



# A REGIONAL APPROACH TO PROSPERITY FOR ALL

Some philanthropists are highly identified with place. Whether their names are visible or remain anonymous, these donors decide that growing up, living, or working in a particular place was a defining factor in their lives, and the impetus for their giving is to make that beloved place even better.

Such a proud, place-based donor was Ewing Marion Kauffman (1916–1993), known as Mr.K, whose defining place was Kansas City, Missouri. His largess can be found in the numerous Kansas City institutions and organizations he made possible, including the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the primary vehicle for his giving; the Kauffman Stadium that is home to the Kansas City Royals major league baseball team; or the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. Most of all, his legacy can be found in the people he supported in the place he loved: “My greatest satisfaction is from helping others.”

After earning his associate degree at Kansas City Junior College, Kauffman enlisted in the U.S. Navy, where he served during World War II. Following his service, he returned home and became a pharmaceutical salesman, an early professional experience that led to his founding of Marion Laboratories. The success of that entrepreneurial venture enabled him to establish the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in 1966. Marion Laboratories, an industry leader, was sold to Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals for \$930 million in 1989, and Kauffman devoted his later years primarily to his philanthropic endeavors.

Kauffman believed two elements were essential to a thriving Kansas City economy that worked for everyone: education and entrepreneurship. Applauded by many for more than 50 years of encouraging innovation in local philanthropy, the Kauffman Foundation has supported a wide range of programs to offer opportunity to all those who call Kansas City home.

Ewing Kauffman engages with Project Choice students.



## Experiment into Entity

What began as an experiment in 1988 grew into an entity in 2003, and the largest and longest philanthropic commitment in the history of the Kauffman Foundation. In 1988, Project Choice was created to reduce high school dropout rates for low-income Kansas City students by offering them

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– AARON NORTH

Kauffman scholars attend J.I.V.E. Fair and connect with Kansas-City area employers and opportunities.



full college scholarships if they graduated high school on time and met other “good behavior” program criteria, such as avoiding substance abuse. Project Choice operated from 1988 to 2001 as the signature program of the Kauffman Foundation. Over the years, the program grew to include students from six different Kansas City schools, funding nearly 1,400 “at-risk” students to attend college.

While more than 30 percent of Project Choice students graduated with a bachelor’s degree within five years, a rate exceeding the national average, nearly 70 percent did not. Those results caused the foundation to realize that the incentive of a full scholarship was a necessary but insufficient condition for low-income students, many of whom lacked the adequate preparation and full support necessary to navigate and complete a college education. The Kauffman Foundation realized much more than a scholarship was needed for students to succeed through college graduation.

After 13 years of the Project Choice program, the Kauffman Foundation applied the learnings from that program toward a revitalized approach to supporting college completion. In 2003, the foundation applied what they had learned toward the creation of Kauffman Scholars, Inc. (Kauffman Scholars), a \$150 million initiative launched to improve college access and completion for low-income Kansas City students over the next two decades. Instead of aiming for reduced high school drop-out rates, the Kauffman Scholars program defined success as nothing less than college completion. As described by Aaron North, Kauffman Foundation vice president for education and Kauffman Scholars board chair, “Our ability to grow, learn, and evolve enabled us to recalibrate, and invest in people, programs and systems.” By also using the latest national and state-wide research and examining why students were and were not successful through college completion, the Kauffman Scholars program leadership created a more comprehensive, data-driven effort that yielded dramatically improved results: the program’s overall college completion rate is expected to reach 65 percent, with later cohorts seeing a graduation rate above 70 percent.

Perhaps the biggest shift made from Project Choice to Kauffman Scholars was that rather than offering support at the end of high-school, Kauffman Scholars were awarded scholarships in the seventh-grade. With eight class cohorts producing an overall roster of just over 2,500 students, from public high schools in Kansas City, Missouri or Kansas City, Kansas, the program offered students the opportunity to participate in college-preparatory programming from a younger age all the way through high school. These Scholars are predominantly students of color, first generation college students, and come from lower-income households. The Scholars receive highly personalized guidance from a team of skilled postsecondary retention specialists (called coaches) employed by Kauffman Scholars through funding from the Kauffman Foundation. These coaches provide

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A Kauffman Scholar and DREAMer celebrates graduation.



year-round support and give guidance on both academic and personal issues. According to North, “We meet the students where they are, and those relationships stay in place through college.” Starting in their junior year of high school, Kauffman Scholars began working with a post-secondary advisor who led them through the admission process with a goal of achieving the “best fit.” Initially, scholarship support was provided for students to pursue post-secondary education opportunities across the U.S. After seeing lower graduation rates than anticipated in the first three cohorts, a post-secondary network of colleges and universities in Kansas and Missouri was established and most Scholars were required to attend those schools in order to receive more direct completion supports.

## More than Money

A critical component of the Kauffman Scholars program design is an emphasis on parents. In most cases, Scholars’ parents never had the opportunity to attend and/or graduate from college, so the Kauffman Scholars program represents a chance to change the life trajectory for an entire family, not just a daughter or son. Parents are engaged as essential program partners and are present at milestone events. Through regular meetings (or summits), parents become informed about college-going, a journey outside of their own educational experiences, and can then better support the counsel provided by Kauffman Scholars coaches and advisors. Parents also guide and inform the program by providing feedback and sharing observations about what they see working or not working for the students. This engagement is facilitated through strong communication vehicles. Parents receive quarterly program updates via email and postal mail, and intentional reminders utilizing a mass text system. They are also able to send and receive individual messages through parent Gmail accounts and check the status of student engagement through the use of a student and parent portal.

Another distinguishing aspect of the Kauffman Scholars program is its emphases on career-readiness, not just college-preparedness. Kauffman Scholars are given many opportunities to explore a wide range of career options with local and regional professionals from private, nonprofit, and public sector employers. With enlarged perspectives, they can start to imagine their lives after college, and what they can do for themselves and others while building a network that will open doors to career opportunities. A highly-structured set of career development activities is available to the Kauffman Scholars and alumni, including a “shadow day” in work settings, interactive professional roundtables, and the JIVE (job, internship, volunteer, education) Fair. The Young Professionals of Color Network is a new resource that reaches beyond the immediate Kauffman Scholars network to better construct and grow racially diverse workforce pipelines.

## SCHOLARS PERSEVERE

While the critical lesson from the Project Choice initiative was that more than scholarship money was needed to ensure student success, the necessity and efficacy of other program resources became even more apparent through Kauffman Scholars implementation. Access to college is one thing; persistence is another. When the inevitable life challenges confront these students, how will they respond? How are they supported?

One such Kauffman Scholar was [Autumn Bryant](#), who faced life-changing challenges, including pregnancy, while attending Howard University in Washington, DC. She sought support back home in Kansas City and she chose to persevere, not only for herself, but also for her daughter, earning her bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri- Kansas City. As a proud program role model, Bryant now serves as a career and [alumni coordinator](#) for Kauffman Scholars, where she is responsible for the Alumni Leadership Council and the Career Development Series. Autumn is the second alumna to join the Kauffman Scholars staff as a full-time employee.

Bryant is just one Kauffman Scholar success story. There are many Kauffman success stories available [here](#) where you can learn about how Scholars and alumni are giving back to their community.

## Next Stage of Evolution

With the final cohort of Scholars entering the program in the 2011–12 school year, and expected to graduate in 2021 or 2022, Kauffman Foundation leadership chose, once again, to apply what was learned and seek an even higher-impact objective for its scholarship funding going forward. To do so would require financial and human resources beyond the means of any single foundation. The next program evolution led to the development of [KC Scholars](#), a partnership to increase college access and completion for low- and modest-income, high-achieving students throughout the Kansas City region. The KC Scholars collaboration involves public, private, and nonprofit partners who are fully committed to improving educational outcomes as well as economic prosperity for the region. The agreed-upon objectives mobilizing these community partners are:

- 8,000+ ethnically and racially diverse college-educated employees
- 13 percent increase in the region's college attainment rate for individuals identifying as students of color
- \$6.4 trillion in increased wages for the region
- \$2.2 trillion into the local economy

To achieve these ambitions, KC Scholars supports a growing pipeline of at least 500 awards annually in the form of 250 traditional scholarships, 200 adult learner scholarships, and 50 college savings matches, and provides seed funding for up to 500 college savings accounts. An evaluation plan is part of the overall program design, and the collaborative partners meet quarterly to monitor progress. KC Scholars is also offering [individual donors](#) the option of supporting the initiative through a named scholarship.

What was started by Ewing Kauffman as a college access program evolved a decade after his passing into a college completion program by the Kauffman Foundation, and has now grown into a full-community mobilization to improve education and economic outcomes for everyone in the greater Kansas City region. Local leaders have combined the critical success factors from their own experience, such as deep engagement with caring adults, along with lessons learned from other regional initiatives.

Ewing Kauffman is often described as a common man who did uncommon things. Through the Kansas City-based scholarships, he encouraged young people from his hometown to become educated, and excel in work, life, and community service. To nurture the next generation of Kansas City learners and leaders, his namesake foundation now asks students and all their community supporters to be [uncommon](#). Acting together, their aligned efforts are leading to an uncommon legacy for Ewing Marion Kauffman.

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For more on the Kauffman Scholars visit [kauffmanscholars.org](http://kauffmanscholars.org), and for more on the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation visit [kauffman.org](http://kauffman.org).

This case study is one of 12 in a suite of case studies focused on how donors are supporting scholarships to create change. These case studies showcase the rich and varied narratives of giving in the scholarships space, giving insight to the philanthropy landscape and approach for foundations, academics, and practitioners.

The case studies have been developed in companionship with Candid's project [Scholarships for Change](#), a dynamic hub that pulls together data and knowledge to tell the story of how philanthropic dollars are supporting transformative scholarships. It includes a mapping tool and a repository of reports and case studies to learn from peers. The site was made possible through the generous support of The Ford Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Please visit [scholarshipsforchange.org](http://scholarshipsforchange.org) to explore further.

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