is a social investment organization that connects talent and innovation with market forces to drive social change.

With this Challenge, SCE’s Digital Learning Program seeks to fund and partner with individuals and organizations working to increase access to the most engaging, educationally effective digital learning media, particularly for underserved populations. We intend to deploy several million dollars to a portfolio of high-potential grantees during this multi-year initiative.

We invite interested organizations to submit a detailed letter of inquiry in response to the prompts below. The deadline for submission is July 2, 2012.

We invite you to visit the Challenge blog at: http://scechallenge.org

**PRIMARY PROBLEM TO ADDRESS**

Millions of underserved American children are heavy digital media users, yet few have ready access to the most engaging, effective digital learning media software and services.

**SCE’s VISION**

We want every child to be able to easily access a broad array of high-quality digital media with learning potential; to pair products with support, enrichment, and helpful contexts to foster the learning of both traditional and 21st century skills; and to have a reasonable metric to test and demonstrate educational gains fostered by these technologies.

**WHAT WE THINK IS MISSING**

We are aware of dozens of promising organizations with similar goals: developers, publishers, certifiers, content curators, platforms, and ecosystem builders. Yet we see gaps in the emerging marketplace, and we believe philanthropy has a unique role in addressing them—through direct support, partnership, and activities that may influence or connect incumbent and up-and-coming players.

To address the gap, this initiative is focused on the following three key areas:

**Target audience**

Many existing digital learning providers focus their efforts on children from higher-income families. SCE places particular emphasis on providing free or low-cost digital learning opportunities to children from moderate- or low-income families, many of whom lack access to quality education. We see value in user experiences and delivery models that respond to the unique needs of underserved learners, including English language learners—in collaboration with peers, parents, educators, and other authority figures. While our Digital Learning Program’s main target is low-income American children between the ages of 8–13, we expect some potential partners to offer products to kids of all ages, and from all socioeconomic backgrounds.
Skills emphasis
Many projects align with traditional K-12 curricula and content, or the emerging Common Core Standards. While we value such skills and knowledge, we believe learners also need opportunities to engage in and practice Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills such as problem solving, creative expression, persistence, and collaboration, to prepare them for successful careers and civic life.

We see significant promise in reaching children during the 7+ hours/day spent engaged with digital media outside of school

Approach and Environment
Many projects focus on reaching children within the traditional educational paradigm, using tech-based versions of legacy tools, such as skill-and-drill software and digital textbooks. We are more interested in the delivery of products that capitalize on the unique qualities of interactive media: personalized software that adapts to the learner; participatory products that encourage children to collaborate and create; highly engaging, immersive games and simulations that reward persistence and exploration (including entertainment media products not originally intended for educational use). We see significant potential in deploying these tools to reach children during the more than 7 hours per day they spend engaged with digital media outside of school time—or via school-based activities that employ informal, student-centered learning.

ELEMENTS OF A POTENTIAL SOLUTION
We acknowledge that we do not know what the ideal solution looks like, or how to build it. However, we have identified several features, functions, and streams of work that hold promise to be a part of the overall solution. We summarize these ideas in the appendix, a straw-man taxonomy that describes our vision of an ecosystem that furthers SCE’s goals. We expect the organizational structure and features of various partners to address these issues in different ways. We view the likely core elements to be:

Choice
A way for learners to easily discover and choose from a curated collection of high-quality digital learning media, aligned to Deeper Learning skills and Common Core Standards.

Engagement
A way for learners to engage with products for free or at very low cost.

Context
Information about (or access to) practices, add-ons, curriculum, related media, or offline opportunities to amplify learning via the products.

Credentialing
Assessments that allow learners to test and demonstrate knowledge and skills.

Learning Management System
An information backbone that helps the system and its administrators learn and modify functions based on usage patterns and feedback, and personalize content for each learner.
WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

We are aware that an organization would require more than just SCE’s support to build and distribute such a project on a national scale. We will prioritize high-leverage opportunities—individuals or organizations that can use SCE’s support and strategic partnership to move an idea, a project, or the field the greatest distance toward our vision.

Some categories in our model are more mature than others—for instance, there are many more content aggregators than Deeper Learning assessment engines. We are most likely to fund potential partners that present a strong case that they are addressing high-need areas of work with potential for positive reverberations throughout the field.

We are most interested in projects that address the market gaps highlighted above: user experiences geared toward children from moderate- and low-income families; ways to engage in and practice Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills; delivery of products that capitalize on the unique qualities of interactive media; serious attention to outside-of-school time, or informal, student-centered learning in schools.

In 2011, SCE initiated a major grant to Common Sense Media focused on identifying learning opportunities within specific digital media products, as well as the context that extends that learning. While we view this initiative as building on CSM’s achievements, we are focused on ends rather than means, and welcome innovative approaches to achieve common goals.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The purpose of the letter-of-inquiry process is to surface a group of potential partners, from whom we will request more detailed grant proposals. We expect to award grants at two tiers: smaller R&D grants in the $25,000–$50,000 range for early-stage projects; and larger implementation grants in the $100,000–$250,000 range to organizations with established records and detailed plans.

We are planning a conference call to answer questions from potential partners. For call details, please contact challenge@scefdn.org

To track the progress of the Challenge, please visit the project blog at http://scechallenge.org

Thank you for your interest in collaborating with us on this intriguing, important set of problems. We can’t wait to see what you come up with.

–The SCE Team.
LETTER OF INQUIRY FORM
Please submit an LOI—no longer than 3 pages—that addresses the following prompts via email attachment (.doc or .pdf) to challenge@scefdn.org by July 2, 2012.

Basics
Please include contact name, organization name, website, a brief project summary, and estimated project cost.

Background
Provide a brief history of your work as it relates to this area. How successful have you been in these pursuits thus far?

Strategy
Describe your overall aspiration for the project. What problem are you trying to solve, and how you are planning to solve it? Describe what research has informed your plan.

Focus
Describe why you believe your project’s area of concentration (e.g. assessment, product curation) is an important lever for moving the field forward.

Budget
Estimate your project budget, with a high-level description of expected expenses.

Funding and Partnerships
Indicate current sources of major philanthropic support, and any other key partners on this project.

Marketing and Communication
Describe your go-to-market strategy and communications plan, if applicable.

Accountability and Learning
Describe key milestones for the project. How will you evaluate its success?
Appendix
The Elements in the Ecosystem (we think)