CIVIC EXPERIMENT MINI-GRANTS

Nebraska is filled with abundance! Every day, more than 1,500 volunteers across the NCF Network generously share their time, talent, and treasure with their hometowns, creating communities where new ideas ignite and fresh possibilities take shape. To help bring those possibilities to life, Nebraska Community Foundation is excited to offer Civic Experiment Mini-Grants designed to unleash local creativity and turn bold visions into reality. We are the people we've been waiting for!

Civic Experiment Grant Contacts

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Nebraska Community Foundation Civic Experiments

In 2025, Nebraska Community Foundation was selected as a Civic Hub by the Trust for Civic Life. This designation creates an opportunity for NCF to offer local support and funding to help unleash more civic experiments throughout the NCF network. *(Please see FAQs below for definitions and examples of civic experiments.)*

The purpose of Nebraska Community Foundation's Civic Experiment Mini-Grants is to ignite local creativity, strengthen civic engagement, and transform bold ideas into tangible community experiments across Nebraska. By providing guidance, funding, and a collaborative framework, these grants empower affiliated funds to leverage local assets, build connections, and design innovative initiatives that reflect the unique strengths, culture, and vision of their hometowns. Through this process, NCF hopes to inspire experimentation, celebrate community ingenuity, and foster a network of civic learning and collaboration throughout Greater Nebraska.

We invite NCF Affiliated Funds to take an asset-based approach to their experiments, with emphasis on the following:

- **Abundance**, not scarcity; **Assets**, not needs
- **Opportunities**, not deficiencies
- **Invite** people into the conversation and **co-create**
- Incremental progress creates **change that sticks**
- Community-**led** and community-**owned**
- **Build relationships** before you need them
- **People belong** through having their gifts and talents received and appreciated
- Volunteer associations (i.e. community-based affiliated funds) are **very powerful** and essential to build community

At the heart of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is belonging. While developing your big idea for a Civic Experiment, please seek abundant opportunities to extend belonging to others.

The Process

NCF is taking an iterative, relational, and asset-based approach to the process. Here's what interested funds can expect:

Step One

Beginning in January 2026, local affiliated funds are invited to share an idea their FAC would like to conduct as a civic experiment. Please take a moment to fill out this form.

Step Two

After you submit your idea, we'll invite you to informal conversations so you can share what you're dreaming about. At that time, we can begin to work together to:

- Identify the level of support and resources that will help your idea take shape
- Estimate the time needed to bring your experiment to life (all experiments should conclude by December 31, 2027)
- Explore ways to enhance and strengthen your idea using local assets and community strengths
- Articulate some of the outcomes you hope to achieve through your experiment
- Consider how your experiment can connect, unleash, and inspire civic engagement across the NCF Network

Step Three

Once approved, NCF issues a 1:1 matching grant to the local affiliated fund to conduct the civic experiment and the affiliated fund gets started on their experiment! The funding range for Civic Experiment Mini-Grants is between $1,000 and $10,000.

About Civic Experiment Mini-Grants

- Civic Experiment Mini-Grant applications may be submitted beginning January 1, 2026
- Funding is available exclusively to funds in the NCF Network
- Community based affiliated funds can request funding between $1,000 and $10,000 for their experiment
- Civic Experiment Mini-Grants require a 1:1 match from the participating affiliated fund
- Civic Experiment Mini-Grant participant communities may be invited to share their ideas, discoveries, and outcomes

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is there a grant application for us to fill out?

A: No. While there is no application, we do ask that you begin step one by filling out this form. Steps one, two and three replace a more traditional grant application.

Q: What do you mean by "civics?"

A: Civics is the study of how people participate in their community, including the rights and responsibilities of residents and how local decisions are made. Civic engagement has always been part of community building throughout the NCF network and is the broader practice of people showing up, collaborating, and caring for the places they live. Civic Experiment Grants are designed to support community-led efforts that help people connect, take meaningful action, and feel more confident in a shared future.

Q: Are these experiments intended to be political?

A: No. NCF remains a nonpartisan organization that celebrates the shared values of Nebraskans coming together to make their hometowns stronger, more vibrant places to live, work, and play.

Q: What if the experiment fails?

A: That's okay! This opportunity is meant to be experimental. Be bold! Take risks! The sky's the limit! What did we all learn to take into the next experiment together?

Need some inspiration?

Below are examples of civic experiments already happening across the NCF Network. We hope they inspire you, and we warmly invite you to propose your own bold, original ideas for consideration!

- Third Spaces
- Local Art Installations and Experiences
- Unique Festivals and Celebrations
- Community Storytelling Projects
- Dinner and Conversation
- Edible Schoolyards
- Intergenerational Experiences
- Intercultural Opportunities
- Investments in Local Journalism
- Serviceship Camp
- Relational Asset Mapping
- Or any other idea you can dream up!

Keep scrolling to learn more about these examples. You might even adapt one of these ideas for your community or propose your own bold, original ideas for consideration.

Third Spaces

In Imperial, the local FAC helped turn an old lot into a vibrant “Art Park” featuring colorful murals, creative design elements, and a unique gathering space made from a recycled grain bin. Looking ahead, they plan to host community potlucks, where neighbors can connect, share culture, and spark conversation over the meals they enjoy together.

Local Arts Installations and Experiences

Affiliated funds in McCook, Keith County, and Valley County are only a few of several Greater Nebraska communities helping build belonging through the development of local murals, live music, and thoughtful theatrical performances followed by authentic community conversations.

Unique Festivals and Celebrations

Last summer in Hebron, the local pickleball court at Willard Park set the scene for Picklefest! Organized by local youth and adults, the event was all about pickles, featuring a pickleball tournament, a pickle-eating contest, and special pickle-themed treats from local businesses and restaurants. The whole community came together to celebrate, compete, and connect over everyone’s favorite tangy snack!

Community Storytelling Projects

Hometown Intern Ally Sedlacek believes that the biggest assets in Holt County are its people. To highlight some of the amazing folks that help make her community such a great place to call home, she created *The People of Holt County*. Through video storytelling, Ally brought the stories of these local changemakers to life, making their gifts and talents visible to Holt County residents and beyond!

Dinner and Conversation

In Nebraska City, Chloe Carlson had an idea: What if people joined to break bread while also sharing a deeper conversation about what it means to belong? She designed a series of questions and invited a group of people who might not always choose to dine together for an incredible evening of discovery, connection, and goodness.

Edible Schoolyards

At the Valley Child Development Center in Red Cloud, students are involved in the experience of growing, harvesting, preparing, and sharing food as a means of fostering knowledge of food and food systems, improving students’ food choices, and connecting students to the land, the environment, and their community.

Intergenerational Experiences

In Verdigre, Hometown Intern Heidi Hollman and her adult Champion, Ruth Frank, teamed up to take on a community project: restoring a local mural. Along the way, they recruited community members of all ages to join in. After several days of painting, the result was not only a beautifully restored mural but also deeply authentic intergenerational friendships.

Intercultural Opportunities

In Perkins County, the FAC is helping bridge cultures through the simple, powerful act of communication. Fund member Rodolfo Arragon teaches Spanish to his neighbors, giving residents a chance to discover the rich diversity of their community while also celebrating the common threads that unite their hearts.

In Columbus, Centro Hispano hosts the Sueños Summit, an annual event that gives high school students an opportunity to hear from a variety of Latino leaders who help motivate youth to embrace higher education and brighter futures.

Investments in Local Journalism

Nebraska Community Foundation aided the Nebraska Reporting Fund as it worked to establish the Nebraska Journalism Trust. This partnership made possible the Flatwater Free Press, a nonprofit news outlet covering important stories across Greater Nebraska. Many NCF affiliated funds have been featured in FFP investigations and articles, and NCF remains a strong sponsor of NJT. NCF is interested in the ways affiliated funds might support local journalism in their communities.

The Coleridge Area Fund (CAF) and a seventh-grade digital media class at Laurel-Concord-Coleridge Middle School are collaborating on *The Coleridge Communication*, a printed newsletter that is co-created by students and circulated to all mailing addresses in the Coleridge zip code.

Serviceship Camp

Every summer in Diller, students from kindergarten through fifth grade come together for a day of discovery. They explore local assets, imagine the community's future, choose a project to bring to life, and learn the basics of philanthropy. Serviceship Camp has been so successful that other communities are now creating their own versions.

Relational Asset Mapping

What gifts do your friends, neighbors, and even strangers possess that may go unnoticed? Through the asset-based practice of appreciative inquiry and relationship mapping, NCF communities are uncovering the goodness already present around them and tapping into local wisdom and passion to move their goals forward.

Any Other Idea You Can Dream Up

Have you ever had an idea you've been excited to try but weren't quite sure how to begin? Is there a group in your community your FAC has been hoping to connect with but could use a little support to make it happen? Or is there something unfolding in your hometown where your FAC could step in as a convener, a connector, or simply a force for good?

These are exactly the kinds of ideas we'd love for you to share with us! We look forward to hearing from you soon.