

2021

Quality of Life in Kansas City:

Belonging is Intrinsic to our Region's Future Success

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

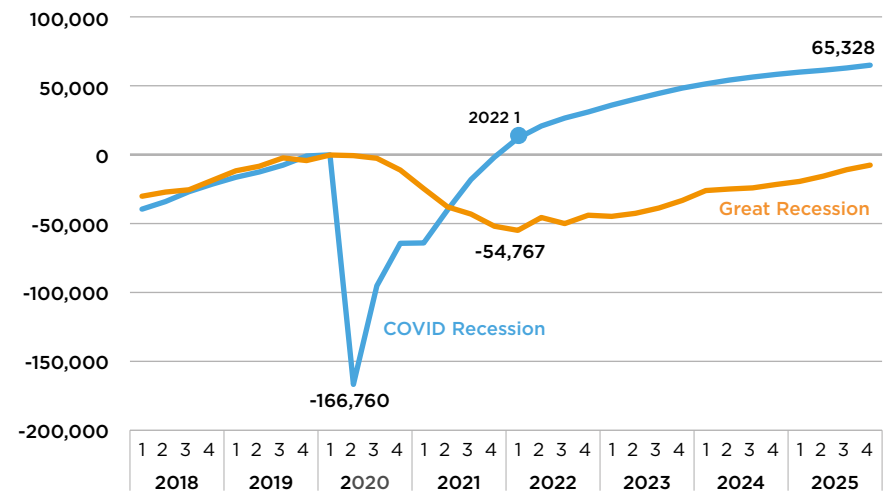
Executive Summary

- In the first year of the pandemic, between early 2020 and 2021, people across the region expressed a sharp decline in how they viewed the direction of Kansas City.
- In addition, residents felt less belonging economically and socially. Residents felt more disconnected from community and Black residents also felt disconnected from economic opportunities/professional growth and development.
- Consequently, almost one out of four (24%) people could see themselves leaving the region in the next five years. That number is nearly one out of three (31%) for Black people.
- Despite the pandemic exposing disruptions in the metro, there is a unique opportunity to bridge those breaks as the pandemic has created an equalizer moment in certain aspects.

Findings

The economy is the top-of-mind issue for the Kansas City region, and on many fronts, people are not feeling optimistic. The economic adversity faced in 2020 changed people's perception of the region and a sense of whether it was heading in the right direction or not. In early 2020, 67% of people reported feeling the region was heading in the right direction versus 49% in 2021. Generally, people of color reported a dip, whereas 63% reported heading in the right direction in 2020, only 50% reported the same in 2021. A lack of economic and social inclusion contributes to the feelings noted above. People's perception of the economy and social inclusion has soured sharply throughout the past year.

FIGURE 1: The Swift Crash of the COVID Recession Created Pronounced Economic Adversity in the KC Region



Source: MARC using REMI model and Moody's national forecast

Depth of the COVID Recession as compared to the Great Recession

**When we belong, we feel it. This feeling is measurable.
Through these measurements, we can create intentional action to make
KC a community where everyone feels like they belong.**

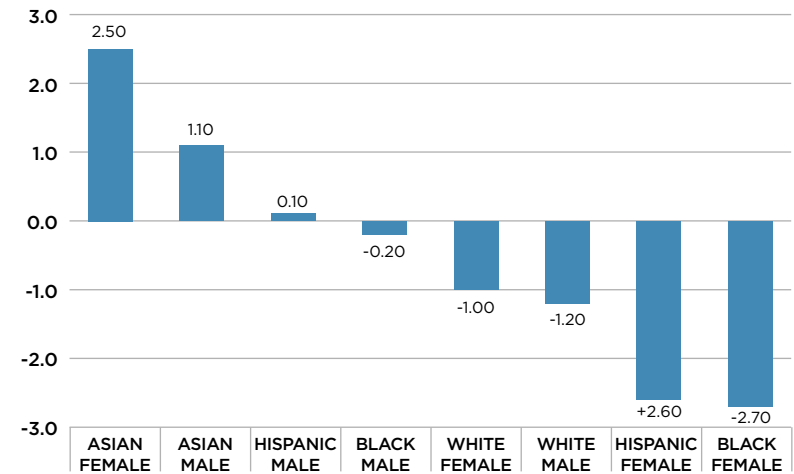
43%

Black respondents indicate racial discrimination as a barrier to a well-paying job in Kansas City.

In 2020, 39% of the total population believed the overall strength of the economy was just fair or poor, but in 2021 that number jumped to 57%. Perception of the job market was worse. In 2020, 35% of the total population indicated the market was just fair or poor, and in 2021, 48% said the same. This indicates people felt there is less opportunity for success in their neighborhood, while 48% strongly felt opportunity existed in 2020 versus 35% in 2021. For people of color, perception gaps are evident in other areas.

For Black residents, existing data points to clear racial hurdles being perceived towards professional development and growth in the Kansas City region. When asked whether they agreed if opportunities for professional growth existed in their community, 21% of white people disagreed versus 32% of Black people. When asked if discrimination acted as a barrier to a well-paying job in Kansas City, 31% of white people indicated it was a major barrier versus 43% of Black people. Qualitative data indicates people of color are more likely to cite concepts such as “explicit discrimination, higher bars for experience, and access to quality jobs,” as issues in the workplace and ability to grow professionally. One resident of color said, “I have to be so grossly overqualified to even be considered for a job than another person or a Caucasian person just have the potential to do without any education or certifications to back them up.” Data indicates the need to embed equitable practices into employee opportunity and development is an economic imperative, as the population at large continues to become increasingly more mixed, and the white population decreases.

FIGURE 2: Quantitative Data Shows Women of Color Saw the Largest Decline in Workforce Participation During Covid



Source: MARC via the Bureau of Labor Statistics

The juxtaposition of the quantitative and qualitative data suggests systemic racism at play in the job market both in access and advancement.

People feel there is less opportunity for success in their neighborhood. 48% strongly felt opportunity existed in 2020 versus 35% in 2021.



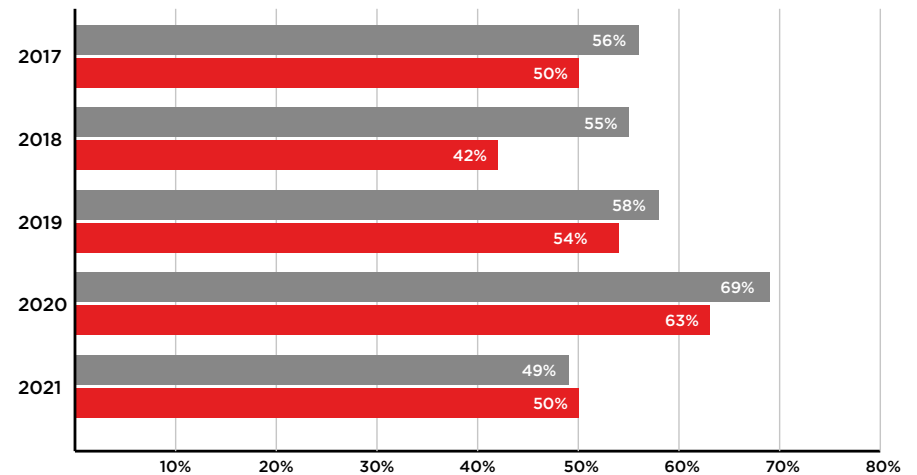
Socially, belonging has also decreased across the board. In 2020, 66% of the population strongly agreed they felt accepted by people in their community, while in 2021, the same feeling dropped to 53%. When asked whether respondents felt members of their community treated them fairly, 9% of white people disagreed while 15% of Black people disagreed. Qualitative data suggests feelings of connection within the community stem from connectedness to institutions.

Increasing attitudes of lack of inclusion economically and socially will likely lead to adverse outcomes. Such as, **almost one out of four (24%) people could see themselves leaving the region in the next five years. For Black people, that number is nearly one out of three (31%).**

As negatively impactful as 2020 was, there remains a general sense of optimism shared across people of color and whites. This shared optimism presents an equalizer moment, an opportunity to break zero-sum thinking and build strategies enhancing said momentum leading to more inclusive growth. Residents of the Kansas City region continue to be generally happy with their quality of life, with more than 50% of both white and people of color rating their quality of life as either excellent or good. Moreover, for the first time, residents of color are similar to their white counterparts in believing the KC Metro is headed in the right direction.

This equitable perception gives Kansas City a unique starting point to build inclusive recovery and growth post-pandemic and into the future. Those efforts must be evident — close the belonging gap economically and socially. Thus, the data points about belonging are intrinsic to our region's future success.

FIGURE 3: **For the First Time, People of Color and White People are Nearly Identical in Their Views that the KC Metro is Moving in the Right Direction**



Latest survey information points to an equalizing, yet slightly more person of color belief that Kansas City is heading in the right direction.

31%

Black respondents indicate they can see themselves leaving the KC metro in five years.

Next Steps:

KC Rising and the Kauffman Foundation will use the Quality of Life Survey data to explicitly track belonging across the KC region. While tracking belonging alone is insufficient, it does create a mechanism to inform action, create accountability, and have consequence. Together, we can align, amplify and accelerate community impact.

Change will require commitment from individuals and institutions. Already, business leaders are engaged in inclusive prosperity through organizations like the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City and the KC Chamber.

Share what you are doing to help KC, its neighborhoods and residents to prosper.



The variety, livability, and affordability of KC's housing market have long served as a leading factor for firms moving jobs to the region. Central

districts, rural towns, and suburbs near and far already make us an attractive option for both young workers and growing families — as well as their employers.

As our city grows, it must stay within reach for the people we will need to fuel our aspirations and our culture, regardless of their income level. KC's neighborhoods need dedicated strategies that provide a true range of quality choices for our residents to live, work, and play. This means collaborative, intentional planning and follow-through for infrastructure and schools, transit and walkability, safety and health initiatives, and amenities and essential resources that all provide a solid foundation for communities to prosper.

We have an opportunity to focus on long-term sustainability as we create and revive the distinctive areas in our city to meet evolving needs. Success also includes maintaining a culture of shared history and viability for both new and established residents of every background and generation. A brighter economic future can best come to life with stable, safe, and inclusive places for everyone to call home.

If you are interested in learning more,
please contact kcrising@kcciviccouncil.org.

You are invited to sign up for KC Rising's
newsletter "The Connection" at kcrising.com.

