

# make more possible.

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2026



# FROM OUR CEO



At Innovia Foundation, our vision is grounded in a simple belief: communities are strongest when people feel connected and supported. That's why we are committed to investing in opportunities that bring people together — especially in times when communities can feel divided. We know that lasting vibrancy doesn't begin with big grants or sweeping policies alone. It begins with relationships built on trust, through everyday connections that bring people together.

This year, we are honored that this approach to community building was recognized nationally. Innovia received the Council on Foundations' inaugural Building Together Award, celebrating the work happening across our region to strengthen vibrancy and resilience. This recognition reflects not only what we do, but how we do it: by listening, partnering, and leading alongside communities to create lasting impact.

In 2026, we've seen the power of trust and collaboration across our region in many ways:

- In March, more than 400 volunteers and community leaders gathered at our Community Leadership Summit to explore strategies for bridging divides and strengthening communities under the theme ***Building Trust, Building Community***.
- This spring, LaunchNW celebrated its first graduating class, with more than 80 donors helping make \$3.8 million in renewable funding possible for students pursuing four years of post-high school education.
- Volunteer review committees recently recommended \$1.2 million in Community Grant investments to nonprofits advancing stability, opportunity, belonging, and more.
- And this summer, we launched The Longest Table and Weave, two new initiatives designed to bring neighbors together and deepen connections, alongside our Community Heart & Soul® program.

In the stories ahead, you'll meet people bringing this work to life, like seniors bridging generations in Orofino, LaunchNW students breaking through barriers, and a Spokane donor planting hope one tree at a time.

Each of us has a role to play as community builders. When we invest in trust and connection, the ripple effects extend far beyond any one effort — strengthening not just individual communities, but our entire region.

Thank you for the many ways you show up with your time, your generosity, and your commitment to this shared work. Together, let's keep building trust, building community, and making more possible across our region.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Shelly O'Quinn". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a background of rolling hills and a sunset sky.

Shelly O'Quinn, CEO





## BECOME A WEAVER

Through support from Weave: The Social Fabric Project at The Aspen Institute, Innovia will award 20 microgrants annually to Weavers — everyday neighbors and small nonprofits who are building relationships, strengthening belonging, and weaving trust into the social fabric of their communities. Awarded in amounts of \$2,500, Weave grants will support activities that bring people together across differences in Kootenai County for storytelling and connection. **More at [goinnovia.org/weave](https://goinnovia.org/weave).**

## BUILDING TRUST, BUILDING COMMUNITY

When trust fades, the connections that hold us together weaken. But when trust grows, the reverse happens — ideas begin to flow and collaboration takes off. This March, our annual Community Leadership Summit was the launchpad.

More than 400 business leaders, volunteers, and engaged residents convened under the theme: ***Building Trust, Building Community***. Over two days, nationally-recognized authors and speakers shared the factors driving mistrust and equipped attendees with tools to reverse them.

**More at [innovia.org/summit-26](https://innovia.org/summit-26)**

In the year of our nation's 250th anniversary, Innovia invites communities to carry the momentum of ***Building Trust, Building Community*** forward. This summer, we bring The Longest Table and Weave home to our region — programs that strengthen communities one story and shared meal at a time. **More at [innovia.org/build-26](https://innovia.org/build-26).**

## HOST A LONGEST TABLE EVENT

From small-town main streets to city blocks and campuses, Longest Table events bring whole communities together around a shared table for a meal and conversation that fosters understanding, reduces isolation, and strengthens trust.

This summer, Innovia is awarding microgrants of up to \$2,500 to support 60 Longest Table events across Eastern Washington and North Idaho, happening between June 1 and September 30. **More at [innovia.org/the-longest-table](https://innovia.org/the-longest-table).**



## A BASKETBALL DREAM FULFILLED

Owen David Pitts, a beloved student and athlete, began his first battle with leukemia at just 5 years old. As a teenager, he found pure joy playing basketball at Medical Lake High School, with dreams of making varsity. But when new tumors appeared during his senior year, Owen's school community gathered family, friends, and peers in the gym, allowing him to fulfill his dream by starting a game as a varsity player. After the game, he received his diploma on the

same court.

Shortly after Owen passed away, his parents Jason and Rachel established an endowment at Innovia supporting Medical Lake's basketball program.

"Owen loved being part of something bigger than himself," says Jason Pitts. "We created this fund to give future players the same sense of belonging, support, and purpose that meant so much to him." **More at [goinnovia.org/owenpitts](https://goinnovia.org/owenpitts).**



## BONNER & BOUNDARY FOREVER FUND

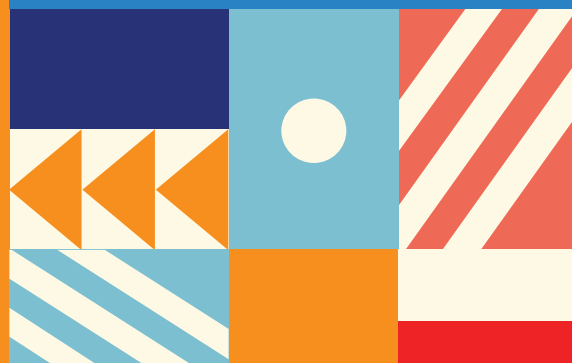
Since 2021, community generosity has fueled the Bonner & Boundary Forever Fund at Innovia, making \$42,000 in grantmaking possible for local causes like emergency housing and food security. Recently, the Equinox Foundation launched the fund into an exciting new chapter with a \$100,000 matching challenge. Innovia is committing an additional \$25,000, creating a total \$125,000 match posed to the community. Learn more about the Bonner & Boundary Forever Fund and the far-reaching impact of funds like it at [goinnovia.org/BonnerBoundaryForever](https://goinnovia.org/BonnerBoundaryForever).



## ENRICHING LIVES FROM THE STAGE

Where a 1950s-era armory once sat in quiet disrepair, Chewelah's Center for the Arts now hums with life. Audiences pack the theater, youth gather for programs, and nonprofits host community events. Since 2017, Innovia has championed the Center's transformation with nearly \$70,000 in grants, including recent support for 1,100 school children to attend a live performance — many for the first time.

"Our director always shares, 'My goal for you isn't to be a famous Hollywood star. My goal for you is to have community theater enrich your life, whether you go watch performances or you're in performances,'" says Board President Sharon Ludwig. "That's what we want for the center too — to have it enrich the people in our community." **More at [goinnovia.org/chewelaharts](https://goinnovia.org/chewelaharts).**



## BRIDGING GENERATIONS IN OROFINO

Five years ago, seniors arriving early for lunch at Clearwater County Senior Citizens found an empty hall. Today, they find a community.

Administrator Julie Hendren has watched this shift unfold with joy. Last year, her community-building efforts were bolstered by a \$15,000 grant from Innovia that connected seniors with their young neighbors across the

street at Orofino Elementary. During a Vietnam War unit, veterans visited classrooms to share stories. When tech questions mounted, students visited to help seniors navigate their devices. And when a local family was in need, seniors pooled resources to purchase gifts and a holiday meal. **More at [goinnovia.org/clearwaterseniors](http://goinnovia.org/clearwaterseniors).**



## PLANTING A LEGACY TREE BY TREE

“Every tree has a story. I’m not a collector of trees, but a collector of the stories about the trees,” shares Innovia fundholder Nancy MacKerrow of Spokane.

Nancy began planting trees in 2003 — honoring her daughter Susie after she was tragically killed while legally crossing the street in a crosswalk. She’s now planted over 1,000 trees around the world. Established in 2008, the Susie Stephens Fund for the Susie Forest at Innovia

will support “Susie Trees” long after Nancy’s lifetime. Two more recent funds commemorate her own 100th birthday with the planting of 100 trees and support for improvisational arts organizations in honor of her son.

“Funds are a wonderful way to honor somebody or leave your own legacy for the future, because they will last forever.” **More at [goinnovia.org/nancymackerrow](http://goinnovia.org/nancymackerrow).**



## A VISIT TO THE ART BAR

Last summer, young visitors to Whitman County’s rural libraries discovered more than literary wonder. “Art Bars” stocked with canvases, clay, watercolors, and more invited children to explore their creativity through the support of a \$10,000 grant from Innovia.

For one grandmother and her three granddaughters, an “Art Bar” transformed a library visit into a

treasured memory.

“The girls expressed that they rarely were able to do art in school anymore,” says Hollyanna Hahn, Collection Development and Digital Archives Manager at the Whitman Colfax Library. “The quartet were so happy to have the chance to explore a creative outlet for the summer together.” **More at [goinnovia.org/whitmanlibrary](http://goinnovia.org/whitmanlibrary).**



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## RITZVILLE HEART & SOUL

Last fall, Ritzville became the newest small town to launch the Community Heart & Soul® program through Innovia. The program's resident-driven process is inviting Ritzville to lean into its strong community spirit. At a kick-off meeting, residents easily shared what they love about their community: "The giving spirit." "Friendly folk." "Good place to raise a family."

As much as Ritzville residents love where they live, they also care about how it could improve, including more

investment in downtown infrastructure and small businesses. As Ritzville enters the imagination phase of the Heart & Soul process, leaders like core-team member Jamie Francisco are excited to see how finding common ground will bring the community together.

"This program will allow people to come together that normally wouldn't cross paths and see others in a new light, full of daily grace. We all have challenges, trials, hopes, and dreams."

**More at [goinnovia.org/ritzvillechs](https://goinnovia.org/ritzvillechs).**