

## Statewide Science, Education, and Equity Initiative

The pandemic has created challenges for Minnesota families and schools like never before. The Science Museum of Minnesota temporarily closed its visitor place and paused in-person programming multiple times to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community, but it remained true to its commitment to be a statewide resource for science and education that center equity. Helping our audiences see themselves in science is more important than ever.

With the building closed and community programming paused, the museum shifted its focus to delivering engaging STEM content online to users across the state - and around the world. Through an interactive approach to program development and delivery, the museum expanded its capacity to reach and serve its audiences.

The 2020-2021 Statewide School and Community Initiative, funded by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, was instrumental in helping the museum identify new opportunities and helpful strategies to succeed in its pivot to distance education. At the same time, we recognized barriers to online learning and services that amplified systemic inequities already present in our communities.

This biennium, the Science Museum will build upon that experience to deliver on our mission of *science and education centered in equity*. We will serve the changing needs of audiences, amplify and expand access to our research and collections, develop the next generation of digital and in-person programs for family groups and schools, and build the capacity of schools and communities to address equity and access in STEM participation.

### **With proposed FY22-23 Legacy funding, the Science Museum of Minnesota will:**

- **Serve the post-pandemic needs of families, communities, and schools in all 87 Minnesota counties.** Legacy funds will allow the Science Museum to implement a research-driven, data-based approach to the planning, development, and delivery of STEM programs that meet the needs of Minnesota's school and family audiences in a post-pandemic world. Schools and communities most impacted by COVID-19 will be a focus of our work in this realm, with a renewed effort to engage with families and community organizations in collaborative dialogue to define shared goals. The result will be innovative, relevant, and accessible programs for school and family audiences.
- **Amplify science through collaborations and increased access to the museum's collections.** The Science Museum has a collection of more than two million objects that represent a broad diversity of cultures and span Earth's history. By capturing imagery and data of these objects and making them available to online audiences - schools, descendant communities, families, and researchers around the world - the collection becomes an even more powerful storehouse of meaningful information. A portion of the collection has been digitized through previous Legacy funded projects, but there's more work to do. The museum will focus its digitization efforts on the needs identified by the schools and communities we serve, with special attention to Minnesota-related collections and their associated records, enhanced through community partnerships and scholarly research. The goal is to bring the objects to life, broaden their reach, and create learning opportunities, both in-person and via digital platforms like [smm.org/learn](http://smm.org/learn), [smm.org/educators](http://smm.org/educators), and social media channels. Digitizing the collections is a crucial step toward improved access and centering our research in equity.

- **Develop and deliver educational programs to equitably meet the needs of Minnesota's families, communities, and schools.**

The emergence of online learning creates an opportunity for the Science Museum to reach schools and communities throughout Minnesota that have traditionally not participated in museum programs. With the pandemic's impact in mind, the museum will develop innovative, accessible, and relevant STEM education programs centered in equity. Museum scientists, educators, and community partners will lead the development of learning experiences that feature the museum's extensive cultural collections. In addition, the museum's IDEAL Center (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access, and Leadership) will conduct intensive institutes for teachers and district leaders to help them explore equity and inclusion, integrating museum collections and exhibits to address systems of oppression and educational inequities. The museum will develop programming that is meaningful and relevant to families and communities most impacted by the virus.

### **Impact**

Science and education that center equity are at the heart of the Science Museum of Minnesota's work. Legacy funding in the FY22-23 biennium will support the museum's efforts to serve all 87 Minnesota counties - particularly those most profoundly impacted by COVID-19 - with accessible, relevant STEM programming. Legacy funds will support innovative learning experiences that meet the changing needs of schools, families, and communities in a post-pandemic world. Key to this work is expanding access to the museum's research and collections, as well as drawing upon the museum's expertise in the realm of equity in education to provide professional development on inclusive education for Minnesota's teachers and district leaders. Continued Legacy support will also allow for the digitization and interpretation of artifacts, with a focus on items from Minnesota's cultural heritage, and provide educators with transformational training in addressing systems of oppression and educational inequities.

