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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **GLOBAL TIES KC WILL CONNECT YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS REGIONS WITH SUPPORT FROM THE J. CHRISTOPHER STEVENS VIRTUAL EXCHANGE INITIATIVE**

*Young people in the United States, Middle East, and North Africa will engage with international peers through learning without having to leave their hometowns.*

**Kansas City MO, April 25, 2023** — Today, the Stevens Initiative [announced](#) Global Ties KC is one of 15 schools, higher education institutions, and nonprofit organizations to receive funding to run virtual exchange programs that connect young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. **Global Ties KC**'s FIRST Robotics Virtual Exchange connects participants from Libya, Morocco, and the U.S. through cultural exchange and technical sessions related to STEM and robotics.

FIRST Robotics Virtual Exchange is implemented by Global Ties KC and KC STEM Alliance and is supported by the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative (JCSVEI). JCSVEI is a U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs program administered by the Aspen Institute.

Virtual exchange connects young people from diverse places using everyday technology for collaborative learning and interaction through sustained and facilitated engagement. Through virtual exchange programs, young people have access to life-changing opportunities that can shape their trajectories, bring new friends into their lives, and expand their worldviews. Virtual exchange is a vital learning tool with the capacity to connect people around the world on an unprecedented scale without a need for travel.

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“At a time when education remains in flux in a post-pandemic world, complex global issues are front of mind, and young people excitedly return to in-person gatherings, virtual exchange continues to be an important learning tool. By fostering unique online spaces for young people to come together over shared challenges and triumphs, virtual exchange moves us toward a more connected and inclusive world. These new grantees play a critical role in making this possible, and participants of this program will undoubtedly approach the future with the belief they can impact their communities and the world around them,” said Christine Shiau, Executive Director of the Stevens Initiative.

Global Ties KC’s FIRST Robotics Virtual Exchange provides personal exploration, global learning, and STEM collaboration opportunities for young people in Libya, Morocco, and the U.S. Virtual exchange participants have the unique opportunity to join the existing FIRST Robotics Competition in global teams, where they benefit from in-depth instruction to help them further their team projects. FIRST Robotics Competition is an exciting extracurricular STEM competition that teams engineering professionals and high-school students to solve real-world engineering problems in fun, rewarding, and inspiring ways. In preparation for the competition, participants meet with teams across the globe through virtual exchange to share best practices and lessons learned through their own robotics build seasons, while building relationships with their global peers.

From Global Ties KC President & CEO Courtney Brooks, “We are thrilled to be working with the KC STEM Alliance, to add this supplemental layer to FIRST programs, connecting student teams from across the world. Global Ties KC is dedicated to giving our community the chance to make lasting global connections and the ripple effects of this program will have a profound impact on student participants.”

The 2023 grantees will reach 20,000 young people across the United States and MENA region. Other grants include:

- **Amideast’s** Qisasna facilitates cross-cultural exchange between young people in the United States and Yemen by providing them with the skills they need to produce podcasts on shared challenges and opportunities between youth.
- **An-Najah National University’s** Climate Futures Exchange is a classroom-based exchange that engages students from An-Najah National University and Arizona State University to discuss a range of climate change issues and strategies to address them when designing and implementing new buildings.
- **Arizona State University’s** Future Educators for Inclusion engages college students from Morocco and the United States through mutual discovery, shared learning, and local action to address the global challenge of disability inclusion as they prepare to become classroom teachers.
- **Culturingua’s** Alliance of Young World Actionists engages young American and Libyan leaders focused on local and global public health challenges and their causes.
- **iEARN-USA’s** Storytelling for Social Change builds global leaders by engaging Algerian, Tunisian, and American youth in global collaboration to tell stories about real world issues in their local communities.
- **Institute of International Education’s** Harnessing Innovation through Virtual Exchange for Enhanced Results develops intercultural communication, problem-solving, and leadership skills among a diverse group of students at participating universities in the United States and Middle East and North Africa.
- **IREX’s** Global Solutions places college students from the United States with peers in Iraq or Jordan in binational teams to collaborate on innovative solutions related to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals through virtual exchange.

- **Missouri State University's** Global Teacher Education Exchange brings new and future K-12 educators from Libya, Morocco, and the United States into a vibrant professional learning community where they engage in cross-cultural collaboration and prepare to teach for global understanding.
- **PATHWAYS Institute for Negotiation Education's** Game Changers: Creative Negotiation Skills builds confidence and skills for creative negotiation, problem-solving, and leadership among university students coming together from Israel and the United States.
- **Plugged In Band Program's** Peace Tracks is a cross-cultural, music-focused online youth exchange that provides high school students with an unforgettable opportunity to connect with peers in other countries to get to know them, learn about their cultures, and collaborate over the course of a semester on an original song.
- **Smithsonian Science Education Center's** Smithsonian Youth STEM Exchange brings together young people in Iraq and Michigan, United States, to discover, understand, and find solutions to sustainability issues in their local and global communities.
- **Soliya's** Connect Program brings together college-aged youth in the United States and in the Middle East and North Africa for online, face-to-face dialogues in the presence of facilitators trained in dialogue and conflict resolution.
- **Soliya's** Global Circles are short online dialogue opportunities, bringing together young people from the United States and from the Middle East and North Africa for a face-to-face exchange around compelling global issues that matter to youth today.
- **Texas International Education Consortium's** Business & Entrepreneurship Virtual Exchange connects faculty from universities in Iraq and Texas, U.S., through virtual exchange, preparing them to implement project-based virtual exchanges on a variety of business and entrepreneurship topics in their courses that will develop key academic skills and cultural competencies.
- **World Learning's** The Experiment Digital *Leadership in STEM* equips high school-aged youth to leverage their interests and skills in STEM to achieve personal and professional goals while giving back to their community.

The Stevens Initiative is an international leader in virtual exchange, which brings young people from diverse places together to collaborate and connect through everyday technology. Created in 2015 as a lasting tribute to Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, the Initiative invests in virtual exchange programs; shares research, resources, and promising practices to improve impact; and advocates for broader adoption.

Global Ties KC has served as the premier connection point and bridge between the Heartland and the world for 70 years by activating citizen diplomacy and relationship building through exchange. Professional exchanges and local student programs provide an avenue for everyone to access the cultural, professional, and financial opportunities that are present through person-to-person global engagement.

### **More Information**

**The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)** builds relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through academic, cultural, sports, professional and private exchanges, as well as public-private partnerships and mentoring programs. These exchange programs improve foreign relations and strengthen the national security of the United States, support U.S. international leadership, and provide a broad range of domestic benefits by helping break down barriers that often divide us. Visit [eca.state.gov](http://eca.state.gov).

**The Aspen Institute** is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the most important challenges facing the United States and the world. Headquartered in Washington, DC, the Institute has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, and an international network of partners. For more information, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://www.aspeninstitute.org).



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