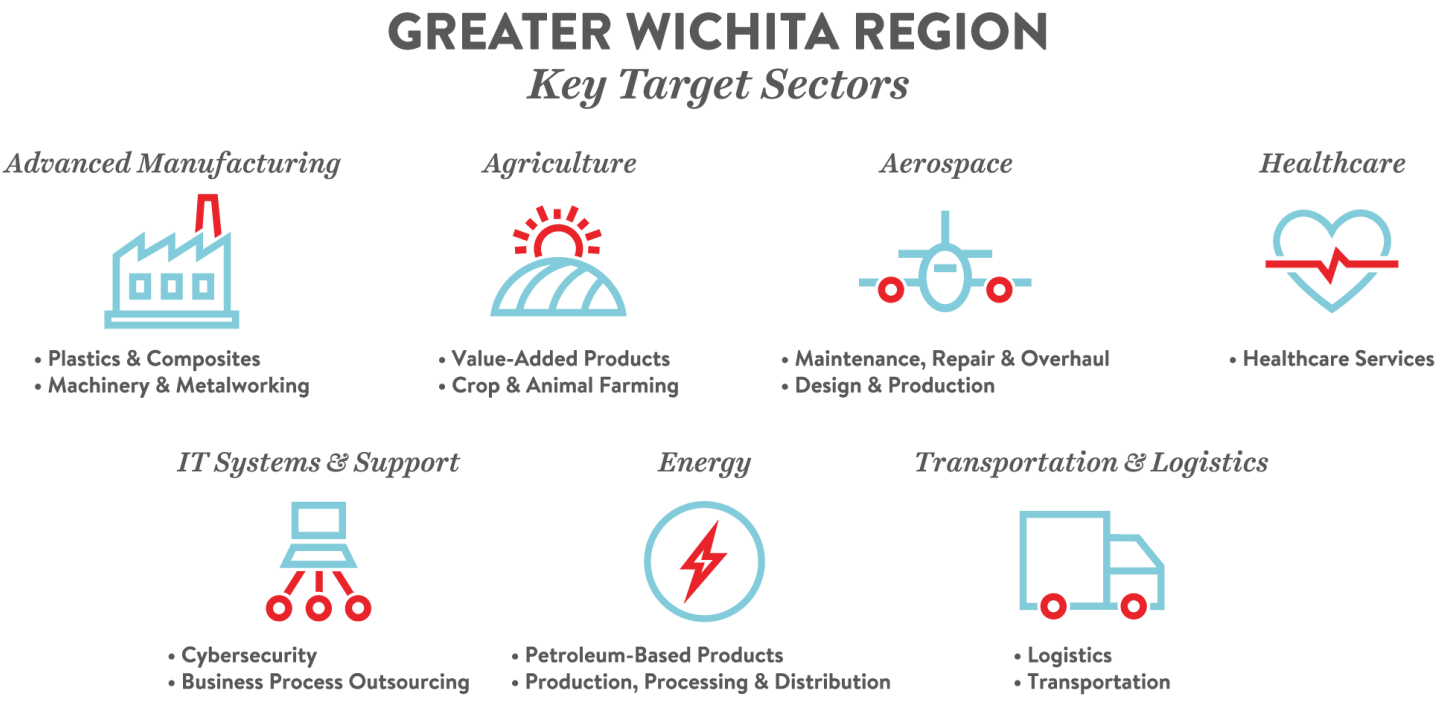
UNCOVERING GREATER WICHITA'S STRENGTHS IN THE CYBERSECURITY INDUSTRY SECTOR

– Adrienne Korson, Director of Economic Development

This year has brought news of firms from east and west coasts choosing no-coast-Wichita for expansion of their cybersecurity businesses. These are validating wins for those of us tasked with implementing the Regional Growth Plan, a strategy created in 2018 to grow Greater Wichita's economy, attract new businesses and expand existing industries.



Cybersecurity is a niche industry sector of the IT Systems & Support industry targeted in the Regional Growth Plan, and part of the Kansas Framework for Growth, created through the Kansas Department of Commerce. Cybersecurity or information technology security is the broad term for protecting internet-connected hardware and software as well as sensitive data from digital attacks. Individuals as well as government and corporate entities across industries need protection against unauthorized access.

California-based Novacoast, Inc. announced in February 2021 that it was opening a Security Operations Center in Downtown Wichita, and a month later Millennium Corp., headquartered in the Washington, D.C. area, formally opened a regional office here.

Both companies are established service providers. Millennium has extensive experience with the U.S. Department of Defense and Novacoast has many clients in the highly-regulated banking, energy and healthcare industries.

Both had many choices of where to expand but chose Wichita for a number of reasons, including some you might not be aware of that give Wichita a competitive advantage in the field of cybersecurity. When we talk with prospective businesses who aren't familiar with Wichita, we focus on three areas that set us apart: our region's talent pipeline, our existing tech ecosystem and the low cost of doing business here.

Our highly-skilled talent pipeline

It's not well known even among locals that the 184th Wing of the Air National Guard at McConnell Air Force Base has approximately 500 men and women trained in cybersecurity. There are multiple squadrons in Wichita using the latest technology to protect Air Force entities from cyberattacks, and 70% work at McConnell part time, making them available to other employers. Potential businesses also appreciate our manufacturing DNA. From the first site visit, they pick up on the advantage of being in a community with a long history in manufacturing and engineering complex products. Many of our workforce's skillsets—from engineers to Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) mechanics with a knack for solving issues on advanced design systems—apply directly to the IT industry.

According to Cyberseek, there are as many as 500,000 vacant jobs nationwide in cybersecurity. Many businesses are developing their own training programs to tackle the labor shortage making it attractive to establish a presence in a community with collaborative education partners. In the Wichita region, these partners range from nationally-certified cybersecurity programs at Wichita State University, including the National Institute for Research and Digital Transformation and National Institute for Aviation Research, Butler Community College, IT training at WSU Tech and the INTRUST Bank Cyber Security Laboratory at Friends University, one of only three of its kind in the nation in a university setting. Additionally, Wichita State is 1 out of 22 schools identified as a national center for academic excellence in cyber defense education (CAE-CDE), which is certified through the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security.

Existing Tech Ecosystem

We like to think of the Greater Wichita region as the nation's best kept secret in the IT sector, though rankings over the past few years are bringing some attention. With our skilled workforce and educational opportunities, the region is considered one of the fastest-growing tech centers in the country and has been ranked No. 15 in digital service job growth by the Brookings Institution.

We also have a high-quality digital infrastructure supported by three major fiber optic networks, the top U.S. city for 5G coverage, multiple tech-centric coworking spaces, and we are a top 20 best metro for remote workers.

#1
BEST U.S. CITY FOR 5G COVERAGE
- WHISTLEOUT

TOP 20
BEST METRO FOR REMOTE WORKERS
- SPEEDTEST

#1
IN DIGITAL JOB SERVICE GROWTH
- BROOKINGS INSTITUTE

Low Cost of Doing Business

Kansas ranked No. 1 in the country for its business-friendly regulatory environment as recently as July 2021 and has a favorable tax climate. Other Wichita features helping firms operate efficiently: our central location, average asking rent for Class A office space is 40% below the national average, commercial energy rates are 7.3% lower than the national average and the average cost of tech labor is 10% to 30% lower.

Novacoast CEO Paul Anderson told us the company was planning an expansion in another area of the country. Wichita wasn't on his radar until the Partnership proactively shared information. After several site visits he said: "I've been running companies for over 25 years and haven't come across such a welcoming and exceptional place to do business as I've found in Wichita."

"I've been running companies for over 25 years and haven't come across such a welcoming and exceptional place to do business as I've found in Wichita."

- Paul Anderson, Novacoast CEO

Enhancing our cybersecurity ecosystem is not only a focus on the local level, but also at the state and federal level. We work closely with the Kansas Department of Commerce to connect with cybersecurity business leads. And as a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Defense Appropriations, Senator Jerry Moran has been a great advocate for our region's cybersecurity ecosystem and has worked collaboratively with our economic development team to recruit companies.

Our robust IT and cybersecurity ecosystem makes us well-positioned for growth in this market. We are still in the early stages of targeting cybersecurity businesses and our early success is motivating. The Partnership is aggressively recruiting businesses and expansion, with several projects in the pipeline that could bring as many as 450 additional IT systems & support jobs. As we build our piece of this industry, we also are mindfully narrowing our focus to specialize within the category so that we continue to stand out in the Silicon Prairie.