



KAN STEP Keeps Helping Communities in Kansas

The Kansas Department of Commerce provided a \$297,970 KAN STEP grant to the city of Sterling to rehabilitate Studio 96, which was an existing brick and stucco building in downtown Sterling to become a like-new community center. The project included new electrical, plumbing, heating, and air conditioning; a total refurbishing of the interior by installing new sheet rock, drop ceiling, and painting. Additional work included installation of a kitchen and ADA accessible bathrooms.

I have worked with the KAN STEP program for almost ten years and have had the joy of attending the dedication of many of the projects upon completion. That's a proud and happy time for the volunteers; they've made a difference and one that will last for generations.

KAN STEP is the community development program sponsored by the Kansas Department of Commerce; it is designed to help communities gain improved facilities, from water systems to fire stations. The types of facilities that qualify include improvements to water or sewer lines and buildings. Examples of eligible buildings include community buildings, fire stations and libraries. The program is designed to benefit low and moderate-income persons. KAN STEP provides guidance, assistance and support directly to the community and identified sparkplug(s). The program also provides help with the following issues: funding, engineering or architectural services, project planning, organizing local resources, working with volunteer labor or contractors, finding equipment and materials, insurance matters, project management, community involvement and project inspection and technical advice.



Local art work was displayed on January 28, 2012, prior to the grand opening of Sterling's Studio 96 Kan Step project. The unique project includes pull down wall sections to subdivide the facility meeting space (far right).

Responsible citizenship

As demonstrated by earlier generations, building and helping sustain communities requires local people to hold themselves to a high standard as responsible citizens. Similar to pioneer families who raised barns for neighbors or their churches in rural villages, successful community projects require effort, commitment and persistent dedication by volunteers.

The KAN STEP program provides direction, technical assistance, guidance and support to help make community projects happen. Self-help is achieved at a substantial savings of at least 40 percent of retail costs. Many smaller communities in Kansas cannot afford high construction costs without raising taxes or increasing



This photo, taken in April 2011, shows the framework of the new KAN STEP fire station in Caney, KS.

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water and sewer rates. Without long-term loans or limited grants, the only solution must be to reduce the cost of the project. One way to do this is to return to the days of neighbors-helping-neighbors. The KAN STEP program requires communities to evaluate what parts of a project they can complete on their own. Many communities do not realize the various skills and equipment their neighbors and local government have available until they begin the process. The community acts as the general contractor, organizing local labor and equipment and coordinating work that needs to be done. Instead of the usual method of applying for a grant and starting with the resources gained, the STEP process begins with looking at the affordability of the community, what local resources can be brought to the project, choice of technology and other cost reducers as compared to full retail costs.

The stages of a typical project

The projects are typically broken down to three stages, as follows:

- ◆ Preliminary (design and bid stage);
- ◆ In Progress (dirt has been turned and concrete poured or waterlines installed);
- ◆ Finishing (the project nears completion).

Potential projects are required to have their pre-applications submitted to the Kansas Department of Commerce in Topeka by August 15. While there have generally been seven to ten projects in progress since the program began, in 2011 there were only two projects that applied. They were both waterline projects. That is the fewest applicants to apply since the inception of the program back in 1998.

“The Department of Commerce stands ready to help qualified applicants with funds to make their dreams of

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KAN STEP keeps helping

clean water or a new community center or fire station come true,” says Salih Doughramaji, Program Manager.

Formoso was first

The first KAN STEP project completed in Kansas was at the city of Formoso in north-central Kansas. Volunteers in Formoso replaced their entire water distribution system. The residents realized a savings of \$400,000 from retail costs.

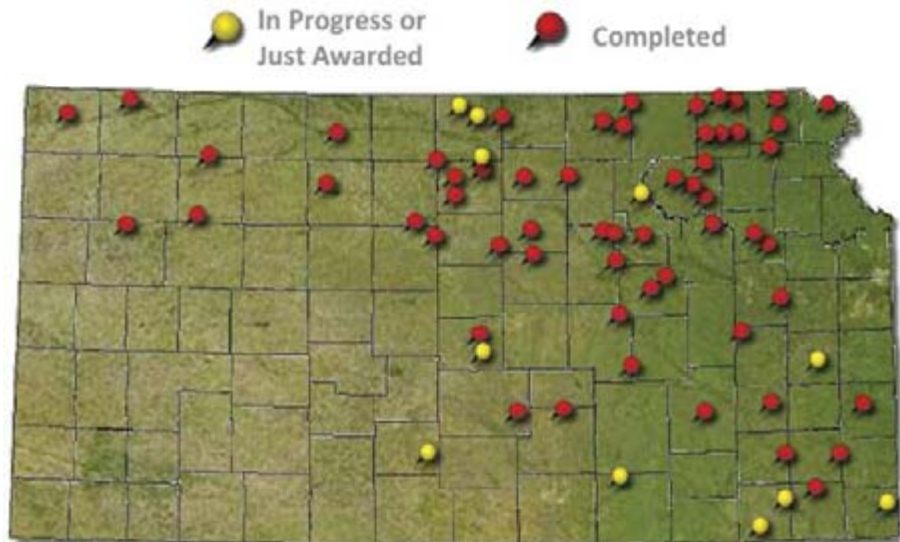
Next was the city of St. Paul that installed a waterline to the eastern part of the city. The new lines provided needed water pressure and additional flow to their nursing home facilities.

Rural water districts demonstrated that KAN STEP would work for them too. In 2001, the KAN STEP program awarded a grant of \$290,000 to Nemaha Rural Water District No. 1. Volunteers installed seven miles of new pipeline in ten working days! Kansas Rural Water Association began providing Inspection Services and Assistance with the Nemaha RWD 1 project and on subsequent KAN STEP projects. Nemaha RWD 1 returned more than \$100,000 of their grant as additional savings when the project came under budget.



The new emergency services building at Miltonvale was completed in early 2011. This KAN STEP project measures 64 feet wide by 100 feet long. The facility includes a training room with a kitchenette, restrooms, an office, two ambulance bays, and a six-bay fire department.

As of December 31, 2011, the KAN STEP program has funded 75 projects totaling \$19,281,610. Volunteers have donated \$15,172,700 in labor and other services. Several additional waterline projects are under review for funding.



Projects	No. of Projects	CDBG Grants	Volunteer Labor
Waterlines	10	\$ 2,297,959	\$ 1,962,892
Community Centers	26	\$ 6,579,741	\$ 4,762,455
Fire Stations	35	\$ 9,086,856	\$ 7,545,122
Misc. Buildings	4	\$ 1,317,054	\$ 902,231
Total	75	\$ 19,281,610	\$ 15,172,700

There are many challenges to a commercial project of any kind, but the fact is that volunteers can do a great job and accomplish the goal of improving their communities. The water systems and community buildings constructed are providing excellent services. Volunteerism is paying off

across Kansas, building communities not only with projects but also making communities stronger. The Kansas Rural Water Association is pleased to be a partner with the Kansas Department of Commerce on the program. The Association’s Web site at www.krwa.net/projects/projects.shtml features a description and photos of ongoing and completed projects.

Shane Holthaus has been a KAN STEP Tech for KRWA since November 2002. He previously worked for 13 years for a professional contractor.



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The mission of the Kansas Rural Water Association is to provide education, technical assistance and leadership to public water and wastewater utilities to enhance the public health and to sustain Kansas communities.