

Theory of Change



HOME REGION PROGRAM: NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

Northwest Arkansas is growing rapidly, bringing exciting opportunities and mounting challenges. This growth puts pressure on the systems, structures and relationships that help communities thrive.

The Walton Family Foundation envisions a region where all residents feel connected, can shape the future of their communities and access opportunities to succeed. Through 2030, the Home Region Program will support local communities to strengthen infrastructure, expand opportunity and foster a strong sense of belonging.

What we plan to do



Invest in civic infrastructure for a strong and future-ready region



Enhance economic opportunity

How we plan to do it



Ensure physical infrastructure meets the needs of a growing population by supporting land-use planning, affordable housing initiatives, transportation projects and more.



Encourage residents to connect and engage by investing in community spaces, fostering civic engagement and growing community champions.



Grow main street businesses and knowledge-intensive young firms that create good jobs through greater access to capital and technical assistance.



Enable residents to attain high-quality jobs and succeed in the evolving global economy.

Why we do it



Accelerated planning and development of critical infrastructure will be necessary for the region to be a vibrant and welcoming place for all.

Northwest Arkansas needs to catch up to peer regions in venture and early-stage capital. New and growing businesses will require access to innovative financing options and technical assistance to ensure success over the long term.

The more residents engage and connect with one another, the more they care about and contribute to their community.

There is an urgent need to ensure the region's workforce is educated and trained to meet existing and new employment opportunities to fully benefit from the region's growth.



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Civic Infrastructure for a Strong and Future-Ready Region

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE

As Northwest Arkansas continues an unprecedented period of growth, local communities are struggling to keep pace. Physical infrastructure, including land-use planning, affordable housing, transportation systems and public facilities, have not scaled quickly enough to support the region's expanding population.

Strategic investments are needed to ensure infrastructure can respond to urgent needs, support economic mobility and connect people to opportunity. With philanthropic support, the region can speed up development that strengthens communities and enables smart, inclusive growth.

What we plan to do



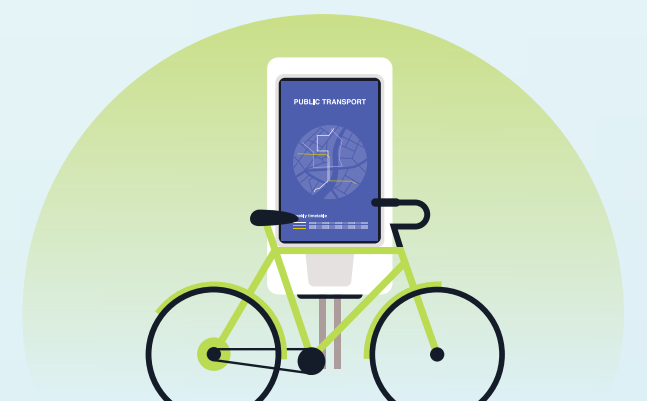
Accelerate infrastructure development



Support comprehensive planning



Improve housing affordability



Expand transportation options

How we plan to do it



Accelerate water, sewer and other critical infrastructure investments, responding to time-sensitive needs, leveraging and maximizing future benefits.



Partner with city planning and regional organizations to focus on best planning practices, future land use and capital improvement plans that prioritize implementation.



Support housing nonprofits and affordable housing initiatives that drive systems change and viable solutions.



Leverage mobility projects that prioritize residents moving safely and efficiently around the region.

Why we do it

Strategic planning ensures infrastructure is equitably distributed and keeps pace with growth.

Rising housing costs are outpacing residents' ability to afford to live in the region.

Infrastructure is a backbone of regional growth. Without it, communities cannot support inclusive development or respond to urgent needs.

Residents consistently highlight transportation as vital to quality of life, expressing concern about unsafe or disconnected pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and a need for more public transportation, like buses.



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FINDING COMMUNITY

The region's rapid growth and sprawl are making it harder for residents to build meaningful connections to each other and their communities. This isolation can lead to a weaker sense of belonging, lower quality of life and even prompt residents, including young talent, to look elsewhere.

By investing in public spaces, civic engagement, leadership development and storytelling, we can strengthen social cohesion, elevate local voices and help residents feel a greater sense of belonging.

What we plan to do



Grow civic engagement and trust



Create and activate public spaces and community hubs



Develop local leaders



Center community storytelling

How we plan to do it



Support volunteerism, local organizing and programs that help residents connect with and give back to their communities.



Fund new and renovated spaces that promote and foster social interaction like parks and public buildings.



Invest in programs that train residents to take on leadership roles.



Invest in projects that highlight contributions from individuals and organizations in the region.

Why we do it



Civic engagement creates trust among residents and a shared sense of ownership around community outcomes.



Welcoming spaces build community identity and reduce isolation.



Local leaders directly and authentically represent community voices and priorities.



Storytelling strengthens regional identity and gives voice to underrepresented communities.



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Enhancing Economic Opportunity

ADVANCING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

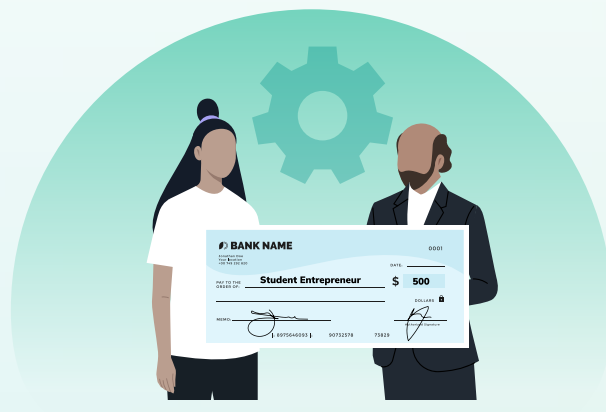
New businesses create nearly all net job growth, drive innovation and build local wealth. They also diversify the economy and reduce vulnerability to economic shocks. Yet Northwest Arkansas trails peer regions in access to venture capital and early-stage financing, particularly for underserved entrepreneurs who face persistent barriers.

Without a strong entrepreneurial pipeline and a collaborative ecosystem, the region risks missing opportunities to build a more vibrant, resilient and prosperous economy. Investing in that pipeline now is essential to sustaining long-term economic growth and opportunity for all.

What we plan to do



Expand access to capital through innovative financing



Support new business growth



Strengthen the entrepreneurial talent pipeline

How we plan to do it



Provide financing and technical assistance solutions that reduce barriers to capital access for Heartland entrepreneurs.



Fund programs that recruit, incubate and establish new businesses in Northwest Arkansas.



Support youth and adult programs that teach entrepreneurial mindsets and skills.

Why we do it



Northwest Arkansas trails peer regions and neighboring states in creating access to venture capital and angel investments.



New businesses create almost all new jobs. These young companies, working alongside larger, established ones, offer a wider range of good job opportunities in the region.



New businesses diversify the economy and reduce vulnerability to economic shocks.



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Enhancing Economic Opportunity

CULTIVATING A CAREER-READY WORKFORCE

Northwest Arkansas has outpaced state and national averages for employment growth, yet median household income lags behind peer regions. At the same time, critical industries, such as healthcare, IT and construction face growing workforce shortages. There are gaps between the region’s projected talent needs and the preparation offered through current K-12, postsecondary and adult learning institutions.

Without better alignment between education and industry, too many residents risk being left out of the region’s economic progress. A coordinated and responsive workforce system is key to helping students and young adults prepare for high-quality jobs and supporting long-term regional growth.

What we plan to do



Expand reskilling and upskilling opportunities



Strengthen education and job training to grow a skilled, job-ready regional workforce



Facilitate coordination between education and industry

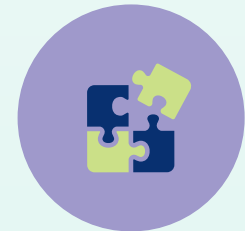
How we plan to do it



Invest in programs that teach new skills to unemployed or underemployed residents in industries driving future economic growth.



Fund programs that enable career awareness, exploration and immersion for students in kindergarten through college.



Support organizations that effectively coordinate employers, educators and other stakeholders to identify and fill workforce needs.

Why we do it

Early exposure helps students navigate career pathways and build relevant skills.



High-quality jobs provide residents with a pathway to greater economic mobility.



Cross-sector collaboration ensures programs are responsive to evolving business needs and rapid technological advancements.

