



Ignite STEM

Learning Collaborative

Frequently Asked Questions

Community of Practice | Cohort 2026–2027



What is the Ignite STEM Learning Collaborative?

The Ignite STEM Learning Collaborative is a six-month professional learning Community of Practice (CoP) that brings together Minnesota out-of-school time (OST) organizations to strengthen STEM programming through collaborative learning, practical application, coaching, and continuous improvement.

Participants engage in weekly virtual learning sessions and monthly Community of Practice meetings where they learn new strategies, apply them with youth, reflect on their experiences, and connect with peers from across the state.

Who should participate?

Participating organizations should designate direct service youth workers to participate in the Collaborative.

Because implementation happens within programs—not just during meetings—we strongly encourage support from site coordinators, managers, and program directors throughout the project.

Does our staff need STEM experience?

No. This Collaborative is designed for youth professionals with all levels of STEM experience. Whether your organization is just beginning its STEM journey or already offers STEM programming, participants will gain practical skills, confidence, and resources that can be immediately applied with youth.

What is the time commitment?

Organizations should expect participants to engage from October 2026 through March 2027. Participation includes:

- Weekly virtual learning sessions
- Monthly virtual Community of Practice meetings
- Implementing learning within youth programs between sessions
- Reflection and peer collaboration
- Participation in evaluation activities

A detailed schedule will be shared with selected organizations before the Collaborative begins.

Is there a cost to participate?

No. There is no participation fee for selected organizations.

In addition, participating organizations will receive an organizational stipend to support staff participation and implementation throughout the Community of Practice.

What can participants expect to gain?

Participants will:

- Build confidence facilitating STEM learning
- Learn practical, youth-centered STEM strategies
- Access STEM resources and implementation tools
- Receive coaching and technical assistance
- Collaborate with a statewide network of OST professionals
- Strengthen their organization's capacity to provide high-quality STEM experiences

What are participating organizations expected to do?

Organizations agree to:

- Support participant attendance throughout the Collaborative
- Encourage implementation of learning within their programs
- Participate in evaluation activities
- Share implementation experiences and project data
- Engage in collaborative reflection and continuous improvement

How will the Collaborative be evaluated?

Ignite Afterschool uses the PEAR Common Instrument Suite and additional implementation measures to understand participant growth, program quality, and overall impact.

Selected organizations agree to participate in evaluation activities and share requested data throughout the project. Evaluation results help improve future Communities of Practice and demonstrate the impact of STEM learning across Minnesota.

What is the PEAR Common Instrument Suite?

The Program in Education, Afterschool and Resiliency (PEAR) Common Instrument Suite is a nationally recognized collection of research-based tools used to measure youth outcomes and educator growth.

The evaluation process is designed to support continuous improvement while helping organizations better understand the impact of their STEM programming. Ignite Afterschool will provide guidance and support throughout the evaluation process.

How many organizations will be selected?

The 2026–2027 Ignite STEM Learning Collaborative will include 10 Minnesota out-of-school time organizations.

How are organizations selected?

Applications will be reviewed based on:

- Organizational commitment
- Capacity to participate throughout the project
- Leadership support
- Interest in strengthening STEM programming
- Geographic and organizational diversity across the cohort

Can more than one staff member participate?

Yes. Organizations may identify additional staff to participate when appropriate. However, each organization should identify at least one primary participant who will attend consistently throughout the Collaborative.

When does the Community of Practice begin?

The Collaborative begins with participant orientation in September 2026, followed by weekly learning sessions and monthly Community of Practice meetings beginning in October 2026.

How do we apply?

Organizations can learn more and submit an application by visiting:

<https://igniteafterschool.org/stem-afterschool>

Questions may also be directed to:

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Why is Ignite Afterschool investing in STEM?

Because every young person deserves opportunities to explore, create, solve problems, and discover what's possible through STEM. By investing in youth professionals, we strengthen the quality of STEM learning experiences available to young people across Minnesota.

