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KANSAS CITY: REGIONAL COLLABORATION FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Greater Kansas City (USA) is one of the first North American regional members of the Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM). As the region spans many political boundaries, its focus is on using **strong, genuine collaboration**, which **brings together diverse stakeholders and leaders to build** regional climate plans and achieve sustainability and emission reductions.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kansas City Metropolitan Area is a region that spans two states, and is made up of 14 counties and over a hundred municipalities, including Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO), which is the region's largest city. The region is diverse, spanning differing local cultures, contexts, and political perspectives. It has experienced impacts from extreme flooding, drought and heat events first-hand, and has become convinced that a **regional response to climate change is necessary to ensure resilience and sustainability**.

The **Climate Action KC** and **Mid-America Regional Council** leverage regional collaboration for impactful climate action planning and implementation. These bodies engage regional representatives spanning 100 local governments, several counties, both states, as well as diverse agencies and organisations to develop climate

action policies and take on climate change education.

The Mid-America Regional Council joined the GCoM in March 2019 in partnership with Climate Action KC and on behalf of local governments in the region.

Climate efforts in Kansas City build off its historic legacies, natural advantages – such as being located in a wind corridor – and build on ongoing efforts to tackle challenges that will be exacerbated and impacted by climate change.

Following success working at the municipal and regional levels, Greater Kansas City has knowledge to share with other regional partnerships around the world, and is eager to engage further in global discussions through the GCoM.



CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The Kansas City Metropolitan Region faces distinct hurdles including social, cultural, and climatic challenges.

As is the case in heterogeneous regions throughout the world, its different areas have varying capacities, levels of knowledge, and political will. Kansas City has responded to these challenges in three main ways: sophisticated regional collaboration that includes representatives from across its counties, states and municipalities; integration of a climate perspective in regional planning across sectors; and capacity building. This approach has been effective and is replicable for other GCoM regions.

The Metro Kansas City Climate Action Coalition is a regional collaboration of over 100 local and state elected officials, as well as representatives of diverse agencies and organisations. It represents a genuine and highly developed collaboration. The coalition leads state and local policy development, community education, and supports the development of a regional climate action plan together with the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC).

MARC is yet another example of Kansas City leveraging collaboration for climate action. The Council represents 119 municipalities and nine counties on both sides of the state line. It plans and implements regional climate action in sectors such as transportation, green infrastructure, affordable housing, hazard mitigation, air and water quality, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. Local communities in the region implement policies, plans and projects in a way that aligns with their contexts.

Most local areas in the Kansas City region – and in regions throughout the world – lack the staff capacity to comprehensively address climate issues. The Coalition thereby leads educational activities for the region's broader community. A partnership with the Association of Climate Change Officers also supports professional leadership development and capacity building across public and private sector organisations. Collaborative efforts and the climate action plans they produce require performance measures both to prepare and to execute. The Kansas City metro sees GCoM reporting and emissions inventories as a critical step in this measurement and planning process.

Alongside producing regional plans, the collaborative governance bodies are taking climate action forward. This action spans emissions reduction initiatives, heat and flood risk mitigation, and more.



Energy use associated with buildings and transport contribute between 85-90 percent of carbon emissions in the Kansas City region. These sectors are thus targeted in the regional climate plan, which has resulted in substantial increases in renewable energy use. Kansas City is known for its design professionals and architectural and engineering firms – working on energy efficient buildings thereby directly takes advantage of the region's context.

As climate change alters risks faced around the world, the most serious climate concerns in Kansas City are heat events and flooding. Hazard and heat island mitigation plans – linked to public health efforts to meet the needs of vulnerable groups – are addressing this. Through these plans, communities have, for example, adopted stream buffers and restricted development along waterways, which reduces flood risks, improves water quality, enhances habitats, cools cities, and reduces erosion.



RESULTS AND IMPACT

Kansas City's collaborative approach and concrete actions have resulted in substantial positive impacts, making it an interesting model to be shared with and refined by fellow GCoM regional members.

GCoM provides the potential to strengthen, accelerate and link regional efforts, driven by a clearer climate lens, which will further develop the region's vitality, resilience, and sustainability.

The Kansas City region has taken advantage of the fact that they are located in the United States' wind corridor, developing aggressive renewable energy programmes that have led to the area's most significant emissions reductions. Over a dozen communities in the region including KCMO will exclusively use wind energy to power municipal operations by 2021.

Focusing on energy use has contributed to the area's largest investor-owned utility moving from relying on coal for 80 percent of its generation, to now producing more than half of its energy from zero-carbon sources. They have invested in nearly 4,000 MW of wind energy, along with significant investments in energy efficiency and solar energy.

Climate Action KC leadership has led to increased climate policy and planning discussions across all governance levels, increasing support for climate-related initiatives in diverse communities, and has normalised discussions about climate change in an area that only recently was reluctant to approach the topic.

The impacts of this work is clear: by 2018, KCMO had seen a 30 percent emissions reduction below 2005 levels for internal operations, and 20 percent reduction citywide.

Although the region only joined the GCoM recently, doing so has already proven extremely



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valuable. Membership has brought with it a deliberate, stated intention to plan, measure and act on climate change. The regional climate action plan produced as part of the GCoM will build on and feature many initiatives already taken on in the region, thereby capitalising on and extending Kansas City's momentum in this arena.

Greater Kansas City is one of the first North American regional members of the GCoM. Operating within a diverse region is a common challenge faced worldwide. Thus, Kansas City's insights into leveraging regional collaboration will undoubtedly benefit existing and future regional partnerships that are part of the Covenant. Furthermore, through the GCoM, Kansas City will learn from others across the world, evaluate what has been done so far, and plan further action with support from a global community.



LESSONS LEARNED



Strong, genuine regional collaboration among diverse members drives change and can overcome challenges.



Regional cooperation is essential, but solution implementation must meet local contexts and needs.



Successful actions often build on local context. Kansas City is in a wind corridor and is known for its building, architectural and engineering sectors, so can effectively target wind energy and more sustainable building energy use.



A growing recognition about how ongoing trends (such as heat waves and flooding) will be impacted by climate change enables communities to build upon previous successful initiatives using a climate lens.

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THE IUC PROGRAMME

The International Urban Cooperation (IUC) programme enables cities in different global regions to link up and share solutions to common problems. It is part of a long-term strategy by the European Union to foster sustainable urban development in cooperation with the public and private sectors, as well as representatives of research and innovation, community groups and citizens. Through engaging in the IUC, cities will have the chance to share and exchange knowledge with their international counterparts, building a greener, more prosperous future. The IUC programme is an opportunity for local governments to learn from each other, set ambitious targets, forge lasting partnerships, test new solutions, and boost their city's international profile. Its activities will support the achievement of policy objectives as well as major international agreements on urban development and climate change, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement.

THE GLOBAL COVENANT OF MAYORS FOR CLIMATE & ENERGY

The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) is an international alliance of local governments with a shared vision of a world where urban leaders and their partners accelerate ambitious, measurable climate and energy initiatives that lead to a just, low-emission and climate resilient future. The GCoM enables cities, local governments, and the networks that support them to move from ambition to action. It elevates climate leadership and facilitates partnerships at the crossroads of research, data, finance, and communications. The GCoM emphasises climate change mitigation, adaptation, and access to clean and affordable energy.

The GCoM supports locally-relevant solutions in sectors where cities can have the greatest impact. GCoM cities register, implement, and monitor their strategic action plans and make information on their efforts publicly available.



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