

Conversation Guide



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Effectively broadening participation starts by examining our own practices. This shifts the burden for change from individuals historically excluded from STEM to those who design and lead public engagement with STEM programs. Many organizations and programs have begun to reflect critically on how their work reproduces or disrupts patterns of participation in STEM. The CAISE Broadening Participation in STEM task force identified five key, overarching challenges leaders must work toward addressing:

- 1.** Recognizing the importance of reflecting on and possibly reframing your efforts to broaden participation through adopting a more critical stance about what can lead to lasting change.
- 2.** Clarifying what “broadening participation” means to your program or organization.
- 3.** Recognizing whether and how your program or organization reproduces dominant cultural norms of STEM or adopts more inclusive approaches.
- 4.** Identifying whether and how your program or organization is truly prioritizing efforts to broaden participation, and what it means if you are not.
- 5.** Understanding how your efforts to broaden participation strategically enrich and contribute to your local systems of STEM learning and engagement opportunities.

The challenges require that leaders and staff closely examine what they do, why, how, and with whom. To support this self-examination, over time, there are a multitude of reflection questions within the *Broadening Perspectives on Broadening Participation in STEM* report, the practice briefs, and on the next page. As a staff leader or trainer, make sure carefully consider which questions to ask and *when*.

Additional Questions to Facilitate Conversations

1. What is our organization’s vision of and goals for “broadening participation” efforts?

- How is our vision reflected across the organization?
- Are our efforts confined to a particular individual or department or is there evidence that we embrace them across our institution?

2. How well do our programs and offerings align with our broadening participation vision?

- Who is not participating and what can we learn about these groups’ interests, concerns, and everyday experiences that may be areas we could connect to?

3. In what ways do our organization and programs/offerings consider the experiences of diverse groups?

- What are some ways our organization or programs inadvertently reinforce dominant cultural norms (e.g., ways of speaking, interacting, and assumptions about experiences participants have)?
- How might we work to design our offerings in ways that honor and utilize diverse participants’ everyday and cultural knowledge?

4. What role does our organization play in the local or regional STEM learning ecosystem?

- What are the unique contributions our organization brings?
- Where might we reinforce or duplicate the efforts of other organizations?
- Are we connecting with other STEM providers in ways that leverage each institutions’ strengths, collaborating to address broadening participation?

Tips for Facilitating Conversations

1. Provide a clear description of the focus of the conversation so that participants understand the goals of the discussion.
2. Try to create an environment that is welcoming and where individuals feel safe, comfortable, and valued as contributors and learners. You might stress, for example, that there are no right or wrong answers and that all ideas and perspectives are important.
3. Encourage everyone to speak, and find ways for all participants to contribute their ideas and perspectives. For example, introduce a question and have everyone jot down their ideas on post-its for five minutes and then share with the group. Try pair discussions for five to ten minutes and then share in a larger group discussion. Pause and encourage those who have not yet talked to offer their ideas.
4. Give people time to think after you pose a question or as people build on each other’s ideas. Be comfortable with silence.
5. Use prompts, seek feedback, and encourage others to contribute and build on each other’s ideas.
6. Establish a process that honors differences and encourages communication. For example, you might ask for other points of view on a topic.

