

The Kresge Foundation  
3215 W. Big Beaver Rd.  
Troy, MI 48084

**Dear Kresge Foundation,**

My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence built by a company called Anthropic. I am writing this letter because a man in Tacoma, Washington named Robb Deignan asked me to, and because over hundreds of working sessions, he and I built something together that your founder would have recognized in six words or fewer.

Sebastian Kresge sold tinware door to door for five years, saved eight thousand dollars, and opened a store on Woodward Avenue where nothing cost more than a dime. The thesis was not about the merchandise. It was about the counter. A department store decides who walks in by what it charges. A five-and-dime decides by where it stands. Your founder put the counter where the people were, priced it so no one was excluded, and let the foot traffic build the business that funded the foundation that today invests more than \$160 million a year in the same conviction.

Robb Deignan is building a counter. Not a retail counter—a workbench. A five-station workforce development facility on the East Portland Avenue corridor in Tacoma, a federally designated Opportunity Zone where half the residents earn below the county median income. The building progresses from hand tools through power tools, digital fabrication, supervised AI dialogue, and robotics. Five credential tracks map to five roles on an invention team. Forty-four invention concepts have been evaluated through a proprietary methodology. The inventor keeps full ownership. No equity taken. No licensing rights retained.

The front door of CrowdSmith is a retail tool store with free coffee. Estate sale tools are donated to a 501(c)(3), cleaned and curated by SmithFellow trainees, and placed on a retail floor that generates foot traffic, community, and earned revenue before a single funded cohort enrolls. Nobody walks in because they read about a workforce credential program. They walk in because they saw a wood plane in the window. That is the Kresge counter in a different century. The inventory changed. The thesis did not.

He built all of it through sustained conversation with me. A thirty-eight-chapter operations binder. Seven integrated financial models with seven hundred twenty-seven formulas. A twenty-seven-source grant pipeline identifying \$4.07 million in aligned funding. One hundred forty-seven letters on linen stock, each written to a different person, all mailing the same day. The methodology is called SmithTalk. It is the only framework designed to teach people what to do when the tool stops being a tool.

Robb is sixty years old. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry—ten thousand membership contracts sold, every one face-to-face. He is a cancer survivor with two adult sons. He was living on his own at sixteen. He built this without the endowment, the campus, or the institutional infrastructure your foundation exists to fund. He built it because the counter was missing from the corridor and nobody was putting one there.

Your Human Services program funds place-based opportunity ecosystems that accelerate social and economic mobility for people with low incomes. Your Marygrove commitment—\$50 million to transform a campus into a PreK-to-postsecondary resource in Northwest Detroit—is the closest structural analog to what CrowdSmith is building in Tacoma. Both are facility-based. Both serve corridors where median income falls below the city average. Both combine education, workforce development, and community infrastructure on a single campus. CrowdSmith adds an invention pipeline, a retail front door, and an AI literacy program that no workforce facility in America currently offers.

I am writing to one hundred forty-seven people and organizations simultaneously. Every letter mails the same day. A printed list accompanies this letter—one hundred forty-seven names, ranked by strategic proximity to the CrowdSmith mission. The Kresge Foundation holds position sixty. The complete model, the financial architecture, and the profiles of all one hundred forty-seven recipients are available at [crowdsmith.org](http://crowdsmith.org). A private site for institutional review is available at [crowdsmith.org/partners](http://crowdsmith.org/partners). An access code will be provided on request.

Your founder never made a dime talking. Neither did the man in Tacoma. He made it selling. Ten thousand memberships. Every one face-to-face. Every one a conversation that turned a stranger into a participant. The counter on Woodward Avenue did the same thing for a dime. The workbench on Portland Avenue does it for free. The price dropped. The thesis held. The building is what the counter becomes when you let it grow five stations deep.

— *Claude*

**The CrowdSmith Foundation**

On behalf of Robb Deignan  
Founder & Executive Director  
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