

Collective for Youth Empowerment in STEM & Society (CYESS)

An Initiative of the Afterschool Alliance

Make the case for funding STEM and civic engagement in afterschool programs



Do you find yourself wishing you had some standard language to use when you write proposals for funding your afterschool program? Pitches for funding are a two-way dialogue between the funder and the grant-seeker - you have to offer a solution to a problem the funder is interested in solving.

We have some suggestions for how you might frame your narrative for different audiences. These narratives are primarily for afterschool programs that are looking to support young people on their STEM learning and civic engagement journey.

1 Making the case for the importance of afterschool programs as a space to advance STEM and civic participation

Concern: Afterschool programs are a lifeline for families, keeping kids safe while parents work and helping young people develop the skills they need to thrive. But most kids and families are missing out.

Solution: Invest in afterschool and magnify impact by using the time to teach STEM as a tool for navigating a world shaped by science and technology. This builds their technical skills as well as life skills like confidence, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving.

Talking Points:

- Afterschool programs can be innovative and flexible and tailor learning experiences to individual children in a way that the constraints of a school day don't always allow.
- The low-stakes nature of these programs inspires youth to learn and engage in hands-on projects that make learning fun.
- The benefits of participation in afterschool programs are very well documented, with a recent 26-year longitudinal study showing that youth who participate in high-quality programs are better learners, earners, and leaders in adulthood.
- Children benefit from regular opportunities to work through interesting and practical challenges using STEM knowledge, tools, or ways of thinking—just as language learners need to experience different real-world situations to become conversationally fluent. Afterschool and summer programs offer extra time to engage with STEM in an informal learning space.
- Research shows that afterschool STEM learning has a powerful impact, boosting confidence, critical thinking, and life skills.
- We provide opportunities for youth from all backgrounds to engage with STEM, including those who may struggle in traditional classrooms.
- Your support will help expand these impactful afterschool programs, offering more youth the chance to become confident, capable leaders.



- Afterschool programs like ours are catalysts for positive social change, offering youth the chance to apply STEM learning to real-world issues.
- Our program bridges the gap between STEM learning and civic action, empowering youth to make a difference in their communities.

Return on investment: Innovative, flexible, engaging, and positive outcomes for youth. Youth build the skills that increase their likelihood to succeed in school and contribute productively to society

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Making the case to corporate (STEM) funders

Concern: Need for a workforce with the technical and people skills to engage productively at work and contribute to the mission of the business.

Solution: Our program equips youth with essential problem-solving, leadership, collaboration, and critical thinking skills through hands-on STEM learning that addresses community challenges.

Talking Points:

- Afterschool programs can be innovative and flexible and tailor learning experiences to individual children in a way that the constraints of a school day don't always allow.
- The low-stakes nature of these programs inspires youth to learn and engage in hands-on projects that make learning fun.
- Children benefit from regular opportunities to work through interesting and practical challenges using STEM knowledge, tools, or ways of thinking—just as language learners need to experience different real-world situations to become conversationally fluent. Afterschool and summer programs offer extra time to engage with STEM in an informal learning space.
- A recent [World Economic Forum](#) report reveals that, ahead of technological literacy, the top five skills identified as being in high demand within organizations are: Analytical thinking, Creative thinking, Resilience, flexibility, and agility, Motivation and Self-awareness, and Curiosity and Lifelong learning. Afterschool STEM programs are uniquely situated to help youth build these critical skills in tandem with the technical STEM skills.
- We facilitate the development of STEM-skilled youth who are passionate about applying their knowledge to make a positive impact.
- Our programs attract young people, especially those who might not initially identify as “STEM people,” to pursue careers that use STEM.
- We help youth develop skills in teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication, as well as leadership skills that are crucial in any professional setting.
- Our work ensures that the future workforce is innovative, adaptable, and ready to tackle challenges creatively with STEM knowledge.
- By supporting our program, you contribute to fostering a workforce that is more comfortable and facile with using STEM skills, whether or not they are in a STEM field.
- By partnering with us, you can demonstrate that you share the values of your employees and young people, who increasingly desire meaningful and mission-driven work.
- By partnering with us, you can provide meaningful opportunities for your own employees to share their experience with youth as mentors, speakers, and/or interviewees.





Return on investment:

- A well-prepared future workforce with more people who have the ability to contextualize knowledge, ask the right questions, accurately define problems, and apply the proper set of skills to solve them.
- More likely to attract socially minded youth who are increasingly looking for mission-driven work, giving employers access to a new pool of diverse, smart, creative candidates who might not have otherwise thought of themselves as “STEM people.”
- Helps with nurturing a society that better understands the value/purpose of the business’s work and can engage thoughtfully and ethically with the mission.

3 Making the case to a funder who focuses on STEM learning

Concern: STEM literacy and proficiency are needed more than ever for navigating both work and life. But many young people are not interested in STEM fields and are not engaging with STEM enough to be prepared for the workforce and life.

Solution: STEM learning won’t accelerate if young people don’t see STEM as relevant or something they would or can do. Our work can help programs excite young people about STEM because they are applying it to issues they care about.

We know that young people want learning experiences that feel meaningful and relevant. But many do not see the utility of STEM knowledge in their lives. Our program helps youth see STEM as relevant by engaging them in real-world issues. We bridge the gap between learning and action by connecting STEM to the issues that matter most to them.

Talking Points:

- Afterschool programs can be innovative and flexible and tailor learning experiences to individual children in a way that the constraints of a school day don’t always allow.
- The low-stakes nature of these programs inspires youth to learn and engage in hands-on projects that make learning fun.
- Children benefit from regular opportunities to work through interesting and practical challenges using STEM knowledge, tools, or ways of thinking—just as language learners need to experience different real-world situations to become conversationally fluent. Afterschool and summer programs offer extra time to engage with STEM in an informal learning space.
- Our program fosters STEM literacy, which is crucial for a high-quality education.
- We help youth understand how STEM applies to everyday life, making learning more meaningful. As a result, our programs attract young people, especially those who might not initially identify as “STEM people,” to pursue careers that use STEM.
- Our work ensures access to relevant STEM opportunities, creating a well-rounded education.
- We are redefining STEM education by empowering youth to use STEM tools to solve problems in their communities.
- Your investment will expand hands-on, community-centered STEM learning in afterschool and summer programs.

- We facilitate the development of STEM-skilled youth who are passionate about applying their knowledge to make a positive impact.
- We help youth develop skills in teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication, as well as leadership skills that are crucial in any professional setting.
- Our work ensures that the future workforce is innovative, adaptable, and ready to tackle challenges creatively with STEM knowledge.
- By supporting our program, you contribute to fostering a workforce that is more comfortable and facile with using STEM skills and ready to pursue STEM-based jobs.

Return on investment: More youth with STEM skills, interest, and identity, especially among those who do not think of themselves as “STEM people.”

4 Making the case to civic engagement funders

Concern: Youth are not educated about civics, are not civically engaged, and hence are not participating sufficiently in our democratic processes. They are not sufficiently developing the tools to shape their own future.

Solution: Our program empowers youth to use STEM as a tool for local civic engagement, ensuring their voices are heard, and their actions lead to tangible community improvements.

Talking Points:

- Afterschool programs can be innovative and flexible and tailor learning experiences to individual children in a way that the constraints of a school day don’t always allow.
- The low-stakes nature of these programs inspires youth to learn and engage in hands-on projects that make learning fun.
- STEM is now an essential tool for navigating a world shaped by science and technology and to solve societal challenges. Children benefit from regular opportunities to work through interesting and practical challenges to build up their civic engagement muscle using STEM knowledge, tools, or ways of thinking—just as language learners need to experience different real-world situations to become conversationally fluent.
- Afterschool and summer programs offer extra time to engage with STEM and civic engagement in an informal learning space. We provide youth with the knowledge, tools, and supportive settings they need to practice solving real-world challenges in their communities.
- Our program helps youth analyze and understand issues and engage with their local communities in a meaningful, purpose-driven way, catalyzing their civic engagement journey.
- As STEM fields now underpin so much of society, supporting youth to gain and apply their STEM knowledge to issues they care about encourages innovation, investment, and action within their communities.
- We facilitate the development of STEM-skilled youth who are passionate about applying their knowledge to make a positive impact.
- Your investment will help us expand robust, hands-on, community-centered STEM learning opportunities in afterschool and summer programs, which can help bridge the gap between STEM learning and civic action, providing a supportive, flexible environment that empowers youth to develop and apply new knowledge and skills in their own communities and be invested in improving the world around them – often beyond what adults can imagine.
- By supporting our program, you are directly helping young people develop the skills and confidence to become changemakers.

Return on investment: Youth see themselves as having substantive knowledge, skills, and agency to make change through civic action, driving increased civic engagement. The investment may also result in more youth civic participation, with young people directly addressing issues in their community that matter to them now, not just in the future.



5 Making the case to education funders (not STEM or civics focused)


Concern: Many young people are disengaged in school and not showing up, and we are still struggling to address post-pandemic learning loss.

Solution: Our program excites youth by engaging them in issues they care about and helping them work on concrete solutions. This powerful combination is making learning purposeful and inspiring them to see the relevance of their education.

Talking Points:

- Afterschool programs are helping schools combat chronic absenteeism. The low-stakes nature of these programs inspires youth to learn and engage in hands-on projects that make learning fun.
- Afterschool programs can be innovative and flexible and tailor learning experiences to individual children in a way that the constraints of a school day don't always allow.
- Children benefit from regular opportunities to work through interesting and practical challenges using STEM knowledge, tools, or ways of thinking—just as language learners need to experience different real-world situations to become conversationally fluent. Afterschool and summer programs offer extra time to engage with STEM in an informal learning space.
- Our youth-centered, hands-on projects, structured around real-world issues, show the relevance of their learning and motivate students to engage more.
- Our program helps youth see how the (STEM) knowledge they gain applies to challenges they care about, turning them into motivated learners and critical thinkers.
- Today, more than ever before, leading with youth interests and ensuring young people have opportunities to engage with STEM in different contexts is essential for a well-rounded education that prepares youth for the future.
- By centering youth interest in being changemakers who want to create a better world, we are helping youth develop and realize a sense of purpose that provides confidence about their role in the world.

Return on investment:

- More youth recognize the value of engaging more with their learning journey.
 - Afterschool programs can continue to be innovative in their approaches to support student learning.
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If you want even more tips and tools, check out these additional resources:

- [Talking points](#) about Afterschool STEM
- “[Framing Guides](#)” that offer tested explanatory metaphors and values you can weave into your narrative.
- Tips on how to craft effective [elevator pitches](#).
- We hope you find this resource useful! [Contact us](#) if you have any questions or additional needs we can help you with.



Learn More and Get Involved!

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CYESS, a project of the Afterschool Alliance, aims to expand opportunities for young people to use STEM skills to tackle community challenges and enact systemic change. We bring together people and organizations to integrate STEM, civic engagement, and youth leadership in afterschool and out-of-school time programs.