

MEETING SUMMARY

# Blending Fee-for-Service and Capacity-Building Models in OST STEM Programs

Themes and Recommendations

*January 6, 2022*

## INTRODUCTION

# October 19th Meeting, Hosted by ExpandedED and Solar One

---

ON OCTOBER 19, 2021, SOLAR ONE AND EXPANDED SCHOOLS HOSTED AN EVENT FOCUSED ON HOW AFTERSCHOOL STEM EDUCATORS AND FEE-FOR-SERVICE STEM PROVIDERS CAN WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE STEM LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN AFTERSCHOOL. In planning the meeting, ExpandedED and Solar One recognized two approaches to STEM instruction broadly within the NYC STEM ecosystem: 1) afterschool programs contracting with STEM service providers to deliver STEM instruction and 2) a “grow your own” approach where CBOs build capacity for their staff on-site to lead STEM activities. Sometimes these approaches operate in tandem at a single site, but often a site selects one strategy or the other. For this meeting, STEM service providers, community-based organizations, and CBO staff (educators and Site Directors) gathered for deeper exploration to build consensus around these approaches to afterschool STEM instruction, identify strengths and challenges of these approaches to afterschool STEM instruction, and understand necessary supports to better integrate these two approaches.

This summary includes five key themes and twelve associated recommendations that emerged from meeting participants. These recommendations serve as a broad call to action and, for the most part, are not assigned to any particular organization. Instead, they are designed as an invitation to action and further discussion to be taken up by meeting attendees, the NYC STEM Education Network and its members, and beyond. We hope that, responding to these recommendations, organization(s) step forward to advance this agenda.

# Themes and Recommendations

---

## THEME 1: BUY-IN FOR A JOINT APPROACH EXISTS ALREADY

---

Many CBOs and STEM service providers are currently implementing – or are planning to implement – capacity-building with their own staff *and* instruction from a STEM service provider in tandem so there’s high buy-in for a joint strategy already that marries capacity-building and the use of STEM service providers.

*Recommendation #1: Share the existing knowledge in the field from partners already utilizing a joint approach. These organizations should consider publishing an article, writing a “one-pager” resource, or hosting additional public events in order to make the emerging body of best practices available to more stakeholders.*

*Recommendation #2: ExpandedED Schools should keep soliciting input on this joint approach, especially from STEM service providers, in order to gauge additional perspectives. Only three STEM providers shared their reflections in the event’s “exit ticket” survey.*

## THEME 2: GRAPPLE WITH EXISTING TENSIONS IN THE FIELD

---

At the same time as some organizations are embracing a joint approach, there are also real tensions that exist in the field about the viability of capacity-building for afterschool educators. Some meeting attendees felt that afterschool educators can and should take on STEM facilitation roles, and pointed to successful examples in their own programs. Other attendees felt that afterschool educators either can’t or shouldn’t play this role in afterschool, either because they don’t bring deep STEM expertise or because they felt it wasn’t fair to ask staff in part-time, minimum wage roles to take on additional planning and professional learning to be successful leading STEM.

*Recommendation #3: Organizations who offer capacity-building should better understand the reasons why afterschool educators do and don’t participate in STEM capacity-building. Stakeholders should be aware of viewing afterschool educators through a deficit-based lens, and instead identify the systemic issues at play that might prevent linestaff from fulfilling these roles.*

**Recommendation #4:** Community-based organizations should provide opportunities for staff who are interested in growing to counteract the assumption that staff can't lead STEM. This recommendation relies, in part, on recognizing the key role of the afterschool Site Director in providing access to training and learning opportunities and in promoting a growth-oriented mindset, believing that everyone can "do STEM."

**Recommendation #5:** Capacity-building providers and CBOs should analyze the conditions that need to exist in order for a "grow your own" approach to be successful. What qualities of line staff (experience, interest, career goals), the work environment, staff supervisors (commitment, capacity), and provider offerings (accessibility, relevance) contribute to successful capacity-building efforts?

**Recommendation #6:** All stakeholders should recognize that these approaches (using STEM providers and building on-site staff capacity) don't need to be in opposition; it isn't an "either/or" scenario. The NYC STEM Education Network (or other city-wide group) could make it easier for CBOs to weigh the investment in fee-for-service versus staff development by providing an up-to-date database or program guide where STEM provider services and professional learning opportunities (free and for fee) are organized. Having this information handy will make it easier for Directors and CBO staff to make informed decisions - within budget - about how to bring STEM programming to their site.

### **THEME 3: FUNDING IMPACTS ALL STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR DECISIONS ABOUT WHICH MODEL(S) TO ADOPT**

---

The availability (or lack thereof) of funding underlies many of the programming and staff development decisions that CBOs and STEM service providers make. Three distinct examples emerged during this meeting. First, individual educators leave afterschool sites (or the field at large) because afterschool employment doesn't sustain a living wage, making an investment in capacity-building feel "risky" for some community-based organizations. Second, Site Directors may not know how to leverage public funds to support contracts with STEM service providers - or may not have funds available in tight, publicly-funded budgets. Finally, STEM service providers may struggle to tap into sustainable public funds and so rely on short-term investments from private funders, making their offerings variable and time-limited.

**Recommendation #7:** For some organizations, perhaps especially STEM service providers, the NYC STEM Education Network should provide technical assistance on how to obtain public funding to support afterschool activities, either from the Department of Education (DOE),

Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), the City Council, or other sources. For example, offering a workshop on how to become a DOE contractor (via a multiple-task award contract, or “MTAC”) might allow service providers to expand their offerings and reach more youth.

## THEME 4: PARTNERSHIPS CAN BE CHALLENGING TO OPERATIONALIZE

---

Operationally, it can be hard to make and sustain partnerships between CBOs and STEM service providers. Identifying partners with mutually-beneficial goals; making connections and securing contracts at the optimal moments in the year; and having adequate planning time to pursue partnerships with intentionality are all challenges.

**Recommendation #8:** *The NYC STEM Education Network should work with CBO partners to better understand and share the best “windows” to add new partnerships from a logistical standpoint. For example, there may be a certain seasonality to program planning, with predictable windows at key points in the year (like May, in preparation for summer camp, or August, before school-year launch) when new partnerships are easiest to secure and fund. Participants recommended a set of ‘working assumptions’ that offer broad guidelines for ideal timing to see and launch new partnerships.*

**Recommendation #9:** *The STEM provider and community-based organization landscapes in NYC are overwhelming and hard to navigate. Building from Recommendation 5 above, the NYC STEM Education Network (or other city-wide group) should offer a “match-making” apparatus that compliments such a database and makes it easier for CBOs and STEM service providers to find their perfect match. Nearly 60% of respondents to the 10/19 event’s “exit ticket” survey indicated that they would like assistance in making these kinds of partnerships.*

**Recommendation #10:** *Oftentimes, quick and unexpected timelines from city funders to launch new programs or respond to requests for proposals (RFPs) make advanced planning around partnerships especially challenging. Though many factors contribute to delayed announcements that may be difficult to change, a broad coalition would benefit from more advanced notice and adequate planning time for new RFPs and new program models.*

## THEME 5: SEEK TO UNDERSTAND HOW INVESTMENT IN CAPACITY-BUILDING SERVES INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS, AS WELL AS THE FIELD OVERALL

---

How to support the continued professional learning of individual afterschool educators is a field-wide question, not just the purview of individual community-based organizations. Some attendees expressed reservations about investing in the professional development of line staff who may move on from their organizations relatively quickly, while others wondered if capacity-building can even work in a field with such high rates of turn-over.

**Recommendation #11:** *Undertake research to understand if rich professional development opportunities improve staff retention in the afterschool field overall. During this meeting, several attendees shared anecdotal evidence that staff who participated in capacity-building activities stayed with their organization longer and had opportunities to grow their careers within the agency.*

**Recommendation #12:** *Find ways to assess the value of professional learning for afterschool staff, even with turnover. While some educators may be able to grow in their organization, some educators will leave and perhaps take that knowledge elsewhere. Think about ways to quantify professional investment via micro-credentials or badges, so that all stakeholders can see how an “investment” in an individual’s professional learning might travel throughout the system, even if staff don’t stay at a single organization.*