

Idaho STEM Action Center Out-of-School Time School Year Programs 2022-23: External Evaluation Summary

Introduction and Background

To support out-of-school time (OST) programs focused on mitigating lost school time and unfinished learning for youth in Idaho, Idaho Out-of-School Network (ION), Idaho Commission for Libraries, and Idaho STEM Action Center developed a unique partnership. With ESSER III—the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund grant program authorized under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funds granted to the Idaho State Department of Education and administered by the Idaho State Board of Education, the 3 agencies coordinated, developed, and delivered grant programs to create opportunities for all types of OST programs. ION and partners commissioned this work to determine the value of programs implemented and partnerships born from this investment in Idaho. The goals of the STEM AC grant included:

Developing and implementing OST activities to address student learning loss

Utilizing evidence-based STEM education practices in OST programming

Implementing family engagement activities aligned with STEM and other academic enrichment focus areas

The STEM AC grant supported 15 OST programs serving youth across Idaho from kindergarten to high school, listed in the Appendix of this report (page 12). The grant provided approximately \$300,000 of funding, with individual awards ranging from \$1,200 to \$50,000. ION contracted with the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) to evaluate this grant program during the 2022-23 school year.

Evaluation Topics, Data Collection, and Limitations

The evaluation of this grant focused on **implementation, successes and preliminary outcomes, and challenges** of the participating programs. The data sources that were used for the evaluation are shown in the figure below.



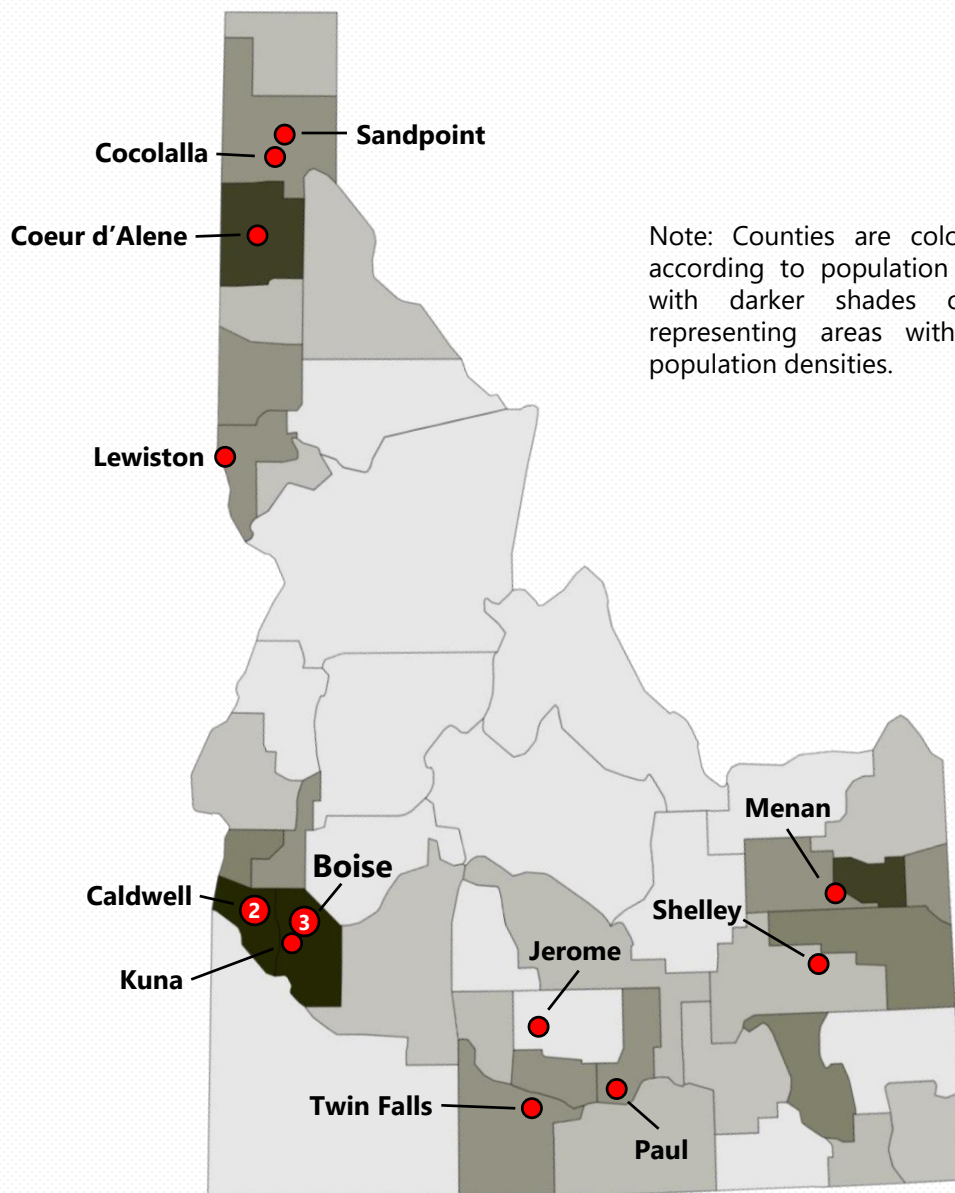
All Program Directors were invited to participate in virtual focus groups. Two focus groups were scheduled based on the availability of those who responded. Seven individuals, including directors and other staff, from 5 of the 15 programs participated in the focus groups. All 15 Program Directors were also asked to distribute online survey links to their staff and families. Programs that did not have consistent staff or families involved and those that conducted their own surveys were given the option to not participate in the surveys. Across the 15 programs, 19 family members representing 3 programs completed the family survey, and 21 staff members representing 8 programs completed the staff survey.¹

¹ Five staff survey responses were excluded from the analysis because the respondents did not work directly with students in their programs.

Due to the low family and staff survey response rates, the survey data was analyzed in aggregate and used to support themes that arose during the Program Director focus groups. However, the focus groups still only represent one-third of all STEM AC OST grantees. Therefore, it is important to note that the evaluation findings presented in this report are limited and may not represent grantees that did not participate in the data collection activities.

Idaho STEM AC OST Grantee Locations

This map shows the locations of the STEM AC OST grantees across the state of Idaho, denoted by red circles. These programs served youth and families from a range of locales, including cities like Boise and Coeur d'Alene, as well as less densely populated areas like Shelley and Jerome.



Report Organization

The UEPC and ION teams collaborated on the organization of this report to share the evaluation results in a clear and concise format. The report presents key findings based on available data across the 15 OST programs funded through STEM AC for the 2022-23 school year. The findings represent consistent themes that emerged across data sources and participants related to program implementation, successes and preliminary outcomes, and challenges. Each finding includes supporting quantitative and qualitative data from focus groups with program staff, surveys of families and staff, project proposals, and end-of-project reports submitted to STEM AC. The report concludes with suggestions for state organizations and program teams based on the evaluation data and findings. Below is an index of the report content.



Program Implementation

- Finding #1 – Variety of Evidence-Based OST STEM Programming Page 4
- Finding #2 – Program Data Collection Practices Page 5
- Finding #3 – Support and Assistance from STEM AC Grant Team Page 5



Successes and Preliminary Outcomes

- Finding #4 – Program Activities to Promote Student Improvement Page 6
- Finding #5 – Family Engagement Successes Page 7
- Finding #6 – Community Partnership Development Page 7



Challenges

- Finding #7 – Program Capacity Concerns Page 8
- Finding #8 – Staff and Volunteer Struggles Page 8
- Finding #9 – Program Transportation Barriers Page 9
- Finding #10 – Plans to Diversify Funding Sources for Future Programs Page 9



Considerations

- Considerations for Future Grant Programs Page 10

Findings

The following findings represent themes that emerged throughout the evaluation, with examples of supporting data from focus groups, surveys, project proposals, and end-of-project reports. The findings are organized into the following categories: program implementation, successes and preliminary outcomes, and challenges. It is important to note that the findings may not represent grantees that did not participate in the data collection activities.



Program Implementation

Finding #1 – Grantees delivered evidenced-based STEM programming through a wide variety of hands-on educational activities.

*We feel our program was very successful and received a great deal of positive feedback from students, families, and school administrators. **All of the students who will be attending our school next year have indicated that they are interested in continuing their afterschool participation in this program.*** (Staff Survey Respondent)

*With the grant we were able to get eight fifth graders to do **droneology**. They learned everything from how to run a drone to all the laws and regulations that are involved with working with drones.* (Program Director Focus Group)

Across the nine programs that completed end-of-project reports, approximately **1,633 youth** were served during the 2022-23 school year.

Examples of Activities

STEM Expo	Family STEM Evenings
LEGO League	Girls' STEM Mentoring Program
Robotics Club	Droneology (coding/flying drones)
Inventors Club	
Botball League	

*It's a **LEGO robotics club**, so it's a robotics club for very young children in grades one through three.* (Program Director Focus Group)

*They learned a lot, from **coding the drone to flying it solo, and how to go under chairs, how to go through racing gates**, the whole bit. It was a lot of fun.* (Program Director Focus Group)

*Loved working with a teacher to help our kids learn about body systems in animals. **They could really imagine working as a veterinarian.*** (Staff Survey Respondent)

All family respondents agreed (26%) or strongly agreed (74%) that the program provided **new learning opportunities** for their child.

Finding #2 – Several grantees collected their own data about youth satisfaction, participation in activities, and learning about STEM topics.

We just do a little emoji survey with the kids and ask them if they enjoyed the afterschool activities. **If they felt like their ideas were heard and whether they would like to continue learning about STEM topics.** (Program Director Focus Group)

We did have an exit survey, so when they first came in, [families] got a map of where everything was... and then just ended up **putting the survey on the back of the map type thing as an exit survey.** (Program Director Focus Group)

I would say one thing we looked at is the percentage of students that participated in afterschool programs at our school. **It was about 33% of our kids.** (Program Director Focus Group)

Our main goal was to really increase STEM interest in younger school-aged children. And so I think we definitely hit that mark and **the parents were very, very happy with the program.** In fact, we just sent out a survey recently to the parents. (Program Director Focus Group)

Finding #3 – The STEM AC team was supportive of new grantees, answering questions and providing assistance in a timely manner.



One of the other challenges that we had was finding volunteers to help us with the expo to be judges or to be volunteers. So we were really struggling getting some people to be judges. **So I reached out to the STEM Action Center, and [they] reached out to some people. And that did actually yield us some judges.** (Program Director Focus Group)

If I had specific questions, [the STEM Action Center] would answer them. But other than that, I thought that the **information in their contract was fairly spelled out.** And some of the other resources that they did provide through other links or whatever, that it answered most questions just from the initial paperwork and contract. (Program Director Focus Group)

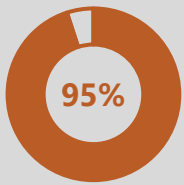
I had a question about it, so I asked the question [to the STEM AC Team] and **got an immediate response,** so that was good. Within an hour, so that was great. (Program Director Focus Group)



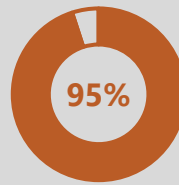
Successes & Preliminary Outcomes

Finding #4 – Many grantees provided activities to promote improvements in youth behavior, communication, and interpersonal skills, while few grantees described targeted efforts to support academic outcomes.

For our grades three and above, we saw a growth in what we were wanting to see, which was in those connections...those communication skills and those interpersonal skills that we were trying to develop. (Program Director Focus Group)



...of staff survey respondents reported that youth in the program improved in their **relationship skills**.



...of family survey respondents agreed (53%) or strongly agreed (42%) that their child **made new friends** in the program.

Staff survey respondents indicated the most interest in **professional development opportunities focused on providing academic support** for students – specifically in aligning programming with the school day (38%) and supporting academic learning and skill development (33%).



Finding #5 – Many grantees and families reported high family attendance and engagement during STEM program events.

Across the nine programs that completed end-of-project reports, approximately
1,758 families
were served during the 2022-23 school year.

*One of my goals was...that families traveled throughout the event together. The fact that I only saw three parents ever sitting on the sideline on their cell phones was like, okay. **They were all traveling around to the different stations as a family and as a group.** To me that was one of the biggest successes that they were enjoying it as a family type thing. (Program Director Focus Group)*

*This program was amazing; **I even learned a lot as a parent.** The passion the staff has makes it all that much better... (Family Survey Respondent)*

In programs that held events for families, 60% of family survey respondents reported
attending at least one event.

Finding #6 – Several grantees started developing partnerships with community programs, schools, PTAs, and district offices to leverage resources for future programming.

*Once the funds end, **the Salvation Army would like this to become an annual STEM event type thing.** I've already been talking with our friends at the library. And as soon as we get a date figured out to try and reach out to other places to fund it for next year. But to have this be an annual event in this area, which needs some STEM focus in the area, especially because there's a couple of Title I schools that are located near this specific Salvation Army. (Program Director Focus Group)*

*I think seeking additional community partners and working together with those is going to be a big asset for us next year. **And so out of the district office I can partner with the schools and try to continue with my programs doing it that way as well.** (Program Director Focus Group)*

*I'll have to also do some **outreach with Boys and Girls Club and other area groups** to try to do a little communication about how to teach and mentor in STEM even when you're not a scientist. (Program Director Focus Group)*





Challenges

Finding #7 – Many programs operated at capacity and were unable to serve all youth and families in need.

*We also have an overflow problem in that, well, **there aren't a lot of programs here in [town] in the summer outside of some athletics programs and camps.** And so, we opened up the registration for our 30 campers plus the 10 or so older students, 15 or so older students who are mentoring the younger students. **And it was filled within a day.** (Program Director Focus Group)*

79% of family survey respondents reported that their child attended the program **all of the days that it was offered.**

*I wish [the program] could open more spots than in years past. **My one child has spent two years on the waitlist** and really wants to attend while she has the chance... (Family Survey Respondent)*

*[To improve the quality of programming and better meet students' needs, we need] smaller groups at some schools **so there can be more one on one engagement with the [participants]...** (Staff Survey Respondent)*

*But the other success I would say, just as a school is now we have the materials to continue these programs in the future. **And we just have to figure out the funding to go for the teachers, for the stipends.** (Program Director Focus Group)*

Finding #8 – Several programs struggled to find staff and volunteers.

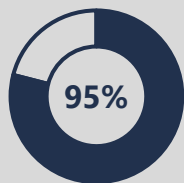
*[We need support in] **finding ways to provide stipends for teachers** so they will be willing to teach in the afterschool program. (Staff Survey Respondent)*

*I had a **very, very hard time finding instructors** that were willing to teach after school. (Program Director Focus Group)*

*To help the program to grow **we would need additional staff members/volunteers** to help supervise to maintain a safe learning environment. (Staff Survey Respondent)*



Finding #9 – Transportation to and from programs was a barrier for many families.



...of family survey respondents indicated that the program **did not provide transportation** for their child, and the remaining 21% did not know whether transportation was provided.

*Our biggest challenge was getting enough students to be able to [attend the program] with **having to have parents pick them up after school after that whole hour instead of being able to be bused.** (Program Director Focus Group)*



*We're going to have to find some kind of other solution or **see if there's a different grant or something that we can try and get some busing** involved with all of our afterschool program. (Program Director Focus Group)*

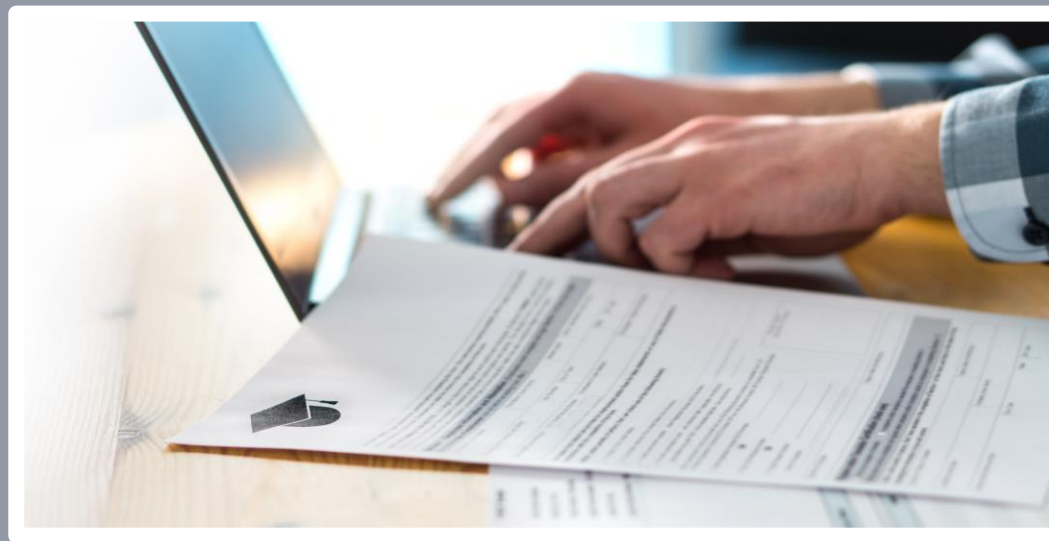
*I wish that there would have been more participation, but **in a rural community, it is difficult for students to get transportation from school after hours** that buses do not run. (Program Director Focus Group)*

Finding #10 – Many grantees started to explore ways to diversify funds for future programs.

*I know that for our funds... We had some of the board members of our Friends of the Library, which deals with a lot of our donation funds and things like that. And a couple of them were at the events with their families and had a lot of fun. **They had already approached me right afterwards to say, 'Hey, are you going to do this next year and how can we help fund it?'** (Program Director Focus Group)*

*I'm looking at my **Title IV funds** to help fund some of these afterschool programs under the enrichment category. (Program Director Focus Group)*

*I'm going to be **looking for [other] grants** to help fund it as well. (Program Director Focus Group)*



Considerations for Future Grant Programs

Overall, findings from this evaluation of the STEM AC OST grant indicated that most grantees implemented a wide variety of STEM activities throughout the 2022-23 school year, engaging both students and families across Idaho. Despite the challenges of recruiting and retaining staff, as well as finding transportation for participants, program staff reported improvements in students' behavior, communication, and interpersonal skills. As the STEM Action Center and program teams enter a new academic year, we offer the considerations below as opportunities for ongoing improvement.



Continue to support OST program teams implementing STEM activities that expose students to a wide variety of STEM skills, topics, and opportunities, while encouraging an intentional focus on quality program services

As programs continue to implement a variety of activities that promote STEM exposure, the next year of programming could include an explicit focus on program quality, supported by STEM AC and the Idaho Out-of-School Network. *The Idaho Building Blocks for OST Quality* is a tool utilized by many programs across the state to self-assess their program quality and identify areas for improvement. ION facilitates trainings for program teams on how to use this tool, as well as steps to develop an action plan based on the results of the self-assessment.



Encourage programs to intentionally focus on academic support and alignment with the school day, including providing professional learning for staff on these topics

While Program Directors mentioned various improvements in participating students' behavior, communication skills, and interpersonal skills, they did not often discuss academic outcomes. However, there are clear opportunities to make connections between the STEM activities that Program Directors described and the academic content of the school day. One tool to support these efforts of program and school day alignment is the *Align for Success: OST Partnership Rubric*. Regular professional learning opportunities around this tool and similar resources would provide a forum in which program staff could learn about and implement strategies for intentional academic support and alignment, as well as connect with other teams to share solutions for common challenges.



Support programs in providing student transportation to increase program access for families

Some Program Directors shared that transporting students home from programs is an important consideration for families, particularly those in rural areas. Building transportation into the grant program and supporting program teams to pursue partnerships that could help provide these services (e.g., school districts, community partners) is critical to ensuring more equitable access for students and families. STEM AC and ION may consider offering targeted guidance for program teams related to creative transportation options to meet the needs of their students and families, as well as establishing a focused community forum for teams to share ideas and successes.

Considerations for Future Grant Programs (cont.)



Continue to encourage community partnerships and braided funding opportunities to support programs' sustainability

Several grantees described intentional community partnerships that provided valuable services for students. As Program Directors explore available resources for additional programming years, STEM AC and ION could facilitate a virtual community network of STEM programs to share successful partnership strategies, ideas for braiding financial resources to sustain services, and ways that other resources may be leveraged to support future OST programming.



Consider future funding opportunities based on community needs and use of competitive priority points to ensure funds are dispersed to communities with the highest need

For future OST funding competitions, STEM AC could revisit their grant application and scoring rubric to ensure that grant funds are allocated to areas of the state with the greatest need and potential impact (e.g., "notable reach," "geographic impact," "STEM deserts"). As many grantees reported operating at full capacity and having extensive waiting lists, prioritizing regions that do not have enough programs to serve families and students could promote more equitable program access. This could be achieved by awarding priority points to grant applicants that have never operated STEM OST programs before, or to those that can provide documentation of high needs in their region.

Evaluation Next Steps

The UEPC will continue to work with the STEM Action Center to evaluate out-of-school time programs during the 2023-24 school year.



Appendix



2022-23 STEM AC OST Grantees

- Ada Community Library - Victory Branch
- Children's Museum of the Magic Valley
- Coeur d'Alene School District 271
- Girl Scouts of Silver Sage Council
- Hobbs Middle School Science & Technology Club
- Hubbard Elementary School
- Lewis Clark State College
- Midway Elementary School
- MOSAICS Public School
- Notus School District
- Selkirk Outdoor Leadership and Education (SOLE)
- Southside Elementary School/LPOSD #84
- Summit Elementary School
- West Minoco Middle School
- Whittier Elementary



Pictured above are students who were able to visit the NASA Kennedy Space Center in Florida, thanks in part to the funding from this grant.