

Growing the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

Amanda Clasen- Community Vitality Agent
March 2026

KANSAS STATE | Extension
UNIVERSITY | Southwind District

Entrepreneurship isn't just something that happens in big cities or corporate boardrooms; it's alive and growing right here in our local communities. Through youth entrepreneurship programming, local students are discovering that their ideas, creativity, and hard work can turn into real opportunities.



Over the past several years, we've seen an exciting increase in young people who are interested in starting their own businesses or learning how businesses operate. Youth entrepreneurship programs give students the opportunity to explore these ideas in a supportive environment while building important life skills. One of the most rewarding parts of youth entrepreneurship programming is watching students gain confidence as they present their ideas to community members, local business leaders, and judges. Events like the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge (YEC) allow students to showcase their creativity while receiving valuable feedback and encouragement from people who understand the importance of innovation and small business development in rural communities.

This year, local competitions in Allen, Neosho, and Bourbon Counties highlighted the creativity and innovation of youth across our area. Students presented a wide range of ideas, from handmade products and specialty foods to service-based businesses and creative solutions to everyday problems. While awards and prizes are part of the competition, the true goal of the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge is to help young people build confidence and realize that their ideas have value. Many students leave the experience with a stronger understanding of how businesses operate and what it takes to turn an idea into reality.

Participants learn how to develop a business concept, identify customers, calculate costs, and create a basic business plan. Along the way, they also gain valuable experience in communication, problem-solving, and financial decision-making, skills that will benefit them no matter what career path they pursue.

Programs like this would not be possible without the support of local businesses, volunteers, and community partners who invest their time and resources in supporting our youth. Their encouragement helps students see that their ideas matter and that their community believes in their potential.

Entrepreneurship is about more than starting a business; it's about developing the mindset to identify opportunities, solve problems, and think creatively. By helping young people build these skills today, we are investing in stronger communities and local economies tomorrow.

If you are interested in supporting youth entrepreneurship efforts, whether by volunteering, mentoring, or encouraging a young person with a business idea, we would love to connect with you. Together, we can continue empowering the next generation of innovators and leaders right here at home.

For more information about upcoming youth entrepreneurship programs or events, please contact Community Vitality Agent **Amanda Clasen** at any Southwind District office or at amclasen@ksu.edu.