

# WE'RE NOT IN 1970 ANYMORE

A historical timeline of Kansas Department of Labor systems.

## 1970s

### KANSAS JOINS THE COMPUTER AGE

It wasn't all bell-bottoms and disco: A two-year recession, persistent high unemployment (Kansas reached 4.2% in 1976), the oil crisis and an inflation crisis marked the decade's economic landscape. Desktop workstations were not in common use in most businesses.

To support the increasing demands of its growing workforce and economy, the Kansas Department of Labor (KDOL) installed a state-of-the-art mainframe in 1977. Like other states, Kansas chose a mainframe written in COBOL-VSAM, the most widely used programming language in the world at the time.

## 1980s

### MORE USERS, MINOR UPDATES

The decade of big money kicked off with a recession of its own and a national unemployment rate that reached 10.8%, and 7.1% in Kansas. Meanwhile, personal technology took center stage, with portable music players, CDs, and VCRs dominating consumer culture. Big, clunky desktop computers made their way into homes, campuses and public institutions—including job search centers.

To support the increased demand for unemployment benefits and access to new job listing databases, KDOL invested in small upgrades to its mainframe.

## 1990s

### THE DAWN OF THE INTERNET

Another recession at the start of the decade saw the national unemployment rate rise to 7.4% and unemployment in Kansas reach 5%. New ways of getting connected—the “World Wide Web,” personal cell phones and text messaging—sustained and expanded the economy and created new jobs.

Even with the proportionally higher demand and the new need for connectivity, KDOL's information technology infrastructure kept running. Still, the system was beginning to show its age and required increasing maintenance to accommodate new demands.

## 2000s

### UPGRADE APPROVED!

The Internet generated the decade's first big bust and recession, followed by a second, deeper recession driven by the housing market. Unemployment rose as high as 9.9% nationwide and climbed to 7.3% in Kansas. This happened as flip phones, MP3 players, and laptops made technology more personal.

KDOL and its aged mainframe struggled to implement federal relief programs during the recession of 2002-03 and the unemployment crisis of 2009-10. A modernization project started in 2002 and was well underway by the end of the decade.

## 2020s

### HERE WE ARE AGAIN

New decade, new economic challenge—except this one generated a 14.7% unemployment rate nationally and 12.6% unemployment rate in Kansas during April 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered businesses across the country almost overnight.

The creaky old mainframe is struggling under the pressure to protect against unprecedented identity theft while simultaneously supporting millions of Kansans—more than ever before—in receiving unemployment benefits under a half-dozen new state and federal programs.



Simple video games debuted for home use in 1972



The term 'personal computer' came into use in 1981

WWW.

The World Wide Web went live in 1991



Smartphones make the Internet a constant — and more accessible — resource for everyone

### NOPE, NO UPGRADE

Unfortunately, the benefits mainframe modernization project was cut short. Its cancellation in 2011 coincided with the nation starting to recover from the global financial crisis that saw national unemployment rise as high as 9.3% and Kansas' unemployment rate reach 7.2%. Consumer and industrial technology advanced to make smartphones the norm, with streaming services and the “Internet of Things” becoming part of the fabric of life.

Meanwhile, programmers who knew the mainframe's decades-old programming language, COBOL-VSAM, were retiring—making the task of supporting Kansas' ever-larger population with an outdated system even more difficult.

Social media networks connected people around the world starting in 2006

In 2020, video conferencing and e-commerce kept us connected and safe during the pandemic

## MOVING FORWARD TO SERVE KANSAS

The road has been difficult, and the mainframe that got us here is beyond outdated. But even with that major limitation, we have been able to support millions of Kansans and pay out the largest dollar amount of unemployment benefits in Kansas history. We have worked hard to connect claimants with the temporary state and federal programs that are intended to help them get through this pandemic.

Every day, we do everything we can to help by:

- adding staff to the Unemployment Contact Center and expanding its hours
- communicating better with the public, such as launching an improved KDOL website to make information easier to find
- stopping fraud and scammers with identity verification, multi-factor authentication and more cyber-security measures
- implementing numerous new relief programs, even with an outdated system that wasn't designed to handle them
- continuing to modernize the unemployment insurance mainframe at long last with legislation to fund \$37.5 million in improvements over 3-5 years



We're fighting to get Kansans the support they deserve today and in the future.