

Derek Ozkal

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Senior applied research and strategy leader with 20+ years of experience translating economic signals into actionable policy, philanthropic strategy, and measurable regional impact. Proven track record of managing multi-million-dollar portfolios (\$31.9M) and directing complex research initiatives to support place-based economic development, talent pipelines, and inclusive entrepreneurship. Trusted "think-and-do" advisor to executive leadership, skilled at bridging academic rigor with practical policy solutions.

CORE COMPETENCIES

- **Research Strategy & Economic Development:** Applied research agendas, regional competitiveness, talent pipeline analysis, adaptive learning frameworks, theory of change articulation.
- **Portfolio & Team Leadership:** Multi-million-dollar resource allocation, cross-functional team management, grantmaking evaluation, managing academic fellows and external research partners.
- **Executive Influence & Public Affairs:** Policymaker briefings, media representation, clear storytelling that drives decisions, convening facilitation, strategic partnerships.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation | Kansas City, MO

2006 – 2008 and 2015 – Present

Senior Officer, Strategic Initiatives (Research, Learning, & Evaluation), 2026 – Present

Senior Program Officer (Research, Learning, & Evaluation, Entrepreneurship), 2018 – 2026

Program Officer (Research, Policy), 2015 – 2018

Research Specialist, 2006 – 2008

Portfolio Management and Strategic Learning

- **Portfolio Leadership:** Directed a **\$31.9M** strategic portfolio across **125+** grants focused on research, labor markets, entrepreneurship, inclusive prosperity, and AI impacts.
- **Signature Programs:** Led the **2018, 2020, and 2022 Knowledge Challenge** initiatives; designed calls that generated **1,100+** submissions and deployed **\$12M** across **60+** projects, with leading economists and management scholars including Erik Brynjolfsson, Lisa Abraham, John Haltiwanger, Kristina McElheran, Nick Bloom, and Ronnie Chatterji.
- **The Legacy Project (Applied AI & Historical Context):** Led a 46-person initiative to digitize 60 years of foundation history; produced a comprehensive historical report; built AI database tool that reduced information retrieval time by **90%+**, establishing a first-of-its-kind digital learning infrastructure for the institution that includes **20,000+** documents.

Evaluation, Learning, and Adaptive Strategy

- **Integrated Evaluation Frameworks:** Transitioned historical research capabilities into an integrated, real-time learning and evaluation agenda designed to drive adaptive strategy and continuous improvement.
- **AI-Enabled Action Review Prototypes:** Designed and built a comprehensive "Before Action Review" and "After Action Review" AI software tool with access to all associates.
- **Systems-Level Impact:** Created comprehensive grant management guides with evaluation metrics to guide internal strategy design for complex, non-linear economic environments.

Executive Advising and Cross-Functional Leadership

- **Executive Strategy & Readiness:** Partnered with the Chief Research, Learning, and Evaluation Officer to shape the Foundation's historical learning approach and delivered actionable, data-driven briefings directly to executive leadership.
- **Enterprise Transformation:** Appointed to the Foundation's core AI working group to define priority operational frameworks and integrating emerging technology into philanthropic operations.

Thought Leadership & External Influence

- **Executive Presence:** Represented the Foundation at 90+ events as a speaker, chair, or moderator at highly influential venues including the OECD, Brookings Institution, National Science Foundation (NSF), NBER, and the U.S. Senate.
- **High-Profile Engagements:** Interviewed U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper for the national relaunch of the Kauffman Indicators (May 2026). Additionally, architected the strategic briefing and interview protocol for former Small Business Administration Administrator Isabel Guzman, translating complex macroeconomic data into actionable insights for policymakers.
- **Publications & Communication:** Authored or contributed content for 35+ pieces in premier outlets such as the Wall Street Journal, Chronicle of Higher Education, and the Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy.

Kansas City Business Journal | Kansas City, MO

2013 – 2015

Director of Research

- **Strategic Content Development:** Partnered with executive and editorial teams to develop evidence-based products for the region's premier business news source (9,500+ subscribers).
- **Innovation:** Architected system to process 4,500+ nominations for the "Best of the Bar" product; authored 130+ articles and lists, driving 500,000+ page views.
- **Data Strategy:** Designed and managed 75 distinct surveys to capture proprietary data on 2,000+ organizations, maintaining database of 4,000+ business entities.

Applied Measurement Professions (Acquired by PSI) | Olathe, KS

2008 – 2013

Account Manager

- **Revenue Growth:** Managed key accounts contributing to \$15 million in annual revenue; successfully grew certification and management services revenue by 20%.
- **Client Strategy:** Served as primary strategic partner for 70 healthcare clients; led proposal development for competitive bids and negotiated pricing for contract renewals.

EDUCATION

Washington University in St. Louis, Olin Business School

Executive Master of Business Administration, 2019

- Global & Policy Residencies in Shanghai, Beijing, Washington DC.
- **Honors:** Peer Award Winner.

Truman State University

Bachelor of Science in Economics, 2003

- **Honors:** *Graduated cum laude*
- Inaugural Alumni Fellow, School of Social and Cultural Studies, 2022.