

KEEPING IT GOING AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



PRACTICE BRIEF 6



Action Steps:

- » Create a community asset map to explore your STEM ecosystem.
- » Make a list to track STEM opportunities already present in your community.
- » Identify the strengths of current STEM offerings, and look for gaps that could lead to new opportunities.

As you implement and evolve your project, build connections and strategies that will continue to develop your community STEM education partnerships (CSEPs)¹ even after your project ends. In particular, what aspects of the partnerships or programs will continue once your project ends? What parts of the work have become particularly meaningful for the community? What partnerships and funding are available to continue to support those elements?



Strategies to Make it Happen:

Maintain Connections

Devote time and energy toward maintaining connections over the long term. Consider which communication methods established over the course of the project can be maintained long-term. Sending a periodic newsletter to collaborators (see below) is a great way to keep current partners, and even those who may have faded into the background, informed of accomplishments. Maintaining a list of your partners and their contact information, including a note about who helped facilitate your connection to each partner, is highly recommended. Send your newsletter or updates to everyone on your contact list, and remember to build onto this list as you connect with more community partners.

Connect to established communication methods within the community, such as a STEM community calendar, family activity guide, school newsletter or other communication platforms like social media, and see if your project can contribute to them. If your partners and audiences are part of different networks, consider organizing efforts to establish new ways to connect.

If the relationship is meaningful to the partner, they will likely return. Reflect on successful partnerships and look for individuals and organizations with the potential to engage in new ways as your project evolves. Give them opportunities to engage with your programming at different stages and capacities. Co-design programming with your partners to capitalize on the unique opportunities they can provide for youth. Establish good communication with your partners, ask for their feedback along the way, and respond to that feedback by adapting your project to ensure mutual benefit.



Tool: Creating a Newsletter to Share with Collaborators

Create a newsletter to build trust and inform collaborators about the project's progress and next steps.

¹Community STEM education partnerships (CSEPs) are long-term collaborations between organizations and project participants that coordinate and leverage expertise and resources to improve STEM learning opportunities for youth.

Continually adapt your program to be relevant

How your program is implemented and how you engage your partners depends on the objectives, setting (i.e., in-school classroom or after school), and format (i.e., in-person, remote, or hybrid). Over time you may need to adjust your programming based on evolving needs of youth, partners, teachers/facilitators, leadership, or funders. Allow your program to evolve to meet the needs of the community, while continuing to meet your project goals and maintaining access to your partners. Look for opportunities to move your CSEPs to the next level within the partnership typology (see [Practice brief 5b](#)). For example, find ways to engage multiple partners that do not already work together around a specific initiative or task, like holding a STEM career fair or supporting an after school STEM program with a design project.

It is ok to make even drastic changes to your programming or to the way your partnerships work, as long as the changes align with your project goals. Consider how the model of technology curriculum supported by community partnerships with integrated career experiences is supported with any programmatic changes. For example, if changing from in-school to a summer program setting, you may find that youth activities need to be completely redesigned to be more fun and informal. You may need to switch from paper-based to interview based methods to evaluate youth engagement and learning.

As you consider how to adapt your program while continuing to meet your goals, ask yourself:

- » How much time do we need to prepare for the new implementation?
- » Does technology integration need to change for my new context? (e.g., gauge the type of technology needed, how it will work in different settings, and getting participants up to speed on the technology)
- » How do I continue to integrate partners and focus on STEM career pathways? (e.g., explicitly having mentors share their career path, connecting with school/district initiatives on career education, working with guidance counselors to develop career interest assessments, making explicit connections between competencies and skills while working through STEM activities)

Plan for Sustainability and Empower Partners

Work with a local foundation to secure funding over a long period of time. To do this, you will need to document and present impact based on your evaluation findings (see [Practice Brief 5b](#)). If you have working groups, is there a way to shift responsibility to those in local leadership (i.e., district superintendents, guidance counselors, or community college/university leadership)? Technology coordinators in the school district can be engaged to provide technology training using the technology and provide support and coordination for materials across multiple schools/after-school locations. Consider the workload required to support the project after its initial phase. Ask what is realistic regarding the amount of time and work needed to sustain the program and how this work benefits learners and all involved.

**Reflection Questions**

- » Why is it important to create awareness about your project with STEM organizations from your community?
- » What steps can you take to build or rebuild relationships with organizations in your community that could benefit your project?
- » In what ways will joining your project mutually benefit both your partners and the project?
- » What type of communication structures (i.e., mode, frequency, tools) should you set up for each partnership?