

# STEM LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS

## ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

**T**he STEM Education Coalition recognizes the importance STEM learning ecosystems play to the future of STEM education around the country. We know STEM learning ecosystems are the best way to provide students a rich array of learning opportunities in STEM and connect all partners invested in STEM opportunities to better align systems that support students, educators, and the community. But far too many of our leaders are often unaware of all the incredible learning opportunities STEM Learning Ecosystems are creating for our students and communities.

The following is a collection of materials and resources to help you become engaged and tell the story of your STEM ecosystem to leaders and stakeholders in your community. Please use this information to reach parents, students, educators, higher education leaders, business leaders, community leaders, media partners and all other STEM stakeholders.

The STEM Education Coalition offers unique assistance and experience in supporting STEM learning ecosystems. The materials presented below are divided into three main categories of support the STEM Education Coalition can provide in your STEM education advocacy needs.

## MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

A critical aspect of successful advocacy campaigns is having the materials to shape your message and how it's communicated to a broader audience. The STEM Education Coalition has an extensive database of materials to support an ecosystem's tailored policy and advocacy needs. Several examples of when an ecosystem might need to leverage written materials include:

- fact sheets to inform policymakers, media, community and industry partners, and other stakeholders to communicate the value of the STEM Ecosystem approach,
- sample policy documents to support legislative advocacy and engagement with executive officials in the development of plans, orders, and councils,
- research and reports to help provide information on best practices and successful approaches happening elsewhere,
- and event planning/agendas to support ecosystems' desire to organize and execute a convening or meeting among stakeholders.



## TOOLKITS

The STEM Education Coalition Policy Forum can develop and distribute policy and advocacy toolkits to outline how ecosystems can get engage on specific policy and advocacy priorities.

- [ESSA toolkit and resources](#)
- [Perkins V toolkit](#)
- [Tips for meeting with legislators](#)
- [Full NSTA Advocacy Toolkit](#)

## STEM BACKGROUND

The Policy Forum has an abundance of background material on everything STEM education and can develop and distribute any background material that would be helpful to ecosystems.

- [STEM state sheets](#)
- [STEM Education in the US](#)



## TRAINING

Given the complexity of the network of federal, state and local laws, and intricate regulations and policies governing STEM education, it is understandable that many require the assistance of an individual who has knowledge or special expertise to ensure that they have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in the public policy process surrounding STEM education. The STEM Education Coalition recognizes that developing effective advocates with a personal connection in the community can be the difference between meaningful progress to advance STEM education and the failure to ensure that opportunities exist for all students to participate in high-quality STEM education programs. The STEM Education Coalition can assist ecosystems with developing training materials for advocates, establishing a concise, easy-to-deliver message, personalizing your messaging, and hosting events or webinars to keep advocates informed.

- [Talking points for advocates](#)
- [Coalition Talks CARES Act Impact on STEM Educators](#)
- [Example Letters to State and District Leaders](#)

## PRESENT YOUR BEST ARGUMENT

Having a few key talking points on a piece of paper is a great way to prepare and make sure you have an opportunity to present all of your best arguments. Below are a few to consider:

### IMPACTS OF THE STEM ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

STEM Ecosystems Initiative is built on over a decade of research into successful STEM collaborations and seeks to nurture and scale effective science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) learning opportunities for all young people. Evaluations of the STEM Learning Ecosystems Approach suggests:

- **Connect** preK-12 STEM learning, in and out-of-school, to post-secondary and STEM career opportunities
- **Match** STEM learning pathways to the changing needs of STEM higher education and workforce
- **Seek out** and successfully engage young people historically under-represented in STEM to participate in high-quality, diverse and interconnected STEM learning experiences
- **Provide** experiences in multiple settings that enable young people to build complex skills, including how to design, test and revise solutions to real-world problems, and to work collaboratively with adults and peers





## PARTNERSHIPS

### PARTNERS

Connecting with state and local partners that share similar advocacy priorities is an effective way enhance support around your advocacy agenda and amplify the message. The STEM Education Coalition Policy Forum has an extensive list of partners in all 50 states and can connect ecosystems with partners to further their policy and advocacy needs.

- [Affiliate Member List](#)

### CONNECTIONS TO NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The STEM Education Coalition Policy Forum has great relationships with organizations at the national level and can connect ecosystems to national organizations to enhance grassroots to grassroots relationships.

- [Coalition Leadership Council National Members](#)
- [State Science Supervisors](#)
- [NCSSS membership](#)
- [STEM X](#)
- [Coronavirus Response Publications and Recommendations from Education and Community Stakeholders](#)
- [STEM Education Coalition to Join Landmark White House Gathering of Nationwide STEM Leaders](#)
- [Coalition Leads 100+ Organizations in STEM Funding Request](#)

### STAYING UPDATED ON ADVOCACY EFFORTS FROM OTHER ECOSYSTEMS

One of the best resources to leverage in local and state-level advocacy is keeping updated with what other Ecosystems are doing in their advocacy efforts around the country. Often times, multiple Ecosystems will be advocating for something similar,

which can be useful in materials development and understanding strategies to advance a particular policy issue.

- [Director of Pennsylvania Afterschool Network Updates Coalition on Smart STEM Initiative](#)

### GRASSROOTS

Grassroots advocacy, at its heart, is about influencing your local decision-makers by sharing your story and expertise. Grassroots advocacy activities can range from bringing up public education in a conversation or sharing an article on social media to inviting Assembly members or Senators to your district for a tour. The keys to a successful grassroots advocacy campaign are preparation and a clear message. The STEM Education Coalition Policy Forum can enhance ecosystem's grassroots relationships and advocacy strategies to engage on-the-ground providers and practitioners to make their voice heard.

- [EIR Survey to grassroots stakeholders](#)
- [Grassroots Letter for local leaders-Iowa Example](#)

### CONVENING/EVENTS

One of the most effective ways to raise awareness for your policy issue is to host summits or events, or join others happening around your state or community, encouraging policymakers and community partners to engage with STEM Ecosystem stakeholders. The STEM Education Coalition can help plan, coordinate, and manage convenings that bring together stakeholders from the community, non-profits, philanthropy, government, and business in a variety of settings with the goal of advancing STEM education opportunities in the community and amplifying the Ecosystem's advocacy agenda.

- [Coalition Visits Idaho for STEM Ecosystems Convening](#)
- [Coalition Keynote's Minnesota Youth Conference](#)
- [STEM Education Coalition Briefings Collection](#)

# ADVOCACY SUPPORT

## AGENDA

Are you trying to advocate for effective policies and more public investments in STEM through an elected official? Are you hoping to convince a funder to invest in STEM programs within the ecosystem framework? Or maybe you are talking to potential community partners and want to make the case for why the ecosystems make good partners in STEM education? For all these scenarios, you should be very clear about your “ask” and gather the best examples, facts and information to make your case to each audience. Developing a strategy and agenda is key for advancing policy priorities among government entities. The STEM Education Coalition can help create and refine an ecosystem’s STEM policy agenda by:

- Helping evaluate state readiness
- Provide guidance in goal setting
- Setting priorities
- Identifying opportunities
- And establishing core principles or a mission statement
- [Coalition Outlines 2020 Federal Policy Goals](#)



## DETERMINING AUDIENCE

Understanding your audience will help you gather the most relevant material and allow you to create messages that will be most effective. It is important that you think carefully about who you are trying to reach and influence - are you speaking to local business leaders, elected officials, program officers in a philanthropic foundation, community members or parents? They will all have different perspectives on the STEM learning landscape. This is why educating our leaders and the public through advocacy is so important! It is vital that all of us make the case to a variety of stakeholders about the importance of the STEM Learning Ecosystem approach in STEM education reform efforts. The STEM Education Coalition can assist ecosystems in this process and next steps as an aspect of a broader advocacy strategy.



## LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT

The STEM Education Coalition can provide further legislative support by identifying legislative champions, developing an integrated strategy using social media and other advocates, identifying model legislation and other legislative text on similar priorities, review bills and make recommendations, and provide advice on interacting with elected officials.

- [Testimony to Bipartisan Policy Committee, PA](#)

**You can advocate for your program and the STEM ecosystem in the time it takes to write an email. There are so many activities you can take on that don't involve lobbying and that require as little time as a phone call to the time it takes to coordinate and conduct a site visit. Here are just a few ways individuals within ecosystems can take action and the STEM Education can provide assistance with.**

## EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

### QUICK HITS — THINGS THAT ARE EASIER TO DO

- **Call** or email a decision-maker - a member of Congress, your state legislator or a school principal, for example - and tell them you would like them to support STEM Learning Ecosystem programs (5 min.)

*Don't worry. For members of Congress, you will likely get a staffer on the first call. For others, this can be an easy conversation about how your program is positively impacting kids and families in your community.*

- **Invite** decision-makers to your the STEM ecosystem event (10 min.)
- **Write** thank you letters to a decision-maker (10 min.)

*Advocacy is about relationships. When a decision-maker supports the STEM ecosystem in any way, either directly or indirectly, be sure they know about it! Write a handwritten note thanking them for their decision and explain why this is good for the community.*

- **Keep** your program's social media up-to-date (10 min.)

*This is an effective way to strengthen community advocates for your program. It is much easier to advocate for something you are educated on, and social media is a perfect vehicle for educating people on what you're doing with children and youth!*

- **Check out** what's going on with the national STEM Learning Ecosystems (10 min.)

*The more you know about the STEM ecosystem advocacy efforts in the state and across the nation, the more comfortable you will feel taking further action. Find out more at [www.STEMEcosystems.org](http://www.STEMEcosystems.org).*

# EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

## NEXT LEVEL — A LITTLE MORE TIME AND EFFORT

- **Write** a letter to a decision-maker asking them to support the STEM ecosystem programs (15-30 min.) Whether you are a parent or a program provider, the letter should follow a basic template:

**1st** paragraph states the reason for the letter and who you are

**2nd** paragraph gives reasons for your position and a specific illustration of those reasons

**3rd** paragraph summarizes your position and requests a specific action from them

[Coalition and Afterschool Alliance Send Joint Letter to Vermont HHS Secretary on New Afterschool STEM Initiative](#)

[Letter to Congress on Higher Education Act STEM Priorities](#)

- **Start** a letter writing or phone calling campaign (30-90 min.)

The more letters and phone calls a decision-maker gets on an issue, the more they pay attention. Using the guidelines provided above, ask others you know who are involved in the STEM ecosystem issues to join you in writing letters and making phone calls. Try hosting a letter writing party using some of the same planning guidelines as you use for a community forum. Email is also a terrific and convenient way to get out information and ask people to join you. Be sure people add their own personal approach to their phone calls and letters—form letters and highly scripted phone calls are not effective advocacy tools.

- **Attend** legislative and community meetings in your area (60-90 min.)

When Congress and the state legislatures are not in session, members generally hold a series of meetings across the state or across their district for the purpose of talking with their constituents. These meeting locations and times are generally advertised in newspapers beforehand and can also be distributed via email networks. Attend a “town meeting” and use talking points to speak with your legislator about the STEM ecosystem issues.

Additionally, various groups may hold community meetings or conversations to elicit input from stakeholders. Consider yourself a critical stakeholder and attend the meetings. Speak up about how your program positively impacts children and families and express your support for the STEM ecosystem in your community.

- **Meet** with decision-makers (15-30 min. plus planning time; total of 120 min.)

Meeting directly with decision-makers is an effective tool in your advocacy arsenal. It allows the decision-maker to put a face and name with the issue. This can take some planning, especially when working with members of Congress. You should first contact the individual via email or telephone to schedule a time that works best for both parties. Plan ahead! Be sure you do your research and be prepared to speak on the talking points. In addition, have promotional or informational materials on hand to provide to the decision-maker, such as a program brochure or STEM Ecosystem one-pagers.

For more information about the toolkit or services that the STEM Education Coalition can provide, contact us at [ahall@stemedcoalition.org](mailto:ahall@stemedcoalition.org)