SCE DIGITAL LEARNING CHALLENGE
SCE will select a short list of exceptional afterschool programs to participate in a learning community to explore how digital media can promote the development of skills to prepare the next generation for success.
WHAT IS SCE?

Susan Crown Exchange (SCE) is a Chicago-based foundation invested in shaping an ecosystem of anytime, anywhere, 21st century learning. It is our aspiration to help prepare youth with the skills to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing and highly connected world. We wish to blend the development of social and emotional skills that are often a focus of informal learning environments with digital fluency. Our emphasis on informal learning is intentional: we believe that learning does not happen solely in the classroom, and we support programs that offer youth ways to explore their own interests.

We describe ourselves as an Exchange for a reason. In our six-year history, we have learned that building partnerships with top practitioners, policymakers, applied researchers, and funders creates the optimal environment for solving hard problems and creating sustainable change. We continually ask challenging questions about what skills will be most valued in the new millennium. We believe that we move closer to solutions by discovering, analyzing, and elevating outstanding field work.

In 2014, SCE partnered with expert practitioners and a team of top researchers to design and implement the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Challenge. The SEL Challenge shed new light on how afterschool programs can equip teens with valuable social and emotional skills by improving the intentionality and impact of skill building and assessment. The SEL Challenge identified promising practices for building skills in six domains: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility, and problem solving. By studying, unpacking, and articulating the practices used by exemplary programs, we created a toolkit for organizations to implement or enhance SEL practices in their programs. Our field guide, Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning aims to provide a roadmap of activities, practices, and assessment tools to address this need. Throughout this process, we also learned that those serving youth both in and outside of school settings were interested in SEL practices, but often limited by the dearth of available resources describing how this work could be done. As interest in this field continues to expand, our partner organizations have become ambassadors of the SEL work by teaching and modeling best practices.

SCE believes that in order for the next generation to thrive as individuals, professionals, and citizens in a rapidly changing world, they must become motivated and thoughtful lifelong learners. Through our next initiative, SCE will select a short list of exceptional afterschool programs to participate in a learning community that will explore how digital media can promote the development of skills to prepare the next generation for success.

WHY DIGITAL LEARNING?

Technology has changed how we view and interact with the world. We have shifted from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy, where anyone with access to the Internet can, with the right skills and under the right conditions, tap into an endless supply of information and connect with citizens all over the world. Technology has also transformed how we work. Workplaces require professionals who can quickly adapt to new roles and master new tools, responsibilities, and jobs while communicating and negotiating across companies, sectors, and continents.

Eligible applicants for this initiative do not necessarily need to refer to themselves as ‘makerspaces’ or a ‘civics’ program per se, but we do believe that these skills and concepts are important for 21st century learners.
and the building of Hive Learning Networks. These initiatives support youth to build, produce, and remix, instead of passively consume, media. Such ‘makerspace’ programs provide hands-on learning using digital tools and safe spaces where youth can cultivate their passions while building 21st century skills. Most importantly, makerspaces represent a mindset: makers create something out of nothing by exploring their own interests. The most successful of these programs connect the activities and skills learned in the program to opportunities and obstacles faced beyond it. This concept of ‘citizenship’ is a powerful one: it empowers youth to be agents of change in their own community.

Eligible applicants for this initiative do not need to call themselves a ‘makerspace’ or a ‘civics’ program per se, but we do believe these skills and concepts are important for 21st century learners. Our goal is to understand the process by which organizations have overcome challenges specific to their populations or communities to implement digital media programs.

DIGITAL LEARNING CHALLENGE

While technology has increased access to knowledge and opportunities, there is evidence of a widening digital divide for low-income individuals, families, and communities. Obsolete tools, uneven internet access, and differing mindsets around innovation in education often hinder the development of learning skills critical to success in today’s knowledge economy. All of SCE’s previous investments in digital learning have focused on these issues. Our partnership with Common Sense Media created “learning ratings” to help parents guide their kids to developmentally-appropriate and high-quality digital products and games. Our partnerships with Gooru, PowerMyLearning, the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, and First Book sought to improve quality content and navigation, and publishing and distribution pipelines.

Through these initiatives and consultation with field experts, we learned that the decentralized and local nature of informal learning environments often make it hard for technology developers and distributors to reach scale. These findings are further supported by research that concludes a “one-size-fits-all” program is not the solution. It is for this reason we are interested in learning more about the place-based context of this work.

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to better understand, from expert practitioners, how we can support partnerships and growth among informal learning environments, system intermediaries, and supply-side developers and distributors in order to equip teens with the 21st century skills they need to thrive as individuals, professionals, and citizens. Our intention is to pursue multiple avenues to share this information with educators and informal learning practitioners so that they will be better equipped to use digital media in their work, and ultimately engage youth in more meaningful learning experiences.
The uneven quality and local nature of informal learning environments inhibit equitable access to and knowledge of digital tools and practices necessary to equip youth with essential 21st century skills.
Explore how organizations define and promote 21st century skills to support the next generation to thrive as individuals, professionals, and citizens.

Uncover an exceptional cohort of afterschool organizations that have overcome place-based barriers to implement high-quality digital media programs.

Identify the best strategies, programs, and practices to engage youth, ages 13-18, in digital learning and skill building in informal learning environments.

Disseminate these findings broadly through resources for practitioners, digital media developers, policymakers, and others.
POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Because every community is different, there is no single or ideal solution to the problem, nor is there any single pathway for building it. Still, we do believe that there are commonalities that can be found across exemplary digital media programs. Part of the work of this initiative will be to understand and describe how each participating youth-serving organization addresses the following in their own specific way:

- Partnerships: Partnering with communities, companies, other non-profit organizations, or thought leaders
- Youth Engagement: Incorporating youth voice into program development
- Communication/Trust: Creating a culture that supports new and innovative ideas
- Staff Training/Retention: Providing opportunities for ongoing professional development and leadership opportunities
- Measurement/Evaluation: Integrating measurement tools and using data and evaluation for continuous improvement
- Outcomes: Defining and illustrating the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in work, life and citizenship

PARTICIPANTS

We invite afterschool organizations that can demonstrate success using digital tools to promote 21st century skill development in teens to submit a brief application in response to the prompts. Top organizations will be selected by SCE program staff and invited to submit grant proposals. The deadline for application submission is January 20, 2017.

Eligible organizations must have the following characteristics:

- Serve youth ages 13-18
- Operate in afterschool settings throughout the school year
- Incorporate digital media into programming (organizations must select one program for initiative consideration)
- Identify 21st century skill growth using digital media as a program outcome
- Demonstrate some evidence of impact, illustrated through questionnaires, evaluations, case studies, interviews, videos, or other sources
- Have administrative capacity, infrastructure and motivation to participate in all initiative activities
- Have 501(c)(3) tax-exemption status

INITIATIVE COMPONENTS

Learning Community: This initiative will convene a learning community of 5-7 afterschool organizations and an evaluation partner. Each participating organization will have a team composed of a senior leader and an “on-the-ground” program staff member. Together these organizations will define, with the help of our evaluation partner, each of their digital media approaches and measure how their practices cultivate 21st century skill growth in youth, over the course of a program year. The learning community will also engage with: 1) human resource and policy leaders to discuss 21st century skills from the lens of workforce development; and 2) supply-side organizations and system intermediaries to discuss barriers faced when developing and distributing digital tools and services.

Participation in the learning community requires a two-year commitment and includes three in-person convenings and three online meetings between June 2017 and September 2018 directed towards answering the questions below. The second year will focus on the production of practical and easy-to-use resources to assist other youth-serving organizations to incorporate digital tools into programs and build effective partnerships with supply-side organizations. Resources may include videos, critical thinking exercises, data collection tools, and case studies, among others.

Meetings: During facilitated in-person and online meetings, the learning community will explore the questions outlined below. We believe that by working together to answer these questions, our learning community can uncover best practices and help other organizations understand how they can implement programs using digital media to develop 21st century skills:

What does it mean to be a 21st century citizen? What skills are required to thrive in today’s and tomorrow’s workforce? How do organizations think about, identify, and measure outcomes?

Why this Question? We believe that in order to persist through school and be successful in today’s changing world, students must be flexible, collaborative, curious, resilient, and able to communicate effectively. However, we want to understand how your organization interprets 21st century skill growth and is supporting and measuring the growth of these skills. We will
then use this information and facilitate discussions to understand how employers are defining 21st century skills, ultimately attempting to bridge gaps among stakeholders.

How are you engaging youth, ages 13-18, using digital media, to explore their interests?

Why this Question? Many organizations have cited consistent attendance as a challenge. Teens tend to ‘vote with their feet,’ meaning they show up when they are interested and engaged in the programming. Afterschool programming is voluntary, which further supports the notion that attendance is driven by student choice and quality of program and staff. We are interested in hearing from organizations with proven success engaging youth in digital media programming on a regular basis.

What are the best ways to support adults to a) teach with digital media, and b) build meaningful and appropriate relationships with teens?

Why this Question? The reason we have taken a specific interest in teens is because they are at a critical juncture in their lives; they are increasingly independent, but still require the guidance of adults to help them navigate the rapidly changing world. We believe that the most successful organizations have developed staff practices that promote learning and leadership in order to support youth voice and meet the youth where they are. We also want to understand how your organization has supported staff development so they feel confident in engaging youth while building digital skills.

How have organizations overcome obstacles specific to their communities or settings to increase digital media opportunities for low-income youth?

Why this Question? Afterschool programs and practitioners face challenges acquiring technology (hardware, software, and network), the skills to teach with digital media (pedagogy), and the knowledge about which tools to employ (navigation and quality of tools, safety and privacy concerns) to support youth-driven digital media practices (participation, production, and co-creation). We want to understand the ways in which your program has overcome these barriers.

What are the main characteristics of youth-serving organizations that successfully create and provide digital media opportunities for teens? How do they address place-based challenges and priorities? How do they capitalize on community assets?

Why this Question? Communities, like people, are all different. They have different strengths, different weaknesses, different sizes, different spaces, and different demographics. While some might face greater challenges – lack of resources, infrastructure, political will – we believe the seeds of innovation exist in every home, school, neighborhood, and community. We want to understand the context of where you work, what barriers exist, and how you are breaking through these barriers.

AWARD

Selected afterschool organizations will receive awards of up to $100,000 to support their work using digital media to develop 21st century skills in teens and their participation in this initiative. All travel and convening expenses related to participation will also be sponsored by SCE.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Applicants will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- Integration of digital tools into program design
- Commitment to developing 21st century skills in teens, demonstrated by intentionality of program design, delivery, content, measurement, and quality of impact on youth
- Alignment of program mission and outcomes to SCE’s Digital Learning Program priorities
- Sound administration and organizational stability. This is demonstrated by strong leadership, committed and effective staff, professional development opportunities, and relationships with community stakeholders
- Capacity to devote adequate time and resources to participate in a learning community and program evaluation
- Willingness to designate one program staff member with substantial experience and knowledge of the program to serve as project coordinator
Please apply to the initiative online* via bit.ly/SCEDLC

The application process is meant to surface a group of potential partners to join the learning community. Top applicants will be invited to submit grant proposals.

SCE will host a Q&A session for interested parties on January 10, 2017 at 1:00 PM CST. Use the following conference line 712-770-8009, Code: 698992. Please email questions prior to the call to challenge@scefdn.org using the subject line Digital Learning Challenge.

*All applicants must apply via the above link; emailed applications will not be accepted.
APPLICATION

DIGITAL LEARNING CHALLENGE APPLICATION
Apply via:  bit.ly/SCEDLC

Afterschool programs must submit an application that addresses the following prompts by 5:00 PM CT on January 20, 2017 via the above link. No applications will be accepted after that time.

YOUR ORGANIZATION

First, we would like to know about your organization.
- Organization: name, state, city and zip
- Point of contact: Name, e-mail, phone
- Website:
- Organization mission:
- Is your organization a member of any local, regional or national networks? If yes, which?
- Number of paid, full-time staff:
- Number of paid, part-time staff:
- Number of part-time volunteers:
- How does your organization align with SCE’s Digital Learning priorities? (max. 200 words)
- Provide a brief history of your organization’s work using digital media for 21st century skill development. (max. 200 words)

YOUR PROGRAM

We would like to know more about your digital media program. We understand your organization may have diverse programs, some of which focus on digital media and teens and others that do not. Please apply with one program that meets the criteria of this initiative.
- Name of program
- Number of youth participants (please note that all program sizes are encouraged to apply)
- Program duration and frequency
- Provide a brief description of the program, core activities, and how you have explicitly incorporated digital media in your program design. (max. 400 words)
- What digital media products and services do you currently use?
- What tools and services do you wish you could use? Why?
- How does your program help teens develop 21st century skills using digital media? Please include specifically how youth benefit from the program and why you think the program works. Include how you define “21st century skills”. (max. 400 words)

Please describe the population you serve:
- Age(s): (<13, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18, 18+)
- Gender(s) (female, male, LGBTQ)
- Demographics: Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latino/a, Black or African American, White, Mixed Race, All Other
- SES: What is the percentage of low, middle, and high-income youth this program serves. If the program primarily serves high-income youth, please articulate how your learnings may be translated to a low-income community.
- Setting: urban, suburban, small city, rural (percentage)
- Is your program fee-based? If yes, please describe the fee structure.
- Are you an application-based program (i.e., do youth have to apply to participate)?
- What is the attendance rate for the program in this initiative? Please indicate how many of your youth attend all of the time, half the time, etc.
- Please describe how this program fits into your larger organizational mission. Feel free to include a link to additional online information regarding your other programs. (max. 200 words)

YOUR ORGANIZATION & COMMUNITY

- Please provide a short description of the community context of your organization. This may include political, economic, and/or social challenges or priorities specific to your community. (max. 400 words)
- Provide 1-2 examples of how you utilize the strengths/assets of your community to overcome barriers. Please name the problem, the parameters, and how you overcame them. Include any key partners included in this effort. (max. 400 words)
- Describe your organizational management strategies, including how you train/support staff to facilitate programs and any local or online professional development sources used. (max. 400 words)

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

We would like to understand the impact your program has on the populations you serve, and how you measure that impact.
- Please describe any findings regarding the program’s impact on youth documented with questionnaires or other quantitative measures. You may include links to any documentation available online. (max. 200 words)
- Please describe any findings regarding your program’s impact on youth documented through case studies, interviews, videos, or other qualitative means. You may include links to any documentation available online. (max. 200 words)
- Please describe any specific outcomes related to digital media and 21st century skills and how you measure them. If applicable, please include any specific 21st century skills frameworks you currently use. (max. 200 words)

LEARNING COMMUNITY

- How do you envision your organization contributing to and participating in the learning community? (max. 200 words)
- What would you like to gain from the learning community? (max. 200 words)

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

- Please upload the following budgets: program budget, total youth services budget (required for multiservice organizations), and annual organizational budget. Indicate primary sources of major support.
- Please upload any results-related evaluations or reports.
JANUARY 2, 2017
Application submission period opens

JANUARY 10, 2017
Q & A session at 1:00 PM CST. Use the following conference line: 712-770-8009, code: 698992

JANUARY 20, 2017
Application submission period closes at 5:00 PM CST

FEBRUARY 22, 2017
Finalists invited to submit proposals via an RFP process

MARCH 17, 2017
RFP closes

LATE APRIL/EARLY MAY 2017
Challenge partners selected

JUNE 12-13 2017
First convening of Challenge partners

SEPTEMBER 2017
Program evaluation and data collection begin

FEBRUARY 2018
Second convening of Challenge partners

FALL 2018
Third convening of Challenge partners
Afterschool programs must submit an application by 5:00 PM CST on January 20, 2017. No applications will be accepted after that time.