



June 1, 2017

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman, Commerce, Justice,  
Science Subcommittee  
United States Senate

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Ranking Member, Commerce, Justice,  
Science Subcommittee  
United States Senate

The Honorable John Culberson  
Chairman, Commerce, Justice,  
Science Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Jose Serrano  
Ranking Member, Commerce, Justice,  
Science Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives

Dear Senators Shelby and Shaheen, and Representatives Culberson and Serrano:

On behalf of the Association for Science-Technology Centers (ASTC), we are writing to seek your support for the NASA Office of Education and, in particular, the Competitive Program for Science Museums, Planetariums, and NASA Visitor Centers (**CP4SMPVC**). This relatively small grant program was authorized in 2005 and allows the NASA Administrator to provide grants to museums and planetariums to enhance programs related to space exploration, aeronautics, space science, earth science, or microgravity.

The program has typically issued \$10 million or less annually in competitive grants. It is part of NASA Education's STEM Education and Accountability Projects (SEAP) which saw its FY17 budget cut from \$25 million to \$10 million—which we conclude will leave little if anything to fund the open FY17 NASA request for applications that are due June 19, 2017.

These grants help kick-start numerous NASA-related and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) or STEM-rich learning experiences for all ages and demographics. Since 2008, the **CP4SMPVC** grant program has funded [81 projects](#) and developed more than [130 educational products](#). To sustain this teaching and learning community, each grantee participates in the Museum Alliance, which includes over 1,400 professionals at more than 700 U.S. museums, science centers, planetariums, NASA Visitor Centers, Challenger Centers, observatories, parks, libraries, camps, and youth-serving organizations. This is a tremendous network deserving of continued support. A few examples from Alaska, Alabama, New York, Texas, and other states follow.

We are very grateful for the recent letter issued by U.S. Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and 32 additional Senators urging the Senate Appropriations Committee to support NASA's Office of Education in the coming fiscal year. We just wanted you to be aware of this particular grant program that is already suffering from the \$15 million cut in the FY17 budget. Therefore, we urge you to restore the SEAP budget to \$25 million, thereby allowing the **CP4SMPVC** to carry on.

Sincerely,

Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) and the following ASTC members:

Adirondack Public Observatory, Tupper Lake, New York  
Chabot Space & Science Center, Oakland, California  
The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Connecticut Science Center, Hartford, Connecticut  
Discovery Center Museum, Rockford, Illinois  
The Discovery Museum and Planetarium, Bridgeport, Connecticut  
Dayton Society of Natural History/Boonshoft Museum of Discovery, Dayton, Ohio  
East Kentucky Science Center and Planetarium, Prestonsburg, Kentucky  
EcoTarium Museum of Science & Nature, Worcester, Massachusetts  
Exploratorium, San Francisco, California  
Frost Museum of Science, Miami, Florida  
Gateway to Science, Bismarck, North Dakota  
Maryland Academy of Science at the Maryland Science Center, Baltimore, Maryland  
Museum of Science, Boston, Massachusetts  
Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, Illinois  
New York Hall of Science, Queens, New York  
Orlando Science Center, Orlando, Florida  
Powerhouse Science Center, Durango, Colorado  
Science Museum of Minnesota, Saint Paul, Minnesota  
Science Museum of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia  
Science Museum Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
Sloan Museum & Longway Planetarium, Flint, Michigan  
Space Center Houston, Houston, Texas  
Texas Museum of Science & Technology, Cedar Park, Texas  
U.S. Space and Rocket Center, Huntsville, Alabama

## A Few CP4SMPVC Project Examples

(More stories from the field can be found [here](#).)

### **ALABAMA & MINNESOTA**

Working with Science Museum of Minnesota in Saint Paul, the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, will create a new interactive exhibition, *Space Station: Science in Orbit*, that will give more than 500,000 annual museum visitors an immersive experience of what daily and professional life is like aboard the International Space Station (ISS), and how the ISS is supported by NASA back on Earth, using the real voices of astronauts and engineers. In addition, the U.S. Space & Rocket Center will host four *STEMcons*, an annual four-day STEM professional development program for 270 educators, from the five-state service area of Marshall Space Flight Center. They will focus on best practices and innovation in hands-on, experiential STEM learning. The U.S. Space & Rocket Center aims to recruit at least 40% of these educators from underserved/underprivileged schools.

Another U.S. Space & Rocket Center project, *Engage and Equip to Empower (E<sup>3</sup>): Building a STEM Generation*, seeks to educate the public about living, working, and doing science aboard the ISS and to provide professional development in STEM for formal and informal educators.

### **ALASKA**

A third project, *NASA's Eyes on the Arctic*, is a multi-disciplinary outreach partnership targeting K–12 students, teachers, and communities. The Challenger Learning Center of Alaska, the University of Alaska Museum of the North, the Anchorage Museum, and University of Alaska-Fairbanks (UAF) researchers aim to build a strategic and long-lasting partnership between STEM formal and informal education providers to promote STEM literacy and awareness of NASA's mission. Specific goals of the project include: 1) engaging and inspiring the public through presentation of relevant, compelling stories of research and adventure in the Arctic; 2) strengthening the pipeline of K–12 students to STEM careers, particularly those from underserved groups; 3) increasing interest in science among children and their parents; and 4) strengthening connections between UAF researchers, rural Alaska, and Alaska's informal science education institutions.

### **COLORADO**

Greetings from the rural Four Corners, where Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico meet! We at the Powerhouse Science Center and the 20,000+ people we serve each year have greatly benefitted from NASA educational resources and grant opportunities. In an area without much STEM opportunity and few STEM resources, national support and leadership has proven essential to the work we do. Support for the NASA CP4SMPVC is critical for organizations like ours and those we serve in our rural area.

**FLORIDA**

Orlando Science Center is pleased to join our ASTC peers and add our name to the letter of support seeking reinstatement of funds for the NASA Office of Education. As a current recipient of funding from CP4SMPVC for our *STEM Satellites program*, Orlando Science Center recognizes the significant impact such funding and partnerships can make on our communities. In partnership with BASE Camp Children's Cancer Foundation and the University of Central Florida (UCF), we are leveraging NASA grant funding to engage several cohorts of chronically ill children at Central Florida hospitals with three unique NASA-themed mobile exhibits. Partnering with planetary science experts and education researchers from UCF, OSC is designing and developing stimulating and informative activities for mobile exhibit carts that can be brought directly to a child's hospital room. Exhibits will engage students with content from the NASA Science Mission Directorate and contain information and activities relevant to current and future NASA missions.

**NEW YORK**

The *NASA Science Research Mentoring Program* (NASA SRMP) presents the wonders of space exploration and planetary sciences to underserved high school students from New York City through cutting-edge, research-based courses and authentic research opportunities, using the rich resources of the American Museum of Natural History. NASA SRMP consists of a year of Earth and planetary science (EPS) and astrophysics electives offered through the Museum's After School Program, year-long mentorship placements with Museum research scientists, and summer programming through its education partners at City College of New York and the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies. The primary goals are: 1) to motivate and prepare high school students, especially those underrepresented in STEM fields, to pursue STEM careers related to EPS and astrophysics; 2) to develop a model and strategies that can enrich the informal education field; and 3) to engage research scientists in education and outreach programs.

**NORTH DAKOTA**

Gateway to Science Center, Inc., is preparing a CP4SMPVC proposal for the June 19 deadline, to develop and implement *North Dakota Takes Flight*. This suite of hands-on aeronautics exhibits and supporting programming will provide authentic STEM experiences for students (grades K–12), educators, and the general public in North Dakota. The exhibits and programming will explore manned and unmanned aircraft design, simulation, and operation and will highlight NASA's research and innovation in these areas. Federal support for our project has the potential to impact our entire state, but the uncertainty of this funding opportunity puts us in a difficult situation. We are a very small shop (literally two of us working on fundraising). We believe our project has merit, and we are planning to devote a great deal of time and resources toward compiling the best application possible. However, we now need to consider the possibility of that funding being eliminated or greatly reduced, and whether an application from a small science center in North Dakota has any chance of competing with larger organizations for a potentially reduced pool of funding. Since the deadline is still scheduled for June 19, we continue to work on this grant application.

## **MICHIGAN**

Funding from NASA's CP4SPMVC program allowed the Michigan Science Center in Detroit to develop a planetarium show called "Sunstruck" that has been shown in more than 30 states and 20 countries around the world. The show teaches about the wonders of our sun and how the incredible energy that has supported life for millennia is now threatening our technology and way of life. NASA funding also allowed the institution to build two exhibits, both of which serve approximately 165,000 people per year. NASA supplies the science center with educational materials, which it shares with the next generation, hoping that they will be inspired to think more deeply about how to protect the Earth as a whole and to think about what lies beyond the Earth.

## **OHIO**

With a NASA CP4SMPVC grant, the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery created the 2,000-square-foot, permanent exhibition *Exoplanets Exploration* for a target audience of ages 12 and up. The exhibition utilizes hands-on, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic interactivity in its various exhibit components, through which visitors gain a basic understanding of the techniques that scientists use to search for planets around distant suns.

## **TEXAS**

One project, *Girlstart 365*, provides year-round, free, high-quality STEM education for girls in grades 4–6, in 65 elementary schools in 13 urban and 10 rural Texas school districts with limited access to STEM education resources and serving high percentages of low-income and/or minority students. A 2014 quasi-experimental evaluation of *Girlstart After School* found that diverse girls who took part in the program "met standard" on fifth-grade State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness tests in math and science, qualified for advanced or pre-AP math and science in middle school, and enrolled in advanced math and science courses at higher rates than their non-*Girlstart* peers.