

EMAN ADVANCED COHORT

CFLeads Economic Mobility Action Network Case Study

A focus on post-secondary opportunity in Eastern Washington and North Idaho

The cities of Spokane, WA, and Coeur d'Alene, ID, anchor a region of 20 counties, six Native American Tribes, and 1.2 million people overall. Yet most counties here are home to fewer than 50,000 people. It's a mostly rural place of natural beauty, agriculture and timber industries, and the largest medical center between Seattle and Minneapolis.



To advance economic mobility, the area's philanthropic institutions, schools, businesses, state government, and nonprofits are laser-focused on post-secondary opportunities. They're working together to create many innovative and accessible pathways for students across Eastern Washington and North Idaho to gain education and training after high school, earn a good living, and contribute to their communities.

Rates of higher education enrollment in this region are low. In some of its rural counties, fewer than 30% of high school graduates go on to attend college. Leaders here know that to achieve their vision, they must engage rural communities so that post-secondary programs are tailored to each place, and each community can build a future that amplifies what residents love about where they live.

Led by [Innovia Foundation](#), the community foundation for Eastern Washington and North Idaho, the region was part of [CFLeads](#)' Economic Mobility Action Network (EMAN) Advanced Cohort in 2024-2025.

CFLeads

Community Foundations
Leading Change



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION:

Innovia Foundation

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES USED:

Shaping public policy, working across sectors, marshalling resources

SUMMARY:

To advance economic mobility in this rural area anchored by Spokane, WA, and Coeur d'Alene, ID, local philanthropic institutions, schools, businesses, state government, and nonprofits are laser-focused on post-secondary opportunities.



“We want every child to be able to focus on their dreams and have clear pathways to achieve them.”

Shelly O’Quinn
CEO, Innovia Foundation

The Vision

“We want to become a place where—when companies want to move here—they can see the talent here and the opportunity to grow, and where students have an access point to every pathway to pursue a career and not just a job,” says Ben Small, Executive Director of LaunchNW, Innovia Foundation’s regional cradle-to-career initiative.

The goal is a future in which every young person finds their passions, the region has a workforce highly prepared for all kinds of roles, and economic mobility becomes a reality for everyone here, no matter how small or large, rural or urban their community is.

The Strategy

Innovia Foundation and its partners are creating an education, skill-building, coaching, and credentialing infrastructure that increases the share of high school graduates who seize post-secondary opportunities and can move up economically—in a way that honors the uniqueness of each of the region’s rural communities.

The EMAN Challenge

The Foundation and its partners entered the EMAN Advanced Cohort looking for

positive ways to promote post-secondary options, including college and certificate programs, while bridging their region’s different perspectives over the value of higher education and the best ways to secure young people’s futures.

How Innovia Foundation Is Leveraging a Community Leadership Approach

Innovia Foundation is **shaping public policy**, working with the Washington state legislature to support post-high school opportunities for students. In spring 2025, policymakers approved a “promise scholarship” program that will match up to \$250,000 in local funds for scholarships for area students, like [LaunchNW Promise Scholarship](#), each year.

The Foundation is **working across sectors**, aiming to serve as a regional hub for scholarships for local students by linking local fundraising and scholarship administration in rural communities with state matching funds. The Foundation also facilitated meetings between universities, nonprofits, and the legislator who sponsored the promise scholarship bill to highlight the unique challenges of rural students. For example, much of this region is a higher education “desert,” meaning many students in rural communities live too far away from a community college to commute. That reality increases the financial cost of attending.

The Foundation is also **marshalling resources**. Innovia’s LaunchNW initiative helps K-12 students prepare for post-secondary opportunities, through services such as mentoring, financial aid application support, and career exploration for high school students. Once in college, students also need support to complete their degrees. So, the Foundation applied for funding to hire six college navigators.



CONSIDER THIS:

How are you making sure policymakers and others you partner with understand the unique challenges of people in your community?

The Partners

Important partners in the region's work include:

- [Ballmer Group](#)
- [Community Heart & Soul](#)
- [Trust for Civic Life](#)
- Local and state governments
- 10 regional leadership councils
- 6 regional higher education institutions
- [Spokane Public Schools](#) and other school districts

The Journey

During the EMAN Advanced Cohort, leaders in Eastern Washington and North Idaho came to see the importance of customizing their economic mobility strategy to each rural community.

“Now we’re asking ourselves, ‘How do we bring awareness to the issues and start funding solutions that are driven by each community?’” Small says.

Even before joining EMAN, Innovia was partnering with Community Heart & Soul, a national movement to revitalize small towns and cities, to bring its community development model to 10 rural communities in the region.

After workshopping its approach with its EMAN peers, the Foundation has shifted how it views the relationship between that initiative and its cradle-to-career work. Now, Community Heart & Soul will be a precursor to LaunchNW in each new community, helping to build capacity, strengthen community readiness, and lay the groundwork for the deep commitment LaunchNW requires.

“Now, with the promise scholarships from the state and Community Heart & Soul programs,” Small says, “Innovia can go into each rural area and say, ‘Let’s work together to change the trajectory of children in your community.’”

“When you think you have everyone at the table, ask who’s not there.”

Shelly O’Quinn
CEO, Innovia Foundation

Wins So Far

- Using its \$50,000 in EMAN funding from CFLeads, the Foundation brought on three new Community Heart & Soul towns: Othello, Ritzville, and Tekoa, WA.
- The Foundation has created a unique strategy for each of the 20 counties it serves. “We now have, for each county, a roadmap that includes possible future Community Heart & Soul towns, ways for LaunchNW to roll out, key stakeholders and ‘friends’ of the Foundation, and other key next steps,” says Matt Bumpus, the Foundation’s Director of Research and Community Impact.
- In spring 2025, Innovia Foundation applied for and received \$2.5 million from the Ballmer Group to create college navigator positions at six regional colleges and universities in Eastern Washington.

What’s Next

- The Foundation is boosting local philanthropy by rolling out a “forever fund” for each county, to enhance or create a local endowed fund that will provide sustainable funding for Community Heart & Soul action plans.
- The Foundation will continue to roll out Community Heart & Soul and LaunchNW throughout the area it serves.
- The Foundation hopes to develop and fund a program of rural “career coaches,” in which local adults offer college and career support in communities that don’t have the resources for school counselors and college and career advisors.



CONSIDER THIS:

Who could be added to your partnerships to boost economic mobility who isn’t yet at the table?

Why Economic Mobility Matters



No matter where you live or what background you come from, we all want—and deserve—to build a better future for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors.

But not everyone in every community has the same access to quality education, good life-sustaining jobs, housing they can afford in the places they want to live, a safe environment, and civic participation and justice.

“True economic mobility comes when communities work together to remove barriers and create pathways for people to succeed. The EMAN community foundations and their partners are showing how local leadership, collaboration, and trust can create lasting change for everyone.”

Mary L. Thomas
President and CEO, CFLeads

CFLeads utilizes [Urban Institute’s three-part definition](#) and defines economic mobility as the ability of people to improve their economic status, have power and autonomy over their lives, and be engaged in and valued by their community.

To communities, economic mobility means that people are able to put food on the table and have more time to spend with their kids or doing things they love. It means kids have good education options, and adults can build generational wealth through buying a home, leave a legacy, and retire comfortably. It means people feel at home in their community, can find good jobs there, and have the power to shape a brighter future for everyone who lives there.

Economic mobility means people have enough, however they define it.

CFLeads Economic Mobility Action Network (EMAN)

Community foundations catalyze change and are trusted place-based partners who work across the nonprofit, public, and private sectors to create thriving communities where all people can prosper.

In that spirit, from September 2024 to October 2025, CFLeads brought together 19 communities to learn from each other as they worked to boost economic mobility over the long term.

The 19 community foundations represented in EMAN are leading the way toward economic mobility by engaging residents, sharing data, working across sectors, marshalling resources, and shaping public policy.

How will YOU advance economic mobility in your community?

Start your journey by learning more about [CFLeads’ work on this issue](#) and exploring economic mobility resources from Urban Institute, Results for America, and Opportunity Insights.