

# Organizing a STEM Alliance for **Impact**

Flickr: Kabsik Park

## What's the Issue?

For a STEM alliance to activate and become a successful organization, a lot of factors have to be considered early in the development process. Without the right focus, key members, or organizing structure, it is an all too common fate of working groups to never evolve past the discussion phase of the critical work that must be accomplished to effectively impact the system.

Determining the key members of an alliance and at what level they will be involved, is one of the most important things to consider prior to launching an alliance. Diversity of members within the alliance can benefit the work of the group by incorporating new ideas, perspectives, and connections.

This brief provides information and guidance for how a lead organizer and leadership team can ensure a successful launch of an alliance.

## References

- 1: Adapted from Bell, P., Neill, T., Penuel, B., Shaw, S. 2016. Advancing Coherent and Equitable Systems of Science Education (ACESSE). Boulder, CO. Download at <http://goo.gl/3B93wr>.
- 2: Watch a webinar at <http://goo.gl/yFDPU7> and read more at <http://goo.gl/CPdDmg>.
- 3: Read more at <http://goo.gl/fXPMPI>.

## Why It Matters To You

- The task of aligning the education and STEM pipelines is a very complex process. Fixing one point of the range of factors that influence the system cannot make much difference unless all parts of the system are improved at the same time. No single organization, however innovative or powerful, can accomplish significant change alone. Instead, an ambitious mission must exist to coordinate improvements. The Collective Impact of a STEM alliance focuses the entire community on a single set of goals, measured in the same way.
- Read more about Collective Impact at <http://collectiveimpactforum.org>.



## Recommended Actions

Once you're ready to launch a STEM alliance, here are a few steps to ensure the success of your Launch Meeting.

**SIX or MORE** weeks before launch, the lead organizer should prepare a short introductory statement regarding the need for establishing an alliance.

**SIX** weeks before launch, the lead organizer should use the Influencer Map<sup>1</sup> to identify a three- to four-member, diverse Leadership Team comprised of education, business, and community representatives. The lead organizer should confirm meeting space for the Leadership Team meetings and the Launch Meeting.

**FIVE** weeks before launch, the Leadership Team should meet to:

- Collectively review STEM Alliance Brief #1 and consider how an alliance would benefit the community.
- Walk through STEM Alliance Brief #2 to develop shared understandings of STEM.
- Complete the Influence Map to determine what stakeholders to invite to an alliance launch meeting.

**FOUR** weeks before launch, the Leadership Team should create the agenda for the meeting and share and send an invitation to those identified as essential stakeholders from the Influence Map. Keep in mind, your agenda may include activities and information from STEM Alliance Briefs #2 and #3.

**ONE** week before launch, the lead organizer should connect with invitees to ensure understanding about the details and goals of the Launch Meeting.

## Reflection Questions

- How might a Leadership Team benefit from using the Influencer Map as a tool to ensure key members are invited to participate in a STEM alliance?
- How might collective impact strategies enhance the overall efforts of an alliance?
- How do you ensure an alliance moves work beyond the discussion phase?

## Things to Consider

**What might be a common agenda of the alliance?** Common agendas often address the vision, sub-goals, and key levers for advancing the agenda. Early on, this should be very malleable.<sup>2</sup>

**How might the alliance establish shared measurement?** While this can be complex and costly, the emerging alliance can identify what information is currently available and determine realistic, timely goals. If data sets are unavailable, the alliance may create a sub-goal focused on creating, gathering, and reporting needed data.

**How might the alliance work to foster mutually reinforcing activities?** Different from an organization-focused planning process, a community-focused strategic planning process and alignment techniques provide a systematic way to enable multiple organizations to find their most productive role in a larger, shared strategy.<sup>3</sup>

**What structures and expectations will encourage continuous communication all stakeholder of the alliance?** Communication plans include in-person meetings, ongoing conversations, and information sharing both across and beyond the alliance.

**How will the alliance ensure there is a dedicated backbone team?** The backbone team must have time and capacity to ensure the work of the organization moves forward by conducting the day-to-day work of the STEM alliance, and it should be comprised of people who are passionate about the work.