
- Are services proactive or reactive?
- What's missing in your community?

Narrative (Why these scores?): _____

Key Takeaways: _____

Evaluate quality, accessibility, and conditions.

[illegible]

- Are these facilities meeting the needs of residents today?
- Are facilities easy to access for all age groups and abilities?
- What condition are these assets in? Well maintained or in decline?
- Are there gaps in services, spaces, or programming?

Narrative (Why these scores?): _____

Key Takeaways: _____

Evaluate availability, affordability, and conditions.

[illegible]

- Who cannot find housing here?
- What types are missing?
- Are houses in good condition or dilapidated?

Narrative (Why these scores?): _____

Key Takeaways: _____

Evaluate strengths and gaps, workforce readiness, and community connection.

[illegible]

Narrative (Why these scores?): _____

Key Takeaways: _____

- Are schools preparing students for future opportunities? Do residents have access to workforce training?
- Are there barriers preventing residents from accessing education or training?
- Does the community have strong partnerships between schools, businesses, and workforce organizations?

Focus on the community's ability to attract, support, and retain employers.

[illegible]

- Are you ready for a new employer today?
- What would stop growth?

Key Takeaways: _____

Consider both resident needs and economic competitiveness.

Narrative (Why these scores?): _____

Key Takeaways: _____

- What transportation or connectivity issues are residents discussing most often?
- Who is most affected by transportation limitations?
- What investments would most improve mobility or connectivity?

Consider both formal amenities and the overall sense of community pride, vibrancy, and belonging.

[illegible]

Narrative (Why these scores?): _____

Key Takeaways: _____

STEP 4: FINAL SUMMARY AND PRIORITIES

OVERALL COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Calculate your final category scores below. Average the scores within each section to create a summary score.

Category	Average Score (1–5)	Priority Level
Public Works Infrastructure	_____	Low / Medium / High
Public Services	_____	Low / Medium / High
Community Facilities	_____	Low / Medium / High
Housing	_____	Low / Medium / High
Education & Workforce	_____	Low / Medium / High
Economic Development	_____	Low / Medium / High
Transportation & Connectivity	_____	Low / Medium / High
Arts, Culture & Quality of Place	_____	Low / Medium / High

QUICK VISUAL PRIORITY MATRIX

As a group, review the results from each assessment section and determine where each category best fits based on current conditions, urgency, and future opportunity.

Write each category into the most appropriate priority level below. Categories should only be listed once.

Priority Level	Categories:
Immediate Attention Needed:	_____
Important but Stable:	_____
Long-Term Opportunity Areas:	_____
Existing Community Strengths:	_____

STRATEGIC OBSERVATIONS

What themes appeared repeatedly throughout the discussion?

Where was there the strongest agreement?

Where was there the greatest disagreement?

What issue creates the biggest risk to future growth?

What opportunity could create the greatest positive impact?

IDENTIFY STRENGTHS

List the top 3 highest-performing areas based on discussion:

IDENTIFY GAPS

List the top 3 most critical weaknesses:

ALIGNMENT CHECK

Is there agreement on priorities? YES / NO

If no, explain:



PRIORITY ACTIONS

The purpose of this section is to help transition the workshop from discussion into implementation planning.

Using the discussions, scores, and priority matrix from the assessment, identify the community’s three highest-priority action areas. These should reflect the issues, opportunities, or investments that would create the greatest positive impact over the next 1–5 years.

WHAT?	WHY?	WHEN?	WHO?	FUNDING?
What issue or opportunity is being addressed?	Why is this a priority? How does it address project goals?	What is the timeframe? Is there a deadline?	Potential partners or organizations? Who is the lead?	How much is needed? What are potential funding sources?
PRIORITY ACTION #1				
PRIORITY ACTION #2				
PRIORITY ACTION #3				

NEXT STEPS

After completing the assessment:

- Submit completed results to the Kansas Department of Commerce
Sara Bloom, Quality Places Director: Sara.Bloom@ks.gov
- Review findings with local leadership and stakeholders
- Communicate major themes and priorities publicly when appropriate
- Identify projects that align with community priorities
- Explore funding, technical assistance, and partnership opportunities
- Consider follow-up planning sessions within 6–12 months
- Use assessment findings to support future grant applications and strategic planning efforts
- Check out the Kansas Department of Commerce **Community Self-Assessment Toolkit** for additional tools, resources, and strategies to help identify the needs, priorities, and opportunities within your community.

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