

Sustaining Current Science Experiences in Science Centers



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Dr. David E. Chesebrough, Ed. D.

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Overview

- **Real & relevant science interactions:** are signatures of COSI and we are always looking to enhance through expanded partnerships.
- **Embedded partnerships:** anchor our signature experiences; daily real science, technology & research opportunities through: OSU researchers and their students working from 3 OSU labs housed within COSI conducting relevant research and using COSI as data collection site (COSI has Approved Research Site status w/IRB process streamlined); COSI guests engaged as research subjects (1) lab conducted over 20 studies with over 5,000 guests last year); undergraduate & graduate students take communication of science course and engage the public on the floor in ways that extend the topics in the labs; (2) WOSU@COSI HDTV studio engages public in media technology and forums on current topics; (3) COSI's Center for Research & Evaluation routinely engages guests in research as part of COSI or client studies; all guests engaged as research subjects have topic and elements of research explained to them.
- **Episodic real science activities:** that engage real STEM professionals with public, teens and schools (e.g. Science Days, co-hosting MiniMakers Faire with The Columbus Idea Foundry (60,000 sf Maker Space 2 blocks from COSI), COSI Academy of continual, intense experiences w/STEM professionals, labs, companies; Interactive Video Conferencing featuring STEM professionals (health/medicine -knee surgery, kidney transplant, autopsy, outreach for researcher projects ranging from engineering to astrophysics to geology); 21st Century lab experiences for MS/HS students which include lab activity working with OSU researchers in their lab space.

Sustainability Strategies

- OSU pays rent for labs and HDTV studio spaces
- The Center for Research & Evaluation (CRE) has an external consulting arm, Lifelong Learning Group (LLG) that has credibility in part from being embedded within science center and has net positive operation.
- We are just beginning to obtain joint funding with partners to cover development and operational costs of new public engagement of science initiatives.

Challenges

- Researchers and scientists generally come to COSI after their grants/budgets are completed with little or no funding to pay for setting up research projects (particularly outside of embedded labs), public engagement elements, COSI IRB support, etc.
- We have built an entire center and division around engaging partners, STEM professionals and researchers and we have not fully covered operational overhead yet, particularly because we have additional STEM professionals and university departments approaching us to partner; requiring large amounts of staff and management time.
- We are trying to get an overarching financial arrangement with The Ohio State University to support the myriad of ways their faculty, researchers and students utilize COSI. (We have had an MOU with them for many years, President to President, but it does not dictate financial arrangements).
- We are beginning to get researchers to recognize how to leverage COSI (the building) and the public, with Center of Research & Evaluation, embedded features from labs, Interactive Video Conference studio and theater, WOSU@COSI studio, two digital theaters and to work with us on applying for major/national funding opportunities.
- Some key teen and professional activities (i.e. COSI Academy, Teen Tech Studio, Portals to the Public, training for STEM professionals, etc.) lack a financial sustainability plan and we have struggled to secure ongoing funding support to fully cover direct and overhead costs.

For further information contact:

Dr. David E. Chesebrough
COSI
President & CEO
333 W. Broad Street
Columbus, OH 43215

dchesebrough@cosi.org
614-629-3103