



**NEWS RELEASE**

June 23, 2014

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202/371-1999

## **Afterschool Alliance Awards Mini-Grants to Support Digital Badges in Five States**

### ***State Afterschool Networks to Pilot Badge Systems in MD, MI, OH, OR and RI, Partnering with Local Afterschool Programs***

Washington, DC — The Afterschool Alliance today announced that it has awarded \$10,000 mini-grants to statewide afterschool networks in five states to support their work developing and piloting digital badge systems in partnership with local afterschool programs. The grants are a follow-up to the Afterschool Alliance's announcement in February that it would commit to a digital badge initiative as part of a commitment the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Mozilla, and the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) made last year at the Clinton Global Initiative to ensure one million students and one million workers benefit from badges by 2015.

In recent years, badges have emerged as an exciting new innovation to recognize the skills young people and adults gain in a variety of settings, including schools, libraries, museums, workplaces and institutions of higher education. Afterschool programs are increasingly looking to badges as a means of validating the diverse learning that occurs after school, and a number of afterschool badges pilot efforts are already in place. For students, badges offer the opportunity to make their learning visible as they gain knowledge and skills, particularly in areas that are not measured within formal education, but that nevertheless contribute to their ultimate success. For college admissions officers and potential employers, badges offer validation of skills students have gained outside the classroom.

The grants will support efforts by statewide afterschool networks in Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon and Rhode Island. Each state network will receive a \$10,000 grant to support its work with local afterschool allies to offer digital badges to youth in afterschool and summer programs and/or to offer digital badges to afterschool professionals.

“We’re thrilled to be able to support the vital work afterschool programs are doing with digital badges,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “This is one of many areas in which afterschool programs are on the cutting edge of education, taking advantage of and leveraging their unique partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and colleges and universities, as well as the flexible nature of afterschool program design. We’re delighted to be working with our distinguished partners in this digital badges effort — the MacArthur Foundation, the Mozilla Foundation and HASTAC. We can’t wait to see the results and how each state network works with local afterschool programs.”

The state networks will take a tailored approach to piloting digital badges efforts:

- **Maryland Out of School Time (MOST)** and the **Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance** will work together to develop a common framework and best practices for badges in afterschool and summer programs. Both states have been involved in badging work and have strong partnerships with key citywide afterschool systems in Providence and Baltimore. Additionally, both states have been working to develop corporate and industry partners that can play a key role in verifying skills gained through afterschool and summer programs.
- The **Michigan After-School Partnership** will work collaboratively with partners, including the Michigan Department of Education, to pilot two types of badges. The first will focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) competencies for students in two different out-of-school time programs: A Michigan State University 4-H Extension Renewable Energy Summer Camp for high school students, and an Eastern Michigan University-Bright Futures middle school program, funded by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers initiative. A second pilot will focus on adding a STEM Endorsement to the Michigan School Age Youth Development Credential that will recognize competency in providing high-quality STEM programming among the afterschool workforce.
- The **Ohio Afterschool Network** will work with the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association, Starting Point, and Case Western Reserve University to pilot a badge initiative for youth development professionals in the Cleveland area and integrate badging into the Ohio Professional Development Registry and career pathways system.
- **OregonASK** will pilot badges with programs in the state that are implementing informal science curricula through their STEM Bridges initiative. Badges will be awarded to students and/or staff trained to offer the curricula. OregonASK is also planning to issue badges to attendees at its state afterschool conference and will coordinate with Maryland and Rhode Island on a common framework for badges in afterschool and summer programs, with the goal of using badges to help bridge formal and informal learning.

The mini-grants to the state networks are made possible by a grant to the Afterschool Alliance from the MacArthur Foundation.

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*The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org).*