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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STEM Action Center earns \$99.5K NSF grant to develop Idaho STEM EcosySTEM

BOISE, Idaho (June 23, 2020) — The National Science Foundation has awarded the Idaho STEM Action Center a \$99,500 NSF INCLUDES Planning Grant to guide the development of the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM.

The Idaho STEM EcosySTEM is an emerging network of partners from PreK-12 and higher education, out-of-school educators, business and industry, nonprofits, state agencies, legislators, and the Governor's Office. The group is working to build awareness of and ensure equitable access to science, technology, engineering, and math education opportunities and careers. It also seeks to align STEM education with Idaho's current and future workforce needs, create successful metrics for STEM education and programming, and build momentum for STEM within the state and nationally.

The network was established in August 2019. Two months later, in October, Idaho was accepted as a member of the STEM Learning Ecosystem Community of Practice, joining 88 other STEM ecosystems from across the county and the world. The STEM Action Center, which works to address talent shortages and create a stronger Idaho with STEM learning opportunities for all, coordinated the state's application process. The agency, under the Executive Office of the Governor, also serves as the backbone organization for the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM.

"Idaho citizens are not pursuing STEM education opportunities and careers at a rate that supports our current and future workforce needs," STEM Action Center executive director Dr. Angela Hemingway said. "The Idaho STEM EcosySTEM was established to create a clear path forward to reach our vision of an equitable, STEM-literate citizenry that will ensure our state's continued economic prosperity."

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The NSF grant will be used to build upon prior foundational work funded in part by a \$12,000 grant from STEMx, a multistate educational network Idaho belongs to that is managed by Battelle Energy Alliance, which also oversees Idaho National Laboratory. The STEMx grant funded the inaugural gathering of the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM in January, where the network formed working groups and developed vision and mission statements.

She said the NSF INCLUDES Planning Grant will fund two more strategic planning meetings scheduled for this fall and next spring in Moscow and Twin Falls, respectively. During the meetings, the group will establish goals and metrics so the network is able to measure success and course correct as necessary. They will also establish a leadership structure and communication protocols. In addition, the network has identified the need to develop a statewide strategic plan focused on broadening participation in STEM.

Ultimately, the group intends to develop a collaborative infrastructure that can support a scaled STEM network via hubs in all regions of the state, laying the foundation for a large system with broader impacts that extend beyond Idaho.

“A cross-sector effort like the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM is essential to address these challenges,” Dr. Hemingway said. “Our new network brings together a large, phenomenal contingency of stakeholders who are poised to advance the systemic change in STEM education practices and workforce development to broaden participation in STEM.”

Co-principal investigators Sarah Penney, Dr. Donna Llewellyn, and Dee Money agreed the importance of the NSF grant, the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM, and STEM education in general cannot be underscored enough.

Penney, the program manager for diversity outreach and communication for Idaho NSF EPSCoR (Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research), said, “The new NSF funding will allow us to build our capacity to identify and create some innovative strategies to engage populations that may not have been involved in the STEM conversation at a state level. Educational inequity impacts the Idaho STEM workforce, and the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM will improve our collective efforts to increase participation from underrepresented groups.”

Dr. Llewellyn, executive director of Boise State University’s Institute for STEM and Diversity Initiatives, said, “The key to success for our state and pretty much any region is creating an educated citizenry capable of being informed and productive members of society. It shouldn’t matter who you are, what your zip code is, or what your family background is. Everyone has a right to STEM education and opportunities. It’s a gateway to a better life, plus science and technology is cool. We need people who can understand data and science and who can use technology to improve the world. A STEM ecosystem that can improve access across the state is critical.”

Mooney, executive director of the Micron Foundation and a board member of the STEM Action Center, said, “The key to accelerating discoveries in science or the next tech breakthrough will be dependent on our ability to bring fresh perspectives to STEM fields. We are excited and inspired by NSF's support to expand the reach of STEM content, and Micron looks forward to working together to drive more diversity and participation in the state's STEM programs.”

Meanwhile, it is not too late for people and organizations to join the Idaho STEM EcosySTEM.

“We’ve accomplished a lot, but there’s so much potential and more work to do,” Dr. Hemingway said. “It’s going to take everyone involved in Idaho’s STEM community to push this network forward, so please learn more and let us know if you’re interested.”

Visit <https://stem.idaho.gov/idaho-stem-ecosystem> to learn how you can help.

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About the National Science Foundation and NSF INCLUDES

The National Science Foundation is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1950 “to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense...” NSF is vital because it supports basic research and people to create knowledge that transforms the future.

NSF INCLUDES is short for NSF Inclusion across the Nation of Communities of Learners of Underrepresented Discoverers in Engineering and Science. One of the organization’s 10 Big Ideas, NSF INCLUDES is a comprehensive national initiative to enhance U.S. leadership in STEM discoveries and innovations focused on the National Science Foundation’s commitment to diversity, inclusion, and broadening participation in these fields.

The vision of NSF INCLUDES is to catalyze the STEM enterprise to work collaboratively for inclusive change, resulting in a STEM workforce that reflects the population of the nation. NSF INCLUDES features a national network composed of design and development launch pilots, alliances, a coordination hub, NSF-funded broadening participation projects, other relevant NSF-funded projects, and other organizations that support the development of talent from all sectors of society to build an inclusive STEM workforce.

Visit [nsf.gov](https://www.nsf.gov) for more information.

About the Idaho STEM Action Center

The Idaho STEM Action Center was created in 2015 because Idaho citizens are not entering the STEM pipeline fast enough to meet current and future Idaho workforce needs. Its goals are to increase access to STEM opportunities, align education and workforce needs, and amplify awareness of STEM throughout Idaho. The organization is working with industry, government, educators, and students to develop new resources and support high-quality professional-development opportunities to foster a STEM-educated workforce that ensures Idaho's continued economic prosperity.

Visit STEM.idaho.gov for more information, and visit <https://STEM.idaho.gov/support-us/foundation> to make a tax-deductible donation to the Idaho STEM Action Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, to enhance the investment the state has made in Idaho's STEM community. Contributions provide greater access to STEM camps for children, student competitions, and many other life-shaping programs.

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