

# **Organization Plan (DRAFT 0.1)**

**Coworking Spaces For Rural America, Inc.**

## **Mission Statement**

Coworking Spaces For Rural America makes available the space, services, community, and connectivity that rural citizens need to participate in the remote and entrepreneurial workforce, enabling rural Americans to get jobs and start companies without needing to urbanize.

## **Value Proposition**

When Americans raised in a rural area want to enter knowledge work or start a business, they're usually stuck with two options: do something local, which caps their earning potential, or move to an urban metropolitan area, which exacerbates the problem of rural brain drain. CSFRA fosters and accelerates a recent third option: work remotely or start an internet-based business, opening up the earning potential formerly only available to those who chose to move to the big city, while keeping the people rooted in (and thus their earnings circulating through the economies of) their rural home.

While the first thought to unlock aforementioned internet-based earning potential for rural Americans might be universal broadband on the scale of the rural electrification of America in the mid 1900s, there are two specific advantages that focusing on coworking as a complimentary solution provides. First, coworking spaces can be built as a centralized service for all citizens of a county, like a university exchange or a courthouse, when broadband internet service is available in part of a rural county but not to most of the citizens at home. Second, coworking spaces continue to provide value and foster economic potential even once every rural home has broadband internet, as evidenced by their success and popularity in cities across the world.

## **Vision**

The vision for the growth of CSFRA is one of responsible but constant expansion, giving the organization the ability to learn as it goes while quickly achieving nationwide presence.

## **Organization Phase**

In the organization phase, the initial board of directors (five people) will be gathered to provide the expertise CSFRA needs to succeed, and CSFRA will register as a 501 (c) (3) exempt organization to unlock funding opportunities that are only available to such non-profits.

## **Pilot Phase**

In the pilot phase, one rural coworking space will be opened to gather data on the costs, benefits, and operational requirements for running a single space. This data will help to power decision-making about future phases, from improving what went wrong to learning how to use economies of scale to reduce costs long-term.

## **Statewide Phase**

In the statewide phase, rural coworking spaces will be opened in all eligible counties in Missouri to gather data on the costs, benefits, and operational requirements for running multiple spaces. This data will help to power decision-making about future phases, and the time it takes to gather this data will provide CSFRA the space to hire a structure of administrative and support employees. Staying focused on intrastate expansion will delay the complexity of working in multiple states, under multiple sets of state laws, and with multiple state economic development organizations.

## **Regional Phase**

In the regional phase, rural coworking spaces will be opened in eligible counties in the following states: Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. This is the same set of states as the USDA ARS Midwest Area Region. States should be added one-by-one, only adding additional states once all existing states have multiple rural coworking spaces in smooth operation. Concentrating interstate expansion in a single geographically-compact region will delay the complexity and overhead of national travel. It will also allow CSFRA to gather experience working in public-private partnerships in multiple states while keeping the number of those partnerships manageable.

## **National Phase**

In the national phase, rural coworking spaces will be opened in eligible counties across America. States and territories should be added in small numbers in a geographically-compact manner similar to the regional phase.

## **Post-Expansion Phase**

Once CSFRA has a presence in every eligible county in America, there are a number of options to continue improving: improving existing spaces; offering new services; reducing fees; partnering with ISPs to bring fiber to new counties, making them eligible for CSFRA expansion; and more.

## Strategy

### Location Eligibility Criteria

Beyond the pilot phase, the eligibility criteria that counties in the next phase will be evaluated against will be set by the board. A likely formula for the first stage is that the county must meet the following criteria:

- Sufficiently high-bandwidth, high-availability internet service must be available in the county seat. *(This provides a “lower bound” for small counties)*
- The county must not yet be served by an existing coworking space, unless the expansion is achieved through acquisition.
- The county seat must be defined as rural by the [Rural Health Grants Eligibility Analyzer](#) published by the Health Resources & Services Administration of the United States federal government. *(This provides an “upper bound” for large counties)*

### Services Offered

Services to be offered to users at coworking spaces include, but are not limited to:

- Drop-in day passes for flex space and furnished private single office coworking.
- Monthly memberships for flex space, dedicated desk, furnished private single office, and unfurnished private office coworking.
- Per-hour usage of conference rooms, board rooms, and client receiving offices.
- Access to common areas (e.g. kitchen, lounges, private call booths)
- Technology services (e.g. black & white printing, color printing, internet access, VOIP service)
- Virtual office services (e.g. reception desk, business addresses, mail pickup, phone answering service)
- Community and training events (e.g. remote readiness workshops, resume & interview training, small business seminars)
- Event space for community organizations

### Financing & Funding

Startup costs for opening the first pilot space will come from loans, grants, donations, private-public partnerships, and/or sponsorship. Once it is established, and excluding all loan payments for startup costs, each coworking space should be financially self-sufficient at 50% capacity from a combination of membership revenue, add-on revenue, and services revenue. Excess earnings from a space at higher capacity will go into the national fund to help pay for future expansion.

## **Tactics**

### **Staffing**

An executive director should be hired as soon as is financially feasible to drive strategy, find public-private partnerships, and win funding opportunities. Each coworking space will need two full-time staff members: an office administrator and a community manager.

The office administrator will be responsible for the day-to-day in the office, with duties ranging from janitorial to reception to handling office supplies. This position will have regular hours, and may be staffed by a daily rotation of members in exchange for a discount, or a full-time employee paid a living wage.

The community manager will be responsible for the day-to-day of the coworking space's local and online presence, with duties ranging from driving public-private partnerships to overseeing after-hours events to managing social media presence. This position will have irregular hours, and will be staffed by a full-time employee paid a living wage.

During future phases, additional staff will likely provide additional value (e.g. information technology specialists) and be necessary for coordination (e.g. regional managers).

### **Workspace Design**

TODO: aesthetically pleasing, modern startup style design, varied lighting, GSA-compliant, etc.

### **Technology**

TODO: Stuff about smart door access, networking, management/billing/booking software, etc.

### **Marketing**

TODO

### **Sales**

TODO

## **Operating Principles**

CSFRA believes in tolerance, respect, inclusion, and hard work. We aim to build an organization of good people making valuable efforts in service of our mission, and to build local communities of patrons bringing value to themselves and their local economies.

These operating principles are based upon the codes of conduct of Ember.js, Ubuntu, Twitter, and Mozilla, though no part of this is an endorsement of any of those people, companies, or projects. This is simply an acknowledgment that the specific language referenced here seems to mirror our own ideals and intentions.

## **Patrons**

Though our patrons do not work for us—and thus they operate on their own set of values—as long as they are in physical or digital spaces provided by CSFRA, we expect them to:

### **1. Be Welcoming**

We are committed to being an organization and to fostering local communities that everybody feels good about joining. Although we may not be able to satisfy everyone, we will always work to treat people well. Whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you look like or identify as, believe in or don't believe in, know that you're welcome.

### **2. Be Empathetic And Respectful**

We work together to resolve conflict, assume good intentions, and do our best to act in an empathetic fashion. We don't allow frustration to turn into a personal attack. A community where people feel uncomfortable or threatened is not a productive one. We expect people to resolve disagreements constructively.

### **3. Take Responsibility For Our Words And Actions**

We can all make mistakes. When we do, we take responsibility for them. If someone has been harmed or offended, we listen carefully and respectfully, and work to right the wrong.

## **Employees And Volunteers**

In addition to following the principles outlined for patrons, employees and volunteers strive to:

### **1. Be Open**

We invite anybody, from rural or urban areas, to patronize the services and spaces that our organization offers. We invite anybody, from any company or no company, to participate in any aspect of our volunteer opportunities. And we invite anybody, from individuals to officials, to inspect our governing documents, annual reports, and other published information.

### **2. Be Collaborative**

Collaboration reduces redundancy and improves the quality of our work. We prefer to work transparently within our organization and involve interested employees and volunteers as early as possible. Wherever possible, we work closely with other organizations and the public to coordinate our efforts.

### **3. Be Pragmatic**

Nobody knows everything! Asking questions early avoids problems later, so questions are encouraged—though they may be directed to the appropriate person to be answered. Those who are asked should be responsive and helpful.

### **4. Step Down Considerately**

Members of every organization come and go. When a volunteer, employee, or director leaves or disengages from the organization, we ask that they do so in a way that minimizes disruption to the rest. They should tell people they are leaving and take the proper steps to ensure that others can pick up where they left off.

## **Leadership**

In addition to the principles outlined for patrons, employees, and volunteers, organizational leadership strives to:

### **1. Set Direction**

The vision for the organization comes from the purpose set forth in our Articles of Incorporation. The strategy required to execute on that purpose comes from the board of directors. The tactics required to execute on that vision comes from corporate leadership including the executive director. And the feedback on whether those tactics succeeded in moving towards the vision for the organization comes from our employees, volunteers, and patrons. Leadership is not an award or a right; it is a privilege, a responsibility, and a mandate, and one that the organization takes seriously.

### **2. Lead By Example**

These operating principles not only apply to leaders; it applies to leaders *more*. Leaders do their very best to show more patience, more respect, and more civility than those they lead.

### **3. Value Discussion, Data, and Decisiveness**

We gather opinions, data, and commitments from concerned parties before making decisions. Once a reasonable amount of research is performed and data collected, we do our best to move decisively and efficiently. If we make a mistake, we'll fix it.

## **Appendices**