

# 2024

YEAR IN REVIEW

+

FIVE YEAR LOOKBACK



**HEARTLAND  
FORWARD**

AN INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMIC RENEWAL



Founded in 2019, Heartland Forward is the nation's only think-and-do tank dedicated to advancing economic success in the middle of the country - the heartland.

We define the heartland as 20 states in the middle of the country - making it the third largest GDP in the world: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin.

## AS WE WORK TO ACCELERATE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE HEARTLAND WE FOCUS ON THREE CORE IMPACT AREAS:



### **REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS**

ensuring the heartland remains the third largest GDP in the world



### **TALENT PIPELINE**

growing human capital, innovation, workforce and entrepreneurship



### **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

creating and sustaining healthy families, individuals and communities



## WHO WE ARE

We are the only think-and-do tank leading the way forward to achieve an ever-stronger economic future in the heartland.

## WHAT WE DO

We build strong public-private partnerships, engage in cutting-edge research, convene policymakers, philanthropy, academia, investors and cross-industry leaders—all in service of accelerating economic growth.

## HOW WE DO IT

As a think-and-do tank, we apply our research and work on the ground to develop and implement innovative programming and initiatives, host events and advocate at the federal, state and local level for smart policy and economic solutions.



A BOLD GOAL

\$500M

IN 5 YEARS

We are committed to generating \$500 million in economic impact in the heartland by 2030 to transform and build a thriving future for the heartland.



# LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on 2024 and look forward to an exciting 2025, we are proud to share the strides Heartland Forward has made to drive economic growth and innovation across the heartland.

2024 marked a pivotal moment in our journey as we celebrated our fifth anniversary. We embraced bold leadership changes, launched transformative initiatives and expanded our research and programming. Together, these efforts set the stage for Heartland Forward to set a goal of **generating \$500 million in economic impact in the heartland by 2030**. Through our work we will ensure the heartland remains the third largest GDP in the world.

As we chart our course for 2025 and beyond, Heartland Forward is steadfast in its commitment to creating thriving, resilient communities across the heartland. We will continue to advance our research and programs to new and unprecedented levels.

We will:

- Launch *Pulse of the Heartland* to provide real-time economic insights and showcase regional competitiveness.
- Continue to drive forward multi-pronged, multi-state initiatives to connect unconnected communities to affordable high-speed internet, grow the talent pipeline and strengthen health and wellness.
- Ensure our communities are leading and are not left behind, in 2025 we are ramping up our research and programs to focus on harnessing the power of AI in the heartland. We know understanding the impact of AI on health care, manufacturing, agriculture and education in the heartland is an increasingly urgent matter for policymakers, business leaders and broader society.

We are thrilled to host the Heartland Summit, May 7-8, 2025 in Bentonville, Arkansas. For the fourth time, our flagship event will bring together 350 policymakers, investors, entrepreneurs, business, philanthropy and thought leaders to “Meet in the Middle” across sectors, geographies and generations.

Our collective efforts—from innovative research to impactful programs—will continue to strengthen and grow the region’s potential and drive measurable economic growth. We are excited for the journey ahead and hope you will join us in helping advance economic growth in the heartland.

**Ross DeVol**  
Chairman of the Board and CEO

**Angie Cooper**  
President and Chief Operating Officer



# THE POWER OF HEARTLAND FORWARD: THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

2018



Olivia and Tom Walton and Steuart Walton launched the first **Heartland Summit**



2019

Jim Walton launched Heartland Forward **think-and-do tank**



2020

Heartland Forward released "**Young Firms**" report

2021



The **Builders + Backers Idea Accelerator** powered by Heartland Forward is launched



Heartland Forward launches "**Connecting the Heartland**" and helped to **connect 120k** previously unserved households to **affordable high-speed internet**

2022

**Secret sauce communities** launched at the Heartland Summit

2023



Heartland Forward launched the **Heartland Health Caucus** after report entitled "**Healthcare Access in the Heartland: How to Improve Services in Rural America**"

2024

Heartland Forward releases "**Maternal Health Report**" and Action Plan



Heartland Forward Supported **1000 entrepreneurs** and provided **\$10M in new ventures**

2025

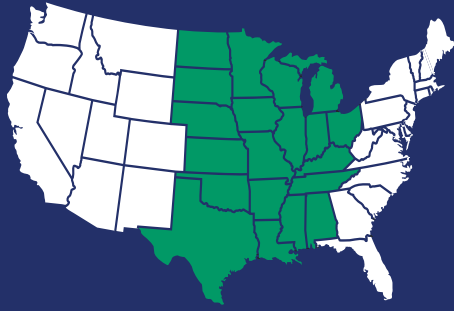
Heartland Forward launched **Pulse of the Heartland** to regularly feature **exclusive heartland-focused economic research**, providing content and insights for stakeholders on key economic topics



Heartland Forward launches **rootEd Arkansas** to drive economic growth through **rural education and workforce development**



# THE PAST FIVE YEARS, BY THE NUMBERS



20 states making up the third largest GDP in the world

## HEARTLAND FORWARD ACCOMPLISHMENT SNAPSHOT: THE PAST FIVE YEARS

**\$10,000,000**

raised to support 1000 entrepreneurs across the heartland

**230,000+**

enrollments in the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) supported

**120,000**

previously unserved households connected to affordable high-speed internet

**100,000**

households have been helped to enroll in home internet service

**20,000**

residents received digital skills training through our facilitated programming

**1,500+**

attendees of Heartland Summits and other heartland events

**1,000**

entrepreneurs supported through the Builders + Backers Idea Accelerator

**110+**

speaking engagements

**70+**

reports released featuring qualitative and quantitative data and insights

**20+**

communities enabled to implement expansion projects via grants

**10+**

initiatives + programs launched

**8**

states represented in the Heartland Health Caucus

## AND WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED!



RESEARCH  
INTO ACTION:

OUR WORK AND IMPACT  
IN 2024 BY THE NUMBERS

NEW GOAL  
ANNOUNCED  
DECEMBER 2024

\$500M  
IN 5 YEARS

## 5 REPORTS RELEASED

- 5th Annual Most Dynamic Metropolitans
- Most Dynamic Micropolitans
- The Economic Case for Investing in Maternal Health
- NASDAQ Entrepreneurial Center Revitalizing Innovation: Models of Equitable Entrepreneurship Across the United States
- Engineers, Computer Scientists and Data Scientists As Drivers of Economic Growth

## 6 NEW PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES LAUNCHED

- Harnessing AI in the Heartland
- rootEd
- Heartland Jobs Board
- Maternal Health Action Plan
- Connecting the Heartland Newsletter
- Nursing Pathways

## 6 EXPANSIONS OF ONGOING PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES



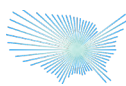
### Telehealth module

- Arkansas
- Oklahoma



### Idea Accelerator

- Arkansas
- Oklahoma
- Alabama



### Expanded our Heartland Health Caucus to 8 member states

- Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma and Tennessee

## 30+ IN-PERSON CONVENINGS AND EVENTS HOSTED WITH POLICYMAKERS AND CROSS-INDUSTRY LEADERS, INCLUDING FEATURED SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- Salon-style dinners on AI focused on:
  - Health, Finance, Entertainment and Policy
  - Agriculture, Technology and Policy
- Heartland Health Caucus
- Northwest Arkansas Health Summit highlighting *The Economic Case for Investing in Maternal Health*
- U.S. Conference of Mayors panel highlighting *Most Dynamic Metropolitans* and Secret Sauce communities
- GOPAC highlighting the work of the Heartland Health Caucus
- NASDAQ Entrepreneurial Center highlighting findings of *Revitalizing Innovation: Models of Equitable Entrepreneurship Across the United States*
- University of Arkansas and Arkansas Department of Commerce release of *Engineers, Computer Scientists and Data Scientists As Drivers of Economic Growth*
- AscendRural Summit

## 2024 MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

- 805 media pieces
- 22 press releases
- 11 Heartland Happenings newsletters distributed with a total of 50,541 openings
- Launched the Connecting the Heartland newsletter





We are so grateful to all of our  
donors over the past five years.



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