

Youth Inspired Challenge FAQs - General Public



What is the Youth Inspired Challenge?

The Association of Science-Technology Centers' Youth Inspired Challenge is a major initiative aimed at expanding the impact of science centers and museums in response to President Barack Obama's goal of strengthening the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) acumen of America's students.

What are the goals of the Youth Inspired Challenge?

In just two years, ASTC member institutions surpassed the original goal to engage youth in a total of 2 million hours of STEM-centered youth development programming in science centers and museums across the United States. By continuing to champion this effort, it is expected that the number of science centers and museums offering this type of programming will increase, providing opportunities for youth in every state – especially those from underrepresented groups. In addition, the Challenge will illustrate the important role that science centers and museums play in advancing the STEM potential of the nation's youth; it will document the academic, social, and civic impacts of STEM-centered youth development programs, resulting in greater investment and support for them.

What are STEM-centered youth development programs?

STEM-centered youth development programs in science centers and museums go well beyond the annual field trip or the special visit to the school by science center staff. They are intensive programs that engage students as early as the sixth grade in cumulative STEM learning experiences throughout the secondary school years and even into higher education. Youth are challenged to explore STEM concepts in fun, challenging, and nurturing environments through hands-on methods designed to encourage both the development of critical thinking skills and the self-esteem necessary for success in academics and the workplace. Many programs also offer opportunities to explore future careers through interaction with local STEM professional mentors, trips to corporate offices, and pre-college visits.

How are Youth Inspired Challenge programs different from other STEM education initiatives?

Unique to these programs is the focus on science learning as a foundation for building self-esteem, developing problem-solving and workplace skills, and increasing interpersonal communication abilities. Middle school-age youth are engaged as program participants, learning from science center staff, peer role models, and STEM professionals. Programs for high school-age youth are often designed as service-learning activities; they offer opportunities to transition from participants into peer mentors who facilitate learning for younger students, or as explainers who facilitate hands-on STEM learning for the general public visiting the science center. Supported by science center staff that are highly skilled in both youth development and STEM education practices, these programs are vital links between parents, local school districts, and community organizations in supporting academic excellence and STEM skills in the youth they serve.



How are *Youth Inspired Challenge* programs funded?

While each institution's funding stream is different, in general, programs are funded through tuition fees, corporate sponsorship, state and federal grants, or private foundation funds. The local impact of these programs is such that the majority of funding comes from local funding sources, rather than those on the federal or national level.

Who is involved in the *Youth Inspired Challenge*?

Involvement in the *Challenge* is open to all ASTC-member institutions offering STEM-centered youth development programs for youth ages 10-19.



Will all ASTC science centers and museums implement the same program?

No. Instead, each institution will implement programs that best fit their expertise and the needs of the youth in the communities they serve.

Why focus youth ages 10-19?

Studies show that this age range touches critical moments in youth development and academic progress: STEM achievement in middle school, STEM matriculation and achievement in high school, high school completion, and pursuit of STEM studies in higher education. By focusing on science center programs serving youth at these critical junctures, the *Challenge* will highlight interventions that can be models for the nation.

How will success in the *Youth Inspired Challenge* be measured and communicated?

All participating science centers and museums will be asked to collect specific data from their individual programs. ASTC will oversee, coordinate, and compile this data and will subsequently share both numbers and stories of success. Specific impacts to be measured include how programs affect participants' perception of themselves as science learners, impacts on overall academic success, and level of financial investment to support these programs.

How can I support the *Youth Inspired Challenge* in my community?

There are a variety of ways to support youth development programming in your local science center. Parents and families can support programs by enrolling youth in local programs and by becoming members of their local science centers. Schools can support programs by exploring new or expanding existing partnerships. Finally, private industry can invest in these programs.

