



Catalyst Funding Opportunity 2025-26

Beyond School Bells (BSB), Nebraska's Statewide afterschool and summer learning network, and a program of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF), is proud to reaffirm its mission to expand high-quality, sustainable, school-based and community-powered K-12 afterschool and summer learning programs—what we call Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs)—with our **Catalyst Funding Opportunity**.

Our **Catalyst Funding** builds on the legacy of our Partner and Leverage Grants, offering flexible support for established ELO programs that are committed to innovation, sustainability, and youth-centered learning. In addition to operational funding, Catalyst grantees join a statewide learning community with access to:

- Coaching and technical assistance
- Virtual and in-person gatherings
- Opportunities to share best practices
- Resources to support long-term sustainability and alignment with statewide priorities such as workforce development, literacy, and attendance

Funding levels are responsive to each program's needs, strengths, and capacity for innovation. Programs should showcase their strengths to bring their most impactful ideas into reality. Strong applications will align with Catalyst Funding goals; examples include applications that:

- Demonstrate use of continuous quality improvement tools and practices (e.g., Nebraska Afterschool Quality and Continuous Improvement System (NAQCIS); Whole Child, Whole Life).
- Show commitment to long-term sustainability through local partnerships and funding strategies.
- Engage in advocacy and awareness efforts that elevate ELO impact and build community support.
- Deliver youth-driven, hands-on programming that builds future-ready skills.
- Demonstrate willingness to actively participate in BSB's statewide learning community to share and adopt best practices.
- Commit to **ongoing, open, and timely communication** with the BSB team to support a strong and responsive partnership

Catalyst Funding Goals and Framework

Catalyst Project goals reflect the core activities Beyond School Bells sees as essential to high-quality afterschool and summer programs, but applicants are not required to request funding under all four goals—you may apply under one, several, or all areas based on your program’s priorities and capacity.

Goal 1 Quality: Facilitate continuous improvement processes to support high quality Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) that engage relevant stakeholders.

BSB will provide funding, coaching, and technical assistance to help programs implement continuous quality improvement (CQI) practices and strengthen partnerships that elevate program quality. Program partners will be encouraged to:

- Use frameworks like NAQCIS and Whole Child, Whole Life to assess and enhance program quality.
- Participate in site-based coaching and statewide convenings.
- Promote youth voice and inclusive family and community partnerships in CQI efforts such as parent-caregiver, student, or community advisory groups.

Goal 2 Sustainability: Increase and enhance efforts that promote local sustainability of partner ELOs.

BSB will invest in strategies that help grantees strengthen long-term sustainability through partnership development, diversified funding, and innovative staffing solutions. Program partners will be supported to:

- Cultivate local champions and secure investments from schools, businesses, and community partners.
- Implement awareness-building strategies, including marketing and storytelling.
- Design and adopt sustainable staff professional development and recruitment models, especially for older youth staff.
- Engage in targeted coaching and use BSB resources like the ELO Sustainability Toolkit and different funding opportunities.

Goal 3 Local Advocacy and Policy: Enhance practices that build local stakeholder knowledge of ELO impact and contribute to supportive policy structures.

BSB will provide resources and opportunities to help programs advocate for supportive policies and elevate community voice in the policy process. Program partners will be supported to:

- Develop and share communication tools, data, and stories that highlight the impact of ELOs.
- Participate in local and state advocacy efforts, including meetings with elected officials and statewide campaigns.
- Identify and engage with local champions to elevate afterschool within schools and communities.
- Stay informed on local and national policy trends through BSB communications and learning communities.

Goal 4 Innovative Programming: Facilitate and enhance use of high-quality programming that reflects youth interests and builds life skills.

BSB will support the development and implementation of engaging, hands-on programming that reflects youth interests and builds essential life and career skills. Program partners will be encouraged to:

- Pilot and refine innovative programming aligned with strategic focus areas such as workforce development, STEM, literacy, and youth leadership.
- Center youth voice in program design.
- Participate in shared learning spaces to exchange ideas and showcase local innovations.
- Track program participation and outcomes, with a focus on building belonging, purpose, and readiness for the future.

Funding Agreement Requirements

Those who receive funding will be expected to:

1. Attend virtual quarterly network meetings
2. Agree to timely and clear contract communication with BSB team
3. Hold a Lights On Afterschool event
4. Attend Advocacy Day in Lincoln hosted by BSB (spring 2026)
5. Submit 5-month and 11-month expenditure reports via WebGrants
6. Submit 5-month and 11-month progress reports via Qualtrics
7. Depending on the goal area(s) applied for, additional requirements may be included.

Examples of these additional requirements could be:

- a. Additional one-on-one coaching
- b. Development of a yearly professional development, sustainability, and/or advocacy plan
- c. Hosting a youth brainstorming session