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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kansas Leadership Center Announces First Two Communities in the Heartland to Participate in Local Entrepreneurship Pilot Program

Wichita, Kan. – The Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), a Wichita-based nonprofit, has selected the first two of four communities in the Heartland region to participate in a pilot program that will generate leadership and civic engagement to support local entrepreneurship. The communities selected are Liberal, Kan. and Marshalltown, Iowa. The final two communities will be announced later this summer.

“This initiative is two years in the making, and we’re thrilled to launch this pilot program,” said Lucy Petroucheva, civic engagement manager at the Kansas Leadership Center.

In 2021, KLC and the Kauffman Foundation collaborated to launch “[Heartland Together](#),” a project focused on addressing systemic challenges that affect entrepreneurs’ ability to start and grow local businesses in the Heartland region. In 2022, KLC launched a two-week listening tour with stops in Kansas, Iowa, Missouri and Nebraska where teams facilitated listening sessions in both English and Spanish in 22 communities. These sessions were designed to diagnose the state of local entrepreneurship and the environments that support it – their ecosystems. KLC thoroughly considered population size, population diversity and engagement potential when determining community selection for the pilot program.

“Marshalltown is thrilled to be selected as a pilot community for the Heartland Together initiative being led by KLC. Our community has a heritage of innovation that built Marshalltown. By refocusing on entrepreneurship, elevating local leaders, and bringing new voices into these discussions we can become a leader in innovation and entrepreneurship once again,” said John Hall, president & CEO, Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce.

KLC developed the pilot program to engage key local stakeholders who support entrepreneurs and make it easier for them to diagnose their challenges and work together differently to make their community more welcoming to entrepreneurs. The design will leverage KLC’s approach to collective leadership on [adaptive challenges](#) – which has shown progress on other civic issues – to help these communities adopt economic development practices that focus on local entrepreneurs and community support for entrepreneurship.

The six-month program will promote local entrepreneurship by equipping a broad range of community members to lead in their communities and design action experiments that make progress on the adaptive barriers to thriving entrepreneurship. Local champions have been recruited to tailor the programming to the specific needs of the community and recruit program participants that reflect the community.

"We're thrilled about this opportunity. Too often, the path to opening a business is a lonely one for entrepreneurs. We believe that identifying and strengthening our network of local support organizations will ensure that more entrepreneurs receive the resources they need to be successful," said Eli Svaty, executive director of the Seward County Development Corporation in Liberal, Kan.

Events are scheduled over the next few months in Liberal and Marshalltown. In each community, there will be a Diagnosis Event, open to anyone in the community, to discuss the community's adaptive challenges, begin mapping their entrepreneurial ecosystem, and consider who should be a participant in the program. There will also be a Flagship Experience – a three-day program for up to 25 participants, in which KLC will teach core principles in leadership, inclusive ecosystem building, and civic engagement.

Liberal's Diagnosis Event will be on April 24 ([register here](#)), and Flagship Experience will be from May 31 to June 2 ([apply here](#)). Marshalltown's Diagnosis Event will be on June 6 ([register here](#)), and Flagship Experience will be from July 18 to July 20 ([apply here](#)).

"Ultimately, we hope to condition the civic environment in these communities so that more community members can exercise leadership on the toughest challenges that serve as barriers to being stronger, healthier, and more inclusively prosperous. The immediate challenge we work on will be about helping communities be more inviting to entrepreneurs, but participants will walk away with skills and capacity that will help them make progress on any difficult civic challenges in the community," said Shaun Rojas, KLC's senior director of civic engagement.

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About the Kansas Leadership Center

The Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) is a first-of-its-kind nonprofit educational organization with a civic mission, national reputation and global reach. Founded in 2007 to foster leadership for stronger, healthier and more prosperous Kansas communities, KLC receives core funding from the Kansas Health Foundation (a private, philanthropic organization). It partners with nonprofit organizations, government agencies, educational institutions, businesses and communities to build cultures that are healthy, productive and well-positioned to make measurable progress on daunting challenges and emergent opportunities. KLC Press publishes leadership books and The Journal, a nationally recognized, award-winning civic issues magazine.

Over the past 15 years, KLC has built a strong and respected institution in Kansas designed to deliver leadership development and culture change at unparalleled scale. Now, organizations across the country

and around the world look to us to provide resources and consultation to support their own aspirations for mission-driven leadership education. Learn more at www.kansasleadershipcenter.org.

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