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STEM SUPPORT: INFORMAL SCIENCE STAKEHOLDER ROLE

The informal science community provides an under-utilized resource in supporting STEM enhancement. Having come a long way from including simply museums and science centers providing educators with field trip opportunities, today's informal science community is a stakeholder group characterized by diversity of facilities, programs, approaches and opportunities. Informal science education programs are generally now developed and managed by professionals; real world-relevant exhibits and experiences, and stimulating, inquiry-based, hands-on learning often benefit from industry volunteers actually working in STEM careers. Pre- and post-experience curriculum is more often than not linked to California standards and students, teachers and families are introduced to a myriad of exciting applications of STEM disciplines at all ages and levels of understanding.

To inspire, informal science can guarantee access through online, interactive programs and free or low-cost exhibits and experiences. STEM experiences can take place in unusual, interesting locations, at times more flexible than those of the school day, often providing mobility of exhibits and programs to more successfully meet even access and equity goals. Teachers can be exposed to stimulating professional development training immediately applicable in their classrooms.

To help engage and educate students in STEM activities, the informal science community offers hands-on labs, interactive media, tours, programs, immersion experiences, educational enrichment at its finest, often aligned with standards-based educational curriculum. Teachers benefit from the resources and contacts available through the informal science community. One untapped area of potential for education/informal science partnering is in the area of professional development for pre-service teachers.

Already well connected with industry and employers, the informal science community offers a wealth of resources from the local community and from corporate partners. Today's informal science community includes not only museums and science centers, but NASA and Federal Labs, youth clubs, non-profits, after-school programs, faith-based initiatives and a wealth of other organizations comprised of thousands of educated, dedicated staff and volunteers ready, willing and able to support education and academia in building the 21st century skills necessary for today's STEM workers.

Courtesy Discovery Science Center



“Scientific innovation has produced roughly half of all U.S. economic growth in the last 50 years”

— National Science Foundation, 2004