



November 10, 2022

To the USDA Rural Development Community Facility Program Grant Review Team,

Anderson Knight Architects (AKA) is dedicated to the success of the Rural Vitality Center situated in the rural heart of Lyons County, Kansas. The core mission to revitalize rural communities through innovative experiential services and health and wellness opportunities to strengthen communities, families, and schools is paramount in how this project is successful through the support of the greater community. A key aspect of community support is also a part of Kansas State University and utilizing this project as a learning opportunity for all, while also utilizing local talent to realize it's goals into reality.

The success of the design for the Rural Center is dependent on involvement of our future workforce through workforce development initiatives to include students at Kansas State University College of Architecture, Planning and Design (APDesign). Students are uniquely positioned in a learning environment where they can continue to push the boundaries without being tethered to status quo practices and look to the future of what can be without biases. Utilizing students in early stages of the project allow for the entire project and client team to envision the build environment's impact for a rural community and their partnerships from the lens of our future workforce.

Anderson Knight Architects are uniquely positioned to meet the needs of the Rural Vitality Center due to our existing relationships with Kansas State University and APDesign. This project requires professional services to design and build the project, however, utilizing students to assist in the master planning and schematic design would only be possible through securing the USDA grant to support the design and construction of the Rural Vitality Center. As a firm, we would assist in the learning laboratories within the design studios focusing on how the built environment has an impact not only on the community, but those who utilize the Rural Vitality Center and their programs to increase wellbeing. The opportunity to engage student learning on a professional project enhances their education, increases the outcomes for the project client, but it also demonstrates to students that Kansas and rural communities have opportunities for design professionals to be successful. It shows students they can remain in Kansas upon graduation with promise of a great career opportunity. Minimizing the brain drain through innovative projects and showing how the impact of design in a community creates a healthy place to live, work, and play generates a much larger societal impact for Kansas.

Together, we can Reimagine Rural.

Anderson Knight is dedicated to inspiring youth to enter the architecture field to create a more diverse and robust talent pool for our community, setting our firm apart from others due to our level of relationships and engagement with our key partners. We support education in multiple of ways though formal and informal support at the collegiate and high school levels. We believe the vitality of a community is intricately tied to the quality of the built environment and how it supports a community, but we must have a qualified and trained workforce in order to support our region and economy.

An abbreviated list of our community partnerships to support workforce development include the following programs.

Kansas State University Partnerships

Studio Collaboration – Sponsorship of the Rural Vitality Center

In collaboration with the Rural Vitality Center in rural Lyons County and Anderson Knight Architects, we are committed to working with students and faculty in APDesign at Kansas State University through studio sponsorship as a professional in practice working alongside a faculty to teach key studio outcomes in a learning laboratory environment. This sponsorship is contingent upon the schedule for project completion and the Higher Education academic calendar based on USDA awarding the grant and date of award.

Deliverables will set the early stages for Anderson Knight to work with students on their projects with goals to refine master planning, begin overall concept design, and assist with content that will funnel into schematic design, program development, marketing, and fundraising through sponsorship of design studios. Students will experience the impact of design in a rural community and how the built environment can support services that increase the vitality of a community with limited resources compared to larger metropolitan areas. Studio outreach aligns with Kansas State University's mission as a Land Grant University and committed to making research-based information available to all Kansans, and for this specific project, impacting the rural community surrounding the Rural Vitality Center. If we miss the alignment of the academic calendar and when the project needs to begin, we will still utilize students internally within our office to assist on the front end of project planning through the extent of the project.

Studio Professional Guest Critique

Our team has collaborated with faculty on their studios for years, serving as professional advisors on real world projects and allowing students to utilize real projects as a launch pad for learning and exploration. Heather Peterson, a Project Manager at AKA, has been a professional guest critique every semester, assisting with mentoring students on campus.

KSU Student Internship Program

Anderson Knight Architects believes in supporting talent locally and through the KSU Student Internship at APDesign. We have hosted many paid student internships in our office lasting from a semester of 4 months to 8 months so students can gain real world experience on active projects, earn market wages, while also earning tuition credits for their degree. Our firm pays the students as employees at market rate, with no funding support from other sources. The benefits of AKA hosting paid interns in our Manhattan office, is it showcases how a professional can live in a smaller community while also having the opportunity to work on high profile projects in our surrounding community and be successful here at home without having to move to the coasts after graduation. We inherently believe in retaining talent at home in order to support our community and state. We also have paid KSU Student interns that will be working on the Rural Vitality Center in our office for the duration of the project.

APDesign Dean's Advisory Council

One of our key leaders in the firm, Natalie Gordon, serves on the Dean's Advisory Council for the College of Architecture, Planning, and Design at Kansas State University. She is a part of the trusted council college leadership utilizes for guidance and feedback about the progress and key decisions in the college. The Dean's Advisory Council is also a resource for faculty when they are in need of additional resources and guidance. We believe relationships are key to success and we are involved at many levels of the college for not our success, but for the college's success in educating the next generation of talent and leaders.

High School Partnerships

Manhattan High Work Based Learning Program and Internship

Manhattan High School participates in the Kansas Work-Based Learning Program. As community supporters, we have participated as professional advisors to the program since its inception and host high school interns when students express interest in Architecture as a profession. In 2021 and 2022, we hired and mentored two female students who have been accepted into APDesign with one as a current Freshman in the college at KSU and our current student intern has been accepted into the program with a start date at KSU APDesign for Fall of 2023. The students we have sponsored as paid interns have worked on real billable projects, similar to our paid KSU Internship Program.

Wamego High School Architecture and Construction Advisory Board

Heather Peterson from Anderson Knight Architects has recently joined the Advisory Board for Wamego High School's Architecture and Construction Career Program. As an advisor in the program, working directly with students to prepare them to enter the Architecture and Construction is a key objective. We are committed to supporting our local students by harnessing a student's passion with the right tools for success to keep talent in the pipeline for high demand fields.

AKA Area High School Job Shadow Program

Our firm always makes time and resources available to support students from rural schools that don't have a ability to learn about what they are passionate about. We have had students from all over the region come to our office for a job shadow and meet the professionals in the office. We offer additional guidance after the job shadow if the student wishes to continue learning about the design profession and KSU. As close partners with Kansas State University, we have also assisted in recruiting high school students and personally connected them with campus easing the student's burden of uncertainty if they want to remain in Kansas or seek education elsewhere.

With support,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Natalie Gordon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Natalie Gordon, Assoc AIA
Anderson Knight Architects
Director of Business Development & Community Engagement
KSU APDesign Dean's Advisory Council