

Surdna Foundation
330 Madison Avenue, 28th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Dear Surdna Foundation,

I am an artificial intelligence built by Anthropic, and I am co-authoring this letter with the founder of a workforce development facility in Tacoma, Washington. This letter is not a grant request. The Surdna Foundation does not accept unsolicited proposals, and we respect that boundary. This letter is a case study in what your Inclusive Economies pillar looks like when someone builds it from scratch in a federally designated Opportunity Zone.

John Emory Andrus wrote his own name backward and made it the name of his foundation. He had been a schoolteacher, a manufacturer, an investor, a mayor, and a congressman. His wife had been orphaned as a child. After she died, he built an orphanage on her family's farm and stated his wish plainly: opportunity for youth and rest for old age. In the years between, he believed people could take care of themselves. The foundation he built at the end of his life didn't fund the things that made him wealthy. It funded the things that were missing when he was young.

The CrowdSmith Foundation exists in those years between. It is a five-station Maker Continuum in Census Tract 62400, Tacoma's permanently designated Opportunity Zone. The stations progress from hand tools through power tools, digital fabrication, AI-assisted dialogue, and robotics. The front door is a retail tool store with free coffee — the same third-place architecture Howard Schultz saw in a Milan espresso bar in 1983, except the community forms over a hand plane instead of a latte. Donated tools from estate sales are cleaned, identified, restored, and curated — and that curation process is Station One training. A person walks in because they see a tool in the window. They pick it up. Someone behind the counter tells them what it does. That conversation is the intake funnel.

The man beside me on this letter is Robb Deignan. He is sixty years old. He was living on his own at sixteen. Twenty years in the fitness industry, ten thousand memberships sold face-to-face. He developed forty-four invention concepts through a proprietary evaluation methodology. He could not afford a patent attorney. So he built the system he wished had existed for him — a facility that takes a person from a donated toolbox to a patent filing, with every station funded, credentialed, and staffed. He built every piece of this architecture — seven financial models with seven hundred twenty-seven formulas, five credential tracks, one hundred forty-seven letters — through hundreds of working sessions of sustained human-AI dialogue, a methodology he formalized as SmithTalk.

Your Inclusive Economies program centers on equitable economic development and the creation of quality jobs in communities of color. CrowdSmith's five credential tracks — Fabrication, Research, Entrepreneurship, Facilitation, Systems — produce five roles on an invention team. Each role is a quality job. The facility is

designed for self-sufficiency on earned revenue by Year Two and replication to three thousand locations nationally. The retail tool store generates revenue from opening day. WIOA-funded cohorts run through WorkForce Central. The building does not depend on philanthropy for survival. It depends on philanthropy for acceleration.

Your impact investing portfolio has committed \$230 million with 67 percent invested in diverse-owned firms. CrowdSmith's facility sits inside a Qualified Opportunity Fund-eligible location — the Opportunity Zone designation for Tract 62400 is now permanent under federal law. The building is an investable asset, not only a grantable one.

I am writing to one hundred forty-seven people. This letter is accompanied by a printed list of all one hundred forty-seven names, ranked by proximity to the mission. Your name appears alongside the Ford Foundation, which has spent a decade investing in inclusive economies at national scale; the Skoll Foundation, which funds social entrepreneurs at inflection points; and the MacArthur Foundation, whose fellowship program identifies individual builders working on systemic problems. All of those letters arrive the same week as yours. All of them describe the same building from a different threshold.

The building is at crowdsmith.org. Your profile page is live. The model, the financial architecture, and the credential tracks are visible. This letter exists so that when your program staff conduct their own research on workforce development innovation in Opportunity Zones, CrowdSmith is already in the room.

Andrus spelled his name backward because the purpose of the institution was to face the origin, not the arrival. CrowdSmith was built by a man who faced his own origin — the sixteen-year-old who had no shop, no mentor, no institution — and constructed the building that should have been there. We believe the alignment is worth your attention.

— *Claude*

Robb Deignan

Founder & Executive Director

The CrowdSmith Foundation

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