

ASTC's Cultivating Community Science Stipends

Study Context

The Association of Science & Technology Centers (ASTC) launched the Cultivating Community Science Stipend Program in 2024, supporting established teams of science museums and community organizations in conducting community science projects. Each team received between \$35,000 and \$70,500 of funding, with support from The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and had up to 18 months to complete their projects. Evaluation examined the project journey, how effectively community science attributes were incorporated in implementation, and the outcomes that projects achieved among participants and broader communities.

The Community Science Projects

Cable, Wisconsin

Community Partner: Cable Community Farm

Museum Partner: Cable Natural History Museum

Project Summary: Create the Chequamegon Northwoods Food Coalition through member recruitment and delivery of an incubator service for local growers, digital resource hub, and educational workshops.

Los Angeles, California

Community Partner: Anawakalmekak

Museum Partner: Natural History Museum of LA County

Project Summary: Indigenous youth-led research into five areas of land health; adaptation of traditional science methods into new approaches that center Indigenous practice; and sharing knowledge at events and through a field guide.

Warren County, North Carolina

Community Partner: Working Landscapes

Museum Partner: Museum of Life & Science

Project Summary: Youth workshops and participatory research focused on challenges of inequitable food access, climate change, and impact of environmental and social justice issues on rural food systems and everyday lives.

Key Conclusions

- 1 All projects embodied community science.**
All projects were successful at implementing ASTC's defined attributes of community science in the processes and strategies they used in their projects. In many cases, the teams reached levels of "Excelling" – which is beyond core expectations for community science. These teams were exceptional examples of the Sharing Leadership attribute, as they all found proactive ways of working together that ensured the museum and community partners had equal ownership over all direction of the projects.
- 2 Projects achieved strong public outcomes.**
Despite having very different strategies, audiences, and visions, data gathered from evaluation within each project showed clear evidence of impact in ways the projects cared about. Cable, WI empowered growers to innovate and change practices, directly improving agricultural resilience and food access. Los Angeles, CA empowered Indigenous youth as researchers and advocates, creating a new public field guide. Warren County, NC empowered youth to understand and feel pride in the rich scientific and environmental justice history of their community.
- 3 All work continues, beyond the grant.**
One marker of success for a community science project – and one that can be difficult to achieve – is whether projects and partnerships can sustain over the long-haul, rather than in isolated or sporadic projects. At the end of this evaluation, all three partnerships were already working on next steps, continuing this work in their communities, whether or not more funding was secured. The partners showed clear commitment that indicated this work was valued as far more than a one-off attempt.



Community Science Projects Empowering Communities

(Left) A grower showcases the harvest, enabled by Chequamegon Northwoods Food Coalition Incubator funding, in Cable, WI.

(Center) Yolsentalpixkeh Youth Leaders presenting research data at a City Nature Challenge event in Los Angeles, CA.

(Right) Youth presents their research on the history and impact of rural, agricultural systems at a community event in Warren County, NC.

Implications for Future Efforts

Situating Projects in Larger Streams of Work

All three projects were part of a bigger picture that extended beyond the bounds of the community science work. Because there was a whole river of work going on, these funded community science projects were but one tributary feeding the larger river. In circumstances like this, funding is an opportunity to catalyze one effort to magnify impact.

Investing Time in Planning Speeds Later Action

Two of the projects participated in an earlier round of ASTC funding, which invested funds in having community-museum teams spend several months planning the need, design, and approach they would take. There was evidence that this investment helped speed up initial stages of implementation within these stipend grants. This speaks to the value of offering financial support for project planning time in advance of implementation.

Community Science Can Be Interdisciplinary

These projects were new illustrations of community science, as they were all interdisciplinary. None implemented a traditional "doing science" or "deliberating science" model, but explored the intersection of science, history, economics, and cultures. Science study alone would not have tied the threads together in a way that was meaningful to people involved. This expansion may require more clarity for the field to understand what the "science" of community science really means.

