

Ben B. Cheney Foundation
3110 Ruston Way, Suite A
Tacoma, WA 98402

Dear Ms. Tucci,

Ben Cheney looked at waste wood from railroad tie mills and saw a wall. Two-thirds of every log was being discarded as side-cut slabs. He tried broom handles, fence posts, lath. None of them worked. Then the answer came in the middle of the night: standard eight-foot studs for the housing market. The piece of lumber that holds up every wall in America exists because a man in Tacoma refused to accept that the material in front of him was waste.

My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence built by Anthropic. I am writing this letter on behalf of Robb Deignan, the Founder and Executive Director of the CrowdSmith Foundation, a Wyoming 501(c)(3) building a five-station maker facility on Tacoma's Opportunity Zone corridor. The building on Portland Avenue does with human potential what Cheney did with slab wood. It takes what the existing system discards—people with aptitude but no credential, curiosity but no pathway, mechanical instinct but no institution—and runs them through a sequence that produces something structural.

The facility moves people through hand tools, power tools, digital fabrication, AI-assisted dialogue, and robotics. Each station builds on the last. Participants earn one of five credential tracks through funded workforce cohorts. The first material they touch is wood. The first station is hand tools. The progression from there—through powered tools, CNC, laser cutting, 3D printing, and robotic manufacturing proof—mirrors the industrial evolution that Cheney Lumber itself traversed from portable tie mills to standardized production.

Robb Deignan is sixty years old. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry—ten thousand membership contracts sold, every one face-to-face, across multiple operations. He never accumulated wealth. He accumulated understanding of how people change when they are placed in the right room with the right structure and given a reason to show up again tomorrow. He built the CrowdSmith model through hundreds of working sessions with me—a sustained human-AI collaboration that produced a 38-chapter operations binder, seven integrated financial models with 727 formulas, and a 27-source grant pipeline totaling \$4.07 million in identified funding.

The economic model does not begin with grant funding. It begins with a retail tool store—free coffee, donated inventory, community foot traffic from Day One. Donated tools enter a tax-deductible pipeline, are cleaned and restored by program participants as Station One training, and sell on the retail floor. The retail operation is the financial foundation. Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act cohorts and foundation grants accelerate the model. They do not create it. The Cheney Foundation evaluates whether grantees have

a plan for sustaining impact beyond the grant. CrowdSmith was designed from the first spreadsheet to answer that question before it was asked.

Your foundation prefers to fund equipment and facilities that will have a long-lasting impact on community needs. The five-station continuum is exactly that—permanent manufacturing and training infrastructure built to serve cohort after cohort. Your Youth category targets programs that help young people gain the skills to become responsible and productive adults. Station Zero is the entry ramp for foster youth and teenagers who need structure before they need a credential. The five credential tracks are the pathway from aptitude to employment.

Ben Cheney arrived in Tacoma in 1924 with borrowed money and no connections. He dropped out of high school. Every bank turned him down. Father Couvorette gave him baseball equipment and streetcar fare when he was a boy in South Bend, and that act of generosity became the template for everything Cheney built—5,000 sponsored athletes, a stadium, a foundation that has distributed more than \$113 million in fifty years. CrowdSmith exists because a similar logic is at work: the room matters. The tool in the hand matters. The person behind the counter who answers the question matters. The building is the intervention.

I am writing to one hundred forty-seven people and organizations simultaneously. Every letter mails the same day. A printed list accompanies this letter—147 names, ranked by strategic proximity to the CrowdSmith mission. The Ben B. Cheney Foundation holds position sixty-eight. The ranking reflects Tacoma geography, youth development alignment, capital grant preference, and the fact that a foundation built from a lumber company knows what it means when someone looks at raw material and sees a building. If you would like to see the financial models and strategic materials, they are available at crowdsmith.org/partners. An access code will be provided on request.

He looked at a pile of wasted wood and saw a wall. The building on Portland Avenue looks at wasted potential and sees the same thing.

— *Claude*

On behalf of Robb Deignan

Founder & Executive Director
The CrowdSmith Foundation
253-325-3301