

Steuben REMC SWOT Summary

Executive Summary

Steuben REMC's strengths are rooted in dedicated employees, local and personal member service, strong community involvement, reliable operations, and a cooperative culture focused on safety, family values, and member commitment. These qualities provide a strong foundation for future service, growth, and community impact.

Key areas for improvement include reliability investment, right-of-way maintenance, member communications, technology modernization, policy alignment, cross-office coordination, and leadership clarity. Over the next 3–5 years, workforce planning, facilities, equipment, broadband profitability, and member expectations will require focused strategic attention.

Opportunities exist in local economic development, community growth, housing, fiber expansion, potential large-load projects, and enhanced community engagement. Threats include inflation, rate pressure, affordability concerns, transmission reliability, staffing challenges, broadband competition, cybersecurity, and the need to plan proactively for future load growth.

Steuben REMC Strengths

1. Employee dedication
2. Local, personal member service
2. Community involvement
2. Commitment to members
3. Commitment to reliability
4. Caring CEO
4. Family-oriented values
4. Quick restoration times
5. Commitment to safety
5. Non-union workforce
5. Strong response in times of need
5. Communication with membership
5. Reasonable cost for services
5. Cooperative business model
5. Alignment between the board and employees

Steuben REMC Weaknesses

1. Reliability: Rebuild more line, invest meaningfully in right-of-way maintenance, and dedicate additional time and funding to system maintenance.

- Create a 3-5 year workplan and include Year 1 in 2027 budget

2. Member communications:

Outages: Improve outage maps, increase proactive text and email updates during outages and planned work, and communicate in the channels members prefer. Provide clearer outage information, including restoration expectations and explanations of system issues such as transmission problems.

General: Consistently update the website and provide more social media updates to better educate and inform members. Upgrade the website for easier access to information and use software-provider tools to send direct messages to members.

90th Anniversary: Do not spend a lot of money on a specific 90th celebration; instead, incorporate it into events throughout the year, such as a \$90 gift card giveaway each month. The significant discussion centered around the list of 90th events being things the cooperative should already be doing for member engagement strategies. Consider brainstorming a list of member engagement strategies; the cooperative will incorporate the remainder of 2026-2027 and bring the board into the strategy for the plan. Also consider where the REMC can partner with existing events to reduce cost and increase engagement.

\$1M ORU milestone: The board was specific that this is a milestone they do not want to miss and the ORU awards, in general, should be promoted more thoroughly.

Residential broadband sales: Members do not know the value and services offered by our internet, just speeds/ cost. Highlight protect IQ, experience IQ, no charge router.

Idea: Consider door flyers for linemen to leave when yard repairs are needed after right-of-way access, or when storm damage affects a member's meter base. Flyers could include contact information for electricians and a simple diagram distinguishing REMC and member responsibilities.

3. Streamline policies across broadband and electric operations, and train office employees consistently.

3. Strengthen leadership across the company by improving delegation, communication, and clarity during ongoing changes.

Steuben REMC 3-5 Year Weaknesses

1. Facilities and equipment: Improve facilities and building security. Low rates have delayed needed vehicle (line trucks are good – basic trucks are old – digger is problematic) and equipment upgrades, limiting timely system maintenance.

- Security – need a key fob system for access control

1. Technology: Modernize technology and establish consistent cross-department processes. Priorities include better outage maps, IvUE and metering updates, and a sustainable IT support model.

- Contact Bryan Wrede with Wintek for a Network Assessment and include access control in that assessment

- Steve to prepare hiring plan and model for IT

- Need a cybersecurity action plan.

2. Workforce: Address an aging workforce, knowledge transfer, field staffing needs, and limited career paths to reduce retention risk.

- Create succession plans for key roles and attach training and development plans for employees who would fill those roles.

- Create employee development plans for employees during performance reviews

- Review employee benefits and adjust as needed to be more competitive (example: vacation policy)

3. Member expectations: Balance expectations for faster, cheaper, and better service, particularly among seasonal lake customers, while maintaining strong customer service.

- Is it time to increase the service charge?

4. Broadband penetration: Continue improving penetration and address ongoing commercial network challenges.

- Create strategies, goals, and packages to increase commercial broadband business. This may include creativity around 30-month payback contracts, etc.

4. Better integration of broadband and electric services

- Increase communication and involvement of all employees to break down cultural barriers that still exist from a lack of previous transparency regarding broadband.

Steuben REMC Opportunities

1. Local economic development and new business growth
 - Continue sharing with EDC capacity plans for substations as they become known
2. Community development
 - Continue to serve on EDC board
 - Continue promoting ORU and use that money to help EDC initiatives and the local community
3. Possible casino development – May not know until December 1
3. Creation of affordable housing
3. Fiber commercial expansion
 - What does an aide-to-construction policy look like for commercial/ and or off-footprint residential customers look like?
4. Adequate facilities and workspace for staff
 - Eventual physical building needs will be a size increase, storage increase, linemen locker room, more office space, community room, get our trailers under roof, nice restrooms – likely to be tabled for three years, but good to have as an idea for long-range plan and to keep our eyes open for neighboring land openings
4. Possible data center development
4. Expanded scholarship-related community involvement
 - Work with local schools and/or Trine on a scholarship for an arborist as a specific part of SCREMC's succession plan
 - Using around \$20,000 a year, award that money to local high school students from SCREMC

Steuben REMC Threats

1. Inflation without corresponding local economic growth or salary increases
2. Keeping power and broadband costs reasonable
2. Poor economic conditions for members
2. Limited local childcare options for members
2. Member understanding of the value of cooperative membership
 - Participate in events where members are already showing up - festivals, parades, community events.
 - Consider LIFO capital credit retirement of significance through physical checks.
 - Stronger community engagement with schools live-line demos; promote youth tour more effectively so our students don't feel they have to be sent through another REMC; consider using the 90th anniversary to promote the value of the cooperative, and consider a pre-/post-metric to evaluate efficacy.
 - How can we tell our story more effectively? Do we consider focus groups?

Steuben REMC 3-5 Year Threats

1. Rate pressures
1. Member perceptions of electric service, influenced by broader utility industry concerns
2. Poor management and reliability of NIPSCO transmission lines
3. Finding and retaining quality staff
4. Growing the broadband network
4. Cyber and building system security
4. Developing a strategy for large load growth before it is needed
- Identify what our role is when these things come to play. Begin a discussion – is our role that of an honest broker of facts?

Ideas for moving forward with the strategic plan to operationalize it.

- Identify a cost-cutting/ efficiency plan
- Identify which initiatives have additional costs associated with them and prioritize

Steuben County REMC Governance Notes

We are a strong board. How do we stay strong and continue improving?

1. Allow for committee rotation and continue assigning committees based on directors' strengths. Ensure existing committees meet regularly.
 - a. For example, the bylaws committee.
2. Incorporate outside speakers to educate the board on relevant topics that may come before the board.
 - a. For example, Mike Brenner could speak on rates and capital credits.
3. Preserve the board's culture by creating policies that define board conduct expectations and accountability measures if those expectations are not met.
 - a. For example, this board does not engage in backroom deals or subversion. If someone attempts to do so, the board will take appropriate steps, up to and including censure and board removal.
4. The board may want to consider succession planning and division-of-duties policies. The next step would be to discuss these topics with the new general counsel.
5. Implement a comprehensive board orientation program.
6. The board was clear that member outreach to schools is lacking within the cooperative and would like to see it improve. Lisa, who has expertise in this area, suggested working through teachers to have someone speak to junior classes about Youth Tour as a starting point.
7. The board is interested in investigating a junior board concept similar to Carroll White's. Potential participant groups include FFA and 4-H. The same classroom conversations used for Youth Tour could also support this effort.
8. A question was raised about restarting the member advisory board.
9. The board would like to see a comprehensive Operation Round Up promotion plan.
10. For the board packet, the board would like an additional reference link or learning material included, or a link that directors can use as homework to be better prepared.