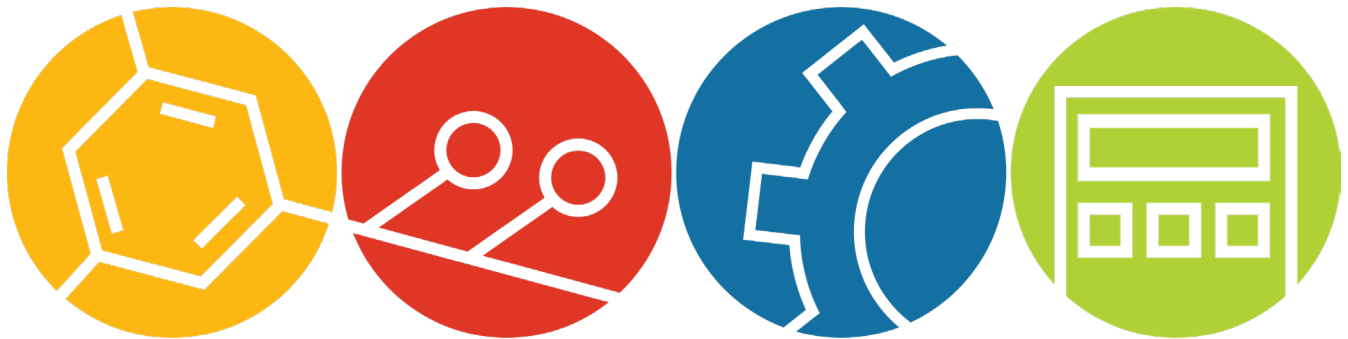


# STEM IN LIBRARIES | Marketing Communications Toolkit



# STEM LIBRARIES

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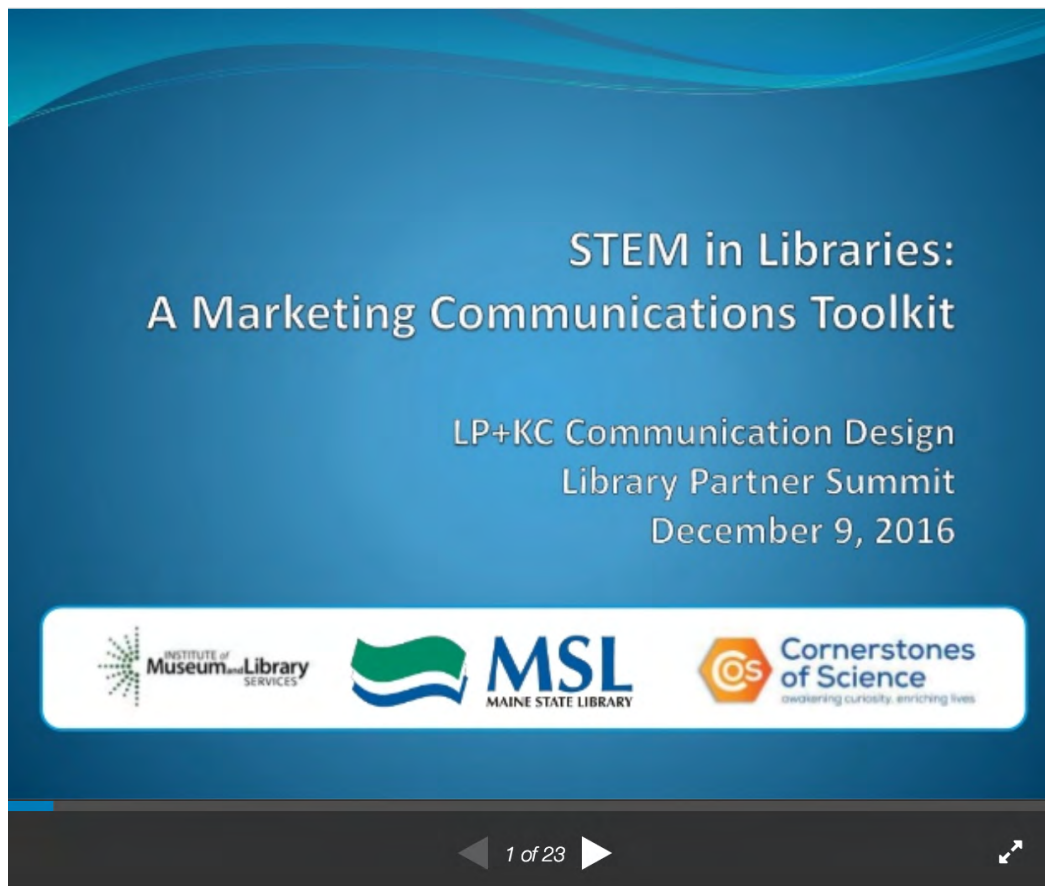
## Introduction

**The *STEM in Libraries: Marketing Communications Toolkit*** provides resources to help you position your library as a learning center for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM ) and promote STEM programs in your library.

### What's inside:

- 10 Tips for Better Marketing Communications
- STEM messaging guide
- Additional resources

### Overview slides:



## 10 Tips for Better STEM Marketing Communications

These tips focus on effective promotional communications for your science, technology, engineering, and math programs. They'll also help you think about ways to position your library as a STEM learning center in your community.

### 1. Think of marketing as an information service

"Marketing" may or may not seem like an appealing thing to do, and it may not even be an official part of your job. But you want people to know what's going on at the library, right?

Try thinking of marketing as an information service. It's about finding your audience and letting them know what you offer that they might find interesting. It's *not* about trying to sell them something they don't want. It *is* about finding the people who want and need what you've got to offer, and then letting them know that you've got it.

With your marketing, the goal is to reach, inform, and engage your community.

### 2. Layer your communications

You really have **two goals** here:

1. In the **short term**, you'll want to promote individual STEM programs, bringing people into the library for specific events.
2. Over the **long term**, you'll want to build the perception of your library as a place for STEM learning. This will be a new idea for many people, and creating a new mindset takes time.

Promoting individual programs requires specific messages about particular events. ("Why do stars twinkle? Let's find out. Come to our Saturday night stargazing party...") Building the perception of your library as a STEM hub is a longer-term goal that requires a broader message about your library's capabilities, resources, and services. ("The XXX Public Library is your charging station for STEM learning. Plug into the library to experiment with science, technology, engineering and math...")

Think about how you can layer your communications to accomplish both the short-term and long-term goals. Every time you promote an individual STEM program, you can help position your library as a natural place to learn about STEM. See if you can find ways to reinforce your broader message about the library's STEM work in your flyers, web copy, and presentations. Show that each individual program is connected to something bigger: a series of related programs or the concept of library as STEM learning hub.

For more ideas, see this toolkit's STEM Messaging Guide and the "Sample Creative Approach to STEM Promotions" listed in the Additional Resources section.

### 3. Talk to your current library users

Many libraries are already pretty good at telling their current patrons what's going on in the library. This is your inner circle, filled with people who already use and feel positive about the library, so of course you'll want to give them a chance to learn about new programs they may not have explored yet. To keep them in the know, you might:

- Include notices about your STEM programs in your newsletter and event calendar.
- Highlight programs on the library's home page.
- Post notices on Facebook and other social media, such as Twitter, and create and share Facebook events.
- Distribute flyers and event calendars at the library.
- Keep desk staff informed, and train them to tell people they encounter about programs.
- Embed STEM "shelf talkers" within the collection. If someone is browsing the computer books, for example, a shelf note can alert him or her to your next coding club meeting.

Keep in mind, though, that every library patron isn't going to fit your target demographic for STEM programs—and many people in your target audience won't be current library patrons. So don't stop here.

### 4. Reach out to new target audiences

Now, for a moment, set aside your current library users and think about who else might be interested in the STEM program you want to promote.

Say you're doing a program on personal genetics. Yes, this topic could relate to anyone anywhere, and you can do the usual broadcasting: posting notices in the local newspapers, on bulletin boards, and on local email listserv and Next Door neighborhood sites. If you live in a small town, this might be enough.

Another approach, especially for urban areas, is to focus on people who have already expressed an interest in genetics. There are probably genetics or science teachers, classes, or clubs at local high schools and colleges, for example. Are there also local genealogy or personal history clubs? Does a company involved with genetic testing have a local office? Are there genetics counselors in your area? Local authors who have written about related topics? Science museums? Finding these groups and individuals will take some research.

Once you've identified a target audience, think about how to reach them.

- Within each group or organization, try to find the influential people, the ones who can help spread the word—the leader, newsletter editor, or social media specialist.
- Share your flyers and newsletter articles, and encourage your new contacts to share these with their networks.
- Find the Facebook pages for relevant groups, and post an invitation on their walls.
- If you have a little budget, you can target specific demographics with Facebook ads.
- If people are already interested in your topic, they're more likely to attend your program—and they'll probably bring a friend.

## 5. Leverage your partnerships

Are you collaborating with a partner on your STEM program? Partnerships can be goldmines. Whether you're working with museums, schools, or individuals, your partners will have their own networks, newsletters, meetings, and mailing lists. They'll bring their audiences to your event. Help them out.

- Give partners your materials—newsletter articles, web banners, flyers—and encourage them to promote the event to their contacts.
- Post on each other's Facebook pages, share each other's posts, and retweet each other's tweets.
- Your partners have a vested interest in the success of the program. They can help you spread the word—and reach new audiences. Tap into their networks.

## 6. Don't forget funders, policymakers, and the media

Remember those layers of communication? All along, program by program, you're working to build the perception of libraries as STEM learning hubs. This is an especially important message for policymakers and potential funders, who will want to see your long-term commitment to STEM learning. So keep local foundations, education boards and departments, reporters, and elected officials in the loop.

- Notify these stakeholders of your STEM events, and keep making the case for STEM learning in the library. Over and over.
- Invite them to your programs—and pay attention to them if they come.
- Encourage them to share information about your programs with their constituencies. City council members and foundations talk to a lot of people in the community, and they often have their own newsletters and blogs.

It's a good idea to develop a checklist of community calendars, funders, policymakers, media representatives, and other contacts you'll want to reach out to on a regular basis. If you keep your contacts well informed, they can support your programs and help reinforce your library's image as a STEM learning hub.

## 7. Connect to the well connected

There's a pattern here: Connect with those who are already well connected, those who have audiences of their own. It's a good rule of thumb to remember as you think about the best ways to reach new people.

Every community has its own networks. Teachers and teacher-librarians can be excellent resources for spreading the word to students and parents. Around town, community leaders and others who know and communicate with a lot of other people can be effective at spreading your messages. [Pew Research](#), for example, noted that "mommy bloggers" were both library supporters and strong influencers in the parent community—a community with an interest in kids' STEM learning. If there are people like this in your area, develop relationships with them. They can be powerful voices for your STEM initiatives.



## 8. Speak plainly

In your STEM promotions,

- *Keep it simple.* Avoid the complex language and technical jargon that some people may associate with science. Don't try to cover everything in your promotions, but do cover the essentials and give people a way to learn more.
- *Explain STEM.* Don't use the acronym "STEM" without including "science, technology, engineering, and math." Although educators and policymakers may be familiar with the term, "STEM" alone may not be meaningful to much of the general public.
- *Lead with the program* rather than STEM. People will listen to a physicist talk about the velocity of fastballs because they're baseball fans, not because it's science. Focus on the topic they care about. Relate it to their everyday lives.
- *Focus on benefits* to the audience. Why would someone want to come to your program? What will they learn or do? Use active words and intriguing headlines that will make people want to find out more.

For more language tips, see this toolkit's Messaging Guide.

## 9. Think visually

It's true: a picture can be worth a thousand words. A good image can capture attention, convey a message, and arouse curiosity. For each of your STEM programs, try to find a powerful image that you can use consistently in your promotions.

Check first to see if you can use images of your own, such as photos from past programs and events, or images shared by partner organizations. If you've got good quality local photos and permission to use them, they'll resonate with your community more than generic images you'll find online. If you do want to make use of free online images, see this toolkit's Additional Resources section for tips on places to look.

## 10. Build over time

Make the most of your marketing. It'll get better and better, just like your STEM initiative.

- When people come to a program, ask how they heard about it. Track which of your marketing efforts are having the most impact, and do more of those.
- Sign up new visitors for library cards and mailing lists.
- Capture positive experiences of programs in event photos and participant comments, and get permission to use these in future marketing campaigns.
- Build your underlying messages over time. Advertisers track "impressions"—the number of times people are exposed to an ad, even if they don't immediately buy something—because repeated exposure builds familiarity with a brand. Can you track the number of "STEM-in-the-library" impressions you're making through website visits, newsletter receipts, and other efforts, even if people don't attend a program right away? Those impressions are exposing people to your STEM message and gradually building an image of the library as a STEM hub.

Let each program, each marketing effort become part of something bigger.

## STEM Messaging Guide

### Making the case for STEM learning in libraries

To support the concept of libraries as learning hubs for science, technology, engineering, and math, we need to make the case with funders, policymakers, educators, and partners. With these audiences, focus on why STEM learning matters, and the role libraries can play.

Much of the advice below is derived from research conducted by the [FrameWorks Institute](#) for the [Afterschool STEM Hub](#). FrameWorks research shows that:

- Even many policymakers and partners won't respond to the acronym STEM. Spell it out.
- STEM messages that focus on hope tend to work better than those based on fear.
- STEM messages that focus on collective benefits and opportunities resonate more than messages about individual gain.

It's also important to emphasize the value of libraries as informal learning centers. STEM belongs in libraries because libraries offer both children and adults:

- A place—and the resources—to deepen and broaden their current STEM knowledge
- Opportunities for self-directed learning
- Opportunities for hands-on learning
- A low-pressure environment
- Opportunities to engage with relevant, real-world problems
- A means of addressing disparities
- Exposure to STEM careers

Instead of this...	Try this...
	<b><i>Spell out the acronym.</i></b>
STEM	science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM
	<b><i>Say why STEM learning matters to us collectively. Focus on hope rather than fear.</i></b>
To remain competitive in a global economy...	To build our shared prosperity...
The U.S. can't fill STEM jobs, so they go overseas.	The STEM sector is growing. Let's grow with it.
STEM degrees lead to high-paying careers.	Innovation drives the economy for us all.
STEM programs help kids learn to solve problems and think critically.	STEM programs build skills our society needs for a complex future.
	<b><i>Explain why informal learning is especially valuable.</i></b>
Afterschool programs extend learning time for kids.	Learning programs in libraries give people of all ages different ways to explore ideas and experiment in a welcoming, supportive setting.

For more on informal learning centers, see “[Redirections](#)” from the FrameWorks Institute’s [The Power of Explanation](#). For more ideas on communicating to funders, educators, and policymakers, see [STEM Afterschool: It’s Time to Activate! A Messaging Toolkit to Make the Case for STEM in Afterschool](#).



## Promoting STEM programs in your community

For the public,

- The acronym “STEM” may be meaningless to some people, so it’s important to spell it out the first time you use it.
- Try leading with a compelling question. Questions can intrigue people, so they’ll want to find out more.
- Avoid complex language and technical jargon.
- Use active verbs, and look for opportunities to engage the audience. STEM learning is all about interactive experiences.

Instead of this...	Try this...
	<b><i>Spell out the acronym.</i></b>
STEM	science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM
	<b><i>Arouse curiosity.</i></b>
Come to our STEM program...	Why do stars twinkle? Let’s find out...
	<b><i>Avoid complex language and technical jargon.</i></b>
Probabilistic reasoning studies show that artificial intelligence is exceptionally accurate in predicting...	Could a robot do your job?
	<b><i>Focus on the interactive experiences.</i></b>
You’ll learn...	You’ll build...  You’ll create...  You’ll make...  You’ll explore...

For more on communicating with schools and families, see the Afterschool STEM Hub’s [Harnessing the Power of Explanation](#) for conversation starters, sample newsletter blurbs, and more. The focus is on kids and afterschool programs, but many of the concepts can also be applied to libraries and adult learning.

## Messaging examples

(Yes, it's OK to use or adapt these sample messages. They're here for you!)

### Sample messages for funders, policymakers, educators, and potential partners

Science, technology, engineering, and math—these fields build skills we need in a complex world. Our schools are critical skill-builders, yes, but informal learning can have a huge impact too. That's where public libraries come in.

Libraries are natural places for both children and adults to learn more about the STEM topics that affect our everyday lives, from computing to nutrition to environmental issues. Learning programs in libraries give people of all ages different ways to explore ideas and experiment in a welcoming, supportive setting.

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The STEM sector is growing, and we can grow with it. Let's work together for a stronger future, and build more STEM learning opportunities in our libraries.

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### Sample messages for the community

Libraries are the latest charging stations for STEM learning. Plug into the XXX Public Library to experiment with science, technology, engineering and math. Get engaged. Get inspired.

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Charge up your curiosity here. Find out how stuff works, why things happen, and what makes our world the way it is. From baseball to butterflies, telescopes to telephones, the XXX Public Library will reveal the inner workings of the everyday. Science, engineering, technology, and math... That's STEM, and it powers our world.

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Got curiosity? The XXX Public Library's got you covered. Here you can explore how stuff works, why things happen, and what makes our world the way it is. From baseball to butterflies, telescopes to telephones, our STEM program reveals the inner workings of the everyday.

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Feed your curiosity with science, technology, engineering, math. That's STEM, and it's how the world works.

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## Additional resources

### Promotional examples

**“Sample Creative Approach to STEM Promotions.”** This document won’t magically transform you into a graphic designer or advertising writer, but it will give you a way to think about the essential elements of your STEM promotional materials. Here you’ll find information on:

- Building a creative platform for your STEM program
- Promoting a specific event
- A sample application of creative elements in promotions

## Communications toolkits and training

**Afterschool STEM Hub.** Here you’ll “discover the most effective ways to make the case for expanding and supporting innovative and engaging afterschool STEM programs.” Recommendations are based on research by the FrameWorks Institute that studied Americans’ perceptions about STEM learning. The target audience for these communications is largely funders, educators, and policymakers rather than the general public. While the focus is on student learning, many of the concepts can be applied to libraries and adult learning.

Resources include:

- **“Making the Case for STEM Learning”**: An online course from the FrameWorks Academy.
- **“Learn to Speak “STEM-ish,”** a two-part webinar (archived online) that explains how to avoid traps that can weaken your STEM messages, and offers tools to help you “increase people’s understanding of informal STEM learning, how it works, and why it matters.”
- For communicating with **funders and policymakers**, there are practical tools, including talking points, suggestions for terms to use—or avoid, and sample tweets, blog posts, and editorials. Sample visuals, such as videos, infographics, and slides are also posted.
- For communicating with schools and families, **Harnessing the Power of Explanation** includes conversation starters, sample newsletter blurbs, and more.

**“Marketing Library Programs”** from Cornerstones of Science. In this video recording of a 2015 presentation, Adam Fisher of the Maine State Library and Peggy Schick of Cornerstones of Science talk about ways public libraries can effectively market their programs.

The **American Library Association** is developing more tools to help promote STEM learning in libraries, so keep an eye out. For example, the ALA Office of Information Technology Policy has developed a video on **coding in libraries**.

## Software and imagery

If you haven't got the funding or staff you'd need for professional software and imagery, here are some low – or no-cost resources.

**Graphic design and layout.** [Canva](#) is a low-cost graphic design program that includes templates and photo editing capabilities. Think of it as a simple alternative to Microsoft Publisher or Adobe InDesign.

**Drawing and graphics.** [Inkscape](#) is a free, open source drawing and graphics editor that offers a simple alternative to Adobe Illustrator.

**Infographics.** [Piktochart](#), [Vennage](#), and [Infogram](#) are free or low-cost infographic makers that get you started with templates.

**Images.** Commercial images can get expensive, but many free or low-cost options are available. Be prepared—image searching takes time. (And be aware that “royalty free” isn't cost free!) Be sure to check copyright permissions and credit the owner.

Some suggestions for finding STEM-related images:

- Check with your program partners. They may already have images you can use in your promotions.
- Look for a government source, museum, or other public collection that relates to your program topic. For example:
  - › You'll find all kinds of space-related imagery in the [NASA image galleries](#).
  - › The U.S. Geological Survey Photo Collection holds photos of the natural world, from [dinosaurs to earthquakes](#), along with works of human engineering like bridges and railroads.
  - › The [Public Health Image Library](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention includes images on environmental health, laboratory science, natural disasters, influenza, everyday activities, and more.
  - › [Wellcome Images](#), a service of the UK's Wellcome Trust, offers many free contemporary and historical medical and health-related images.
  - › The [History of Medicine](#) collection from the U.S. National Library of Medicine offers free historical images from the world of medicine.
  - › [Wikimedia Commons](#) includes photos, diagrams, and other visuals, with categories including nature, engineering, and science (including math and technology). Copyright status will vary; it's safest to focus your search on public domain imagery.
- If you spot an image you like online, you can always ask the photographer for permission to use it. The artist may be willing to help out a library by sharing the image, if you include a credit and a link back to his or her website.
- For more sources, here's [“A Guide to the Best Free Sites for CC0 Art and Stock Photography”](#) from UK librarian Ned Potter.