OMAHA STEM ECOSYSTEM
COMMUNICATION PLAN
2020 - 2023

Goals and Objectives:

- Develop a communication strategy focused on increasing awareness of STEM priority and information on available resources and STEM programs.
- Build citywide collaborative capacity through consistent and diverse stakeholder engagement.
- Implement a shared framework that evaluates measurable effects of high-quality STEM programs and their impact on the STEM workforce.
- Promote and provide professional development for STEM educators.
- Implement a system that ensures students are engaged in high-quality STEM programs that build career-ready skills.
- To become the top-of-mind organization for STEM in the Omaha metro area.

Target Audiences:

- Government – Nebraska State Board of Education, Nebraska State Education, Association, state legislature and local school districts.
- Philanthropic – nonprofit organizations focused on education, foundations with a funding emphasis on education, individual donors interested in promoting education and STEM in their communities.
- Businesses with career opportunities in STEM.
- Students/Parents in the Omaha metro area.
- Media – publications, reporters, bloggers, and other media outlets covering education and/or the STEM industries.

Key Messages:

- Omaha, and the state of Nebraska, has an overwhelming shortfall of current and future professionals in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The Omaha STEM Ecosystem works with diverse stakeholders to build capacity in these areas through the availability of high-quality STEM programs in urban and rural school districts to positively impact the STEM workforce in the 21st century.
- The Omaha STEM Ecosystem is a collaborative partnership between education, government, nonprofit, and business to maximize science, technology, engineering, and mathematics learning initiatives for all young people in the Greater Omaha area, especially those underrepresented in STEM careers.
- The Omaha STEM Ecosystem helps to define, identify and evaluate high quality educational programs in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and

mathematics and communicates this information to students and educators along with a linkage to industry/businesses needing those specific skillsets.

Common Language: Taken from Beyond School Bells and *The Case for Being Bold: A New Agenda for Business in Improving STEM Education:* US Chamber of Commerce

- **Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs)** ELO is emerging as the main term used to describe afterschool and summer learning programs. ELOS help improve outcomes for youth by providing expanded academic enrichment and engagement, leveraging community resources to offer instruction and experiential learning opportunities in core and other subjects. ELOS incorporate strategies such as hands-on learning, working in teams and problem solving to contribute to a well-rounded education. Services may be delivered through a variety of approaches, including afterschool, before school, summer and extended day, week or year programs. Partnerships between schools and community organizations are at the core of strong ELOs.
- **Afterschool Program** Afterschool programs encompass academic, enrichment and recreational offerings—they can occur before school, after school and in the summer months. Afterschool programs are typically provided by licensed school age care programs, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, teen centers, community organizations and schools.
- **21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC**) The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to after-school programs. The No Child Left Behind Act transferred the administration of the grants from the U.S. Department of Education to the State Education Agencies.
- **Citywide Systems (or Systems Building)** This term refers to the movement by communities and cities around the country in building systems that seek to make the most of public and private resources to provide accessible, high quality, expanded learning opportunities for youth. These systems create an overarching city-level infrastructure for ELO programs and can minimize service duplication, streamline efforts and leverage community resources while increasing access to programming. Coordinated city/community wide systems require organizations in multiple sectors to collaborate—mayoral and school district support are critical components of successful citywide systems.
- **Community-Based Organizations** Most often, the term “CBO” is referring to common after-school programming providers such as YMCAs or Boys & Girls Clubs, or even museums and libraries. However, a CBO can also be a local sports franchise, a law enforcement group, an arts council or even a fraternal organization such as the Rotary Club. Quality standards Standards, or “common elements of quality”, promote consistency, enhance quality, and increase recognition. They define the principles and practices that lead to the delivery of quality programming for youth.

- **Quality Standards** are a set of agreed upon benchmarks that research has shown as being essential to successful programs. They also serve as guides for continuous improvement and accountability.
- **STEM** There is a growing movement to increase young people's interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). STEM activities are meant to be more than just content—they are designed to motivate and excite youth so that they will be interested in pursuing STEM activities and eventually careers beyond the life of any one activity or program.
- **21st Century Learning/Skills** The Framework for 21st Century Learning consists of core subjects and themes that revolve around three core skills: life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, information media and technology skills. These are the skills that students need in order to be successful in the 21st century. Principals of 21st Century skills include authentic learning, mental model building, internal motivation, multi-modal learning, social learning and international learning.
- **Digital Divide:** A term first coined by the 1999 U.S. Department of Commerce report Falling Through the Net to describe gaps in access to technology among various populations. More recently, rather than referring solely to the presence or absence of technology, the digital divide refers to the disparity in how technology is used in schools.
- **Distance Learning:** Delivery of instruction via multimedia computers, satellite or teleconferencing when the teacher is in one place and the students in another.
- **E-Learning:** Use of technology, especially computers, to enhance education and learning. This technique is commonly associated with distance-learning.
- **Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS):** A set of cognitive skills beyond the basic acquisition and memorization of facts. This broad term includes the following: critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, decision-making, and reasoning.
- **Work-Based Learning:** Education opportunities that reinforce core curriculum subjects through internships, apprenticeships, or other programs that place the student in a real-life work environment.

Elevator Speech:
The Omaha STEM Ecosystem is a group of diverse educators, businesses and nonprofits who have come together to build a robust STEM community in Greater Omaha by identifying or developing high quality educational programs that will advance the necessary skill sets in our students to grow the talent pipeline needed for our 21st century businesses.

Communication Channels:
- Social Media – social media will allow you to educate all of your target audiences over long periods of time. You will also have the ability to announce special events, research, success stories, etc which will engage your audience and entice them to share information with the networks thus broadening your reach.

- Public Relations – press releases, newsletters, pitching stories to specific media outlets, news conferences when appropriate. The key here is to develop relationships with journalists/reporters who will think of Omaha STEM Ecosystem and the expert in this area and will contact you for story information.
- Website – populating your website with interesting and informative messaging about what you do, successes you have had, ways you need help, how your funding is used, etc. is important to help your target audiences understand your mission and your goals. It is also important to continue to update the information and use Search Engine Optimization to maintain high rankings in search engines.
- Direct Mail or Email – these channels allows you to tailor your message to specific audiences such as educators, donors, or businesses and deliver that message right into their hands. You also have more room to expand on the mission/need and, direct mail has a long shelf like. Reaching out to these groups with a series of meaningful, unique messages that grab attention and tell a story will help to build a base of supporters for the organization.

Materials/Activities:
Depending on the communication channels chosen, there are a number of items that would need to be developed or maintained.

1) Editorial calendars for all social media platforms.
2) Press Releases and other public relations materials.
3) Media Kit – information about the organization that would be helpful to media.
4) Email campaigns – annual calendar, copy, layout, audience segmentation
5) Direct mail packages – depending on your audience these would be postcards or full packages including a letter, brochure, reply device, and envelope. An annual schedule should be developed with specific messages for specific audiences.
6) Fundraising – packet of information that could be sent to potential donors explaining the mission and need for funding.
7) Presentation/Powerpoint – presenting information on the organization to all the target audiences will spread the message faster. This could include school districts, nonprofits, business groups, etc.
8) Annual Report
9) Website Updates with new or pertinent information
10) Event based around National STEM Day – November 8th, 2019

Timing and Frequency:
Communication should be an ongoing activity to stay top-of-mind with your audiences although timing and frequency is also somewhat dependent on budget. Social media should be handled with a monthly editorial calendar showing the number and types of posts each week. Public relations will be dependent on the information the organization has to share but should be frequent enough to give fresh information to reporters, at the very least a quarterly update. Direct mail or email could be based around National

STEM Day or other important benchmarks in the school year and could also be incorporated into a fundraising plan. New information should be added to the website on a minimum of a monthly basis. This could be the monthly newsletter, a blog, or other update information.

Responsibilities:

To be determined by Omaha STEM Ecosystem team members.

Budget:

To be determined by Omaha STEM Ecosystem team members.

Measurement and Evaluation:
The first step in measurement and evaluation is to determine specific goals for success. This could be a fundraising goal, number of followers on social media, number of people requesting your newsletter, number of high-quality programs identified and used during the year, etc. Once we have these identified a measurement program can be put into place to track the success.

Some of the communication channels such as social media, website traffic, and direct mail are easier to measure than others. However, even public relations can be measured based on number of impressions gained from stories.