



September 2026

Announcement

Beyond School Bells Awards \$300K in Catalyst Funding to 13 Nebraska Programs

Beyond School Bells, Nebraska's statewide afterschool network, is investing over \$300,000 in Catalyst Funding to support 13 afterschool and summer programs across the state. Selected sites will pursue one of two pathways — literacy or workforce exploration — while receiving coaching, professional development, and a spot in a growing statewide learning community.

"Afterschool and summer programs are too often left out of conversations about educational improvement and workforce development," said Dr. Alison O'Toole, Vice President of Beyond School Bells. "This funding is an investment in changing that - helping these programs become essential community infrastructure for the outcomes Nebraska has prioritized for its young people."

The nine-month grant runs September 2026 through May 2027, with funded programs joining BSB's Advocacy Day in early 2027 to spotlight the impact of expanded learning.

2026-2027 Awardees: Chadron Public Schools, Cardinal Community Learning Centers (Crete), Tiger Kids Club (East Butler), Aspire For Greatness (Fremont), Eagle Connect (Milford), Aftershock (Norfolk), BLAST (Beatrice), Kearney Community Learning Center, Warrior Academy (Schuyler), Scottsbluff Public Schools, Project Washkon (Walthill), West Lawn Elementary (Grand Island), and York Afterschool Program.

Professional Development and Networking

Nebraska's Afterschool Conference 2026 Final Call for Registration



GETCONNECTED
NEBRASKA'S
AFTERSCHOOL CONFERENCE

September 26, 2026

Day of Conference Registration Available!
Pre-registration closes 9/11

What to Expect

Share ideas | What are other programs doing?

Ask questions | Get support from others who have experience.

Exchange Resources | Discover new things to bring back to your program.

Connect & Network | Meet new people to grow your network.

Walk n Talk Tables

Exhibitors will have booths set up providing you the opportunity to discover new resources from state programs to grow your program!

What to Bring

Wear business casual attire
a bag for exhibitors swag
a pen (notebooks provided)

Food

Grab & Go Breakfast: Burritos & More:

Check in at registration, grab your breakfast & take it to your first workshop!

Lunch & Keynote: Fuel Your Inspiration!

Dessert & Awards: Celebrate Together!

*Dietary restrictions will be accommodated.

Awards

CELEBRATING NEBRASKA AFTERSCHOOL:

MICHELLE AREHART CHAMPION

THE STRONGER TOGETHER

THE GLOW UP

BOB WHITEHOUSE ELO

YEARS OF SERVICE

NOMINATE YOUR PROGRAM:



Three Reasons to Attend

1

Grow & Learn

2

**Meet New Program
Leaders & Staff**

3

**Discover New Ideas &
Resources**

Keynote

Behavior Is a Signal: Reframing
Student Behavior Through
Developmental Relationships

**Monica Dixon, Senior Director of
Solutions- Search Institute**

Sponsors:



Register Here:



The GetConnected 2026 Nebraska Afterschool Conference offers an opportunity to learn more about planning and implementing high-quality afterschool or summer programs. Sessions offered throughout the day target a variety of audiences including program leaders, program staff, teachers, school administrators, community partners, and others interested in afterschool and summer learning opportunities for children and youth.

Register at the link below for the 2026 NE Afterschool Conference, *let's GetConnected!*

Register Now

Pre-Conference Networking Event

Join Beyond School Bells for an evening of networking, fun, and celebration on Thursday, September 24 at this year's Meet, Greet, and GetConnected Networking Event. This special event is included with conference registration at no additional cost and is open to all conference attendees. Whether you're new to the field or a seasoned afterschool professional, this is a great opportunity to connect with colleagues from across Nebraska and build new partnerships. Come and enjoy delicious food, entertainment, networking opportunities, door prizes, giveaways, and a cash bar.

Don't miss one of the conference's favorite opportunities to connect with fellow afterschool professionals and partners in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

Be sure to indicate that you'll be attending the Networking Event when you register for the conference!

Join Our



Meet, Greet, & **GetConnected** Event

Connect, unwind, and explore possibilities at the 2nd annual NE Afterschool Conference networking event!

Event highlights include:

- Free Raffle & Giveaways
- Free Finger Foods & Desserts
- Cash Bar
- Networking Activities
- Games & Prizes

RSVP on your conference registration.



Thursday, Sep. 24



7:00 PM - 9:00 PM



Location:

Younes Conference Center South

Nebraska Afterschool Conference Awards *Nominations close September 10*

Nominations are open! Celebrate the programs making a difference in Nebraska afterschool programs. Nominate for the **Glow Up Award** or **Stronger Together Award** by **September 10**. Self and peer nominations welcome!



Nominate Someone Today!

Discover Mobile STEM in Action!

Join us on Thursday, September 24, from 10:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. at the Younes Conference Center South in Kearney for the Mobile STEM: Think. Make. Create. (TMC) Trailer & STEM Cart Training.

Experience hands-on learning as you explore the Think. Make. Create. (TMC) Trailer and Mobile STEM Cart, and discover practical, ready-to-use STEM activities and strategies you can immediately implement in your afterschool program.

This free professional development opportunity is designed for afterschool directors, site coordinators, frontline staff, library professionals, STEM partners, new directors, high school student staff, and anyone interested in bringing engaging, mobile STEM experiences to youth.

Participants will leave with new ideas, resources, and inspiration to transform STEM learning in their programs. **The first 10 programs to register will receive \$500 to go towards their STEM programming.** Lunch is included at no cost.

Registration closes September 9.

Held the day before the Nebraska Afterschool Conference: GetConnected, this training offers a great opportunity to enjoy two full days of professional learning in Kearney.

[Register Here](#)

Mobile STEM: **Think. Make. Create.** (TMC) and STEM Cart

**A Pre-Conference
Professional
Learning Experience**

*Ignite Curiosity.
Inspire Innovation.
Build Future-Ready Learners.*



**\$500 STEM Programming Stipend
for the First 10 Programs!**

Limit one stipend per program.
Participants must attend the entire training.



Kick off the Nebraska Afterschool Conference: **GetConnected** with an immersive hands-on STEM experience designed specifically for Nebraska afterschool programs. Learn more about the **Think Make Create (TMC) Trailer** and **Mobile STEM Cart**, discover engaging makerspace activities, and leave with practical strategies you can implement immediately in your program.



Thursday, September 24



10:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.



**Younes Conference Center
Kearney, Nebraska**



**FREE Professional Development
Sponsored by Beyond School Bells**



**Registration Required
by September 9**



Why Attend?

- ✓ Explore exciting, hands-on STEM activities.
- ✓ Spark creativity and innovation in your program.
- ✓ Strengthen collaboration and problem-solving skills.
- ✓ Experience inquiry-based learning in action.
- ✓ Engage in engineering and makerspace challenges.
- Plan for mobile makerspace success.
- Adapt activities for elementary, middle, and high school students.

FREE PD SPONSORED BY



Beyond School Bells™
nebraskachildren

Inspiring Learning, Expanding Opportunities.

Perfect For

Afterschool
Program Directors
Site Coordinators
Frontline Staff
Library Professionals

STEM Partners
New Directors
High School
Student Staff

**Bring your team and discover how
mobile STEM learning can transform
your afterschool program!**

**Register by
September 9!**



Think. Make. Create. — Hands-On Learning. Endless Possibilities.



For more information, contact Ann O'Connor: annoconnor@nebraskachildren.org

NAA: Help Bring Healthy OST Practices to More Programs!

Registration is now open to become a Training Partner with the Collaborative for Advancing Healthy Experiences in Out-of-School Time (CAHE-OST)! This free professional learning

opportunity is for organizations that provide training and technical assistance to out-of-school time (OST) professionals. Training Partners will receive everything needed to facilitate CAHE-OST trainings focused on building staff knowledge and confidence to create healthy, supportive OST environments for youth and the adults who work with them.

[Read More Here](#)

Registration Open for NAA27!

Join your peers at the **NAA 2027 Convention**, March 14–17, 2027, at the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center in Denver, Colorado. Take advantage of NAA's lowest registration price and secure your spot now!

[Learn More and Register Today](#)

Student Opportunities

Grow NE 2026-2027 - Deadline Extended!



Beyond School Bells is excited to announce Grow NE club funding for the 2026-27 school year! Grow NE supports Expanded Learning Opportunity programs to cultivate youth leadership in Food Systems – gardening, agriculture, local foods, and so much more. Grow NE contracts and technical assistance are offered to support high school student leadership and afterschool club activities that empower youth to understand and lead local food systems. There are four club tracks to support programming: **Innovative Agriculture, Local Food Systems, Sustainable Growing, and Afterschool to Table.** [More information can be found on BSB's website.](#)

Afterschool programs with interest in gardening and food systems are encouraged to apply! Programs may have experienced gardeners or be brand new to food systems lessons. All will be supported to introduce youth to local food systems. Beyond School Bells will host monthly learning communities for club staff and support high school student leaders to participate in Service-Learning through Conservation where they will pursue food systems solutions like local farmers markets, supporting pollinators, and reducing food waste. High school student leaders will also learn to lead food systems activities with their peers.

Student leader [registration](#) is due by **September 11** and [club applications](#) are due by **September 15**. Please reach out to Alexis Hansen (ahansen@nebraskachildren.org) or Dakota Staggs (dstaggs@nebraskachildren.org) if you have any questions.

Club Application

Service-Learning through Conservation: Deadline Extended!

Do you know high school students interested in conservation and serving their community? Have them apply today for our Service-Learning through Conservation (SLC) opportunity! Applications due **September 11!** [Click here to learn more.](#)

[Apply Here](#)

FOR HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS

Service-Learning through Conservation


Beyond School Bells[™]
nebraskachildren

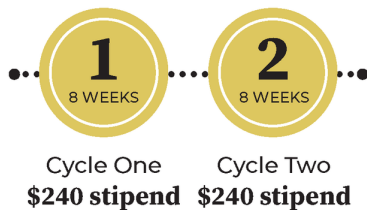
We're looking for student leaders who care about conservation – and about showing up for their communities.

WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR

- High schoolers into **conservation, nature, sustainability, gardening, or teaching** — including students working in afterschool programs
- Must be **at least 15 years old**
- **Parent approval** required

No experience required — just a genuine interest in the outdoors and in helping others learn to care for it.

HOW THE PROGRAM RUNS



IN FEB. 2027, STUDENTS MUST COMPLETE
National Geographic Slingshot Challenge

COHORT BEGINS	WEEKLY COMMITMENT
Week of Aug. 31	2 hrs / week

MEETINGS	TOTAL STIPEND
Biweekly with BSB	\$480 (both cycles)

APPLICATIONS DUE:

August 28

<https://bit.ly/BSB2026Conservation>

APPLY NOW
→



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Indigenous Identity: Beyond Trauma Series with Indigenous Foodways

Join us in honoring Indigenous Peoples Month through community, culture, and the powerful traditions of Indigenous foodways. Together, we will celebrate the ancestral knowledge and relationships that connect people, plants, animals, water, and land.

[Learn More](#)

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY: BEYOND TRAUMA



Nov 1st 5PM @ The Foundry

The Land Is a Teacher: Indigenous Epistemologies and Ways of Knowing - with Dr Angel Hinzo and Manny Macedo



Nov 4th 5:30pm @ UNL Library

Who Gets to Define Knowledge? - A Panel with Nikki Menard, Allie Tamayo, Rogelio Villalobos and community.



Nov 8th 10am @ Wilderness Park

An Indigenous-Led, Place-Based Learning Experience. Led by Indigenous Youth.



Nov 12th 5pm @ The Ellery

What Makes Us Who We Are? - A Panel with Melisa Becerra Gonzalez, Bryce Blue Horse, Erin Poor.



Nov 17th 5:30pm @ The Ellery

"Stories We Tell About Ourselves" - A Poetry Night hosted by Joanna Cael and Manny Macedo.

More events in the following weeks. Last event Nov 30th 5pm. Stay tuned for more information.



**AI Innovation Challenge with STEM Next +
Panasonic Foundation**

Do the young people in your afterschool program have ideas for using artificial intelligence to solve problems in their community or around the world?

[The AI Innovation Challenge](#), created by STEM Next Opportunity Fund in partnership with the Panasonic Foundation, gives high school youth the opportunity to explore those ideas while competing for prize funding for their afterschool program.

Youth identify a local or global issue they care about and use AI as a research and development partner to research the issue, explore possible solutions, and strengthen their thinking. Throughout the challenge, youth lead the work while educators provide guidance and support.

What's the Prize?

- Two first-place winning projects: \$5,000 each for their program site
- Three second-place winning projects: \$3,000 each
- Five third-place winning projects: \$1,000 each

Programs with winning projects will also be featured in STEM Next communications and may be invited to participate in future opportunities.

Who Can Participate?

Eligible afterschool and other structured out-of-school-time programs serving youth in grades 9-12 across the United States are encouraged to participate.

No prior AI experience or coding skills are required for youth or educators. After signing up, educators receive a free AI Innovation Challenge Toolkit with facilitation guidance, AI safety resources, templates, and everything needed to confidently support youth throughout the challenge.

Final project submissions are due November 19, 2026.

Learn More and Sign Up

AFTERSCHOOL EDUCATORS: TAKE THE **AI INNOVATION** CHALLENGE

Presented by STEM Next Opportunity Fund + Panasonic Foundation

Programs compete
for up to \$5,000.

Youth lead the
innovation. Educators
guide the process.



Sign up for the free educator toolkit + get started:
stemnext.org/ai-innovation-challenge

Afterschool Toolkits and Resources

Celebrate Farm to School Month in October

Check out the [Nebraska Farm to School website](#) for resources, ideas, and information to help your school or program celebrate Farm to School Month this October.

There are so many ways to celebrate Farm to School Month in October!

Serve up some local Nebraska food using our **Taste Test Guide**.



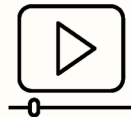
Learn more about a local food product with a **Nebraska Harvest of the Month Presentation**.



Watch one of our **From Farm to You Videos** to visit real Nebraska farms and meet the folks who grow our food and learn how it gets to our plate.



Learn how to prepare a simple, budget-friendly recipe using local ingredients with our **Harvest of the Month Food Demonstration Video Series** or try one of our **Harvest of the Month Recipes**.



Get the whole family involved! Send home a **Nebraska Harvest of the Month Newsletter** featuring one of our 30 local food items! These colorful newsletters include recipes, activities, nutrition information, selection and storage tips, and more!



Challenge your students with **fun trivia questions** about local foods, farming, and nutrition. Great as a warm-up or a brain break!



Use our **After School Lessons** to dive deeper into food systems, nutrition, and agriculture. Each lesson is hands-on and tied to real-world themes your students will love.

Hang up a **Harvest of the Month Poster** of a local food item to build excitement. Perfect for kicking things off or creating a display.



Make it a Party!

Combine resources to create a Farm to School Celebration Day with stations like trivia, recipe tasting, videos, and more! Don't forget to take a big group photo!



Access all of these resources and more at:

<https://www.education.ne.gov/ns/farm-to-school/harvest-of-the-month/>



Participate in the Mountain Plains Crunch Off

The **Mountain Plains Crunch Off** is a fun way to celebrate local foods during October by encouraging students and communities to take a bite of locally grown produce. Nebraska schools and childcare centers have accepted the challenge by crunching to higher levels year after year.

In 2025, a record setting total of **96,431** Nebraskans came together to crunch! Registration for the 2026 Crunch Off will open October 1, 2026, and will close on October 31, 2026. Students, teachers, farmers, parents, organizations, community members, and local food enthusiasts can register their team and crunch into local food products anytime

in October! **Help us reach our goal of 100,000 crunches in Nebraska this year!** Learn more about the Crunch Off, register your team, and find out how to participate at the link below.

[Learn More and Register](#)

Launching Futures: A New Toolkit from STEM Next



The **Launching Futures Toolkit**, created by STEM Next and powered by RTX, equips educators with practical resources to connect young people to the fast-growing world of space and aerospace careers.

Built around the four strategies in STEM Next's Career-Connected Learning Framework, the toolkit is designed to make it easy for afterschool and informal educators to bring aeronautical and aerospace careers to life.

Inside, you'll find:

- Hands-on activities modeled on real challenges aerospace professionals face, segmented by grade level and paired with facilitation guides
- Career profiles spanning different aeronautics and aerospace fields, explaining how it contributes to the industry and highlighting the skills, education, and day-to-day responsibilities involved
- Resources from partners, including NASA, the Smithsonian and Space Museum, and more

Access the Toolkit

Join **STEM Next** and **RTX** on **September 15 at 2 pm ET/11 am PT** for the webinar launch of this toolkit to learn more about how to bring aerospace career learning to your program.

Register for Webinar

Challenge Based Learning Activity Bundle



Challenge Based Learning, or CBL, is a flexible framework that empowers learners to co-own and co-author learning experiences, ultimately bringing Career-Connected Learning to life! This Activity Bundle from STEM Next is designed as a “quick start” for out-of-school time educators looking to bring CBL and career-connected learning into their programs. Through three hands-on lessons, youth in grades 5-8 explore science, environmental stewardship, and AI while building skills in problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. Each activity invites learners to take ownership, apply their ideas to real challenges, and create solutions that connect to their communities.

Check Out the Activity Bundle

Our Contact Information

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