

BRIAN CRAWFORD MEMORIAL

Community Opportunity Initiative

WE CAN DO MORE TOGETHER

A Strategic Concept for Strengthening Local Opportunities for Oklahoma Children, Families & Communities

September 2026

Discussion Draft for Philanthropic & Nonprofit Review

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This master concept is designed to begin a professional evaluation process. It intentionally separates documented history, research-derived observations and proposed future concepts. Nothing in this document obligates CFO or any prospective partner to participate, fund, sponsor or endorse the initiative.

Executive Summary

The Brian Crawford Memorial Community Opportunity Initiative asks whether Oklahoma can better connect philanthropy, nonprofit expertise, schools, public assets, experienced practitioners, volunteers and local leadership to strengthen opportunities for children and families.

It is not a finished statewide program, an immediate funding request, or a request that Communities Foundation of Oklahoma (CFO) endorse Baseball Heaven research. It grows from twenty-one years of memorial service, scholarships, youth-sports programming, facility development and operations, followed by research into governance, public assets, community access and youth-sports economics.[1][2][3]

The central proposition is simple: Brian Crawford Memorial cannot do this alone - and should not try. CFO is a logical first conversation partner because it already administers the Brian Crawford Memorial Scholarship relationship and publicly describes work involving community collaboration, charitable funds, fiscal sponsorship, administrative services and locally governed community funds.[8][9][10][11]

What This Initiative Is - and Is Not

This is a structured inquiry into how local opportunity can be strengthened. Youth sports are the starting laboratory, not the outer boundary. The intended lens includes children, families, education, recreation, mentoring, inclusion, grief-informed service, community connection and durable local institutions.

It is not another statewide sports sanctioning body; not a plan to centralize local programs; not a demand that CFO serve as fiscal sponsor; and not a request that partners endorse allegations, litigation, tax matters, political positions or investigative conclusions associated with separate Baseball Heaven research. The goal is to determine whether existing organizations can contribute what they already do well while local communities retain meaningful ownership.

From Memorial to Mission: 2005-2026

Brian Allen Crawford died on April 27, 2005. The Crawford family subsequently created ways to preserve his memory while creating opportunities for others. The first Brian Crawford Memorial Baseball Tournament followed in 2006. Seventeen annual editions were held from 2006 through 2022, becoming both a family tradition and an operating education in facilities, officials, volunteers, relationships and event economics.[3]

A family-funded scholarship began in 2015, followed by a permanent Brian Crawford Memorial Scholarship Fund through CFO in 2016.[3] BCM Sports extended the work into league and tournament operations. Brian's name became connected to permanent youth-sports facilities in Prague and Seminole. The Seminole project created practical experience with facility planning, governance, technology, user groups, programming and sustainability.[3][12]

The memorial work also included quieter service, including memorial graphics and canvas prints for grieving families.[1] The later research is best understood as a consequence of the mission rather than a replacement for it: remembrance led to programming; programming led to facility experience; facility experience generated questions; documentation and research followed.

The March 12, 2025 CFO Conversation

On March 12, 2025, Kenneth Crawford contacted CFO about whether the Brian Crawford Memorial, Baseball Heaven research and a broader nonprofit/community concept might warrant future partnership. The discussion included endowments, public-private collaboration, fiscal sponsorship, statewide community benefit and a possible follow-up with appropriate CFO staff.[1][2]

The CFO representative described a philanthropic-services pathway, discussed fiscal sponsorship, and indicated that CFO could help determine whether the concept fit CFO's resources or whether another organization might be better positioned to help.[1] The planned follow-up did not develop into a substantive partnership discussion. This document restarts that conversation with more evidence, clearer boundaries and a more mature concept.

What Has Changed Since March 2025

The largest change is not simply that more documents exist. The theory itself has matured. Earlier concepts often centered on a facility, tournaments or a specific operating model. The 2026 research increasingly points toward institutional design: how mission, access, governance, resources, facilities and continuity can be aligned so that community opportunity survives changes in founders, boards, elected officials, operators and market conditions.[4]

The research base now includes statewide tournament-economics work, municipal records, facility-governance studies, historical operating records, community-access research, public-asset studies, the Shawnee Regional Sports Park retrospective, the Pottawatomie County recreation concept, BCM operating history and comparative stewardship models.[4][5][6][7]

The question has changed from “Can one nonprofit build or operate something?” to “Can multiple institutions create an ecosystem that makes local programs easier to start, sustain, govern and protect?”

The Problem We Are Trying to Understand

Many communities possess pieces of the solution but not the complete institutional capacity required to sustain opportunity. A community may have fields but lack programming; volunteers but lack administrative systems; children but no affordable entry point; a nonprofit but no durable facility rights; donors but no long-term fund structure; schools with facilities but limited after-hours programming; or tournament activity without a clear mechanism connecting economic activity to local access.

The initiative does not assume one statewide explanation. It proposes a disciplined discovery process that distinguishes local facts from statewide patterns and documented findings from hypotheses. The practical question is whether a shared support network can lower the institutional burden on local organizations without taking their mission away from them.

What the Research Suggests

Successful programming does not automatically create institutional security. Community organizations can contribute labor, participation, relationships, goodwill and capital improvements while remaining dependent on another party for scheduling, access or continuation. The Community Asset Stewardship research describes the need for durable, transparent and mission-protected control - through ownership where appropriate or well-designed long-term stewardship arrangements.[4]

Economic impact, facility revenue, operator revenue and community benefit are different measurements.[7][12] The July 2026 Hidden Valley working dataset documented 165,190 recorded team entries and \$36.34 million in calculated team-entry fees. The same source labels gate, concession, umpire and broader economic-impact fields as modeled rather than verified receipts. The appropriate lesson is scale and complexity - not an unsupported claim about where every dollar went.[5]

Community access and competitive pathways do not have to be opposites. A durable local model can provide an entry point for children who do not already have a team while allowing advanced players to pursue competitive opportunities. Tournament activity can support the community mission rather than replace it.[4][12]

Beyond Youth Sports

Youth sports are the research laboratory, not the outer boundary of the mission. The broader opportunity question includes after-school programs, recreation, scholarships, mentoring, arts and enrichment partnerships, adaptive and inclusive opportunities, family support, volunteer development and pathways connecting children to organizations already serving their communities.

No single sports organization is equipped to address transportation, equipment, mentoring, safe after-school space, disability services, grief support and every other barrier. A collaborative network can route needs toward organizations with appropriate expertise rather than duplicate specialized services.

The Community Opportunity Network

The proposed model is a network, not a new centralized bureaucracy. Children, families and local communities remain at the center. Around them sit organizations with different capabilities: community foundations, local nonprofits, youth-development organizations, sports groups, schools, higher education, municipalities and counties, disability organizations, grief and family-support organizations, corporate foundations, donors and experienced practitioners.

The network's value would be connective capacity: helping a community identify what it already has, what it lacks, which organizations can fill those gaps, how funding can be structured, and what governance protections are needed for continuity. A successful network should make local organizations stronger and more independent, not more dependent on a statewide intermediary.

Local Communities Remain in Control

The initiative should begin with a presumption of local ownership. Local advisory leadership should define community priorities, evaluate needs and participate in grantmaking or program decisions. Outside partners should contribute expertise, infrastructure and resources without displacing local accountability.

This has a useful analogue in CFO's current community-fund model, where local advisory governance is paired with CFO professional financial and administrative services, oversight, donor relations and support.[10] This does not assume a CFO community fund is the correct vehicle; it shows that shared local/professional responsibility is an established philanthropic concept.

What BCM Can Contribute - and Cannot Do Alone

BCM can contribute lived institutional experience: memorial programming, scholarships, tournaments, public-facility operations, officials management, facility development, technology, community relationships, documentation practices and long-term research. Its strongest future role may be as a catalyst, historian, researcher, pilot-design participant and mission partner rather than the entity attempting to administer every component.

A credible collaboration also requires expertise BCM does not possess internally and should not pretend to possess: philanthropic fund administration, specialized accounting, legal structuring, statewide grantmaking systems, formal program evaluation, child-safeguarding systems across multiple organizations, clinical grief or mental-health services, disability-service specialization, insurance architecture and broad nonprofit capacity building. Partnership is not a workaround for weakness; it is the operating premise.

Potential Partner Ecosystem

Potential participants should be selected by function rather than prestige. Community foundations can provide philanthropic infrastructure. Local nonprofits can deliver programs. Schools can provide trusted community access and, where appropriate, facilities. Municipalities and counties can contribute public assets and local coordination. Universities can support evaluation, research and workforce development. Corporate and family foundations can provide targeted capital. Specialized nonprofits can address disability inclusion, mentoring, grief support, health, arts, education or other needs.

No organization should be invited merely to endorse a prewritten plan. The first table should include people willing to challenge assumptions, identify duplication, surface risks and point to existing Oklahoma programs that should be strengthened rather than recreated.

Potential Roles for Communities Foundation of Oklahoma

CFO should be asked to determine its own appropriate role. Possibilities include advisor or convener; philanthropic infrastructure partner; fiscal-sponsorship resource for a qualifying pilot; fund administrator; community-fund resource; connector to aligned nonprofits and donors; scholarship partner; or no formal role beyond professional guidance and referrals.

These possibilities are grounded in CFO's public description of its work, not assumptions about approval. CFO currently describes fiscal sponsorship as an option that may be available for qualifying charitable projects and community funds as partnerships combining local advisory governance with CFO administrative and financial support.[9][10] CFO also emphasizes collaboration and connecting nonprofits, businesses, individuals and communities.[8]

The initial request should therefore be for assessment, not commitment: Does this problem merit further exploration? Is any CFO structure potentially relevant? What expertise is missing? Who else should participate?

Community Asset Stewardship

The 2026 research supports design principles rather than a single ownership formula: mission-protected governance; durable access or control; open community participation; transparent financial reporting; capital-reserve planning; representative leadership; written rules for scheduling, concessions, rentals, improvements, contracts, renewal and termination; and institutional continuity designed to survive changes in personalities and administrations.[4]

Facility ownership may be appropriate in some settings, while a multi-decade stewardship agreement may be appropriate in others. The principle is durability and mission protection, not ownership for its own sake. Stewardship should extend beyond physical fields: funds, data, volunteer knowledge, scholarship processes, program standards and community relationships are also assets requiring continuity.

Economic Activity Supporting Community Opportunity

The initiative should not begin with the claim that tournaments will fund a statewide solution. It should ask a more disciplined question: Can some economic activity generated through events, facilities, sponsorships, donations or other lawful revenue streams be deliberately reinvested into local opportunity?

Potential sources could eventually include charitable gifts, grants, sponsorships, endowment distributions, program fees, facility partnerships and event activity. The mix would vary by community and require professional financial, legal and philanthropic review. The governing principle should be transparent reinvestment tied to mission and measurable community benefit.

Pilot Before Scale

A statewide rollout would be premature. The recommended path is discovery, design, pilot, measurement and only then a replication decision.

Phase I - Discovery: convene a small cross-sector group, map existing Oklahoma resources, identify duplication, define the problem more precisely and test the assumptions in this document.

Phase II - Design: select one willing community; map children, programs, facilities, organizations, funding sources, barriers and unused assets; define governance and measurement before launch.

Phase III - Pilot: strengthen existing local organizations where possible. Potential components could include recreation, after-school programming, scholarships, equipment assistance, coach/official development, adaptive opportunities, facility access and family-resource referrals.

Phase IV - Measurement: evaluate participation, affordability, utilization, volunteer capacity, partner leverage, financial transparency, continuity and whether local organizations became stronger.

Phase V - Replication Decision: expand only if evidence shows that the model adds value and can be adapted without erasing local differences.

Governance and Research Firewall

BCM's independent research and a future philanthropic collaboration should be formally separated. Participation in the Community Opportunity Initiative should not constitute endorsement of Baseball Heaven findings, allegations, litigation positions, tax submissions, policy recommendations or interpretations.

Supporting research can be available for transparency and independent review. Partners should be free to accept, reject or challenge its conclusions. Charitable-program decisions should be based on the collaborative initiative's own governance, due diligence and evidence. This firewall protects prospective partners while preserving research independence.

Questions for CFO and Prospective Partners

1. Does the underlying community-opportunity problem merit structured exploration?
2. Are existing Oklahoma organizations already solving parts of this problem that should be strengthened rather than duplicated?
3. What philanthropic or legal structures could support a limited pilot while preserving local control?
4. Could any CFO structure - fiscal sponsorship, community funds, scholarship infrastructure, charitable funds or another mechanism - be relevant, subject to CFO's own review?
5. What governance, safeguarding, financial-control and evaluation standards should exist before a pilot begins?
6. Which nonprofit, education, disability, family-support, recreation, philanthropic and community partners should be at the first table?
7. What would constitute measurable success for children, families and local organizations?
8. If CFO is not the appropriate institutional partner, who should BCM approach next?

Proposed Next Steps

The immediate request is an exploratory conversation, not money. BCM should provide CFO with this master concept, a short executive brief and a controlled online briefing page. CFO should be invited to review the concept internally and identify appropriate staff or external partners for a first discussion.

If interest exists, the next deliverable should be a discovery charter defining scope, decision rights, research boundaries, confidentiality where appropriate, conflict-of-interest expectations and a limited timetable for determining whether a pilot is warranted. No facility acquisition, fiscal sponsorship, statewide entity, public financing mechanism or major fundraising campaign should be presented as decided before that discovery process.

Conclusion: We Can Do More Together

The Brian Crawford Memorial began with one family's effort to carry Brian's memory forward. Over time, remembrance created tournaments, scholarships, service, facilities, operating experience and research. That history does not give BCM authority to design Oklahoma's future alone. It gives BCM a responsibility to place what it has learned before people with other forms of expertise.

The opportunity is not to build an organization around one person's answers. It is to build a table capable of asking better questions.

What could Oklahoma accomplish for children and families if organizations stopped asking which single institution should solve the problem and instead asked what each institution is uniquely equipped to contribute?

That is the conversation this initiative is intended to begin.

Research & Evidence Roadmap

Human origin & memorial history - From Memorial to Mission; Brian Crawford Memorial archive

2025 partnership origin - March 12, 2025 CFO transcript and strategic discussion summary

Facility stewardship - From Facility User to Community Asset Steward

Pre-opening governance - Before the Gates Opened

Tournament economics - Hidden Valley / HVIIOG research

Municipal/public-facility outcomes - Shawnee Regional Sports Park: Promise vs. Actual Outcome

Distributed community programming - Pottawatomie County Parks & Recreation concept

CFO structural context - CFO fiscal sponsorship, community funds, scholarship funds and community-engagement materials

Endnotes

1. March 12, 2025 CFO call transcript; philanthropic services, fiscal sponsorship and possible referrals.
2. Expanding Community Partnerships for the Brian Crawford Memorial Scholarship: A Strategic Discussion, March 12, 2025.
3. From Memorial to Mission project archive; tournament, scholarship, BCM Sports, Seminole complex and Prague field chronology.
4. From Facility User to Community Asset Steward, Baseball Heaven Research Executive Summary, September 22, 2026.
5. Hidden Valley / HVIIOG July 2026 working briefing packet; 165,190 team entries and \$36,339,630 calculated entry fees, with modeled-value cautions.
6. Pottawatomie County Parks & Recreation Commission concept, June 26, 2025.
7. Shawnee Regional Sports Park: Promise vs. Actual Outcome, Baseball Heaven case study, September 2026.
8. Communities Foundation of Oklahoma, Home and About Us, accessed September 29, 2026: <https://cfok.org/> ; <https://cfok.org/about-us/>
9. Communities Foundation of Oklahoma, Fiscal Sponsorship Funds, accessed September 29, 2026: <https://cfok.org/fiscal-sponsorship/>
10. Communities Foundation of Oklahoma, Community Engagement and Community Funds, accessed September 29, 2026: <https://cfok.org/community-engagement/> ; <https://cfok.org/community-funds/>

11. Communities Foundation of Oklahoma, Scholarship Funds, accessed September 29, 2026: <https://cfok.org/scholarship-funds/>

12. Before the Gates Opened historical case study, based on November 24, 2021 operating presentations. An older project summary contains a superseded 2021 employment-end date; this master uses the subsequently corrected December 31, 2022 chronology.

**Brian Crawford Memorial cannot do this alone - and should not try.
We can do more together.**