



January 2026

Program Spotlight

Why Nebraska is Investing in Boys and the HEAL Economy



Nebraska is launching the Boys in HEAL initiative to engage boys in careers within healthcare, education, and literacy. By focusing on experiential learning and mentorship, the program aims to counter declining male representation in these essential fields, promote purpose-driven career choices, and ultimately strengthen communities while addressing workforce shortages.

Read the full article by Dr. Joe DiCostanzo, Vice President, Education at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation.

[Read the Article](#)

Resource Spotlight

National Agriculture in the Classroom

National Agriculture in the Classroom supports local-level Agriculture in the Classroom programs by providing a network that seeks to improve agricultural literacy - awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of agriculture as it affects quality of life - among preK-12 teachers and students.

Visit [National Agriculture in the Classroom's](https://agclassroom.org/) website to discover a wide range of free resources for K–12 educators—from ready-to-use lesson plans and virtual field trips to helpful teacher tools that bring educational standards to life through agriculture. Be sure to explore their **Curriculum Matrix**, a free, searchable database of standards-based lessons that use agriculture as a real-world context for science, social studies, and nutrition education.

<https://agclassroom.org/>

Student Opportunities



The Mott Million Dollar Challenge: Where Big Ideas Win Big

Kids and teens everywhere have world-changing ideas that deserve the spotlight, and the Mott Million Dollar Challenge is their chance to shine. This national pitch competition invites K-12 students to submit a simple 30-90 second video sharing an idea that betters their very own school, home, or community. And at Beyond School Bells, we want to make sure that Nebraska youth are able to contribute to this exciting project.

Students can enter individually or in teams of up to three, and \$1 million in prizes will be awarded across the competition! **Submissions are due February 27, 2026.**

Supported by funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Mott Million Dollar Challenge is powered by the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) in collaboration with VentureLab, Young Entrepreneur Institute (YEI), the Afterschool Alliance, and Collaborative Communications.

We at Beyond School Bells are excited to help promote this exciting, one-time opportunity to afterschool programs across Nebraska – and we have some resources to help, including a limited number of stipends for program facilitators who are willing to assist applicants in navigating the pitch process. Contact Jeff Cole at jcole@nebraskachildren.org if interested in learning more about this one-time opportunity for Nebraska youth to pitch their ideas in a 50-state competition!

Learn more about this amazing opportunity at mottmillion.org



BSB’s Spring 2026 Partnership with the Contribution Project

***If someone gave you \$400 to make a difference in your
Nebraska community, what would you do with it?***

Building on our successful Fall 2025 launch, BSB is once again partnering with the Contribution Project to provide Nebraska youth, ages 14–24, with the resources they need to bring their big ideas to life. Read more about this innovative program [here](#).

We will once again be offering \$400 stipends to accepted Nebraska contributors – *youth in your communities* - to help them pursue their dreams.

The Contribution Project’s Spring 2026 application opens February 2nd. Please help us spread the word to youth who may be interested in this amazing opportunity. Stay in the loop! Sign up here to get updates on the Contribution Project and be the first to hear when applications reopen: <https://contributionproject.org/nebraska>. If you have questions

about this amazing opportunity for Nebraska youth, please contact Jeff Cole at jcole@nebraskachildren.org



National Geographic Slingshot Challenge

It's not too late! The National Geographic Slingshot Challenge is underway and there is still time for youth ages 13-18 to sign up and participate. Slingshot Challenge submissions are due February 6, 2026. Beyond School Bells is a proud partner of the National Geographic Slingshot Challenge. Our team is ready and available to support your students to submit solutions to local environmental challenges and to address those challenges in afterschool and summer programs. For more information or support to participate in the Challenge, reach out to Dakota (dstaggs@nebraskachildren.org) or Alexis (ahansen@nebraskachildren.org).

Conservation Management 2026!



We're getting an early start on planning our Conservation Management programs for 2026! Watch for our upcoming **day-long Conservation Management Experiences** this

spring and our **two-week Conservation Management Internship** this summer.

Through these programs, students will travel across Nebraska to learn about and actively participate in conservation efforts, explore career opportunities, and engage in meaningful service work. Nebraska's unique and diverse landscapes provide the perfect backdrop for these experiences, giving students the chance to connect deeply with nature, discover the beauty of their state, and lead youth-driven service-learning projects that make a real difference in their communities.

Funding Opportunities

2026 Aim High Grant Program

The New York Life Foundation is seeking applications from afterschool, summer, or expanded learning programs serving underserved middle-school youth. In total, \$800,000 in grants will be awarded to programs across the country. This is the tenth year of the [Foundation's Aim High grant competition](#), bringing the total amount awarded to \$14.15 million. A total of 40 grant awards will be made nationwide—take a look to see if this opportunity is a good fit for you and apply today!

Grant funds are for general operating expenses. Applicants will need to describe how programs support youth in the transition to the ninth grade.

[Join their informational webinar](#) on **January 15** to learn more about this opportunity.

Applications are due February 6, 2025, at 5 p.m. ET. [Learn more about this grant application, view the RFP, and submit your application here.](#)

Reach out to the Afterschool Alliance at aimhigh@afterschoolalliance.org with questions.

Apply Now

Outdoor Classroom Challenge: Project Green Schools

Project Green Schools' 2026 Outdoor Classroom Challenge is inviting schools across the U.S. to design and implement an inspiring outdoor learning space for a chance to win the \$10,000 Grand Prize to enhance an existing space or build a new one.

All U.S.-based schools Pre-K through 12 are eligible to apply.* Schools will submit a brief proposal, budget, and design. The top five submissions will be invited to present their ideas in a virtual pitch event, where judges will select the \$10,000 winner. Applications are due by January 23, 2026.

<https://projectgreenschools.org/outdoor-classroom-challenge/>

Professional Development

Lead with Confidence Workshop 2026!

Build confidence leading afterschool STEM!
Hands-on activities and teaching strategies for all OST professionals.

January 29th, 2026
Schuyler Community Schools District Office

Register Now



This 2-hour workshop is designed to build confidence in leading afterschool STEM learning experience for both new and experienced staff. The hands-on workshop features STEM activities you can use right away and focuses on developing teaching skills and strategies. All out-of-school time professionals are invited to attend, from part-time staff to site directors and educators.

During this workshop, you will:

- Learn how to encourage active STEM learning and plan strategies you can use to keep children engaged in all the activities you lead.
- Learn how purposeful questions support learning and thinking, and practice developing purposeful questions you can use.
- Experience hands-on activities designing paper circuits and engineering marble rollercoasters.
- Be prepared to apply new skills and strategies when leading STEM activities afterschool.

Workshop Objectives:

- Participants will be prepared to use **Active STEM Learning** strategies that keeps children engaged in learning.
- Participants will learn and apply strategies for **Asking Purposeful Questions** that support learning.
- Participants will leave the training with concrete ideas for applying what they have learned and resources to continue developing their STEM teaching skills.

January 29, 2026
6:15-8:15 PM

Schuyler Community Schools District Office
2023 Colfax St., Schuyler, NE

Doors open at 5:45 PM with dinner served.

Registration link: <https://go.unl.edu/uc2spdwl>



Stay Up-to-Date on Opportunities Like These by Visiting Our New Webpages

NEW: BSB Resources and Professional Development Pages!

To complement our recently refreshed website, Beyond School Bells is developing new Resource and Professional Development pages to provide afterschool and summer program professionals with quick and easy access to toolkits, resources, professional development opportunities, and upcoming conferences. We hope this serves as a “one-stop shop” for the highest-quality, easiest-to-use, and relevant resources you and your programs need now!

Check out our newest additions:

- **[Toolkits and Resources](#)**: Here, you can find direct links to BSB and partner resources on topics ranging from ***Staff Development*** to ***Afterschool Community Networks*** to ***Engaging Clubs, Curricula, and Play!***

Engaging Clubs, Curricula, and Play



- **[Professional Development Opportunities](#)**: Here, you can find free virtual trainings and professional development opportunities hosted by BSB and other trusted local and national organizations in the afterschool space. Trainings range from ***Behavior Management*** to ***National Afterschool Policy Updates*** to ***STEM Facilitation Tips***. Additionally, check out the “Upcoming Conferences” section to find local and national conferences you may be interested in attending.

Upcoming Opportunities



Behavior Management Training that "Sticks" for Supervisors

January 8, 2026

Option 1: 10:00-10:45 AM CT

Option 2: 4:00-4:45 PM CT

As a part of our January webinar series, learn about a behavior management training resource made specifically for Afterschool Staff teams that really "sticks"!

Join:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89983685409>



Policy Pulse with Afterschool Alliance

January 9, 2026 11:00-11:30 AM CT

Tune in to Policy Pulse for national afterschool policy updates every second Friday at 11:00am CT. On these monthly webinars, Afterschool Alliance's Senior VP of Policy, Erik Peterson, will recap the latest policy developments, what we know (or don't know!) about how they may impact afterschool and summer programs, and what may be coming up next.

Register: <https://bit.ly/48Kg7eU>



Behavior Management: Success Planning Tool

January 15, 2026

Option 1: 10:00-10:45 AM CT

Option 2: 4:00-4:45 PM CT

As a part of our January webinar series, learn about a team approach to guiding positive behavior for individual students in your program. Leave with access to all Success Planning Tools!

Join:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89983685409>

- **Student Challenges:** Here, you can find programs to expand students' thinking and skills while earning prizes or funding for their afterschool program.

🏠 > What We Do

Student Challenges

The Mott Million Dollar Challenge: Where Big Ideas Win Big

MOTT
MILLION DOLLAR
CHALLENGE

**THIS IS WHERE
BOLD IDEAS
WIN BIG.**

A Pitch Competition for Kids and Teens

Deadline: February 27, 2026

**\$1 MILLION
PRIZE POOL**

Stay tuned for new additions in the coming months!

Our Contact Information

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