NEBRASKA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

2026 ANNUAL REPORT



Common COURAGE

WHAT IS *Common Courage?*

COMMON COURAGE IS EACH INDIVIDUAL PLAYING THEIR PART IN THE BIGGER PICTURE.

- VANCE HEYER
Ainsworth

IT'S TAKING A STEP WHETHER IT'S POPULAR OR NOT, AND IT'S FOR THE GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY.

- ERIC DUHACEK
Ogallala

IT MEANS THAT YOU LOVE THE PLACE WHERE YOU LIVE AND YOU ARE WILLING TO SUPPORT WHERE YOU LIVE.

- LINDA ALBERTS
Long Pine

COMMON COURAGE IS SOMETHING THAT EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE, EVERYONE DOES HAVE, AND IT'S JUST A MATTER OF WHETHER THEY ACT ON IT OR NOT.

- PAIGE HANSEN
Deshler

COMMON COURAGE IS THE DECISIONS, SMALL AND LARGE, THAT PEOPLE MAKE FROM DAY TO DAY TO IMPROVE OUR PLACES.

- AUSTIN TRUEX
Norfolk

IT'S BEING OPEN ABOUT WHO YOU ARE AND THE PRINCIPLES THAT YOU DEFEND IN YOUR LIFE, THE VALUES THAT YOU HAVE IN YOUR LIFE.

- RODOLFO ARAGON
Grant

COVER PHOTO:

Hometown Interns and their Champions gathered at Dahlia Valley Ranch outside Arnold for an evening of reflection and celebration at the end of the summer. After eight years of Hometown Internships, 113 young people have completed the program.

Common COURAGE



Every day, thousands of Nebraskans wake up and choose to believe in their community. That choice is the seed of our shared bravery. As that inspiration connects with a neighbor or friend or family member, those seedlings grow into something powerful enough to transform the future of Greater Nebraska. They become our Common Courage.

Through our work with Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF), we see this courage take form in multiple ways. It's rooted in our asset-based approach, which requires the courage to take an honest look at your community, acknowledge its imperfections, and dedicate your time and talents to celebrate and amplify each of its unique assets. After all, they are what make your place one of a kind.

This annual report captures just some of the ways Common Courage appears in the NCF network. It looks like knocking on your neighbor's door and asking what their dreams are for the community. Maybe they imagine a new playground for a revitalized park, a mural to breathe new life on main street, or a new community center to bring every generation together under the same roof for conversation and connection.

It looks like neighbors working toward a shared vision, maybe over coffee or maybe on a Fund Advisory Committee. It can look like asking our family, friends, and neighbors to contribute to an unrestricted endowment or to consider supporting their community in their estate plan. It can look like issuing a Homegrown Challenge.

It looks like returning to your town as a Hometown Intern and making space for yourself in important conversations. It can also mean leaving space for those whose voices aren't heard enough. It can look like inviting a young person to return home someday.

Common Courage manifests in the creation of public art projects, inclusive playgrounds, early childhood development centers, community buildings, science fairs, makerspaces, and so much more. Common Courage shows itself when we share our experiences and wisdom with others as peer mentors.

It means doing all of these things with the understanding that there is no rule book for community-building. When we practice Common Courage, we build the path while we walk it. We are never alone in this effort.

We hope you see yourself and your community reflected in the stories compiled in these pages. From the moment you joined the NCF network, you have played a part in each and every success across our state. ■

Jeff Yost, *Chief Executive Officer*

Chuck Hibberd, *Board Chair*



Efforts to grow unrestricted endowments empower Nebraskans today and in the future. Wayne's Little Roots Child Development Center is one of many local organizations benefitting from Wayne Area Legacy Fund's increased grantmaking capacity from its unrestricted endowment's annual payout.

BUILDING *Courageous* COMMUNITIES

The Nebraska Community Foundation network is a virtuous cycle. Conversations lead to ideas, ideas lead to fundraising campaigns, fundraising campaigns capitalize endowments, grantmaking from endowment payout leads to impact, and impact leads to conversation about what more is possible. After that, communities are ready to start all over again.

> **WHEN YOU START TO GIVE AND YOU SEE THE GOOD THAT DOES, THEN YOU WANT TO DO MORE.**
>
> - BECKY KEIDEL
> *Wayne Homegrown Challenge Lead Donor*

People are at the center of this process. They are the courageous engine of this cycle, the motivation, and the recipients. Change happens along the lines of relationships at the speed of trust. Change also happens when people create a reserve of "big dream" capital to use as they see fit in their hometowns. That's the power of an unrestricted endowment.

Today, 94 communities in the NCF network are building unrestricted endowments; those total $96 million. In 2018 the total was $34 million. In 2012 it was $12 million. Nearly 60 communities receive an annual payout of $10,000 or more from their unrestricted endowment—33 have annual payouts surpassing $50,000. That's money that can be used to start something new, save something important, or adapt to the future. This annual report is a testament to all the things communities can achieve with such an important and flexible resource.

Contributions to unrestricted endowments are increasing as generous Nebraskans find the courage to commit to their communities through a Homegrown Challenge. These challenges

begin with a $100,000 initial gift from a lead donor—often a local family or business. Nebraska Community Foundation then offers an additional incentive of $50,000 if the community raises an additional $300,000. The result is a $450,000 investment in the community's unrestricted endowment.

Dick and Becky Keidel issued their challenge to the Wayne Area Legacy Fund in 2023, motivated by their gratitude to the community where they lived for 50 years. There, they raised their children and became embedded in the community, Dick as a pharmacist and Becky as a travel agent, teacher, board member, and so much more. They were also invited to give their time and talent to Wayne's civic wellbeing.

"There were two or three men who were community leaders who reached out to us, brought us along in their journey, and asked us to do things we thought we couldn't do," Becky said. "We found out we could help. When you start to give and you see the good that does, then you want to do more."

The Keidels agree that Wayne Area Legacy Fund is an ideal vehicle for giving and doing good in Wayne. They admire how the Fund Advisory Committee ensures all aspects of the community are supported.

"They're doing a good job of making sure the money doesn't all go to a few places," Becky said. "Everyone in the community at some time feels like they've had some benefit from this."

Twenty-nine other affiliated funds are walking alongside the Wayne Area Legacy Fund, accepting Homegrown Challenges from generous people in their own communities. As unrestricted endowments continue to grow in the NCF network, the cycle begins anew with Fund Advisory Committees well positioned to build communities equipped to meet new opportunities in the future. ■



JOE KAMLER,
SHICKLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUND

The unrestricted endowment has been a game changer for Shickley. It now totals $3 million. Not only has the Shickley Community Foundation Fund made 508 grants totaling nearly $1,154,000, the diversity of areas assisted is also significant. Grants have supported our library, school system, parks, community clubs, health care, and economic development.

The combination of the dollars invested back into Shickley and all the programs that have benefited have fueled a feel-good spirit of repetitive giving to the unrestricted endowment—the donors are witnessing community improvements come to life that their gifts have made possible.



SHELBY McCLUNG,
BIG SPRINGS COMMUNITY FUND

Our community wanted to expand and refresh the existing shelter at the Big Springs Community Park, creating a larger and more welcoming space for our community. The park has always been an important gathering place in Big Springs, and we saw an opportunity to make it even more functional and enjoyable for families, community events, and local organizations.

Since completing this project, we've continued to enhance the space by adding picnic tables and a beautiful park mural. What began as an effort to refresh and expand our shelter has grown into a revitalized gathering space that brings people together and builds community pride.

THE *Courage* TO BUILD SOMETHING NEW

Across Nebraska, parks host family reunions, intramural sports leagues, club meetings, and communitywide celebrations. They are shared spaces where people come together and strengthen their bonds through play and recreation. Without them, our hometowns wouldn't shine quite so brilliantly.

Earlier this year, the community of Creighton gathered for a ribbon cutting. It was not for a new business or building, but for a new set of sports courts at their town park.

For the residents assembled on the renovated surface, replete with nets for pickleball and tennis and hoops for basketball, the project was about more than a new recreational amenity. It was about creating a symbol of a town embracing a bright future. It took the entire community working together, including a local construction company tearing up the old courts for free, to make this dream a reality. Leading the charge was the Creighton Community Foundation Fund's Youth Group.

"Our group cares deeply about this community, and we want it to look nice with amenities so people will decide to move back into this town," said Youth Group member Jordyn Coutts. "This park renovation will give us the opportunity to bring the community together and create a space where friends and family can enjoy time outside and away from screens."

To the west in Ainsworth, the Brown County Community Foundation Fund supported the creation of a new pond south of East City Park. In addition to the pond, the project also brought a new walking trail, benches, and a picnic shelter to the community.

Chappell celebrated the grand opening of a splash pad in May, just in time for warm weather. In fact, the party took place on the last day of school—the perfect kickoff event for summer break. The community had entertained the idea for a couple of years prior to making it a reality.

Shauna Mashek, a member of the Chappell Community Fund Advisory Committee and Chappell's community development director, said the splash pad is a great alternative to constructing a new pool.

The impact has been huge, Mashek said. At times this summer, there were dozens of kids enjoying the splash pad. Families from neighboring Nebraska communities and even Colorado towns frequented the park, building bonds but also providing an economic boost when they shop in Chappell.

"I always love when I drive by and there's a gaggle of kids out there living their best life," she said. "It's amazing that we'll have this splash pad forever."

> **THIS PARK RENOVATION WILL GIVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO BRING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER AND CREATE A SPACE WHERE FRIENDS AND FAMILY CAN ENJOY TIME OUTSIDE AND AWAY FROM SCREENS.**
>
> - JORDYN COUTTS
> *Creighton Community Foundation Fund Youth Group*

NCF affiliated funds in dozens of Nebraska hometowns are investing in quality-of-life amenities ranging from trails to swimming pools, pickleball courts, ballfields, inclusive playgrounds, and much more. Some examples include playgrounds in Spencer, Utica, and Barneston, a new pool in Crofton, soccer fields in Plattsmouth, bath house renovations in Beaver Crossing, a new YMCA in McCook, a park shelter in Big Springs, disc golf in O'Neill, a walking trail in Wauneta, and ballfields in Fullerton, Howells, and Pender. These are all wonderful examples of Nebraskans investing in their hometown and in the next generation. ■

Chappell's new splash pad was a popular spot in town this summer, drawing families from across the region to enjoy fun in the sun. Chappell Community Fund played a central role in bringing the amenity to life.



IMAGINATION STIRS *Courage*

In 2016 leaders of the Nebraska City Community Foundation Fund met with NCF to explore how they could support a community-led effort to address intergenerational poverty in their homeplace. This effort became EDGE (Engage. Discover. Grow. Embark). Its mission: Give families an EDGE by engaging the community, helping kids and families discover the power of literacy, grow the hopes and dreams of the community, and create opportunities for all children and families to embark on a path to success.

> **YOUR LIBRARY CAN DO SO MANY THINGS THAT BUSINESSES OR CIVIC GROUPS DON'T HAVE THE TIME OR RESOURCES TO DO.**
>
> - VICKIE FRITZGES
> *St. Edward Public Library*

Today the literacy portion of this community-based effort is creating real and sustained impact for children and families. Annually more than 60 community volunteers deliver EDGE programming in public and parochial schools. Nearly 25,000 books have been given to children in the past decade. The community has built trusting relationships which can help end the cycle of intergenerational poverty. This effort will be sustained, as EDGE now has an endowment of $723,079.

In St. Edward, the public library offers weekly English language learning classes for adults. Childcare is provided for all participants at no charge. Spanish-speaking community members instruct these classes, many of which are focused on simple, practical language useful in a variety of day-to-day situations.

Columbus Area Future Fund is also a major supporter of the library, awarding grants that help the Columbus Public Library continue to serve local families. Across the NCF network, affiliated funds work with area libraries to create learning and connection opportunities.



"The Boone County Foundation Fund has been amazing," said Vickie Fritzges, director of St. Edward Public Library. "We've used grant funds for the last several years for our weekly classes."

The classes draw in people from afar, with students traveling from Columbus, Newman Grove, Cedar Rapids, and other regional communities. There have been times when nearly 20 adults attended, and Fritzges estimates that 10 people on average attend the classes.

"Your library can do so many things that businesses or civic groups don't have the time or resources to do," Fritzges said, adding that library events allow informal space for people to connect and talk about their community. "The activity may not even be related to the town, but it brings people together and gives them an opportunity to voice their thoughts."

NCF stewards 15 rural library endowments totaling nearly $8 million. Of those, five exceed $500,000, including two of the largest: the Syracuse Public Library Endowment at $2.9 million and, in Nebraska City, the Morton-James Public Library Endowment at $1.7 million.

Several NCF affiliated funds (benefitting Arnold, Atkinson, Boone County, Imperial, Keith County, Nebraska City, Norfolk, O'Neill, and Sidney) make grants annually so libraries, health clinics, and community programs can provide age-appropriate books monthly to every child through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program.

Libraries are an important resource for strengthening childhood literacy, alongside education centers. This is why NCF and NCF affiliated funds continue to advocate for and raise resources to support early childhood development. The Keith County Community Foundation Fund has committed $1 million to support such efforts, including a $200,000 grant in 2026 to support Tiny Trails Early Learning Center in Ogallala. Many other NCF affiliated funds, including Stuart, Norfolk, Laurel, Red Cloud, Pender-Thurston, and Boone County are leading the way and sustaining the early childhood literacy efforts in their community. ■



DENISE DAVIS,
NEBRASKA CITY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUND

Have you visited your local library lately? If not, I invite you to do so. Libraries—and library staff—are by their nature community-centered partners in cities of all sizes. We offer free access to a variety of resources, even "Libraries of Things" such as fishing poles, pickleball kits, and telescopes.

We strive to reach everyone in our area—a library's first responsibility is to address the needs of its community. We are indeed the ultimate type of "third place" where everyone is welcome to explore possibilities—the only limit is one's imagination. The Nebraska City Community Foundation Fund understands the value of public libraries and has been a tremendous supporter of all our work. It's a relationship we cherish.



ASHLEY CABALLERO-LÁZARO,
NELIGH HOMETOWN INTERN

Looking back, my internship grew from simply exploring my hometown to actively helping shape its future. At the beginning, I focused on really getting to know the community by meeting with local leaders, conducting one-on-one conversations, attending community events, and really identifying Neligh's strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

It has given me valuable experience in community engagement, collaboration, and leadership while allowing me to contribute meaningful projects that I hope will benefit Neligh for years to come. Although I've known of people in Neligh, this internship has given me the opportunity to really grow a unique connection with every person.

THE *Courage* TO INVITE

Takaylynn Hergott commutes nearly two hours a day to her cosmetology courses in Lincoln. She could eliminate the drive by moving to the capital city, but convenience isn't what motivates her. She loves her hometown.

Hergott always felt connected to Hebron, but her experience as a Hometown Intern changed the way she saw her place in the community.

"When I did my Hometown Internship, I found my purpose," Hergott said. "Everyone I'm close with is from Hebron."

She appreciates the work of those who came before her and wants to carry that momentum forward.

"When I see what they did, it just made me feel like my purpose is to be here."

She now owns a home in Hebron and serves on the local Fund Advisory Committee. When she finishes school, she plans to open her own salon in town.

Hergott's story is one example of what can happen when young people experience belonging, discover what is possible in their hometowns, and accept an invitation to see themselves as an important part of what comes next.

After eight summers of Hometown Internships, 113 young people have completed the program. Today, 26 live in their hometowns, 10 live elsewhere in Greater Nebraska, and 17 have made their homes in Lincoln or Omaha. Fifty are currently pursuing college or graduate degrees.

There are many valuable things young people take away from a Hometown Internship, but perhaps one of the most powerful is the experience of being invited, welcomed back, and wanted by the adults in their communities. Ask almost any Hometown Intern what drew them to the experience, and most will share that an adult made a personal invitation asking them to consider returning.



Entrepreneur Vickie Ference shared her experience with Hometown Interns gathered at the Golden Husk at a Peer Learning Session in Ord. Ference, a former Hometown Intern, owns two businesses in Valley County.

Sometimes that invitation changes everything. When Vickie Ference was away at college, someone from Ord told her that if she didn't come back, the community wouldn't be the same.

After her 2024 Hometown Internship, Ference already knew she wanted to return to Valley County. Then, while mapping community assets as a Hometown Intern, she learned a storefront was opening in downtown Ord. She saw possibility.

Ference used money she had saved from childhood allowances to make an offer on the building. Today, it is home to both Vickie's ExtraORDinary Pork and Grateful Adventures, her décor and party rental business. More than 400 people came to celebrate when she opened the doors.

"I saw opportunity in myself," she said. "Ord did, too."

Jayden Meyer also answered an invitation from the Syracuse Community Fund to return home this summer as a Hometown Intern. The experience helped her see her community with fresh eyes.

"I'm growing to understand that my community loves me and I love what I'm doing," she said. "That's just been really comforting."

Ference hopes to extend her own invitation to another young Nebraskan someday. In the meantime, she pays it forward by noticing what makes others in her community special and saying so.

"If you see something in someone else, tell them," she said. "You might be the reason they take that next step." ■

> **I SAW OPPORTUNITY IN MYSELF. ORD DID TOO.**
>
> - VICKIE FERENCE
> *2024 NCF Hometown Intern*
> *Ord, Nebraska*

THE *Courage* TO EXPERIMENT

Before paint hit brick, the new mural adorning a family car wash in Fairmont started with stories. Each brushstroke is informed by the memories, legacies, and dreams of the Fillmore County community of just over 600 people.

Shelia Lauby has the receipts—or interview notes, in this case. In the early stages of planning for the mural, she turned to her neighbors for inspiration. Lauby talked to 34 residents, the youngest being 13 and the oldest at 92, seeking insights into what they loved about Fairmont. Among many memories, they shared stories of the old Army airbase where soldiers trained during World War II, they praised the strong bonds created by agriculture, and they recalled the feeling of knowing you're home when you see the water tower peek over the horizon.

Those stories, along with a $2,200 Civic Experiment Mini-Grant from NCF, helped the Fairmont Legacy Foundation Fund bring the mural to life. In 2025, Nebraska Community Foundation was selected as a Civic Hub by the Trust for Civic Life, creating an opportunity to offer the mini-grants throughout the NCF network. Every grant is matched 1:1 by a local affiliated fund, inviting communities to pair outside resources with their own generosity, ideas, and leadership.

Lauby handed the notes over to local artist Pieper Neiman, who took those words and made them into a visual representation of the community's hometown pride. Supporters celebrated with a dedication just in time for the town's 150th Old Settlers Picnic.

"Getting the grant gave us purpose," Lauby said. "It kickstarted us into making it a reality."

Fairmont Legacy Foundation Fund recently celebrated the dedication of its new community mural, created by local artist Pieper Nieman and supported through a Civic Experiment Mini-Grant. This project is one example of how communities across Nebraska are turning creative ideas into action.



In Leigh, a Civic Experiment Mini-Grant helped turn another long-held idea into reality: a community celebration honoring Leigh and the people who make it home. Generations came together for a free community meal, a joint performance by the high school band and alumni musicians, 25 craft vendors, FFA-supported activities, and plenty of volunteers.

> **GETTING THE GRANT GAVE US PURPOSE. IT KICKSTARTED US INTO MAKING IT A REALITY.**
>
> - SHELIA LAUBY
> *Fairmont Legacy Foundation Fund*

Young people were at the heart of it. Members of the Leigh Legacy Fund's Youth Advisory Council partnered with a local company to create an aerial drone show, choosing the music and designs themselves. They weren't simply invited to attend. They were trusted to contribute. Leigh is home to about 400 people, but that night 1,000 people gathered under the stars to watch the show.

The Arnold Community Foundation Fund also received a mini-grant to create a commemorative magazine entitled *Arnold: The People Who Make It Work*. Gracie Neth of Arnold said that without the support, she and fellow Hometown Intern Anna Tullis would not have had the opportunity to conduct their civic experiment. Throughout the summer, Neth and Tullis conducted interviews around four themes: grit, belonging, innovation, and service. They talked to farmers and ranchers, educators and entrepreneurs, and everyone in between. In interviews with people who had moved to Arnold from somewhere else, a recurring theme was the community's ability to help them feel welcome.

"I hope it helps people realize that what makes Arnold special is the people," Neth said. "All these places are special because of the people who are here." ■

Turn the page to learn more about this year's Civic Experiment Mini-Grants! ▶



JUSTINE FISCHER,
LEIGH LEGACY FUND

In a word, our civic experiment was epic! Leigh Appreciation Day was more than just a day of food and fun! It was a celebration of what can happen when people come together with a shared vision for the future.

We were incredibly proud to celebrate a milestone that once seemed like a dream: over $1.3 million in our endowment fund and more than $50,000 to be invested back into our community every year for generations to come.

Our goal was to make everyone feel welcome at this event, and our amazing turnout proved that we succeeded!

While capital projects are important, what is most important is celebrating people and building a sense of community. That is the work that truly matters.

SHOWING *Courage* IN OUR NETWORK

In 2025, the Trust for Civic Life selected NCF as a Civic Hub, recognizing that our network is fertile soil for local participation, problem-solving, and belonging. This designation created an opportunity for NCF to offer local support and funding to help unleash more civic experiments throughout the NCF network. The purpose of the Civic Experiment Mini-Grants is to ignite local creativity, strengthen civic engagement, and transform bold ideas into tangible community experiments. Here are some examples of projects catalyzed by this opportunity.



Leigh Legacy Fund used its grant to organize the first ever Leigh Appreciation Day. The event celebrated the community's history, culture, and the people who make it all happen. The day ended with a drone show designed with input from local youth.



In Stuart, kids enjoyed the first year of a new edible garden at Brain Builders Early Childhood Center. They were involved every step of the way, from planting seeds to pulling weeds, and especially enjoying the fruits (and veggies) of their efforts.



Perkins County Community Foundation Fund conducted community conversations about the importance of local news in southwestern Nebraska. Hometown Intern Brock Tines led focus groups to learn how residents get their news and what could change in the future.



Norfolk Area Community Foundation Fund supported the Philanthropy Council of Northeast Nebraska by funding a celebration to kick off the community's Big Give. The Fund helped create an event that built energy and visibility for philanthropic organizations.



Crawford Area Fund received a grant to organize a multi-day event centered around a traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall. The activities—co-created with the Pine Ridge community—honored veterans, Gold Star families, firefighters, and prisoners of war.



Dodge Area Community Fund volunteers wanted to pay homage to the town's rich baseball history, so they used the grant to fund the painting of a mural on the local diamond's grandstand. Dodge artist Jeannette Johnson designed and completed the mural.



Red Cloud Community Fund used its grant to support The Valley Child Development Center's edible schoolyard and Adopt a Crop program. The garden is a fixture among families at the center, and this experiment invited the community to play a larger role.



Newman Grove Foundation Fund hosted a community appreciation picnic to celebrate the people who make Newman Grove special. It was also an opportunity for residents to learn more about the Fund. To encourage wider participation, the event was free to attend.



Holt County Economic Development received a grant to fund their Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge, creating a more expansive and inclusive event. The first place award went to Visión Media, a documenting service for celebrations like quinceañeras.



Affiliated funds in Thayer County hosted a countywide event that celebrated each community's assets while recognizing all the ways affiliated funds in Hebron, Deshler, Byron, and Chester are collaborating to create a shared story of success.



Liz Lovejoy Brown (left) and her daughter, Layla Saunsoci, are proud to be following in the footsteps of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte, who prized education above all else. Saunsoci received the Chief Standing Bear Journey for Justice Scholarship, which NCF has been stewarding since 2015.

SHARED *Courage,* BOLD FUTURES

Liz Lovejoy Brown likes to say her daughter, Layla Saunsoci, has been a college student since birth. When she was born during Brown's freshman year of college, she became the ideal studying companion.

"She was essentially a college student with me," Brown said. "She'd be scribbling while I was taking notes."

> **THIS SCHOLARSHIP IS BRINGING A SPOTLIGHT TO ALL THESE TALENTED INDIVIDUALS THAT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN SEEN WITHOUT IT.**
>
> - LIZ LOVEJOY BROWN
> *Omaha Tribe of Nebraska*

Brown, a member of the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, is now the Executive Director of the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Center in Walthill. La Flesche Picotte grew up on the Omaha Reservation in the 1860s and 1870s. Motivated by a desire to bring better health care to her community, she enrolled in a Pennsylvania medical school. In 1889, she graduated as valedictorian and became the first Native American physician in the United States. She brought her newfound knowledge and experience back home to serve her people, establishing the first hospital ever built on Native land. That building is now the Picotte Center.

"She created a legacy to inspire people to pursue their education," Brown said. "I'm one of them. I never thought in a million years I would end up working at her hospital."

Picotte's story also inspired Saunsoci. She's currently studying nursing at Morningside University with the goal of returning home one day to help her community. Her mother is proud, though

she knows from experience how expensive a degree can be. She took out multiple loans to finance her own education, and she doesn't want to see her daughter shoulder a similar burden.

That's why opportunities like the Standing Bear Journey for Justice Scholarship are so valuable. This scholarship honors Ponca Chief Standing Bear and his contributions to America's Native peoples by helping American Indian students pursue post-secondary education. Scholarships are awarded by the Chief Standing Bear Journey for Justice Scholarship Fund, an NCF affiliated fund established by author Joe Starita using proceeds from the sale of his books chronicling the lives of Chief Standing Bear and La Flesche Picotte.

Saunsoci said receiving this scholarship relieved a lot of stress as she was beginning her college journey.

"It lifted a lot of weight off my shoulders," she said. "It made me feel better knowing my education was being taken care of."

The scholarship has lifted weight from a lot of shoulders over the years. Since its inception in 2012, the fund has awarded 146 scholarships totaling $251,364. Along with other opportunities, the scholarship helps dreamers continue to dream, Brown said. There's a sense of fear that comes along with leaving the community. The scholarship helps students feel comfortable pursuing their goals.

"It's just one less thing to worry about," Brown said. "This scholarship is bringing a spotlight to all these talented individuals that may not have been seen without it."

According to Brown, seeing siblings, friends, and family head off to college creates ripple effects in the community. Her second-oldest daughter already wants to follow in Saunsoci's footsteps and study nursing.

"We are creating all these leaders in our community. They are making a difference." ■



ESPERANZA DEL ANGEL,
CHIEF STANDING BEAR JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

I am grateful the Chief Standing Bear Journey for Justice Scholarship exists—not just for me, but for my community. This opportunity has helped many Indigenous students go to college who otherwise may not have had the resources to continue their education.

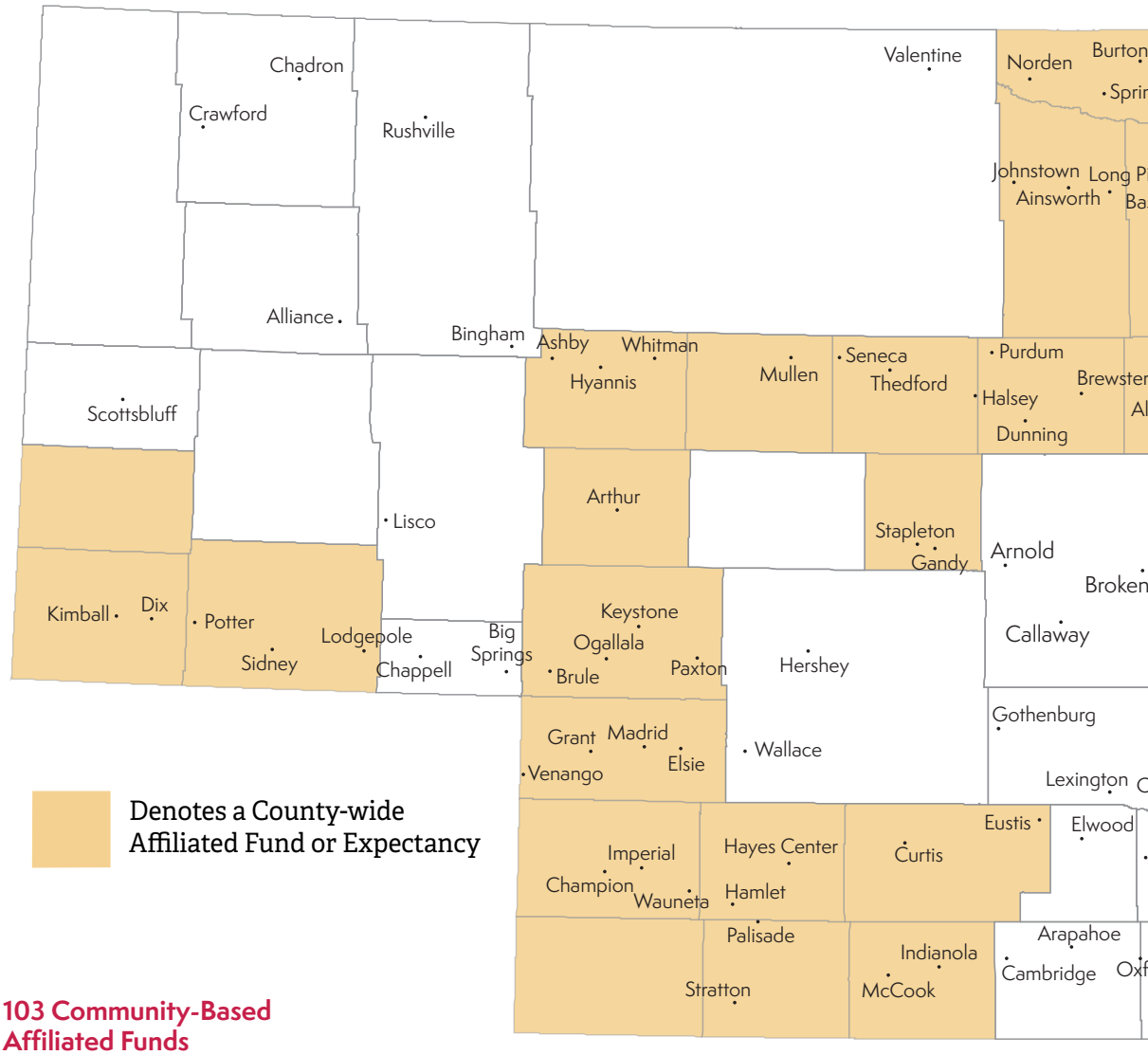
It also means a lot to me personally. Without this scholarship, higher education would not have been an option for me. I would've had to go home and enter the workforce.

I wanted to go to college. I knew I deserved better. I'm so glad I've been able to have this scholarship, because it's allowed me to thrive.

OUR *Affiliated Funds*

This map depicts counties and communities that benefit from planned gifts and affiliated funds of Nebraska Community Foundation.

June 30, 2026



103 Community-Based Affiliated Funds

Arnold Community Fund

Arthur Area Community Foundation Fund

Atkinson Community Foundation Fund

Axtell Community Fund

Bennet Community Fund

Bertrand Area Community Fund

Big Springs Community Fund

Blaine County Community Fund

Boone County Foundation Fund

Brown County Community Foundation Fund

Burr Community Fund

Butler County Area Foundation Fund

Byron Community Foundation Fund

Calamus Area Community Fund

Callaway Community Fund

Chambers Community Improvement Foundation Fund

Chappell Community Fund

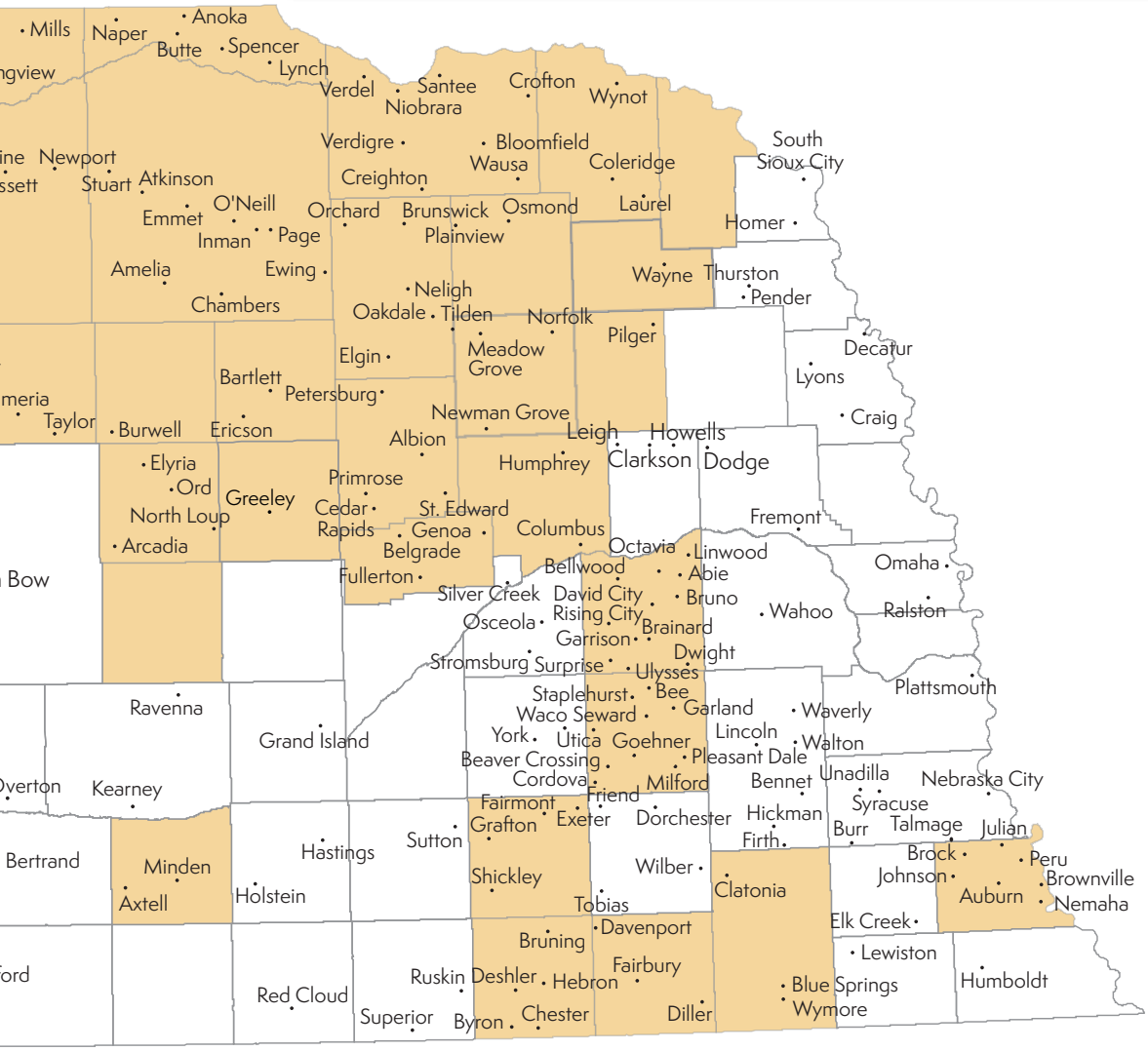
NCF NETWORK BY THE NUMBERS

265 affiliated funds

1,500 volunteers

298 communities

84 counties



Chester Community Fund
Clarkson Future Fund
Coleridge Area Fund
Columbus Area Future Fund
Craig Community Fund
Crawford Area Fund
Creighton Community Foundation Fund
Crofton Community Foundation Fund
Curtis Community Foundation Fund
Deshler Community Fund
Diller Community Foundation Fund
Dodge Area Community Fund
Dorchester Community Foundation Fund
Elgin Community Foundation Fund
Elk Creek Community Fund
Eustis Area Community Foundation Fund
Exeter Area Community Foundation Fund
Fairmont Legacy Foundation Fund

Firth Community Foundation Fund

Friend Area Fund

Future of Decatur Foundation Fund

Greeley Legacy Fund

Hayes County Community Fund

Hebron Community Fund

Hickman Area Community Foundation Fund

Holt County Economic Development Fund

Howells Community Fund

Humboldt Area Community Foundation Fund

Hyannis Area Community Foundation Fund

Imperial Community Foundation Fund

John and Alyce Wozab Memorial Fund (Valley County)

Keith County Foundation Fund

Keya Paha County Foundation Fund

Kimball Area Foundation Fund

Laurel Area Community Foundation Fund

Legacy Fund for Seward County

Leigh Legacy Fund

Lodgepole Community Fund

Logan County Community Foundation Fund

McCook Community Foundation Fund

Minden Legacy Fund

Mullen Area Foundation Fund

Naper Community Foundation Fund

Nebraska City Community Foundation Fund

Neligh Area Community Fund

Nemaha County Future Fund

Newman Grove Foundation Fund

Niobrara Community Foundation Fund

Norfolk Area Community Foundation Fund

Oakdale Community Fund

O'Neill Community Foundation Fund

Orchard Area Legacy Fund

Osmond Community Fund

Overton Area Community Fund

Palisade Community Foundation Fund

Pender-Thurston Education & Community Foundation Fund

Perkins County Community Foundation Fund

Plainview Brunswick Community Fund

Plattsmouth Community Foundation Fund

Ralston Community Foundation Fund

Ravenna Area Vision Fund

Red Cloud Community Fund

Rock County Community Fund

Rushville Community Fund

Ruskin Community Foundation Fund

Shickley Community Foundation Fund

Sidney And Greater Area Fund

Spencer Community Foundation Fund

Stratton Community Foundation Fund

Stromsburg Legacy Fund

Stuart Community Foundation Fund

Syracuse Community Fund

Thedford Area Community Foundation Fund

Tilden-Meadow Grove Community Foundation Fund

Unadilla Area Community Fund

Valley County Community Foundation Fund

Verdigre Community Foundation Fund

Wallace Community Foundation Fund

Wauneta Community Fund

Wausa Community Foundation Fund

Waverly Community Legacy Fund

Wayne Area Legacy Fund

Wheeler County Community Foundation Fund

Wilber Area Community Foundation Fund

Wymore-Blue Springs Area Fund

Wynot Area Legacy Fund

32 Organizational Affiliated Funds

Auburn Public Schools Foundation Fund

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4 Public/Private Partnership Funds

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60 Designated or Field of Interest Funds

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Cumulative Lifetime Gifts through June 30, 2026

These generous donors' cumulative gifts have helped build and sustain NCF's work for over 30 years.

$1,000,000 and above

The Ford Foundation
New York, NY

W.K. Kellogg Foundation
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$250,000 to $999,999

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Earlier this year, affiliated fund leaders, NCF board members, and other dedicated Nebraskans gathered in Nebraska City to connect, learn, and dream big about Nebraska Community Foundation's future.

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Unadilla

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Diller Telephone Company
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Geneva

Frontier Bank
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Gifts received from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

$100,000 and above

Acklie Charitable Foundation
Lincoln

Anonymous

Robert B. Daugherty Charitable Foundation
Omaha

Peter Kiewit Foundation
Omaha

Trust for Civic Life
New York, NY

$25,000 to $99,999

Dan and Beth Bahensky
Kearney

Dale G. Buchta Estate
Osceola

Cornerstone Bank
York

Lora Damme
Talmage

FMNE Insurance Company
Lincoln

Lynn and Dana Roper
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Pinnacle Bank
Nebraska

$10,000 to $24,999

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Lincoln

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Oakland

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Valparaiso

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Wauneta

Jay Yost and Wade Leak
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Omaha

Dan and Denise Cotton
Lincoln

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Auburn

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James and Susan White
Sutherland

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Lincoln

**Donor is deceased*

SUPPORT OUR MISSION

SUPPORTING A *Courageous* FUTURE

Every year, Holt County Economic Development, an affiliated fund of Nebraska Community Foundation, receives a boost of more than $100,000 to support youth entrepreneurship opportunities, people attraction efforts, and leadership capacity growth. The annual gift is due to the forethought of Rudolph Elis, a farmer who established an endowment with NCF to support Northeast Nebraska after his death.

Elis is among the many generous Nebraskans with the courage to put their belief in the future in writing—the NCF network has more than 400 planned gifts confirmed with an estimated value of at least $83 million.

In Holt County, 17 people have made planned gifts to benefit their community. Many of those are in Stuart, where 71% of Fund Advisory Committee members have documented their plans to give.

Tate Schmaderer of Stuart is among those inspired by that tradition of giving back. In lieu of giving now, at a time when the young banker does not have the same kind of assets as more established residents, Tate decided to do what he could. He made a planned gift.

"I wasn't sure I was going to be able to contribute anything right now," he said. "But I knew that one thing I could commit was a portion of my retirement plan."

Tate's gift is the result of a simple process. Beneficiary designation gifts are among the most flexible of all charitable gifts—donors can still take distributions or withdrawals from retirement, investment, or bank accounts.

NCF recognized (from left) board members Ann Bruntz and Sarah Sinnett as well as NCF staff members Kara Asmus and Amy Sandeen for making planned gifts to benefit our mission.



LEAVE FIVE TO THRIVE

Knowing Tate shares their passion for giving back is special to his parents, Jon and Jennifer.

> **IT IS ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING THINGS I HAVE EVER BEEN A PART OF.**
>
> - TRENT MASTNY
> *Howells Community Fund*

"Jennifer and I are very thankful that all of our children share a deep connection to their community and the surrounding area," Jon said. "Tate is a community banker and takes that role very seriously. He understands that you have to be 'all-in' and planned giving is just one really natural step to living out that passion."

In Howells, Trent Mastny and his wife, Nevada, want to be part of the progress happening every day. A desire to give back to their community inspired their decision to designate the Howells Community Fund's unrestricted endowment as a beneficiary of their life insurance policy. The young couple knows that commitment won't be realized for a long while, but they also know that demonstrating belief in the community can be a powerful motivation to their family, friends, and neighbors.

Like Trent and Nevada, most members of the Howells Community Fund Advisory Committee have made a commitment to give to the unrestricted endowment. They understand the need to both talk the talk and walk the walk. Grantmaking decisions are always a big responsibility, especially when granting the money their fellow residents entrust them to steward well.

The payoff is worth it.

"You are part of something that is bigger than yourself," Trent said. "You have a lot of weight on your shoulders to ensure you're using that money properly. It is one of the most rewarding things I have ever been a part of." ■

5 TO THRIVE

WHY FIVE PERCENT?

Five percent may not seem like much, but we believe it's going to transform the future of Nebraska.

Think of the Nebraska hometown you love. This is your opportunity to enrich its future. NCF's Five to Thrive campaign asks you to consider leaving just five percent of your assets to your favorite Nebraska hometown or to Nebraska Community Foundation to benefit all of our communities. If all Nebraskans "left five," it would result in $5 billion over the next 10 years and $47.5 billion over the next 50. Imagine the positive change that could occur with those kinds of resources! When you leave just five percent to a community's endowment, you can secure your family's legacy and help your hometown thrive.

To learn more about how you can benefit your family and your hometown visit www.fivetothrivene.org.

OUR *Legacy Society*

Honors those generous individuals who have made a planned gift to Nebraska Community Foundation to support our community-building mission.

411
Planned Gifts
TOTALING **$83 Million**
to benefit NCF and its affiliated funds

Pamela S. Abbott Revocable Trust
Ogallala

Kara Asmus
Columbus

Dan and Beth Bahensky
Kearney

Dena and David Beck
Minden

James* and Patricia Blackburn
Neligh

Steven A. Brewster
Stuart

Judy K. and Don A. Brockmeier
Eustis

Fred and Penni Bruning
Bruning

Wayne* and Bev Buller
Albion

Gary* and Jan Chvala Family
O'Neill

Jelayne Clark
Johnson

Bill Claybaugh
Carroll

Julie Claybaugh
Wayne

Judith Scherer Connealy and Matt Connealy
Decatur

Janny and Ryan Crotty
Auburn

Tom and Deanne Damkroger
Lincoln

Brandon and Tammy Day
Norfolk

Dale and Mary Dueland
McCook

Kenneth* W. and Charleen Y. Haring Frerichs
Kearney

Douglas A. and Patricia L. Friedli
Nebraska City

Denise Garey
McCook

Douglas and Judy Gaswick
Imperial

Mark and Linda Graff
McCook

William and Sandra Graves
McCook

Jim and Terri Gustafson
Lincoln

Bernard and Susan Hay
Scottsdale, AZ

Vance Heyer
Ainsworth

Chuck and Janel Hibberd
Lincoln

Anthony and Kara Hillhouse
Walton

In Memory of Leo Hink

Thomas and Cynthia Huff
McCook

Jana M. Jensen
Bingham

Patrick and Carlece Kenner
Hebron

Kurt and Jerene Kruse
Albion

Bethanne Kuck
Loomis

Greta Leach
Lincoln

Paul and Angie Madison
Nebraska City

Todd Mekelburg
Lincoln

Maxine and Francis* Moul
Lincoln

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Lincoln

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Lincoln

Lori and Russ Pankonin
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Judy and Ron Parks
Valparaiso

Ashley B. and Adam D. Pavelka
Hastings

Pete and Jonnie Peterson
Ogallala

Gary Radil and Sara Coffee Radil
Omaha

Jim and Becky Ries
Ord

Lynn and Dana Roper
Lincoln

Amy Sandeen
Hastings

Jon D. and Jennifer L. Schmaderer
Stuart

James P. Scholz
Omaha

Nicole Sedlacek
O'Neill

Dennis* and Rita Shimmin
Ogallala

NEBRASKA *Legacies*

These individuals are among the hundreds of generous Nebraskans who have made a planned gift to benefit their community, NCF, or both. A full listing of our Legacy Society members can be found at https://nebcommfound.giftlegacy.com.

SCAN FOR FULL LIST

SUSAN UGAI, *Lincoln*



Susan Ugai joined NCF's Board of Directors in 2002. Over the course of nine years, she witnessed incredible growth in the NCF network. Her estate gift is a financial gesture of trust in Nebraska communities.

"As NCF evolves, they will figure out what's the best way to spend that money for the organization. That's what it comes down to. I think you have to trust the organization that you're going to give it to."

DON AND JUDY BROCKMEIER, *Eustis*



The Brockmeiers' commitment to their community will continue well into the future through their planned gifts to benefit the Eustis Area Community Foundation Fund. The couple has also designated NCF as a beneficiary in their estate plans. For them, it's a matter of paying it forward.

"If you had success, there was probably somebody who helped you along," Don said. "By contributing to a forward-looking fund, you're going to be helping other people succeed."

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

TODD MEKELBURG, *Senior Director of Gift Planning*
402.323.7343 | tmekelburg@nebcommfound.org

BECKY RIES, *Assistant Director of Gift Planning*
308.730.1048 | bries@nebcommfound.org

NEBRASKA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Frank and Shirley* Sibert
Kearney

Dennis and Nancy Stara
Lincoln

Al and Lois Steuter
Johnstown

Bob and Jean Stowell
Ord

Emily Sulzle
Lincoln

Brian Thompson
Waverly

Susan M. Ugai
Lincoln

Kiel and Mimi VanderVeen
Nebraska City

Greg and Donna Vasek
Lincoln

Richard Vosteen and Joyce Flood Vosteen
Lincoln

Richard and Darlene Walter
Shickley

Gene Weedin
McCook

Jim and Kathy Welniak
Taylor

Ray and Deb Welsh
Pender

Marcia A. White
Lincoln

Henry L. Wicke
Wauneta

Jay and Susie Wolf
Albion

Jeff Yost and Cindy Ryman Yost
Lincoln

Benedict and Jane Zach
Omaha

**Donor is deceased*

STATEMENTS OF *Financial Position*

June 30, 2026 and 2025

	2026	2025
ASSETS		
Cash and temporary cash investments	$7,001,647	$24,487,447
Certificates of deposit	32,176,759	14,313,821
Receivables	102,495	101,740
Unconditional promises to give	2,145,447	2,029,830
Investments	260,929,717	235,558,456
Investment in real property	82,085	82,085
Interest receivable	251,360	254,365
Due from related party	3,550	7,202
Property held for sale	2,640,000	--
Operating lease right-of-use assets	674,052	787,343
Property and equipment, net	45,701	62,272
Contracts receivable	--	--
Other	9,354	9,354
Total assets	$306,062,167	$277,693,915
LIABILITIES		
Funds held for agencies	$20,685,393	$18,191,472
Due (to) from related party	--	--
Accrued payroll liabilities	235,790	218,591
Accrued other liabilities	50,486	54
Gift annuities payable	384,316	304,338
Unconditional promises to give others	2,534,416	972,679
Operating lease obligations	687,892	802,066
Total liabilities	24,578,293	20,489,200
NET ASSETS		
Without donor restrictions, undesignated	214,812,924	194,156,428
Without donor restrictions, board designated	30,058,733	26,228,827
With donor restrictions	36,612,217	36,819,460
Total net assets	281,483,874	257,204,715
Total liabilities and net assets	$306,062,167	$277,693,915

STATEMENTS OF *Activities*

For the fiscal years ended June 30, 2026 and 2025

	2026	2025
CHANGES IN NET ASSETS		
Revenue and support		
Contributions	$28,865,483	$29,440,779
Contributed nonfinancial assets	5,179,064	2,169,444
Investment income/(loss)	30,423,622	23,901,484
Actuarial gain/(loss)	(56,713)	(53,935)
Administrative fee revenue and reimbursements	3,090,816	2,695,214
Total revenue and support	67,502,272	58,152,986
Expenses		
Program services	36,949,106	34,261,726
Management and general	5,346,312	4,373,147
Fundraising	927,695	877,244
Total expenses	43,223,113	39,512,117
INCREASE/(DECREASE) IN NET ASSETS	24,279,159	18,640,869
Net assets, beginning of year	257,204,715	238,563,846
Net assets, end of year	$281,483,874	$257,204,715

The financial statements of Nebraska Community Foundation are audited annually by an independent public accounting firm. Copies of NCF's tax filing (Form 990) and audited financial statements are available at nebcommfound.org or by contacting the NCF office.

CFNS ACCREDITED FOUNDATION

Nebraska Community Foundation is confirmed in compliance with National Standards for U.S. Community Foundations as established by the Council on Foundations. This means that NCF meets the nation's highest philanthropic standards for operational quality, integrity, and accountability.

BELONGING TO *Our Network*









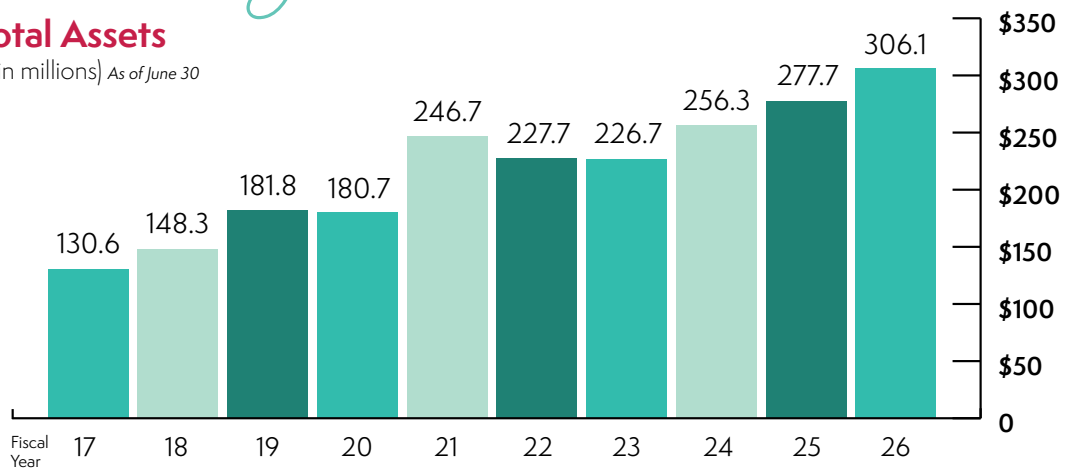
Nebraska Community Foundation unleashes abundant local assets, inspires charitable giving, and connects ambitious people. The benefits of being part of the NCF network are countless, and our talented team is proud to provide the support necessary to help more than 1,500 volunteers who lead the 265 affiliated funds serving 298 communities in 84 Nebraska counties. Among many other things, Nebraska Community Foundation:

- Enables affiliated funds to receive tax-deductible contributions without setting up a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.
- Handles all gift receipting, accounting, legal work, investment, audit, and tax filing.
- Ensures that all distributions from affiliated funds are in compliance with IRS rules.
- Assists donors with gifts of non-cash assets, such as real estate, appreciated stock, retirement accounts, life insurance policies, agricultural commodities, and tangible personal property.
- Educates professional advisors, volunteers, and generous Nebraskans on the importance, benefits, and many avenues of gift planning.
- Provides training for volunteers on dozens of topics including fundraising, community visioning, leadership, and more.
- Supports communities in discovering and maximizing their unique local assets.
- Employs a full-service marketing and communications department to assist with affiliated fund promotion.
- Connects members to peer learning opportunities with volunteers from hundreds of communities across the state.
- Manages donor data using the industry's foremost software products.
- Links affiliated funds to funders and challenge grant opportunities available exclusively to members of the NCF network.
- Guides volunteers in efforts to engage and co-create opportunities with Nebraska youth.

NCF *at a Glance*

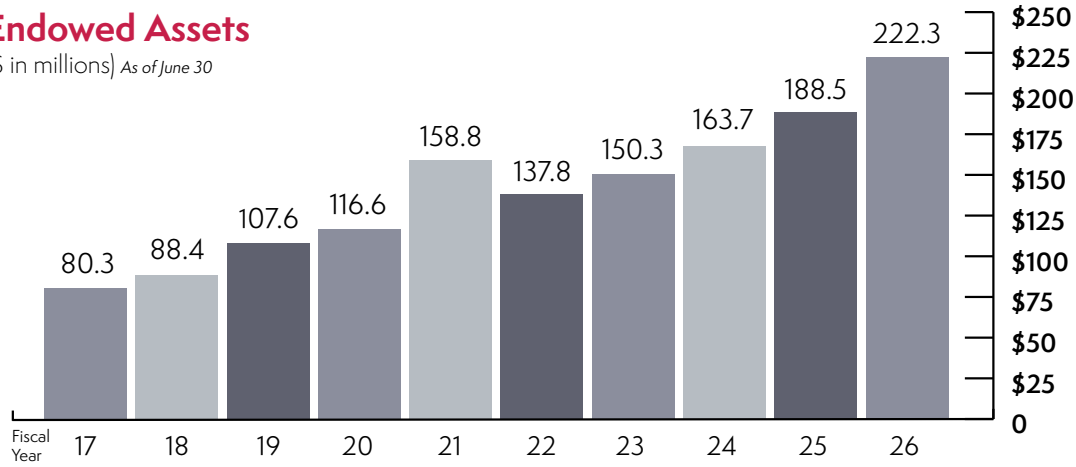
Total Assets

($ in millions) *As of June 30*



Endowed Assets

($ in millions) *As of June 30*



Unrestricted Endowment Growth for Community-Based Affiliated Funds

	2012	2018	2026
CBAFs with an unrestricted endowment	63	75	94
CBAF unrestricted endowments (million $)	**$12**	**$34**	**$96**
CBAFs with $10,000+ payout	**16**	**41**	**57**
CBAFs with $50,000+ payout	**2**	**9**	**29**

48,952
Contributions in the last
5 years

$633 Million
Reinvested since 1994

OUR *Vision*

Nebraska is a place where our hometowns are achieving their dreams.

OUR *Mission*

We unleash abundant local assets, inspire charitable giving, and connect ambitious people to build stronger communities and a Greater Nebraska.



NEBRASKA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

CONTACT US:

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