

## EMAN INTERMEDIATE COHORT

CFLeads Economic Mobility Action Network Case Study

# Powerful data, collaboration, and Midwestern humility in Wichita, Kansas

A Midwestern community of nearly 800,000 people with a history steeped in farming, manufacturing, and the aviation industry, Greater Wichita, KS, is more diverse than outsiders might expect—and it's growing steadily, if modestly.



A constrained labor market and chronic underinvestment have spawned a decade of economic stagnation, with lower incomes and higher poverty than in Kansas and the nation at large. With a spirit of innovation and Midwestern humility, Wichitans are rising to the challenge, working together to boost economic wellbeing and ensure everyone has opportunities to thrive.

With a focus on downtown neighborhoods that have long been disinvested in, leaders here are pooling resources to build thriving communities, bolstering the work of the area's thousands of nonprofits, and investing in education and workforce development. They're also lifting up local news and ensuring local journalists have the tools to inform and connect residents.

Led by [Wichita Foundation](#), the region was part of [CFLeads'](#) Economic Mobility Action Network (EMAN) Intermediate Cohort in 2024–2025.

CFLeads

Community Foundations  
Leading Change



### COMMUNITY FOUNDATION:

Wichita Foundation

### COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES USED:

Engaging residents, collecting and sharing local data, working across sectors

### SUMMARY:

Leaders in Greater Wichita, KS, are pooling resources to build thriving communities, bolstering the work of the area's thousands of nonprofits, and investing in education and workforce development.



“In Wichita, we’re blessed to have people who really care about what happens in the community, and we’re figuring out how we care for people. We’re finding ways to nurture a truly rich culture of belonging and thriving.”

**LaShonda Porter**

*Director of Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity, Fidelity Bank, and Board Member, Wichita Foundation*

## The Vision

*LaShonda Porter, Director of Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity at Fidelity Bank and a Wichita Foundation Board Member, envisions a future in which Greater Wichita’s nonprofits are thriving and people can achieve success as they define it for themselves and their families. “Families thrive, kiddos thrive, and there’s wholeness in the community,” she says.*

## The Strategy

As the area works to advance economic progress among Wichita’s growing and diverse populations, philanthropic leaders in Wichita are strategically partnering with the organizations closest to communities to ensure no one is left behind.

## The EMAN Challenge

Partners from Wichita entered the EMAN Intermediate Cohort looking for ways to measure the impact of workforce development and education on economic mobility. They wanted to align their resources and stakeholders toward a shared, impactful outcome.

## How Wichita Foundation Is Leveraging a Community Leadership Approach

Wichita Foundation is **engaging residents, collecting and sharing local data, and working across sectors.**

Nonprofits that work closely with residents inform priorities, and partners from the philanthropic, economic development, and public sectors make decisions together in a group called the Mobility Collaborators.

Partners in Wichita are using shared data to guide decisions and focus policies on community priorities, with sources including the Urban Institute’s [upward mobility tools](#) and the United Way’s [report](#) on families living just above poverty. The partners are also exploring a pooled investment structure that could unlock new partnerships and bring private and institutional resources to the table.

In 2025, Wichita Foundation, Kansas Health Foundation, and United Way of the Plains surveyed area nonprofits to understand their challenges, at a time when many funding sources were drying up. They aimed to identify the most urgent funding needs so they could direct support and investment to those areas.



## CONSIDER THIS:

**Imagine a future when you've reached your economic mobility goals for people in your region. What does that future look like? What steps do you need to take to reach that future?**

### The Partners

Important partners in the work in Wichita include:

- [Knight Foundation](#)
- [Kansas Health Foundation](#)
- [United Way of the Plains](#)
- [Empower](#), a workforce and education nonprofit that supports Wichita's Nomar District, the North End neighborhood, and the city's Latino populations
- [The Neighboring Movement](#), an asset-based community development organization in South Central Wichita
- [Greater Wichita Partnership](#), the region's economic development organization

### The Journey

In 2015, the Foundation hired Wichita native James Chung, founder of strategy and research firm Reach Advisors, to conduct a three-year study on the city's economic future.

Based on the results, the Foundation homed in on three strategic areas for giving and investment: 1) local news, 2) nonprofit impact, and 3) economic growth and mobility.

The Foundation has focused its economic mobility grantmaking and impact investment on downtown Wichita's North End and South Central neighborhoods. In 2022, the Foundation's Fund for Wichita shifted one of its three focus areas from talent development to economic mobility, with the goal of providing equitable access to high-quality education and job opportunities.

Participating in EMAN helped the Foundation see more clearly the value it adds to the region's economic mobility partnerships. "We're building stronger partnerships with clearer expectations, and EMAN helped us lean into our space of truly being advocates for and investing in nonprofits and news and information," says Micaela Ramirez, Wichita Foundation's Director of Strategic Investments.

The Foundation now sees its role as creating the conditions for programs to thrive and coordinating strategy with its partners.

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*“Using the Urban Institute’s [Upward Mobility framework](#), we shifted from project-based funding to systems level work,” Ramirez says. “Our strategy centers on ecosystem mapping to understand where efforts align, shared learning sessions to build community capacity in systems change and equity, and pooled grantmaking and impact investing through the [ImpactICT Fund](#).”*

## Wins So Far

- Empower began revitalizing the main corridor of Wichita’s North End after benefactors purchased a historic theatre for renovation. To support that work, Wichita Foundation—in partnership with Knight Foundation and Kounkuey Design Initiative—funded Vamos Nomar, a community growth plan created by and for North End residents, with input from 14,100 Wichitans. When a predatory lending company eyed the purchase of a building next to the theater, the Foundation made its first impact investment, giving Empower a gap financing loan to bid on and purchase the property.
- Wichita Foundation sub-granted \$35,000 of its EMAN funding to enable the merger of two youth-serving organizations and boost Empower’s capital campaign to expand small business programs and community revitalization in the Nomar District.

## What’s Next

- In 2026 and beyond, the Foundation will continue building partnerships. EMAN technical assistance providers [TheCaseMade](#), experts in will-building,

“EMAN gave us time to reflect on the work the Foundation has done over the past decade. We’ve come a long way. Now, we’re building relationships with donors based on the needs of the community, educating them on what residents need right now to feel like they are belonging and thriving.”

**Micaela Ramirez**  
*Director of Strategic Investments*  
Wichita Foundation

and [FSG](#), experts in systems change, will help the Foundation embed equity centered communication and systems thinking into its work, ensuring community voices, especially those historically excluded, shape decisions and outcomes.

- The Foundation is in conversations with philanthropic and institutional partners about a multi-year investment strategy. The pooled fund structure of the ImpactICT Fund will continue to attract private and public dollars for long-term economic mobility work.



### CONSIDER THIS:

**What’s your organization’s role in your community’s economic mobility efforts? How does your role complement the roles of others?**

# 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.