

White Paper: Sparks! Ignition Grants for Museums and Libraries

Administrative Information

Institution: Detroit Zoological Society

Project Name: Learning Classroom – Community of Practice

Award Number: LG-45-14-0009-14

Amount Awarded: \$24,772

Total Project Cost: \$18,277.50

Project Dates: 8/1/2014 – 7/31/2016

Project Director: Diane Miller, Chief Program Officer

Project Summary

Cultural institutions can, and should, play a role in supporting healthy communities. Within partnerships between cultural institutions and community organizations, it is necessary to make sure both parties recognize each other's operational culture, explore each other's values, create a common vocabulary and build a common vision. The IMLS Sparks! Ignition grant provided an opportunity to lay a foundation for a partnership between the Detroit Zoo and the Boys and Girls Club of Southeastern Michigan (B&GC). This grant provided the resources for the Detroit Zoo and the B&GC to explore possible barriers to building successful partnership, provided the foundation for leveraging resources in the community and supported development of a meaningful joint project.

Recognizing the role that zoos can play in STEM education by collaborating with out-of-school-time (OST) programs, the Detroit Zoological Society (DZS) proposed a partnership model, Learning Classroom-Community of Practice (LC-CP) with the Boys and Girls Club. Through a series of workshops, DZS educators, OST educators and experts in the fields of youth development, communication, animal welfare and conservation collaborated to create a common vocabulary and mutual understanding between the partnering organizations.

The workshop topics were selected to spark conversations and encourage educators from both organizations to talk about complex learning environments, how youth deal with risk, both organization's priorities and goals and how youths' experiences during their developmental years shape their future.

Process

The initial step was to identify an OST community partner who was willing to explore a partnership and engage in a series of collaborative workshops. The B&GC agreed to explore the partnership potential. The DZS selected the B&GC for their long-standing presence in the

community, the volume and diversity of the audience served by the ten clubs and their holistic approach to supporting youth.

At the Detroit Zoo's Ford Education Center, a series of workshops were conducted that included education staff from the Zoo and educators from B&GC. These workshops provided the foundation of a successful partnership. The first workshop took place on June 9, 2015, with three subsequent workshops conducted from August through September 2015.

The first workshop focused on communication between the staff of the two organizations. Janice Siska Jjelmgren, an expert in building effective organizations and partnerships through effective communication, facilitated the first workshop, creating a safe environment for participants to share their ideas, challenges and thoughts about their work and the potential partnership. Workshop activities enabled the educators to recognize and focus on their organizational commonalities over some identified differences in order to build synergy and enthusiasm for upcoming workshops.

The second, third and fourth workshops took place during the B&GC annual professional development period. DeAnna Banks, a nationally recognized expert in math and science education and youth development, provided the first keynote on the importance of authentic science and making science accessible for all audiences. The second workshop highlighted her work in engaging all youth in science and math, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, and access to quality education, and was riveting and pertinent for the audience. In the afternoon, David Hartney, President of Firsthand Learning, Inc., which promotes inquiry-based teaching, learning from direct experience and closer links between cultural institutions and schools, engaged the participants. He conducted a hands-on science workshop, focusing on the natural world and opportunities for authentic science experiences in any and every environment. By pairing the keynote with a hands-on science workshop, participants could take the abstract information and make it concrete. The communication tools provided by Janice Siska Jjelmgren in the earlier workshop also enhanced discussions around the topic.

The third workshop focused on building a community standard. James Bell, Project Director, Center for the Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE) spoke about science in out-of-school learning environments and shared the CAISE project, research and evaluation database as a resource. In the afternoon, the participants engaged in a hands-on workshop based on the principles of Portal to the Public, a NSF-funded project that supports scientists in sharing their disciplines and work with a general public audience. This workshop encouraged thinking about how people learn and being more conscious about how to use discrepant events - an unexpected turn of events that leaves the individual wondering why - to engage natural curiosity, provoke thought and build interest.

The fourth and final workshop highlighted the principles of humane education, a pillar of the DZS organizational philosophy. Dr. Stephanie Allard, director of the DZS Center for Zoo Animal Welfare, provided an overview of how the Zoo works to ensure each individual animal thrives in

our care, not just survives. Curator of Humane Education Lisa Forzley conducted the afternoon workshop titled “Most Good, Least Harm.” She spoke about making conscious choices that take into consideration the full impact of how each individual’s decisions affect the world around him or her.

An external project evaluator collected two sources of data to monitor the effectiveness of the project: a post-workshop survey to obtain feedback on the impact of the project on participants and a semi-structured interview conducted several months after the workshop to identify lingering perceptions about the effectiveness of the program.

At the conclusion of the workshops, the B&GC staff asked DZS to host their annual teen leadership event during the fall. The DZS team facilitated the request and DZS Education Curator Mike Reed, who is a B&GC alumnus, spoke to the teens about his professional journey.

Lessons Learned and Resources Resulting from the Project

Early in the project, the education staff of the B&GC stated bluntly that they did not want to teach science. As reasons, they stated they did not feel that they had the expertise or the time – school was the place to learn science. They felt that their students were all learning science in school, so they did not have to duplicate this instruction in their OST setting. Zoo educators approached the partnership believing that students benefit from science learning away from the classroom, and that B&GC youth would benefit from the opportunity to explore the world around them, ask questions, investigate their questions and share their findings.

At the end of the experience, everyone agreed that science was about exploring the world. The B&GC staff increased their comfort level in teaching and exploring science – they actually had fun learning science. They discovered that hands-on inquiry was engaging, that it would be valuable for their students to explore science outside of the classroom and they wanted the opportunity to do more.

Another key example of how the project resolved a difference in organizational culture between DZS and B&GC was the resolution of the initial disagreement between Zoo educators and B&GC educators around the use of live animals in educational settings. B&GC initially wanted the Zoo to bring animals to various club locations. Due to Zoo policies that stem from animal welfare concerns, the Detroit Zoo does not use animals in community education settings. The Zoo was able to discuss these policies as well as other areas where the two groups might be at odds in an eloquent and concise way. The presentations of Dr. Allard and Ms. Forzley also deepened understanding of the DZS commitment to animal welfare and humane education. At the completion of all of the workshops, B&GC educators understood why DZS does not use animals in our off-site education programming and agreed that it was a good thing. In fact, after addressing these animal welfare concerns in the context of the

project, the staff from B&GC decided that they wanted to address with their students the negative impact of images of celebrities having wild animals as pets.

DZS and B&GC worked together to submit an NSF Advancing Informal STEM Learning (AISL) grant. Unfortunately, this proposal was not funded. However, B&GC wrote a successful grant to add science to the activities they offered at their clubs. DZS educators continue to work with the B&GC once a week for two hours, providing inquiry-based science activities and citizen-science experiences at the ten clubs of Boys and Girls Clubs of Southeast Michigan.

On March 30, 2017, the Fauver-Martin Boys and Girls Club in Highland Park, Michigan, awarded the Detroit Zoological Society the 2016-2017 Outstanding Community Service Award.

The IMLS Sparks grant award was instrumental in initiating what will surely be a fruitful, long-term relationship between our two organizations.