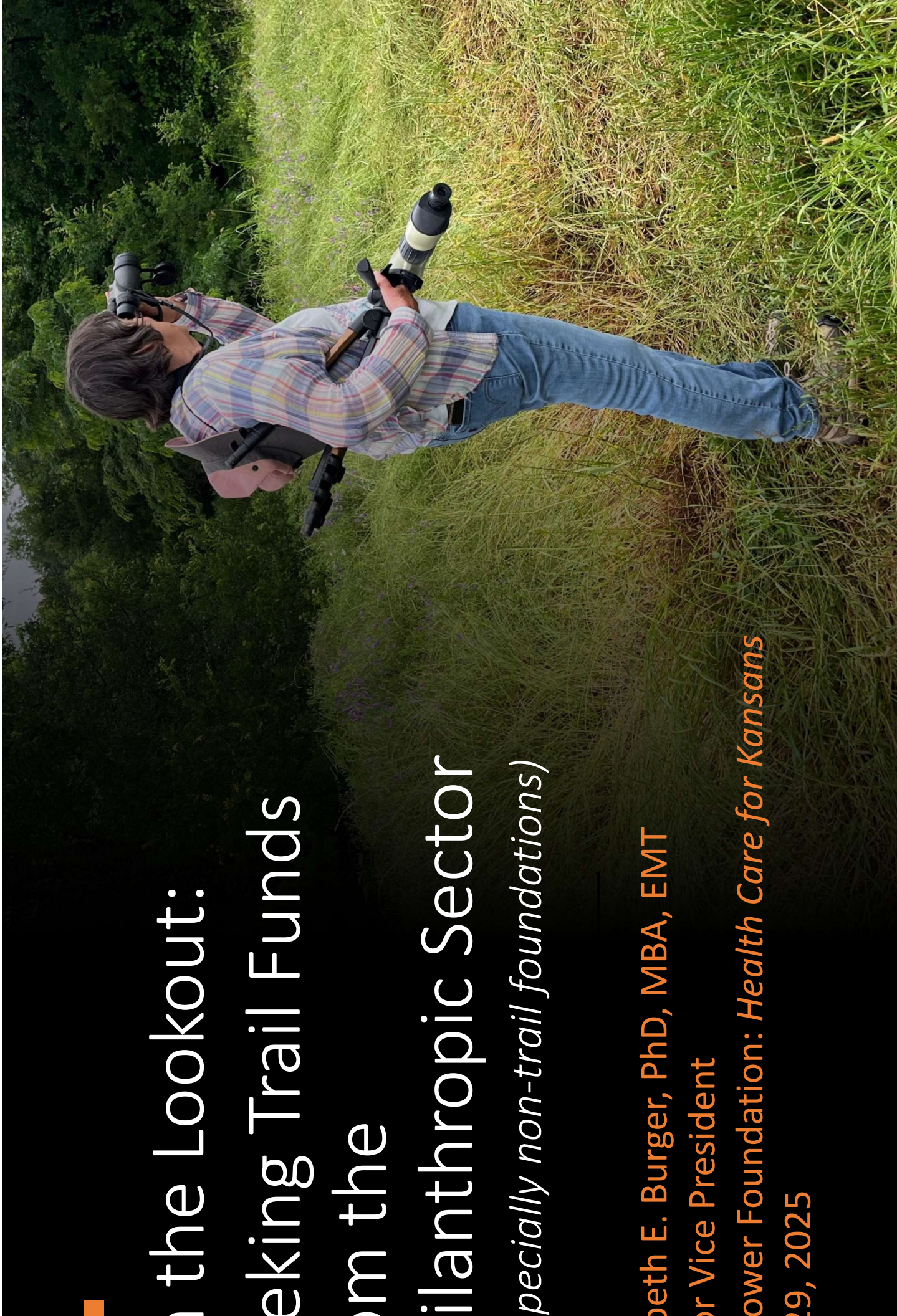


in the Lookout: eking Trail Funds om the ilanthropic Sector *(specially non-trail foundations)*

beth E. Burger, PhD, MBA, EMT
or Vice President
ower Foundation: *Health Care for Kansans*
2025



Investing in People and Places for a Healthier Kansas

ABOUT SUNFLOWER FOUNDATION

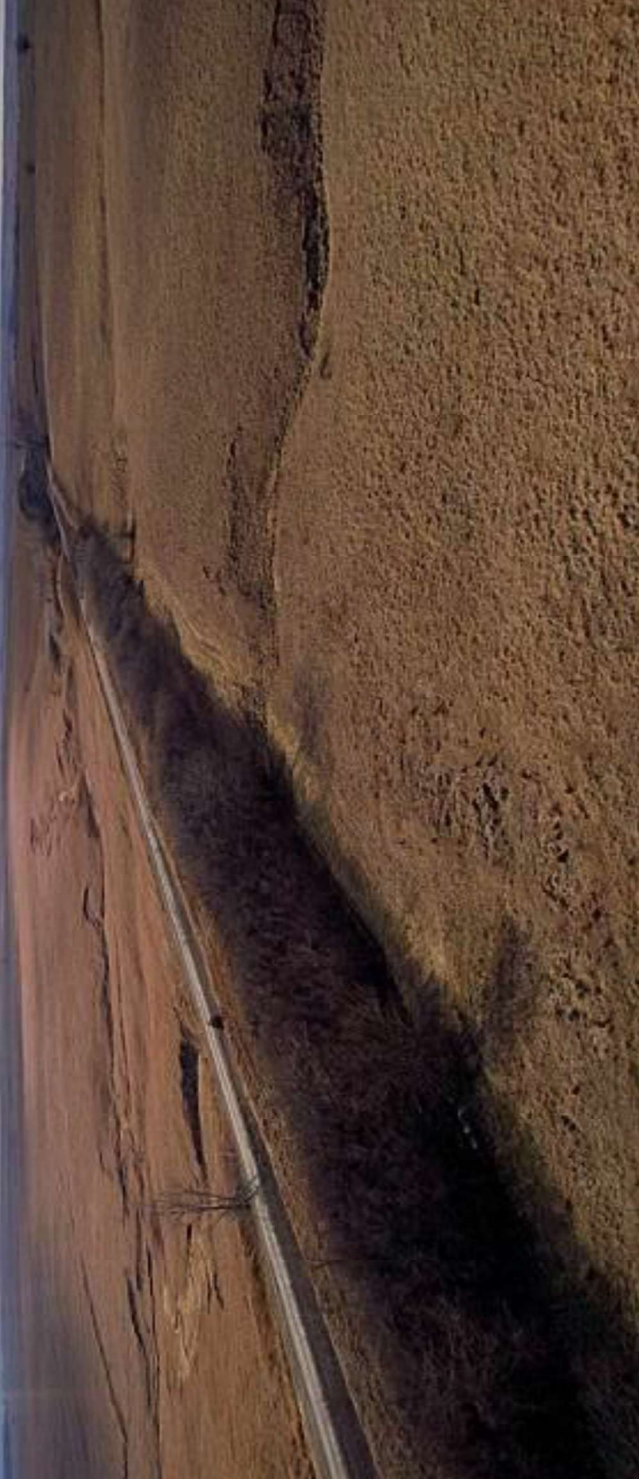


unflower Foundation has proudly supported 200+ trail projects in 80+ counties over the past two decades.

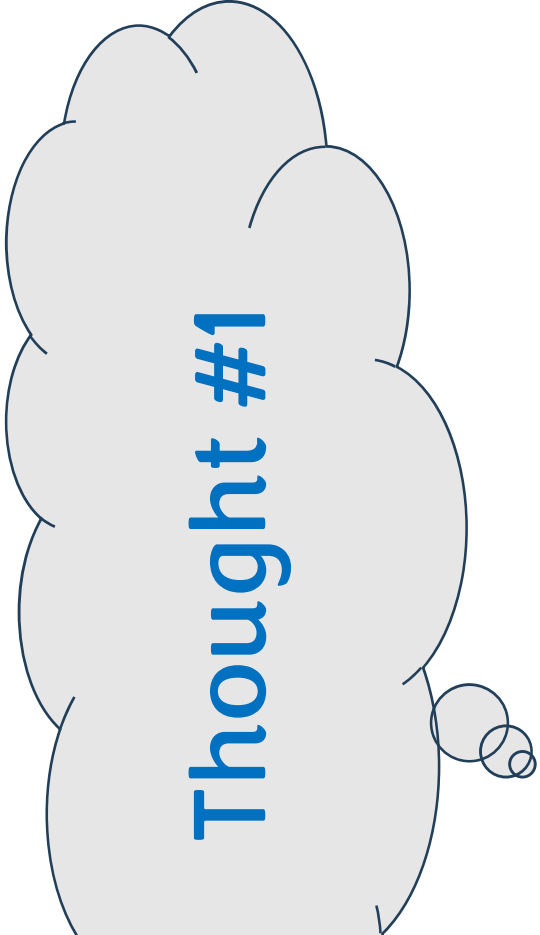


Kansas Landscape on Trails

*Existing constraints can open
the skies for new ideas.*



- No funds earmarked for trails from SO
- 1990's – 2020: Ongoing resistance and lawsuits challenging KRTA
- 85% of Kansas counties are classified as rural or frontier, more cows than people
- < 2% of land is public
- Many entire counties do not have a single public trail



Thought #1

WE all know the multiple benefits of trails,
often backed by science and research, but
not everyone does. Make it easy and
enjoyable for funders to learn.

How do trail benefits connect to a funder's core mission?

#1 Physical Health Benefits: Outdoor Activity & Exercise;
Nature-Derived Health Benefits

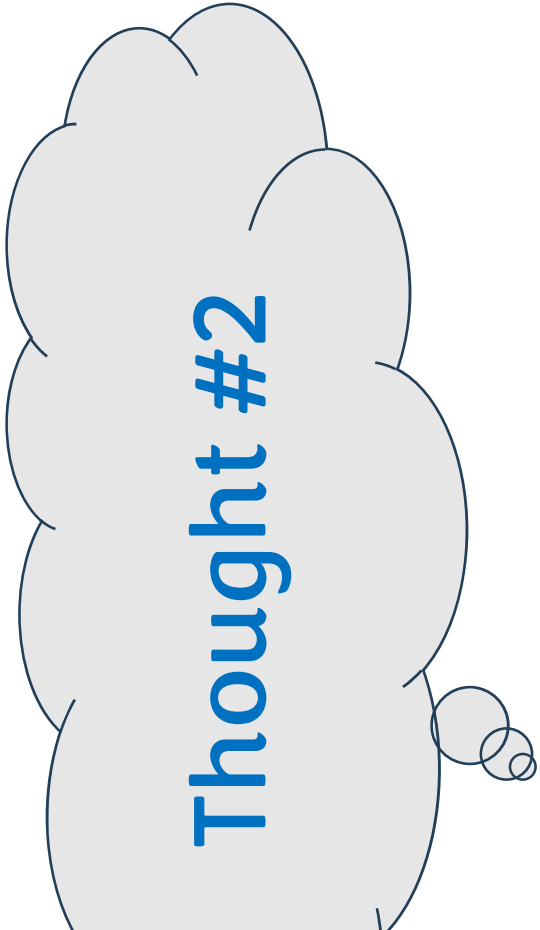
#2 Mental Health Benefits: Reduced Stress, Improved Cognition
Enhanced Emotional Well-Being, Nature-Derived Health Benefits

#3 Social Benefits: Civic Enhancement & Pride,
Quality of Life, Social Cohesion & Engagement

#4 Community Benefits: Potential Catalyst for Community-Drive
Economic Development (generative vs. extractive)

#5 Equal Benefits (equity): Public trails are accessible to people
of all ages, incomes, abilities, backgrounds and beliefs





Thought #2

Understand WHY trails are often dismissed as agents of change, then help funders understand a trail's potential by using language and framing familiar to funders.



Trails are Tangible. Too Tangible. Without the right framing, trails can be seen as too “downstream” by many funders.

PHILANTHROPY VS CHARITY

Philanthropy - literally, “love of mankind” - refers to active efforts to promote human welfare. Philanthropies provide resources in the form of gifts, grants, technical support, capacity building, in-kind donations, community development and strategic planning.

Charity is used to describe giving that directly fulfills urgent and basic needs and alleviate human* suffering. **“DOWNSTREAM”**

Philanthropy is designed to address deeply-rooted, systemic issues to ease the human suffering. **“UPSTREAM”**

Example: Food pantry provides emergency assistance food: **CHARITY**

Example: Food pantry part of larger initiative to change the quality of food offered to clients to address the systemic challenge of food insecurity’s link to obesity and chronic disease: **PHILANTHROPY**



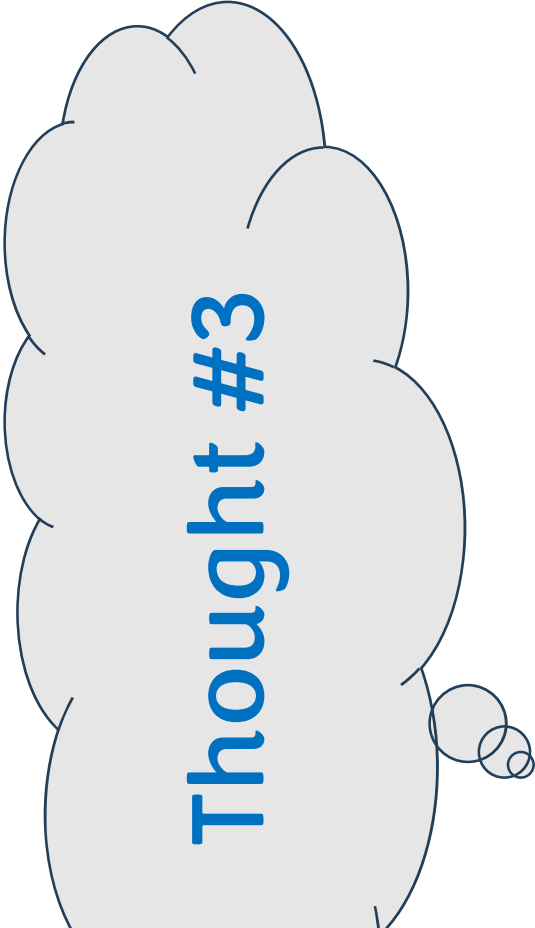
Where do trails fit?

CONSIDER THIS FRAMING

One trail is **more** than just a physical infrastructure that provides a great experience to **individual users**.

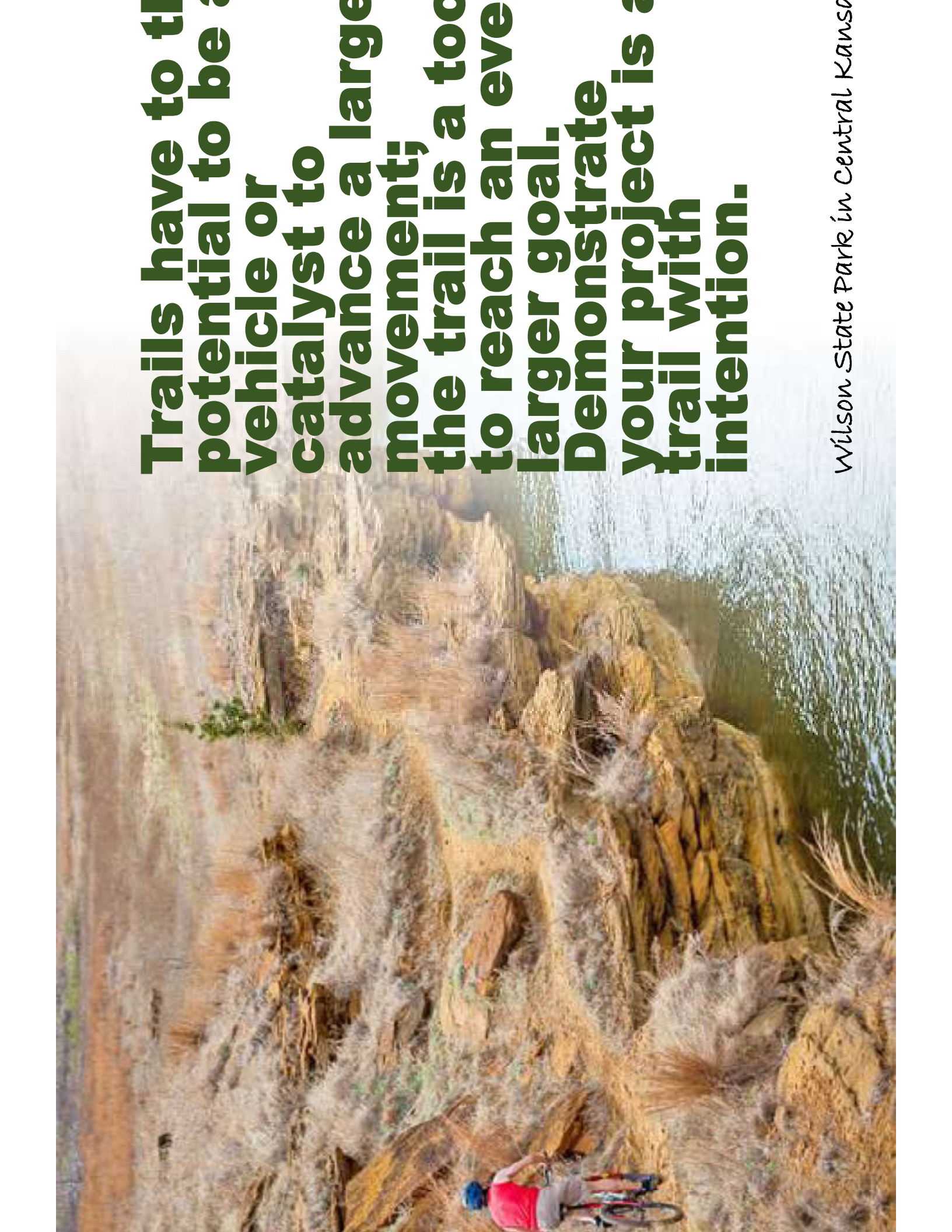
The trail is ALSO a valuable tool that can play a key role to address those **upstream** **community conditions** that can lead to problems **downstream**.





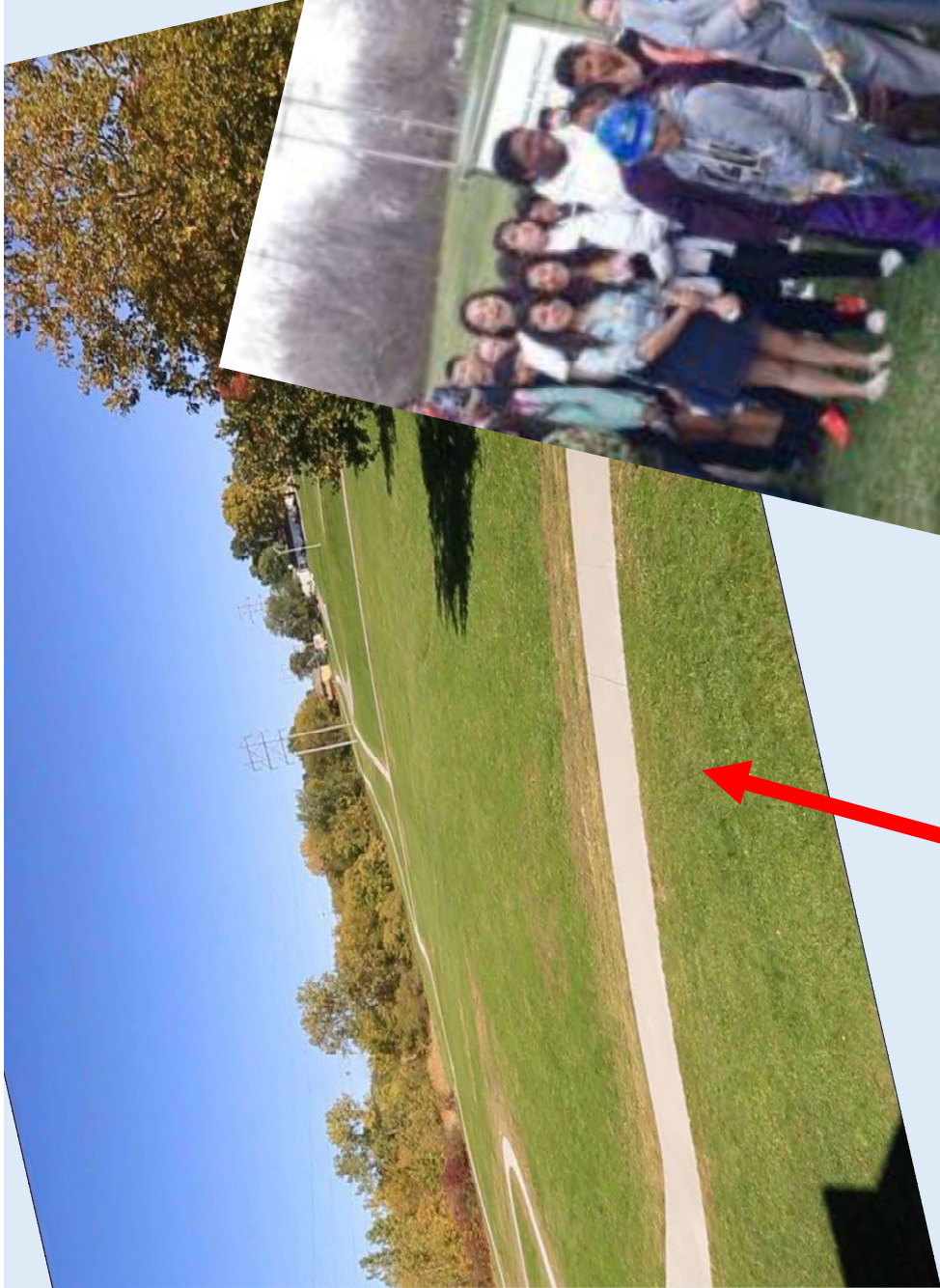
Thought #3

Demonstrate how a trails intrinsic value goes far beyond its physical form.

A person wearing a red shirt and a blue helmet is riding a bicycle on a rocky, dirt trail. The trail is surrounded by dry, yellowish-brown grass and scattered rocks. In the background, there is a body of water, likely a reservoir or lake, with a hazy, mountainous landscape in the distance. The overall scene is a natural, outdoor setting.

Trails have to take full advantage of the potential to be a vehicle or catalyst to advance a large movement; the trail is a tool to reach an even larger goal. Demonstrate your project is a trail with intention.

Wilson State Park in Central Kansas



THIS is part of the
bigger picture!



Harmon High School
Walking Trail...
much more than
trip of concrete!



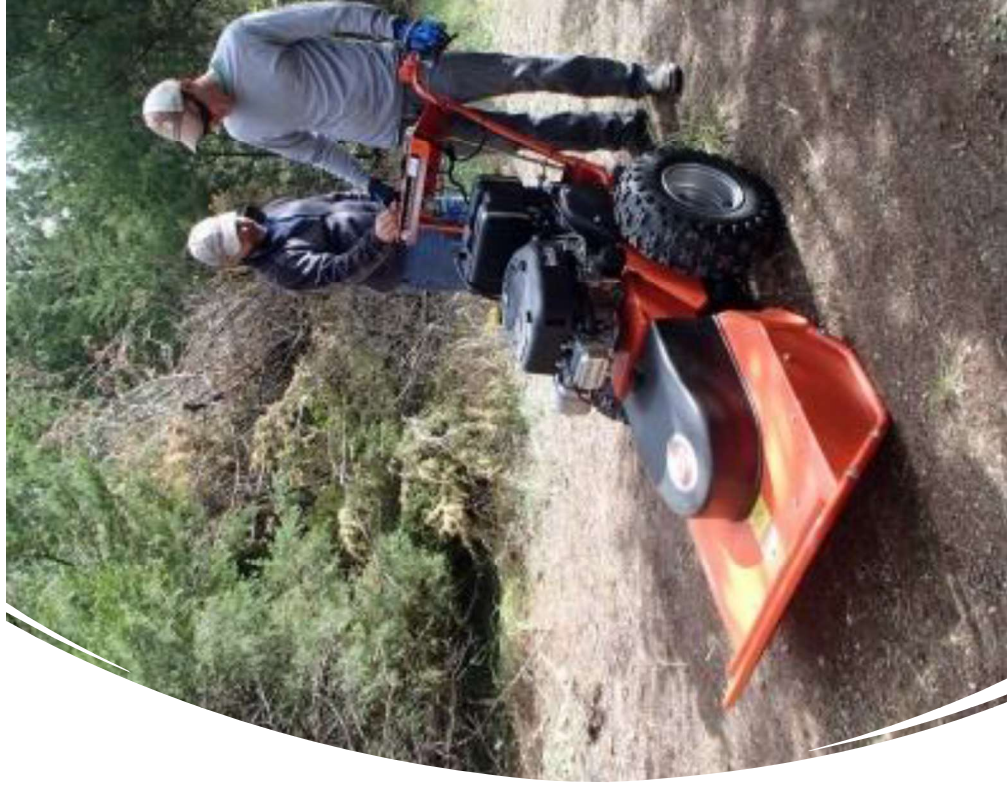
VS.

We're building a trail."

"We're changing the w



Thought #4



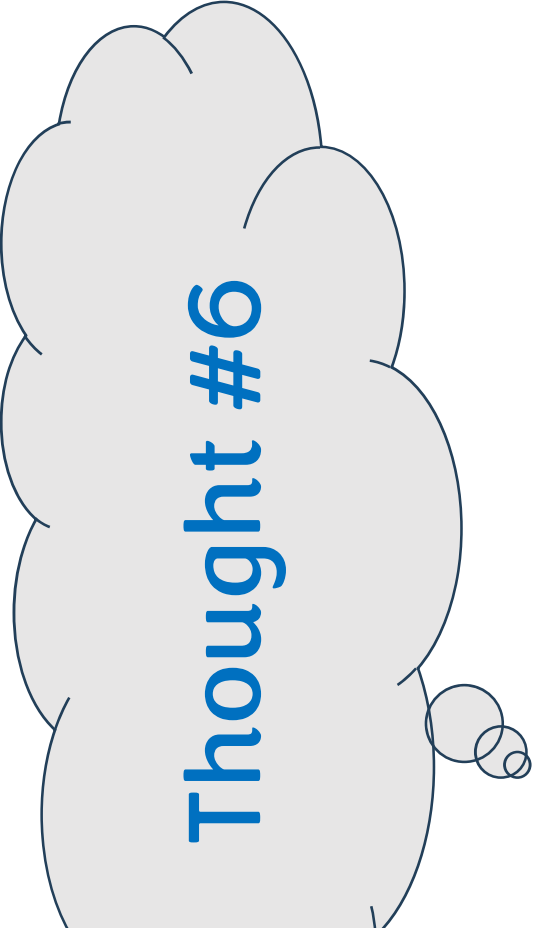
Working with philanthropy requires a different set of tools (language).

Less about Pulaski's... More
about Partnerships, People
and Possibilities

Less about Bench cutting...
More about Cross-cutting
Collaboration and
Community Connectivity

Less single focus
("build/maintain more")
More big picture
("what does this
represent?")





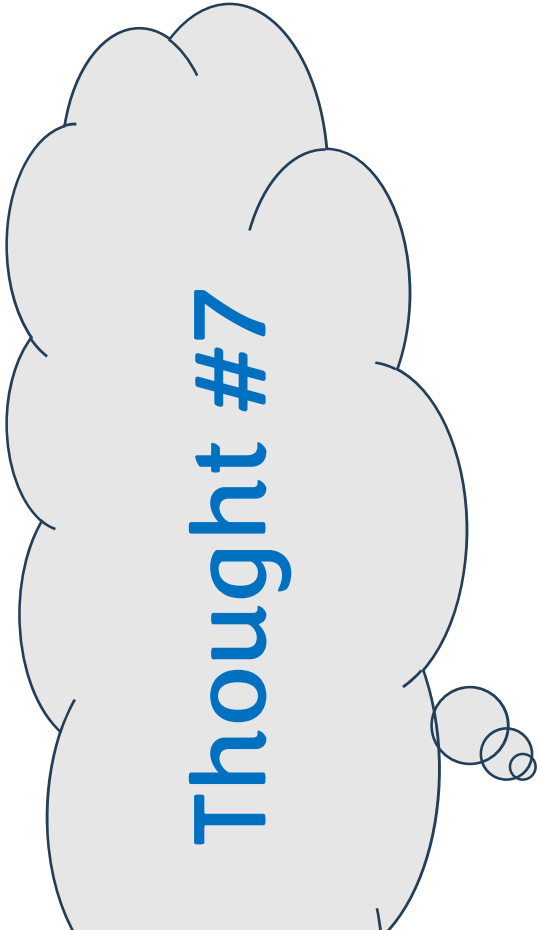
Thought #6

Remember that many philanthropies are focused on righting the injustices of the world; thus, they may prioritize certain populations, typically those underserved.



Health philanthro
tends to be less
interested in people
already using trails
and more
interested in people
NOT using trails a
WHY.

*Sorry, not many health
foundations will fund this guy.*



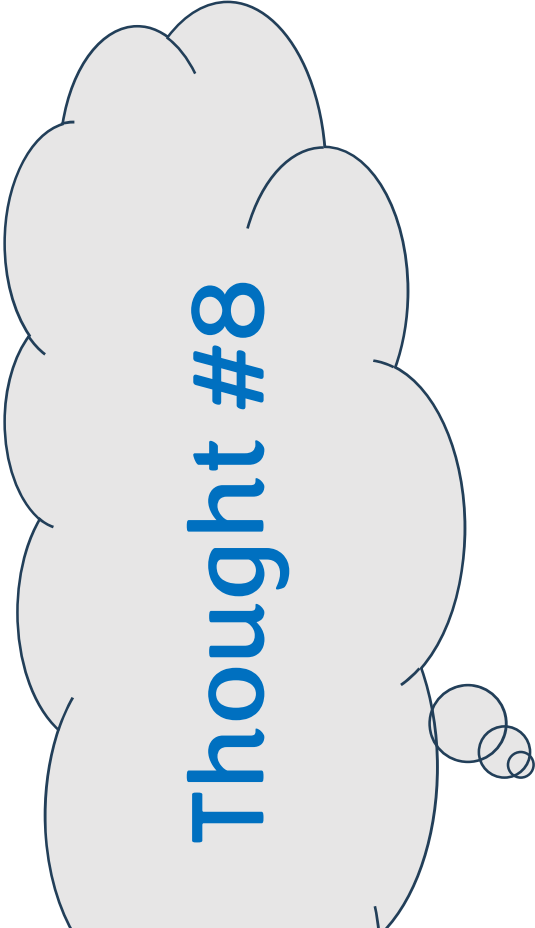
Thought #7

Non-trail philanthropy, like much of the world, does not understand the care and feeding of trails. Gently help them learn.

Elk River Hiking Trail, Elk City State Park, KS

- If asked about trails, most people will it's the job of local government/municipality with a dedicated budget & staff. You know, like roads!
- Few people realize that trails are birth of a powerful (if fragile) process of persistence, leadership, technical expertise, grants fundraising, and volunteer sweat equity.
- Even fewer people realize this same process is necessary to support these trails... in perpetuity. Help funders understand the trails are living things need constant care.

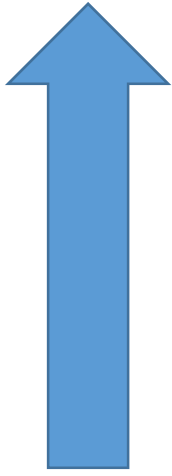




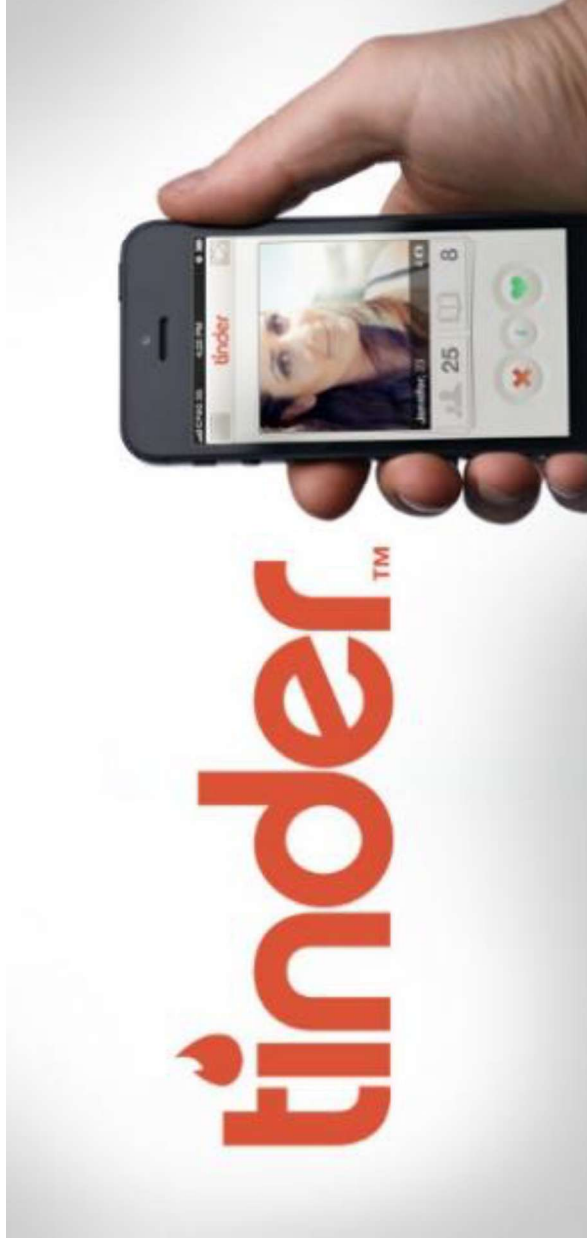
Thought #8

Philanthropic funds are different than government grants.

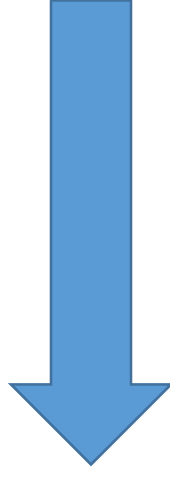
ilanthropy is more
e this...

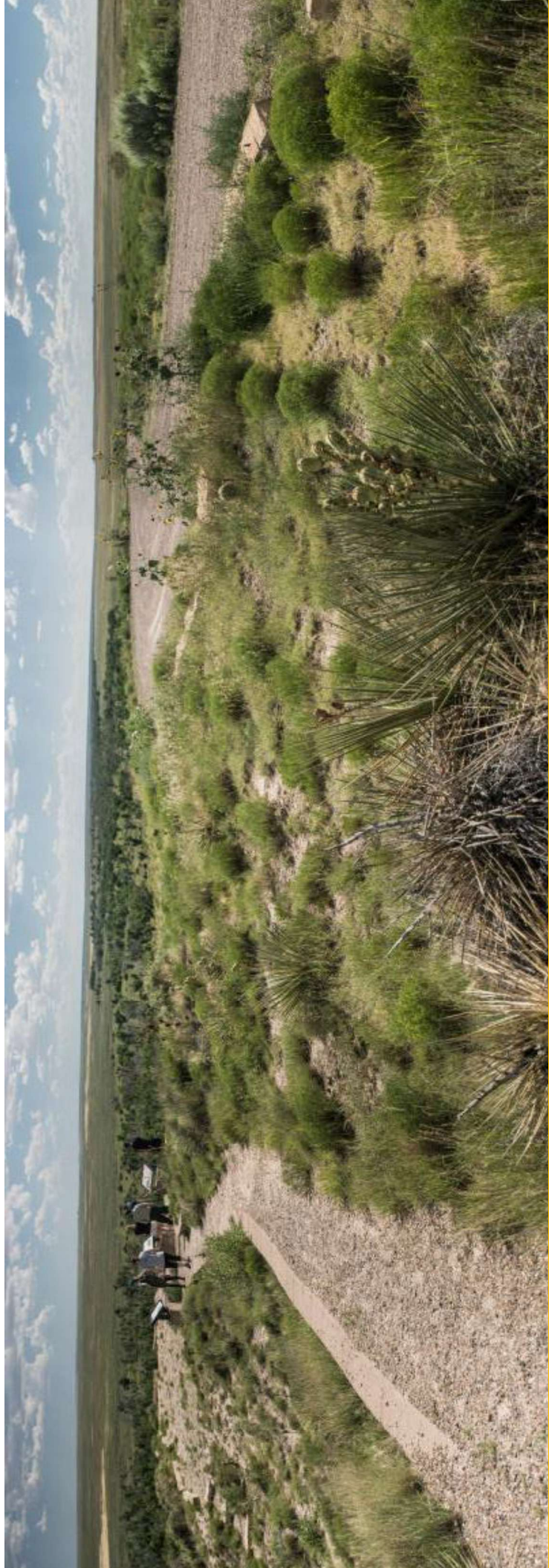


tinder™



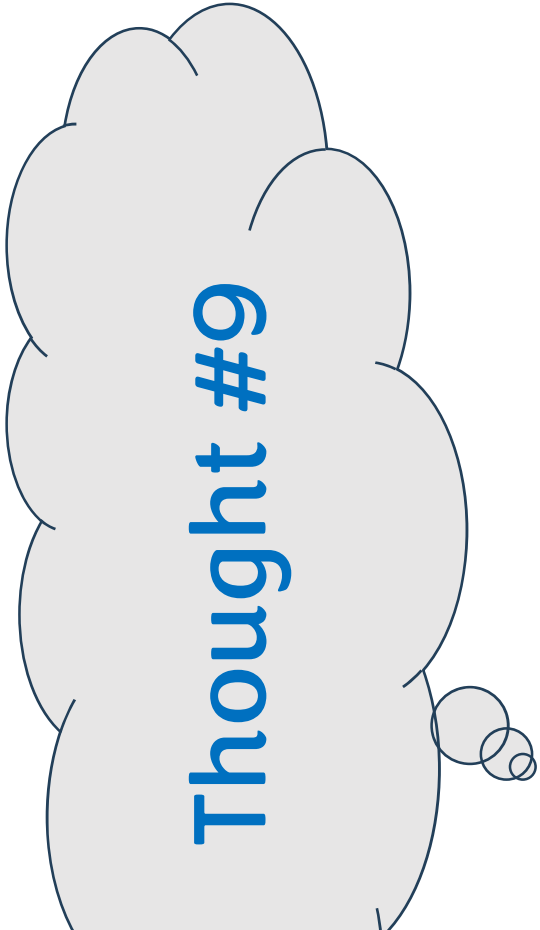
Less like this!





Sante Fe Companion Trail, Cimmaron Grasslands, K

Many, not all, philanthropies take a more relationship-based approach to grantmaking rather than strictly transactional. The best time to start a relationship with a foundation is before you need the money. Also, never discount the ‘knowledge capital’ among foundation staff. They often offer tremendous value beyond the check.



Thought #9

Let's address the elephant in the room.

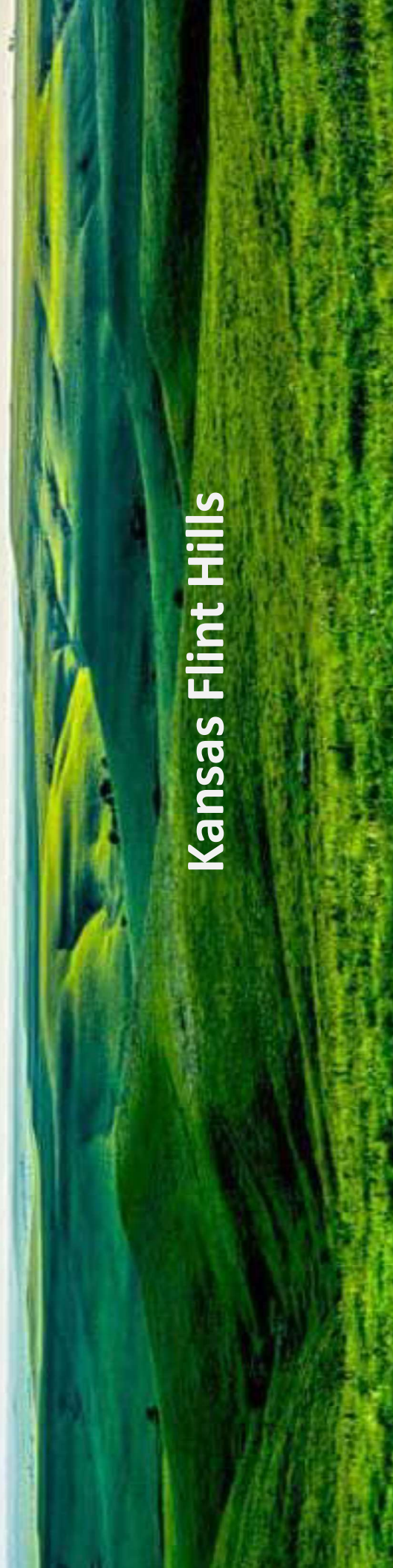
—
We're having a
moment in America.
Why fund trails
NOW... when to
many, it seems the
sky is falling? —



Reconnection to the outside world is fundamental to human health, well-being, spirit and survival

Richard Louv

Kansas Flint Hills



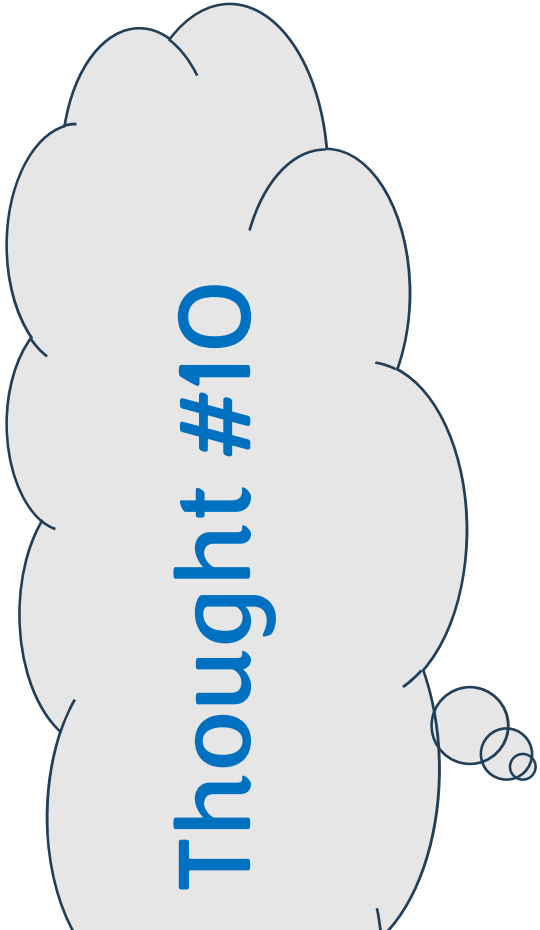
Trails are one of the most powerful tools we have to bring people of all backgrounds and beliefs... together.





Stress to health funders the volu
aspect of trail development &
maintenance. Volunteerism is str
correlated with improved mental
and increased social cohesion





Thought #10

**Building a Relationship with Funders.
(A whole bunch of practical tips)**

RESEARCH

Learn about different types of foundations – family, corporate, community, health conversion, etc.

Once you have identified a possible funder, take the time to really research and study foundation website.

- Most important – what is the service area and what types of projects do they fund?
- Mission, values, philosophy
- Stated priority areas?
 - Don't be seduced by broad phrases like “healthy living”
 - Read annual reports and lists of grant awards – then visit websites of successful grantees
- Sign up for any e-news type service

Reaching Out

- Learn the protocols.
 - Do they encourage phone calls and emails?
 - Do they ever take unsolicited requests or RFPs only?
 - Who is the best person to contact? Typically, it will be program staff.
 - HINT: Do NOT send emails directly to CEO – it will disappear in a black hole.
- You have nothing to lose by sending a polite, introductory email with funding request; just information about your work, how it might relate to foundation's work, ask for a brief meeting to share more.
- Some foundations appreciate and understand the benefits of learning directly from those doing the work on the ground and welcome the opportunity to talk more.
- If a foundation is local or regional, invite program staff to a trail event with no strings attached. Let them see the magic for themselves.

Building the Relationship

Always stress your interest in learning about foundation's priorities – never make assumptions about what is important to them. Listen and learn directly from them.

Do not take it personally if foundation staff is direct – “I’m sorry, we don’t fund trails.”

- They have just saved you time!
- Learn why... it might help with future framing of trail projects in funding requests.

Be Passionate, Polite and most of all, PATIENT. Most foundation staff are hardworking and motivated, juggling multiple variables and stressors, just like you. They aren’t just sitting there with empty hours and drawers full of money waiting for you to call.

Psssst.... Many secretly wish they could fund EVERYTHING! But they can’t.

Will share this
handout... tips
on working with
foundations +
great resources
to help find &
write grants



Working with Foundations

The Four R's

Sunflower Foundation

Every foundation is different, and some of these tips may not be applicable to some foundations.

RESEARCH



You may have heard the phrase “if you’ve seen one foundation, you’ve seen one foundation.” Foundations vary greatly in size, assets, structure and tax status, so it’s helpful to learn about the broad categories of foundations (family, community, corporate, etc.). Foundations often spend significant time learning about organizations to inform their funding decisions, so it makes sense to invest some time in researching them before reaching out with a request:

- Learn from foundation websites and annual reports.
- Sign up for foundation e-newsletters and follow foundations on social media.
- Keep your own website and social media current for when foundations want to learn more about you.
- Research your own project and demonstrate a robust understanding of the problem and solution.

REALISTIC



There are nearly 2 million nonprofits in the U.S., and the vast majority require external funding. Foundations can't fund them all, so they typically adhere to established strategic plans and funding priorities. Some things to consider:

- Even if your organization doesn't quite fit, there is still value in sharing its story and starting a relationship.
- Foundations set their budgets every year to fit funding priorities with available funds. There often isn't a lot of easily accessible money just lying around – even for great causes and ideas.
- Patience is key. Foundations may operate on different timelines than your needs. In general, foundations do not operate to offer SOS type funding. They prefer to invest in long-term, system-based initiatives.

RELATIONSHIPS



Foundations value relationships with prospective grantees/partners and appreciate the opportunity to learn about organizations and how they fit into the bigger picture of systems change. Consider cultivating such a relationship before asking for money.

- Send a succinct but informative email describing your organization and its needs and ask for a virtual or in-person meeting to learn more about the foundation.
- If you don't hear back right away, politely follow up.
- Recognize that many foundations offer more than just money, such as technical assistance, networking and learning opportunities, advice and feedback, and moral support. Take advantage of them!
- Thoughtful questions about funding parameters are appropriate, but avoiding argumentative. Foundation have policies and processes to follow.

RESPONSIVE



If a foundation responds to your request, always acknowledge its response. This is important if staff have spent time gathering tailored information from you. And if they ask for additional information from you, send it in a timely manner. Other things to keep in mind:

- If foundation staff makes a recommendation, let them know when you have followed up.
- Every grant you receive is an audition for the next grant. Avoid creating more work for the foundation by ignoring emails, grant report deadlines, etc. If you have questions or concerns, be positive and proactive.
- Always be ready to answer this question: In what specific ways can funding advance your mission and goals?

w.sunflowerfoundation.org

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see videos and resources to help nonprofits diversify revenue base and build capacity in general on
sunflower Foundation website. Go to home page and click on “Learning” in top right-hand corner.

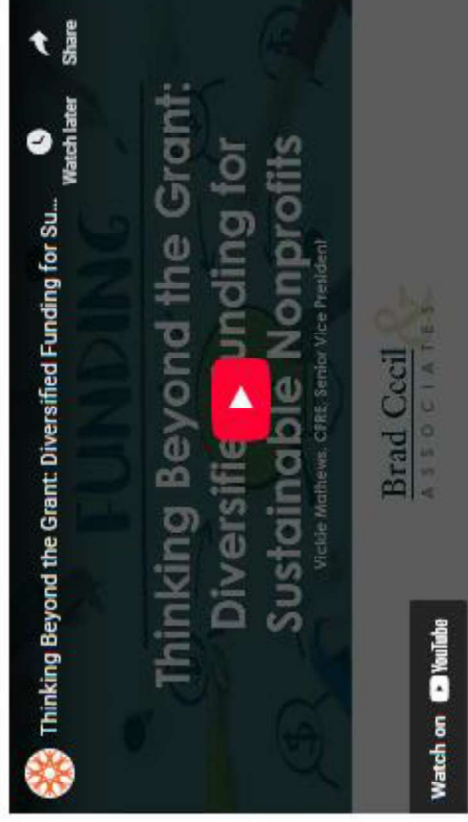
Diversified Funding: One of our most popular sessions from May 2025 Learning Event



Brad Cecil
ASSOCIATES

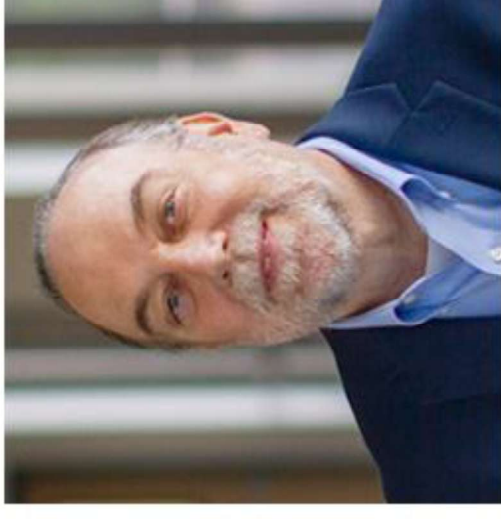
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Brad Cecil

President, Brad Cecil & Associates



Vickie Mathews, C.F.R.E.

Senior Vice President, Brad Cecil & Associates

**Black Mesa State Park,
Oklahoma Panhandle**

Thank
You!



eburger@sunflowerfoundation.org