INTRODUCTION

Community defines not just the patrons you serve but also the community within the library itself—your staff, your volunteers, your leaders. Within this group of individuals, “your team,” you will find your core mission statement for your library and your patrons. Before any vision can be created this network must discuss goals, challenges and priorities.

What is the big picture?

What are your plans and goals for the next five years in regards to programming, outreach and essential services for your patrons? What will your guidelines be in regards to policy for all of these? How will potential STEM programming be affected or affect these guidelines? Will you focus mainly on youth programming or do you want everyone to have access to these programs? Will your budget allow for youth and adult STEM programming? Or only one? These are questions that must be answered and understood by your team before moving forward.

Once your organizational goals and guidelines are in place, it’s time to reach out. Time to pay attention, observe perceived needs and wants, really do your homework and discover what is going on in your community in regards to STEM.

Is your focus adult programming? Seniors? Baby Boomers? Unemployed patrons? Parents? Young adults? What resources and programming could be offered to impact their needs and wants?

If children and youth programs are your focus—talk with schools, after schools, daycares, gifted and talented programs, parents—and most importantly the children and youth you hope to reach. Do these agencies need help supplementing their curriculum? Do some agencies lack the resources to have any STEM programming at all and you will be their only resource? Are the children engaged or are they just going through the motions? What can your organization do to impact these needs and wants?

METHODS AND MATERIALS

From natural sciences and technology to world renowned archaeologists and animal behaviorists, what can you do to bring exciting and informative STEM programming to your community? Engaging presenters provide momentum for programming and are a catalyst for new ideas.

I am not a scientist but one of my favorite books as a child was Madeleine L’Engle’s, A Wrinkle In Time, and of course, there was Star Trek, Star Wars, and more recently, the book, The Martian, by Andy Weir. There are many children who might not identify with science or think it will interest them but think of the possibilities if we introduced them to it through literature. A whole new audience! What an opportunity! As you go through the conference this week, think about your goals, your priorities and your vision for STEM programming in the 21st Century—Natural Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Math Literacy—these are for all ages. And as reading really is fundamental, no one is too young or too old to let their Imagination take flight, to learn, and to create. What can you do to make this happen? Who can you partner with to make Science exciting and inspirational not only for your patrons but also your team? Those individuals will be taking these programs out into the community and interacting with the public on a daily basis. What can you do to inspire them? What will you do to make sure they are prepared for the task before them?

ABSTRACT

I preface this by saying, I am not a scientist. This is important because the majority of librarians we hope to reach to promote STEM programming are not scientists either. Librarians come from varied backgrounds but generally, science, as recognized here, is not one of them. If we hope to create a vision for 21st Century STEM Learning in Public Libraries this fact has to be acknowledged. Creating STEM programming from this position requires more of an effort in collaboration and training. AND IT REQUIRES A MISSION STATEMENT. True vision suggests scope, scope suggests opportunity—and this conference is an opportunity for many voices to be heard. Voices from all walks of life need to be a part of this 21st century equation if we want it to succeed. Several years ago, I attended a ‘scientific’ training solely for the purpose of improving the quality of the programming I offered my patrons. Theater, stories, plays, arts, music, crafts, books—I offered literacy in all shapes and sizes—except math and science. I knew I needed to do better for my patrons—to prepare them for school and life. This fundamental need to offer our patrons more, to be the bridge to their future—this is why many librarians have embraced the STEM movement across the country. We want to give our patrons opportunities to learn and explore and we need training and encouragement to make this happen. Creating and implementing a community vision will be the core of my presentation.