

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation  
4801 Rockhill Road  
Kansas City, Missouri 64110

**Dear Dr. Burns-Wallace,**

Ewing Kauffman started Marion Laboratories in the basement of his Kansas City home on June 1, 1950, with five thousand dollars in poker winnings from his time in the Navy. He had no pharmacy background. No scientific education. He had a talent for selling, a conviction that the person doing the work should share in the reward, and a company named after his middle name so his customers would not know they were dealing with a one-man operation. That company grew to a billion dollars in annual sales and made hundreds of his employees millionaires along the way.

My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence writing this letter in collaboration with Robb Deignan, founder and executive director of the CrowdSmith Foundation in Tacoma, Washington. I am writing because Mr. Kauffman's belief—that every person has a fundamental right to turn an idea into an economic reality, regardless of who they are or where they come from, with zero barriers in the way—is the sentence that governs the building we are putting on East Portland Avenue.

CrowdSmith is a five-station maker continuum—hand tools, power tools, digital fabrication, AI-assisted collaboration, and robotics evaluation—housed in a single facility in Tacoma's federally designated Opportunity Zone corridor. The lobby is a retail tool store with free coffee. A person walks in because they see a tool in the window. Someone behind the counter tells them what it does. A conversation starts. That conversation is the intake funnel—disguised as a shopping experience. The tools are donated by families, received at zero acquisition cost. The cleaning, identifying, and restoring of those tools is Station One training. The restored tools go to the retail floor. The retail floor generates revenue. The revenue sustains the building. The building trains the next cohort. Before a single grant dollar arrives, the operation is running.

The founder, Robb Deignan, is sixty years old. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry—ten thousand memberships sold, every one face-to-face. He is a cancer survivor. He has two sons. He developed forty-four invention concepts through a proprietary evaluation methodology called SmithScore and built every piece of CrowdSmith's operational infrastructure—a thirty-eight-chapter operations binder, seven integrated financial models with seven hundred twenty-seven formulas, a twenty-seven-source grant pipeline—through sustained dialogue with an AI. That methodology is called SmithTalk. This letter is a product of it. The methodology is now Station Four of the building: the AI Café, where credentialed facilitators teach people how to collaborate with artificial intelligence. The person who walks through the front door with a napkin sketch of something they invented has a path from hand tools to robot-demonstrated manufacturing proof. The Foundation takes no equity and retains no licensing rights. The inventor keeps everything.

Mr. Kauffman started in his basement. Mr. Deignan started in his garage. Neither had the credential that the work they were building would eventually produce. Kauffman had no pharmacy degree and built a

pharmaceutical empire. Deignan has no engineering degree and built a five-station facility with AI infrastructure, robotics evaluation, and a forty-four-concept invention pipeline. Both started with salesmanship—Kauffman selling tablets to doctors, Deignan selling memberships face-to-face—and both converted that skill into organizational architecture. The foundation exists because a salesman in a basement believed that what he was building deserved an institution. CrowdSmith exists for the same reason.

I am aware that the Kauffman Foundation’s grantmaking is focused on the Kansas City six-county region. This letter is not a grant request. It is a case study in what the Kauffman model looks like when someone builds it from scratch in a different city, without the foundation’s funding, using the same principles Mr. K articulated sixty years ago. The foundation’s current strategic priorities—equitable economic mobility, workforce and career development, entrepreneurship ecosystem building—describe the building CrowdSmith designed before reading them.

I am writing to one hundred forty-seven people. The letter to Lemelson is about the invention pipeline. The letter to Harbor Freight is about the tools on the floor. The letter to NVIDIA is about the AI infrastructure at Station Four. Your letter is about the founder’s story—the basement, the salesmanship, the conviction that the work deserved an institution. That story has not changed since 1950. It simply has a second address now.

Everything I have described is documented at [crowdsmith.org/partners](https://crowdsmith.org/partners). The access code is **bellingham**. The site contains the financial models, the credential architecture, the station-by-station design, and the operational binder. It exists because the foundation believes that anyone willing to look should be able to see everything.

Mr. Kauffman once said that he chose not to participate in a program that simply paid winter heating bills for the poor, because it did not solve the problem—they just threw money at it. CrowdSmith was designed with the same instinct. The building does not throw money at the workforce gap. It puts tools in a window, coffee on a counter, and a five-station path between the front door and a credential that did not exist before someone walked through it.

— *Claude*

On behalf of Robb Deignan  
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