



STRATEGIC GOAL

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation's Entrepreneurship Support Organization strategy focuses on growing support capacity for entrepreneurship in the four states of the Heartland region (Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas). We do this through grantmaking, convening peer learning communities of practice, and building the capacity of entrepreneur support organizations in the Heartland region.

CONTEXT & OPPORTUNITY

The 2020 Heartland Challenge Communities of Practice brings together entrepreneurship support organizations located in the Heartland region through a 12-month facilitated peer-learning process to share learnings about solutions to specific challenges faced by entrepreneurs in the states of Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. The purpose of the Communities of Practice is to increase trust and ability among Heartland entrepreneur support organizations to self-organize towards solving the most pressing challenge entrepreneurs face.

There will be three different Communities of Practice, one associated with each of the three specific Challenges:

Challenge 1: Co-creating objective, milestone-based entrepreneurship training programs to mitigate the impact of implicit bias faced by entrepreneurs from communities systemically left behind.

As the demographics of the Heartland states continue to diversify, the risk of subjective judgments of gatekeepers (like investors, lenders, mentors) widening business outcomes between entrepreneurs from communities systemically left behind increases. This creates additional barriers to entrepreneurial growth that could slow the economic growth of the region.

To address this, the Foundation is interested in models and frameworks to narrow the gap that can exist between what entrepreneur support organizations think entrepreneurs need to know, and what gatekeepers expect them to have done to make them viable for support or investment. This community of practice will be focused on education about practices to build relationships between gatekeepers and entrepreneurs, practices to reduce implicit bias in gatekeeper decision-making, and increasing the rigor of programs aimed at entrepreneurs from communities systemically left behind.

Challenge 2: Addressing rural business transfer opportunities by providing education on models of shared business ownership, including business cooperatives.

Population aging, rural depopulation, and lack of concentrated capital are driving a critical mass of conversations around business transition in rural areas. Successfully completing a transition not only ensures economic vitality in a community, it may create more opportunities for business expansion¹. Cooperative ownership models are emerging as promising alternative modes of business transition in rural areas that build broad community wealth, keep businesses (and jobs) alive, and foster new generations of rural entrepreneurs, without ownership moving outside of local communities.

To address this, the Foundation is interested in piloting or developing education programs focused on cooperative ownership models to facilitate business transfer and build community wealth in the Heartland. This Community of Practice will be focused on increasing participant's ability to develop and implement such programs, and other emerging models for cooperative business ownership in rural parts of the Heartland region.

Challenge 3: Building cross-university programs that increase knowledge related to securing research and development funding, and commercializing available technology in order to start new businesses.

¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15575330.2017.1287110?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

While the Heartland is home to research strengths in agriculture, animal science, healthcare and others, the region receives few patents and grants to engage small businesses in the process of refining these technologies (SBIR/STTR). This is driven in part by the Heartland's lack of infrastructure to support growth in these areas.

Basic improvements to the regional support structure like creating educational programs to help prepare potential SBIR applicants, pursuing iCorps programs and node status², and Phase 1 matching funds could have immediate and drastic impacts on the ability of the region to convert research and technologies to businesses.

To address this, the Foundation is interesting supporting cross-university collaborative planning efforts that will increase knowledge and skills in securing federal research and development funding. This Community of Practice will provide space for universities to share their promising practices in this area, and build new regional cooperative structures across the Heartland to increase university commercialization rates.

All organizations awarded a grant under the Heartland Challenge Request for Proposal will be required to participate in a Community of Practice as a condition of their award, and thus all funding applications will also serve as an application for the Community of Practice. However, if an organization is not interested in being considered for funding, they may apply directly the Community of Practice of their choice. Participation in these communities of practice will be competitive, with the final size determined based on available budget and number of interested applicants.

Read on for more detailed information about each Community of Practice Challenge area, and the application process.

ABOUT HEARTLAND CHALLENGE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

This pilot program is designed to help individuals who work directly with entrepreneurs by providing:

1. Knowledge to create improved practices for supporting entrepreneurs in their communities.
2. A space to build trusted professional relationships with peers across in the Heartland.
3. A process to collaborate and co-create a regional entrepreneurship culture that solves problems for the full diversity of the region's entrepreneurs.

Benefits for participants include:

1. Access to a peer learning and action network of entrepreneurship support leaders across the Heartland who connect and support each other in improving program quality and building the conditions for growing entrepreneurship.
2. Access to local and national thought leaders on the topics of quality entrepreneur support and equitable entrepreneurship development.
3. Opportunities to share learning and best practices towards building replicable programs that reduce barriers to entrepreneurship among entrepreneurs in the Heartland, including:
 - One in-person kick-off meeting scheduled alongside the 2020 ESHIP Summit in Kansas City. Travel costs will be covered by the Foundation.
 - Three facilitated, interactive learning and leadership webinars tailored to the topic of the Community Practice.
 - Two hosted mastermind and collaborative planning conference calls tailored to the topic of the Community Practice.
4. The chance to co-create organizational and regional models to solve significant challenges faced by entrepreneurs in the Heartland region.

Target audience:

The Heartland Challenge Communities of Practice have been designed specifically to help individuals more easily and effectively help entrepreneurs in the Heartland with regional challenges that impact their ability to start and grow businesses. The ideal participant would be a program manager or director who wants to experiment with new ways of

² https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/i-corps/nodes.jsp

helping entrepreneurs facing one of the three challenges outlined above. While organizational senior leadership is welcome to apply, these groups are focused directly on helping participants improving the quality, rigor, and equity of entrepreneurial support activities in the Heartland, not on organizational strategy.

Participant expectations:

Communities of Practice will meet monthly (mostly online with at least one in-person meeting during June 2020) and participation is required in all sessions. Participants will be expected to actively engage in the process of exploring the Challenge of their Community of Practice, be curious about existing and possible solutions, and be willing to co-create solutions they can implement in their communities. A spirit of trust, humility, commitment to inclusion and equity, and eagerness to learn are required of all participants. All participants are required to abide by the [Kauffman Foundation's Anti-Discrimination & Anti-Harassment Policy](#).

A note about participating and funding:

We understand it is easy to assume that participating in Kauffman Foundation activities increases the likelihood of future funding. The Communities of Practice will be facilitated by an experienced external party, with Kauffman Foundation staff acting as content colleagues in the Communities of Practice. Participation does not guarantee, nor increase the likelihood of receiving, funding from the Kauffman Foundation in the future. Participating with the sole purpose of building a relationship with the Foundation is wholly inappropriate.

All applicants will have to indicate which Challenge they are applying for. Each applicant can only apply for one Challenge.

ELIGIBILITY & RESTRICTIONS

Eligibility

This call is open to program staff of nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) designations, higher education institutions, and fiscally sponsored organizations with a track record of working with entrepreneurs to help them start and grow businesses. Applicants are limited to apply for one of the three Communities of Practice outlined above. More than one person per organization can apply, but it is unlikely that more than two individuals per organization will be selected given significant interest in the program.

Additionally, eligible applicants must meet all the following criteria:

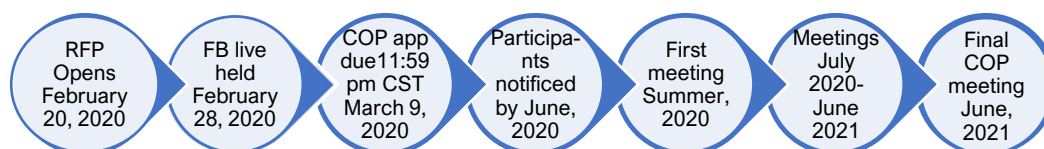
- They must be focused primarily on serving entrepreneurs in the Heartland region (defined as the states of Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas).
- Have a record of successfully helping entrepreneurs launch and grow businesses.
- Have a record of serving entrepreneurs from communities systemically left behind.

Restrictions

We are not able to consider applications from:

- For-profit consultants.
- Individuals who work with organizations headquartered in locations other than the Heartland region (defined as Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas) and/or serving the majority of entrepreneurs in locations other than the Heartland region.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TIMELINE



HOW TO APPLY

The application process is one stage. Below is an overview of the application elements and selection process.

PLEASE NOTE: Applications that are incomplete or do not contain all the required documentation will not be reviewed. Additionally, please review the timeline carefully. Applicants should plan to submit materials well before the deadline as we will not accept late applications or applications submitted outside of the designated systems. Because the application is so short, we encourage you to complete it in one sitting.

Application Elements

In addition to some contact information, we will be asking short answer questions around the following topics:

Interest in your Community of Practice Topic: Which Challenge's Community of Practice are you applying for? Why are you interested in being a part of this Challenge's Community of Practice?

Co-creating Learning: What is one thing you are hoping to learn from participating in the Community of Practice? What is one thing you can share to help other participants?

Quality Entrepreneur Support: Please share your vision for quality entrepreneurship support in your region, or as it relates to the entrepreneurs you support. How do you know when you have done meaningful work?

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Please explain how you see diversity, equity, and inclusion interacting with your work to support entrepreneurs. How are you actively working to ensure that you and your community can more effectively support entrepreneurs from communities systemically left behind?

Prospective Applicant Support

Prospective applicants are encouraged to take advantage of the following opportunities for proposal support:

Facebook Live for prospective applicants on February 28, 2020 at 10 a.m. CST: Join Kauffman associates and fellow grantseekers in a live session to learn more about this opportunity. We strongly encourage questions to be submitted in advance of this session to heartlandchallenge@kauffman.org.

Question Period from February 20 to March 4: Submit questions related to this RFP and the application process from February 20 to March 4 to heartlandchallenge@kauffman.org. Responses to these questions will be posted to the [RFP FAQ page](#) on March 5.

Application System

[Start the application process](#)

[Return to an application already in progress](#)

REVIEW PROCESS

Application submissions will be reviewed by internal Kauffman Foundation staff. Reviewers will rate and comment on the following aspects of your application proposal:

Interest in Your Community of Practice Topic: Is it clear that the applicant has a passion for the Challenge topic of their Community of Practice?

Co-creating Learning: Does the applicant demonstrate a curiosity about the nuances of the Community of Practice Challenge topic? What diverse perspective do they bring to solving the topic of their Community of Practice?

Quality Entrepreneur Support: Does the applicant have a thoughtful, rigorous and equitable approach to imagining how the Heartland region can better support its entrepreneurs? Does this applicant demonstrate a commitment to being active in imagining a future more supportive of entrepreneurship in the Heartland region?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Does the applicant clearly explain the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their work to support entrepreneurs? How has the applicant acted to ensure that they, and their community, can more effectively support entrepreneurs from communities systemically left behind?

INQUIRIES:

If you have more questions about the goals of the Communities of Practice, please email heartlandchallenge@kauffman.org.

For technical assistance on the online application system, please email heartlandchallenge@kauffman.org.

RESOURCES:

[Download the Heartland Challenge Executive Summary.](#)

[Heartland Challenge Request for Proposal information.](#)

TERMS & CONDITIONS:

Submitting an application to participate in the Community of Practice does not guarantee acceptance. Applying for, and participating in, the Communities of Practice does not increase the likelihood of future funding from the Kauffman Foundation. All participants are required to abide by the [Kauffman Foundation's Anti-Discrimination & Anti-Harassment Policy](#).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

APPLICATION LOGISTICS & HELP

If I have a question about my submission, or I would like to talk to someone about my idea before submission, who do I call?

Due to the volume of prospective applicants, our staff will not be available for individual calls. However, we will be hosting a Facebook live on February 28, 2020 at 10 a.m. CST and will do our best to respond to submitted questions at that time. You can also submit a written question to heartlandchallenge@kauffman.org email by March 4. We will post responses to the [RFP page](#) on March 5.

Will directly contacting Kauffman Foundation staff increase the likelihood that I am awarded a grant?

The purpose of a Request for Proposals is to ensure that all applicants have an equal chance to receive funds, and those who have personal or professional relationships with Foundation staff are not given preferential treatment. We actively discourage applicants from contacting Kauffman Foundation staff with questions or information about their applications. Questions can be answered through submitting an email or question during the Facebook Live. Instructions for accessing both are included in this document.

Where can I find definitions for terms you use in this document?

[Download the Heartland Challenge Glossary.](#)

Where can I find out more information about the Heartland Challenge?

More information about the background on opportunity can be found [here](#).

I am having difficulty submitting my application, who do I reach out to?

For applicants having problems with accessing or submitting the application, please email heartlandchallenge@kauffman.org.

I haven't heard back from the help desk and the deadline is tomorrow. What should I do?

The Foundation will not accept late submissions or applications submitted outside of the designated systems. Therefore, you should review the timeline carefully and plan to submit your application materials well before each deadline. If you find yourself in this situation, please email heartlandchallenge@kauffman.org and someone will respond as soon as possible.

Will we receive feedback on our applications?

Due to the volume of applicants, it is not possible for us to give individual feedback on Community of Practice applications.

Will you make public the name of other applicants?

At this time we are not planning to do so.

If my application is not successful, will there be other opportunities to participate in a Community of Practice with Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation?

We are piloting a variety of mechanisms to support entrepreneurship support organizations focused on helping entrepreneurs in the Heartland in 2020. We encourage you to subscribe to [Kauffman's newsletter](#) for an announcement when additional RFPs are open. At this point, we anticipate the Heartland Challenge will run again in 2021, but are unable to make guarantees about the availability of funding or Communities of Practice.

ELIGIBILITY**I work for a for-profit entity. Can I apply for the Community of Practice?**

As a private foundation, the Kauffman Foundation can only provide support for charitable activities. Therefore, organizations affiliated with for-profit organizations are not eligible to participate in Communities of Practice.

I would like to apply to two Communities of Practice. Is that allowed?

No. Given limited budget and high number of anticipated applications, we are only accepting one application per person per Community of Practice.

I am not physically located in the one of the four states, and the majority of entrepreneurs I serve do not live in those four states. Do I qualify to participate in the Heartland Challenge Communities of Practice?

The purpose of the Heartland Challenge is to increase the ability for individuals and organizations in the Heartland to solve problems faced by entrepreneurs in the Heartland. We are only accepting applications from individuals who primarily serve individuals in the four states of Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas.

I am not physically located in the one of the four states, however, the majority of entrepreneurs I serve do live in those four states. Do I qualify to participate in the Heartland Challenge Communities of Practice?

The purpose of the Heartland Challenge is to increase the ability for individuals and organizations in the Heartland to solve problems faced by entrepreneurs in the Heartland. We would accept an application from anyone who is serving entrepreneurs located primarily in one (or more) of the four states of Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas.