



Sunflower Foundation

*Paving the Way: From
Blazing Trails to
Building Community*



Trail Blazer Learning Series

Supports communities that are exploring the creation of their first public trail. Through a structured virtual learning series and early planning funds, it strengthens local leadership, fosters community engagement, and lays the groundwork for a sustainable, well-designed trail.



Session 5: From Trail to Community – Building Engagement

Learn who your trail users are, what they need, and how to create a welcoming, engaging trail experience that keeps people coming back!

- Welcome!
- **Engage them and they will come!** Michele Archie
- **Trail Signage and Trail Markers.** Mike Goodwin
- **Special Guest Speaker!** Deb Kolb, Barber County United
- **Tips and Tricks for an engaging and successful Community event!** Mike Scanlon
- **Wrap up and announcements**



Joining us today



Michele Archie,
Harbinger
Consultancy



Mike
Goodwin,
Kansas
Trails Inc.



Deb Kolb,
Barber
County
United



Kelli Mark,
Sunflower
Foundation



Mike Scanlon,
Kansas Trails
Inc.



Sunflower Foundation

A few details

- American Trails membership and resources - Reminder!
- Trail Exchange Day - Registration now available!
- Special Evening event with Amy Camp - Registration now available!
- Trail Exchange Day - Poster Presentations as your report
- We're all friends here. Please turn your camera on but mute your audio. Questions? Jump in, unmute yourself or raise your hand. Use the chat if you have a question on a different topic.



Engage them and they will come

Helping people find, use, stay on and linger because of your trail



Sunflower Foundation

We asked who. Now ask how.

You have already answered:

Who do you want to use your trail?

Today:

How do you want them to use it?

What will help them do that?



Mount Mitchell Historical Trail near Wamego



Sunflower Foundation

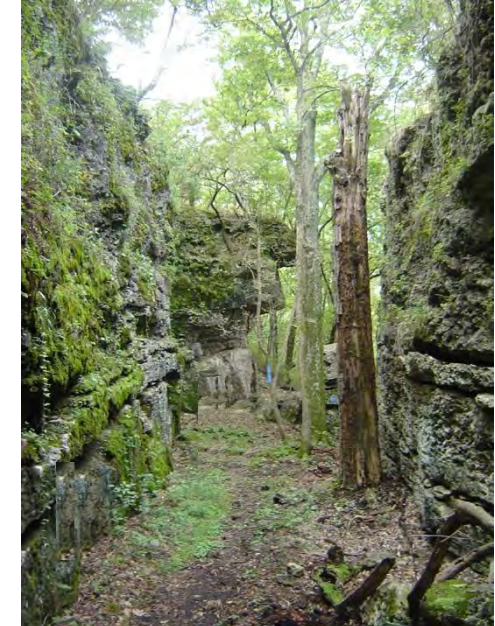
Thoroughfare, or a place to linger?



Eudora



Table Mound



Elk River

THOROUGHFARE

- Getting from A to B
- Most rail trails start here
- Design question: how can we give people a reason to stop?

PLACE TO LINGER

- Slow, wandering, exploring, stopping
- Rest areas built in from the start
- Design job: how can we make lingering easy?



Sunflower Foundation

Signage answers three questions

WAYFINDING

*Do I know it exists?
Can I find it?
Am I still on it?*

INFORMATION

*What am I looking at?
Why should I care?*

THEMES

*What is this trail
actually for?*

Mike is about to show you what these can look like on the ground.



Sunflower Foundation

Connections: does anyone know it's there?



Prairie Spirit Rail Trail, Garnett

- **On the highway** — the sign that tells a traveler you exist at all
- **In town** — downtown, the square, the school, the visitor center: “trailhead, two blocks”
- **From other routes** — where a sidewalk, a bike lane, or a neighboring trail meets yours
- **Online** — does your trail come up when somebody searches for it?

People won't use a trail they don't know is there.

ONCE THEY'RE ON THE TRAIL

Reassurance blazes · loop markers · mid-trail maps · emergency location markers — ***Mike Goodwin will dive into this***



Sunflower Foundation

Information: what am I looking at?



Quindaro Ruins

- Interpretation turns **a place** into **a story**
- History · ecology · people · what used to be here
- Not-just-trail signage: wellness prompts, reflection, “slow down here”
- Ask: what do people walk past without knowing what it is?

A site without its story is just a walk ... not knocking “just a walk”!



Sunflower Foundation

Themes: what is this trail for?



Art trails (Totem Creek Park, Parsons)

A walk built around the work



Mental health trails

Designed to make you pause



Story trails (Wamego Public Library)

A page every hundred feet



Sensory & inclusion

Stations, quiet zones



Poetry trails

Placards along the route

Coming up

Deb Kolb on mental health and wellness placards

Michael Stubbs on a poetry trail he is building right now



Sunflower Foundation

A place to stop is an invitation to stay

- Shade · seating · rest stops · water · restrooms
- **Quarter-mile trail?** One good bench at the end.
- **Longer trail?** Somewhere to sit before people need it.
- This is quietly an accessibility decision — older walkers, parents with small kids, anyone in August



Sunflower Foundation

Design the pause



Little Jerusalem Badlands — an iconic viewpoint

- **Viewpoints** — where the view is obvious, so is the bench
- **Pocket parks** — a reason to pull off a through-trail
- **Space around the art** — so people are not standing in the trail to see it

Where do I want people to stop — and did I build for it?



Sunflower Foundation

Signs people stop for, smile at, and share



The Osawatomie welcome sign

"Higher than Aspen — if we were only measured in inches." Mike Scanlon

- Humor and personality make people stop
- People stop → people photograph → people post
- Give them something worth standing next to

Every photo taken on your trail is free marketing.



Sunflower Foundation

Making a place on almost no budget



- **Mow a room** — a mowed pocket off the trail is a place to be
- **Widen the trail** — occasional bubbles mean that stopping doesn't block anyone
- **Sit on what you have** — stumps, boulders, a log, native limestone
- **Let someone buy the bench** — memorial benches cost you a plaque
- **Shade** — plant a tree now, or build a simple shelter
- **Frame the view** — clear brush so the bench looks at something



You can make this happen!



*For more ideas, explore
“all persons trail”*

What to listen for today

1 How do we want people to use our trail?

2 What are our top priorities — signage or otherwise?

3 What have we not thought about?

COMING UP

Mike Goodwin — signage on the ground

Deb Kolb — mental health trails

Michael Stubbs — a poetry trail

Mike Scanlon — the day you invite everyone out

These questions and a couple more are in your workbooks.



Sunflower Foundation

Trail Signage

- Way Finding
- Information
- Themes

Way Finding

Route marking – Reassurance
Blazing



Route marking – Directions



Way Finding – Mid Trail Maps

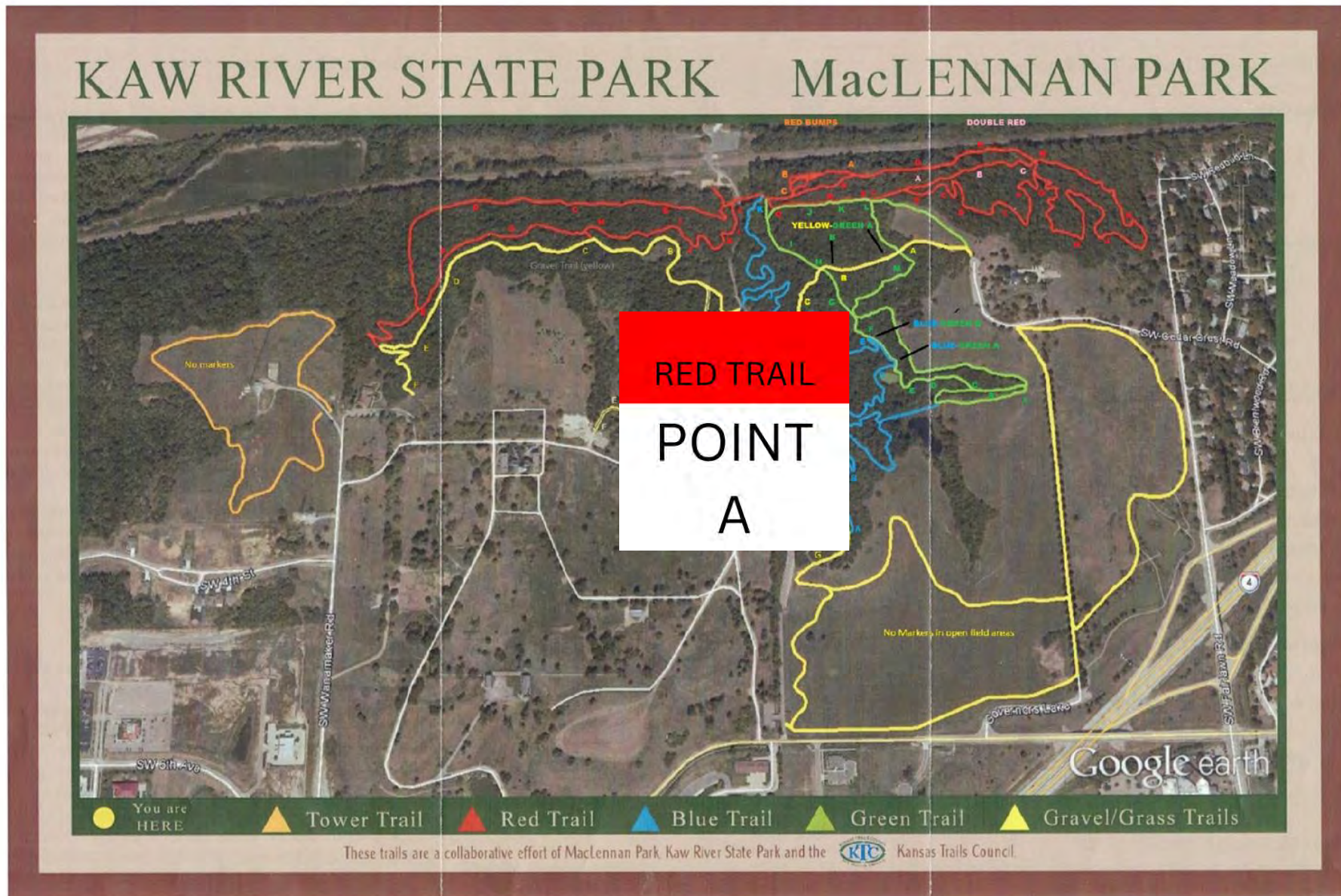


Way Finding – Natural Materials



Native Stone Markers

Safety Markers



Trailheads



Rossville



Goodland

Trailheads



Kiosks



Kiosk Kit \$5K~



Scratch Built <\$1K

Bridges



Trail Users



Information Displays



Sillyness



Themes – Art



Tolen Creek Trails - Parsons

Guest Speaker

Deb Kolb, Barber County United



Sunflower Foundation

ENHANCED TRAIL EXPERIENCES

A Collective Response to Community Needs.

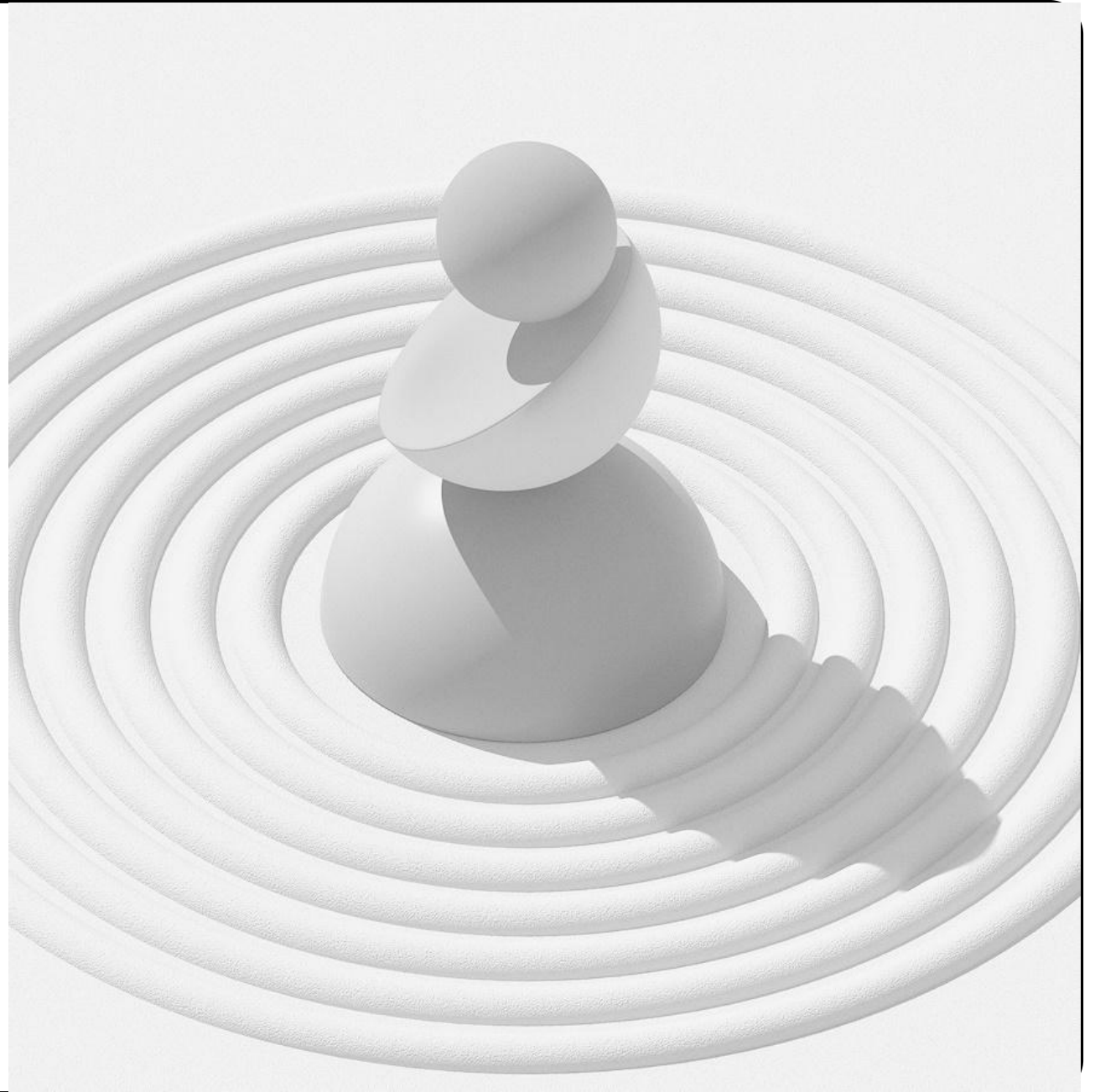
Deb Kolb

Barber County United, Inc.

WELCOME

Barber County United is a quality-of-life nonprofit driving bold, rural-forward solutions that improve the way people live, work, and connect in frontier Barber County, Kansas,.

- COMMUNITY CARES
- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- ARTS & CULTURE
- COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS



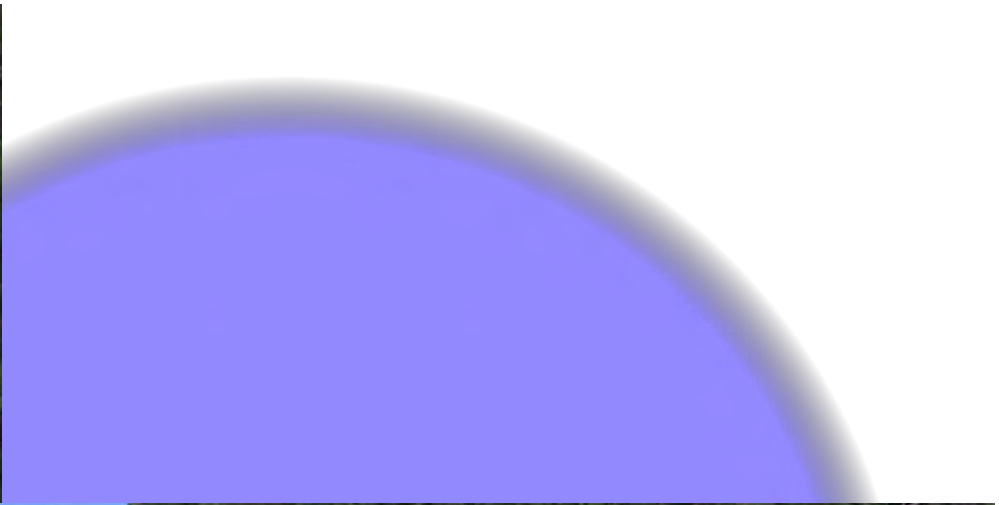


THE CONCEPT

A lingering thought in the back of
our minds.













KANSAS TRAILS INC.

Trail Signage

Wayfinding, community connections, and the shareable moments
that build a trail's following

Photo: the Mile Zero mural, 5th & Main Street, Osawatomie

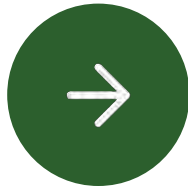
The signage system: five types

Every well-run trail leans on the same five categories of signage — each doing a different job.



Identification

Trailhead & gateway signs that welcome and orient visitors



Directional

Arrows, blazes & fingerposts that keep users on route



Mile markers

Distance tracking that also speeds up emergency response



Interpretive

Ecology, history & points-of-interest panels



Regulatory

Rules, closures & safety warnings

Identification & directional signage



Identification & trailhead signage

- Marks trailheads, parking areas, and trail entry points
- Often the visitor's first impression — sets the tone for the whole trail
- Example: Flint Hills Trail arch signage welcoming riders into a town



Directional & wayfinding signage

- Arrows, fingerposts & painted blazes keep users on route
- Can note mileage to other trails, towns, or attractions — and trailhead distances to go
- Consistent, ADA-compliant placement builds rider and hiker trust in the system

Mile markers & interpretive signage



Mile markers & distance signage

- Traditionally posted every mile; many trails now mark every quarter mile
- Doubles as a 911 dispatch tool — first responders use markers to find trail users fast
- Matters most on distance trails like the 118-mile Flint Hills Trail



Interpretive signage

- Panels on ecology, history, and points of interest along the route
- Turns a trail into a classroom — deepens visitors' connection to place
- Example: “Voices from the Trail” history panels along the Santa Fe route

Regulatory & safety signage



Real example: trail courtesy — yield hierarchy sign



- Communicates rules, closures, and hazard warnings
- Must meet MUTCD retroreflectivity standards in low-light or hazardous areas
- Applies equally to cyclists, hikers, and equestrians sharing the corridor

Common on Kansas rail-trails

● No motorized vehicles

● Open dawn to dusk

● Yield: bike → hiker → horse

● Mobility aids welcome

Connecting towns to trails

Signage doesn't stop at the trailhead — the best systems pull trail traffic into downtown.



Real example: downtown wayfinding kiosk, Iola, KS

- Gateway signage at city entrances signals “the trail runs through here”
- On-street directional signs guide riders from the highway or trailhead to Main Street
- Turns pass-through trail traffic into downtown foot traffic — shops, cafes, lodging

CASE STUDY

Osawatomie: pulling the trail into town

- Extended the Flint Hills Trail the final half-mile into the downtown corridor
- Raised \$150,000+ from local foundations & governments to fund the connection
- Result: 50–75+ extra visitors in town on a typical summer weekday — roughly double on weekends
- Wayfinding signage and historical markers are next on the list

The Mile Zero bike rack — Osawatomie



5th & Main Street

- A bike rack shaped to spell out “MILE ZERO,” installed in front of a mural of John Brown, the historic Creamery Bridge, and classic Kansas icons: sunflower, wheat, railroad, honeybee
- Visitors are invited to stand inside the “I” to snap the photo — the rack is built to be posed with, not just parked at
- A geotagged, ready-made photo op at the exact spot where the trail meets downtown
- Every post from that corner is a free, authentic ad for the trail and for Osawatomie

Why it works: fun + functional signage turns a bike rack into a landmark — and a landmark into marketing.

The elevation sign — 10,428 inches



- A simple trailside sign marking Osawatomie's elevation: 889 feet
- Kansas's famously flat reputation makes the number itself the punchline — nobody summits 889 feet, and that's exactly the joke
- Low-cost, low-effort signage that earns outsized attention simply by inviting a pose next to it
- Proof that a sign doesn't need a big budget to become a “prove you were here” moment — it just needs a reason to stop

Why it works: playful signage invites a specific action — stop, pose, post — and that action is the marketing.

Signage is strategy



Orient & inform

Identification, directional, mile marker, and interpretive signage keep a trail safe and legible for every kind of user.



Connect

Town-to-trail wayfinding turns trail traffic into downtown foot traffic and local revenue.



Go viral, on purpose

A few well-placed, fun landmarks turn trail users into trail promoters — for free.

Every sign is a chance to orient, inform, protect — or go viral.

Workbook & what's next

Modules

Workbook Cover Page

Session 1: Why Invest in Trails? ▾ ⋮

Session 2: Land, Routes & Partnerships ▾ ⋮

Session 3: Safety & Accessibility ▾ ⋮

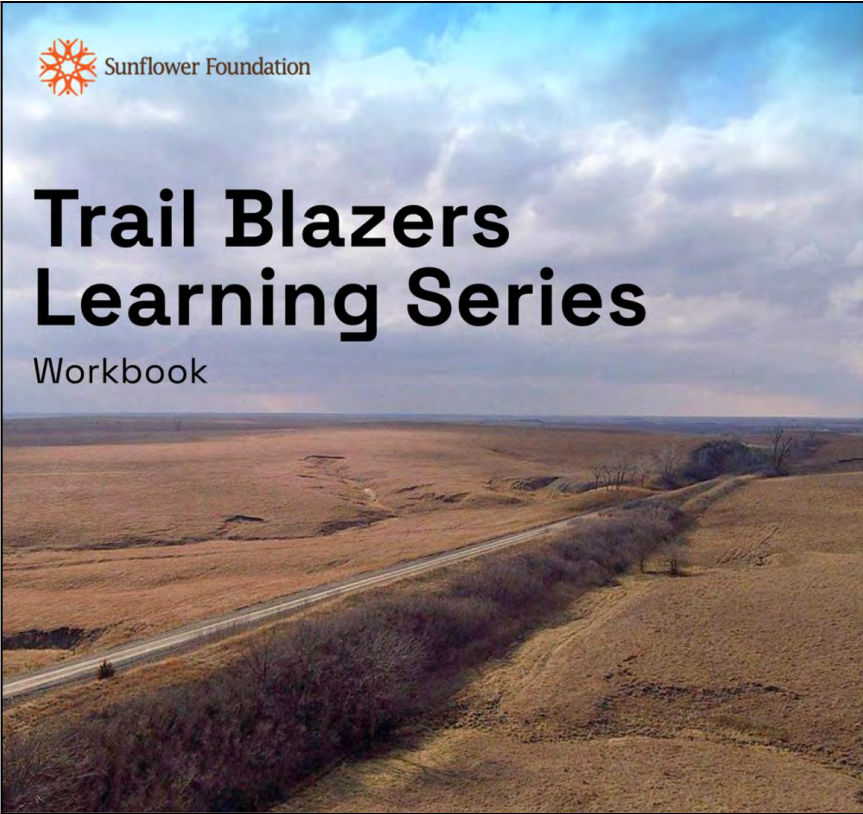
Session 4: Funding & Other Resources ▾ ⋮



Sunflower Foundation

Trail Blazers Learning Series

Workbook



Open office hours —
September 01, 12-1 pm

Next session —
Implementation & Long
Term Sustainability
September 15, 12-1:30
pm

Loads of resources in
the Learning Library!

Thank you!



Sunflower Foundation

Kelli Mark, Director of Healthy
Communities
(785) 232-3000 X 105
Kmark@sunflowerfoundation.org



Mike Scanlon, Executive Director
Kansas Trails, Inc.
Admin@kstrails.org

THE HARBINGER
CONSULTANCY



Michele Archie
(808) 389-9995 (mobile)
michele@harbingerconsult.com



Sunflower Foundation