

# AISL Awardee Meeting 2026

## Beyond Individual Impacts: Identifying Characteristics of Youth STEM Programs that Yield Community-Level Impacts



CYESS



We acknowledge Grant No. DRL- 2517238 from the U.S. National Science Foundation for supporting this work. *AISL: Beyond Individual Impacts: Identifying Characteristics of Youth STEM Programs that Yield Community-Level Impacts.*



# Principal Investigators



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# Why We're Here

- To share highlights from the beginning phases of our new project
- To connect with others who are engaged in complementary work
- To learn from the resources and research others have to share
- To get your ideas on how we can best “tell the story” of this project as we go along



# Project Background

We have been exploring the intersection of afterschool and other out-of-school (OST) STEM programming and youth-led engagement with community & global issues

- Young people are an integral part of our communities and society but they are often left out of conversations that impact their lives and shape the future.
- When we make space for young people to join us at the table, their perspectives and lived experience can help generate better solutions - *often beyond what adults can imagine.*

**We hope to support programs with engaging more youth in decisions that impact their lives, communities, and futures; and make the case to normalize such youth involvement.**



# Project Goals

This project aims to document the broader societal benefits of youth involvement by conducting a study of programs operating at the intersection of OST STEM learning, youth leadership, and community engagement.

**The team will examine not only the programs' impact on young people, but also how community challenges were addressed, and the extent to which the community benefited from youth participation.**



Document the broader systemic impact(s) of youth involvement



Design a documentation framework that programs can use to capture these broader impacts



Identify the commonalities and support structures programs need to achieve these impacts.

# Timeline at a Glance

**Year One:** Project launch, field survey, case study selection, review existing frameworks, and finalize evaluation plan.

**Year Two:** Data collection, framework drafting, and initial evaluation.

**Year Three:** Finalize research outcomes, refine framework, final evaluation, and dissemination activities.

# The YOUTH STEM Framework

The YOUTH STEM Framework will be developed to provide educators and practitioners with a tool for documenting and describing youth-led community impact.

Informed by research collected in Years 1 and 2 of this project, the development of the framework will involve:

- Determining the best process for capturing community impact; and
- Identifying the indicators and metrics that illustrate community impact (e.g., physical infrastructure changes, public interest changing, support for policies changing, etc.)

We are currently conducting a review of existing frameworks to help guide our later development of the framework. We are exploring factors such as:

- Purpose, audience, components, formatting/organization

# Methodology

- **Comparative Case Study approach:**
  - ◆ **Justification**
    - Looking across multiple programs with no intention to intervene
    - Supports rich descriptions of individual programs while also identifying commonalities and differences between programs
    - Acknowledges and values place-based, cultural, geographic distinctions
  - ◆ **Diverse group of participating programs (approx. 10-12)**
  - ◆ **Site visits to subsample of participating programs (approx. 4)**
    - Video recorded observations
    - Interviews
    - Artifact (e.g., news stories, websites, white papers) collection

# Year 1 Data Collection: Survey & Interviews

## Survey responses collected in November-December of 2025

- Over 150 completed surveys received
- Representation across 33 states and territories (i.e., Puerto Rico)
- Snowball sampling suggested additional organizations

## Case study selection and data collection currently in progress

- 62 programs met all exclusion criteria
- Selected 12 programs to proceed with Zoom interviews
- From analysis of interview data, will select a subsample for site visits

# Youth Engaged Research

- 2–4 youth per program participate in a monthly research cohort.
- Youth receive training as co-researchers in community-engaged research methods.
- Youth lead peer focus groups and interview additional community stakeholders.
- Builds youth leadership, research capacity, and shared ownership of findings.



**Timeline:** Spring (design & recruitment) | Summer (pilot) | Fall (implementation & youth-led data collection)

# Questions & Discussion

1. We are currently reviewing existing frameworks to inform our work. Are there existing frameworks you suggest we should look at?
1. Are there other researchers/research projects we should connect with?
1. Are there others doing “youth-engaged research” we should connect with?

# Stay in touch!



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