



Association of
Science-Technology
Centers

STEM PUBLIC PROGRAMS: Updates and Opportunities for Science Centers

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*In an effort to make ASTC members more aware of some of the lesser-known programmatic and funding opportunities offered by a variety of sources – and available to science centers and museums – ASTC recently launched **STEM Public Programs: Updates and Opportunities for Science Centers**, a new series of electronic briefs where we'll share details from meetings and conversations with key representatives from U.S. federal agencies and elsewhere. In today's edition (already our fourth!), we'll highlight the Environmental Education Grants Program offered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency...*

Over the past 20 years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has made more than 3,500 Environmental Education Grants Program (EE) awards to recipients in all 50 states and several U.S. territories. Among the awardees? Science centers and museums. Since 2008 alone, ASTC members like the Da Vinci Discovery Center of Science and Technology (Allentown, PA), the Discovery Center at Murfree Spring (Murfreesboro, TN), the Madison Children's Museum (Madison, WI), the Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary (McKinney, TX), the South Dakota Discovery Center (Pierre, SD), the Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose (San Jose, CA), the Children's Museum at La Habra (La Habra, CA), and the Placer Nature Center (Auburn, CA) have all received funding through the program. In short, if your institution is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and has an educational component written into its bylaws (or falls under another category), it is generally eligible to apply for a grant.

If you're not already familiar with the Environmental Education Grants Program, it probably won't surprise you to learn that its purpose is to provide seed money to support environmental education projects that increase the public's awareness about environmental issues. At the same time, it seeks to provide that same public with important skills to help them take responsible actions to protect the environment. EPA makes it clear that while environmental information and environmental outreach are both critical components of what they're looking for in a grant application, proposals must "cover the range of steps and activities from awareness to action with an ultimate goal of environmental stewardship." Furthermore, proposals must – at least under the most recent solicitation – address specific educational and environmental priorities established by EPA. Current educational priorities include Capacity Building, Educational Advancement, Community Projects, Human Health and the Environment, EE Teaching Skills, and Career Development, while environmental priorities include Taking Action on Climate Change, Improving Air Quality, Assuring the Safety of Chemicals, Cleaning Up Our Communities, Protecting America's Waters, Expanding the Conversation on Environmentalism and Working for Environmental Justice, and Building Strong State and Tribal Partnerships.

Historically speaking, the EE Grants Program receives between \$2 million to \$3 million from which to make awards each year, and that funding is distributed among 10 geographic regions (in 2011, for example, the program estimated \$1,943,000 in total funding available, with \$194,300 distributed to each region). Individual grants typically fall in the \$15,000 to \$100,000 spectrum, though the amounts awarded to the ASTC members mentioned above ranged from \$6,937 to \$39,800. Matching non-federal funds are required, and must be at least 25% of the total project cost.

A conversation with one of the program's regional grants coordinators provided some good insight that we want to pass along. First, while the 2011 Regional Grants Solicitation Notice is available online for

reference, it is important to note that the agency is currently in the process of revamping the program. A new 2012 Grants Solicitation Notice is expected to be released in the coming weeks, and you can be among the first to get information about it by visiting the EE Grants website, <http://www.epa.gov/education/grants/index.html>. Once there, click on the “Sign up for email updates” link in the red-bannered box on the right side of the page. The EPA says that a two-month application window between a solicitation’s release and a submission deadline is standard, so keep that in mind for your planning purposes. Also note that the agency hopes to reach as many people as possible through EE Grants; as a result, partnerships and capacity-building programs are encouraged.

For more information about the Environmental Education Grants Program, including detailed application instructions, additional tips for applicants, a list of contacts for each of the 10 regions, and a database of grants awarded since 1992, please visit the aforementioned website at <http://www.epa.gov/education/grants/index.html>.

Previous issues of “STEM Public Programs: Updates and Opportunities for Science Centers” have focused on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, the Science Education Drug Abuse Partnership Awards program, and the Museums Connect program. Please visit: <http://www.astc.org/about/government/STEMprog.htm> to view these archived bulletins.