



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/community-health-mini-grants>

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Kansas Health Foundation connects with extension offices to spur state's health

CEO says mini-grants intended to help people 'innovate' for healthier communities

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news

MANHATTAN, Kan. – The chief executive officer of the Kansas Health Foundation has hailed the value of the state's extension service in renewed efforts to improve health across the state.

Ed O'Malley said local extension offices in Kansas are in line to receive mini-grants aimed at helping extension agents "try innovative things related to health in their communities."

"We love giving these mini-grants," O'Malley said. "We plan to do more of them in the future because we've got to get people experimenting and doing new things across the state. That's starting to happen."

In Fall, 2024, O'Malley announced that the Kansas Health Foundation would provide \$300,000 in funding, most of that through local extension offices, to address hunger and food insecurity in Kansas. Those awards will go out soon; officials are expecting to award 20 mini-grants, ranging from \$2,500 to \$30,000

The move was partly in response to the 2024 report of [America's Health Rankings](#) that put the Sunflower State at No. 28, slightly up from No. 31 two years earlier but far behind its highest ranking – No. 8 in the United States – in 1991.

"We've been sliding precipitously for 30 years," O'Malley said. "The good news is that the last two years, we've started climbing back up the rankings, but we're nowhere near where we should be as a state."

O'Malley noted that Kansas is "an aging state," but the issue of healthy people and healthy communities goes beyond age and clinical care. Instead, he said, it relates to civic health.

"This project is not about health care," O'Malley said. "It's about creating the conditions for people to be healthy, and that has more to do with economics and education and the way a community operates."

“We’re really looking for catalytic opportunities where a little bit of money can encourage people to work together... We want to motivate people to innovate and try things that could lead to a healthier neighborhood and community.”

O’Malley said the Kansas Health Foundation formed a partnership with K-State Research and Extension because it has a presence in every Kansas county – 105 in all.

“Extension is an incredibly powerful tool for any civic challenge, and I think specifically for the challenge of helping Kansas lead the nation in health, which is our purpose,” he said.

O’Malley said changing health attitudes and habits “is hard.”

“I know that there’s a lot that’s not figured out yet in the world of the future, but I’m a big fan of trying to imagine what our extension system will be in the 21st century. I believe Kansas should be a model for the world, and we want to do whatever we can at the Kansas Health Foundation to help spur that long.”

A full discussion with O’Malley on community-level efforts to improve health in Kansas is available on [the weekly radio program, Sound Living](#), produced by K-State Research and Extension.

More information is also available at [local extension offices in Kansas](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas Health Foundation, <https://kansashealth.org>

America’s Health Rankings, <https://www.americashealthrankings.org>

Sound Living, <https://soundlivingksu.libsyn.com>

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations>

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