



## ASTC Announces 2017 Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Award Recipients

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) presented the 2017 Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Awards to four ASTC-member organizations and two people who work at ASTC members during the opening ceremony of the 2017 ASTC Annual Conference in San Jose, California, on October 21.

Given annually, these honors recognize extraordinary accomplishments in business practices, visitor experiences, and leadership in science centers and museums around the world. The “Edgies” commemorate the late Roy L. Shafer, a former science center director, ASTC president, organizational coach, and mentor to many institutions and people in the science center and museum field. The 2017 awards were sponsored by Group Delphi.

A record number of nominations were received for the awards this year, representing snapshots of a dynamic, innovative global field—and making selection from the highly competitive pool challenging for the jury of science center and museum professionals.

The nine-member jury awarded the **Leading Edge Award for Business Practice**, in the small institution category, to the **Museum of Discovery** in Little Rock, Arkansas, for its outreach work executed through its Discovery Network. Founded in 2006 as a network of six museums in Arkansas, the network has expanded to 21 members during the past 14 months, including libraries; university centers for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); K–12 schools; and a Head Start program. Membership is expected to surpass 45 by the end of the year. Members pay dues based on the level of support and interaction they wish to gain from the network, and members are sought from across the state to help foster STEM learning in all areas and also to serve impoverished communities in Arkansas’s Delta region.

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In the large institution category, the **Leading Edge Award for Business Practice** went to **Scitech** in Perth, Australia, for its traveling exhibitions program in North America, in partnership with Imagine Exhibitions, Inc. Scitech and Imagine Exhibitions partnered in 2014 to extend Scitech's reach to North America and increase the institution's nongovernmental revenue. On average, more than 100,000 visitors experience Scitech's exhibitions at each host location. Scitech's exhibition rental revenue nearly tripled between 2014 and 2016 due to the success of this partnership, which provides a significant contribution to its overall business model.

**NOESIS–Thessaloniki Science Center & Technology Museum** in Themi, Thessaloniki, Greece, received the **Leading Edge Award for Visitor Experience** (small institution), for its Welcome Refugees program. This initiative offers children from refugee camps in Thessaloniki a suite of scientific, educational, cultural, and social activities, including a guided tour of the museum and a digital planetarium show in their native language. The program aims to help the children and their families integrate into Greek society and learn about science, technology, and the history of their adopted community.

The **Leading Edge Award for Visitor Experience** (large institution) went to the **Oakland Museum of California** (OMCA), honoring its *Altered State: Marijuana in California* exhibition. OMCA developed this exhibition to generate authentic, cultivated conversations about marijuana prior to the 2016 vote on its recreational use in California. The exhibition did not take a position on legalization but rather provided a neutral forum for Californians to share their views on the issues and learn about perspectives different from their own. Visitors to the show experienced 10 galleries, each exploring a different facet of marijuana in California public life, including medical use, policing and drug policy, history, and economics. Community collaborations and visitor feedback informed the visitor experience from start to finish.

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The **Leading Edge Award for Leadership in the Field** (non-CEO) was bestowed on **Patti Curtis**, director of the Washington office for the Museum of Science, Boston, and its National Center for Technological Literacy. Curtis has worked on both engineering/STEM education authorization language and budget appropriations so that STEM education grant opportunities remain available not only to the Museum of Science but also to the entire field. Most recently, she has worked on K–12 STEM curricula expansion, codifying the National Informal STEM Education Network (NISEnet), and assisting the ASTC Public Policy Committee through challenging political times.

**Ahmed Abdullah Al Shebil**, CEO of Western Province Science Centers in Saudi Arabia, received the **Leading Edge Award for Leadership in the Field** (CEO). His passion for hands-on science started when he was a high school chemistry teacher. Since 1999, with the support of the Ministry of Education and Tatweer and Tatweer Company for Education, his vision for informal science education has evolved into a nationwide network of science centers, the fourth of which opens this year, and a large informal science outreach program that carries STEM experiences to schools and public venues across the kingdom.

Serving on this year's jury were **Jonah Cohen** (the jury's chair), from McWane Science Center in Birmingham, Alabama; **Adrienne Barnett** from Thinkery in Austin, Texas; **Toph Bryant** from Kentucky Science Center in Louisville; **Megan Dempsey** from Connecticut Science Center in Hartford; **Andrea A. Durham** from Science World British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada; **Kathy Gustafson-Hilton** from Hands On! Studio in St. Petersburg, Florida; **Ann Metzger** from Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh; **Jeff Rosenblatt** from Science City at Union Station in Kansas City, Missouri; and **Harry White** from At-Bristol in the United Kingdom).

ASTC thanks the jury for their service and Group Delphi for sponsoring the award.

Nominations for 2018 Roy L. Shafer Leading Edge Awards will be accepted in Spring 2018.

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## **About ASTC**

Founded in 1973, ASTC has nearly 700 members in 50 countries. It includes not only science centers and museums, but also nature centers, aquariums, planetariums, zoos, botanical gardens, space theatres, and natural history and children's museums. Its members also include companies that offer products and services to the field and non-profit organizations that have an interest in science education. Through strategic alliances and global partnerships, ASTC strives to increase awareness of the valuable contributions its members make to their communities and the field of informal STEM learning. [www.astc.org](http://www.astc.org)