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NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANT TO MSI TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW TO ENCOURAGE MINORITY YOUTH TO ENTER STEM CAREERS

CHICAGO (September 30, 2015) — The Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago (MSI) has received a grant from the National Science Foundation to study whether teens in the Museum's youth development programs ultimately pursue STEM careers because of their participation.

The four-year grant for \$996,163 from the federal government agency will support a multiyear study that will track Chicago-area teens in MSI's Science Minors and Science Achievers programs as they complete high school and continue on to college and careers. The study aims to answer how out-of-school-time programs can increase participation in STEM especially among minority youth.

About 200 students take part in these programs annually. Most are underrepresented in STEM fields; typically about 75 percent are African-American or Hispanic and two-thirds are female. Participating teens learn about science, gain communication and leadership skills, and conduct hands-on experiments with Museum guests.

"MSI is at the forefront of national efforts to develop and provide high-quality, innovative science programming," said David Mosen, Museum president and CEO. "It's critical that we help inspire and prepare students to become our next generation of scientists and innovators. This funding will allow us to more fully understand the impact we're having on teens at a critical point in their lives."

About 70 percent of Science Minors and Science Achievers say they're interested in STEM careers when they graduate from high school. Interest is stronger among women (78 percent) than men (57 percent). The NSF-funded research will examine how being involved in the Museum's programs affect a teen's career choices.

The study's research design is innovative in three ways: it follows participants over a long period of time while using a control group to clarify what change is due to participation in the program; it uses culturally sensitive research designs and methodologies; and it reaches youth at a critical point in their life as they prepare for college and careers.

In the Science Minors program, teens attend 10 weeks of science education and training by Museum staff and then volunteer to conduct interactive science experiments for Museum guests. Teens gain a better understanding of science, improve their public speaking skills and earn service learning hours.

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Those who complete Science Minors and want to continue can become Science Achievers. Achievers deepen their work by learning about more rigorous science topics, meeting with working science professionals and preparing for college and careers.

“The teens in these programs are developing leadership, teamwork and critical thinking skills they need for the jobs of the future,” said Bryan Wunar, the Museum’s director of community initiatives. “When they’re out in the Museum doing science, the teens are role models who show younger children that science is cool and part of their everyday lives.”

The fall session kicks off on Saturday, October 3. Teens will be learning about microbiology and cardiovascular health. Science Achievers will work on high-tech projects in the Wanger Family Fab Lab (the Museum’s digital design and fabrication workshop), while others will teach science on a live weekly television show on CAN-TV, Chicago’s community access channel.

Learn more about Science Minors and Science Achievers at msichicago.org/science-minors.

The Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago (MSI), one of the largest science museums in the world, offers world-class and uniquely interactive experiences that inspire inventive genius and foster curiosity. From groundbreaking and award-winning exhibits that can’t be found anywhere else, to hands-on opportunities that make you the scientist—a visit to MSI is where fun and learning mix. Through its Center for the Advancement of Science Education (CASE), the Museum offers a variety of student, teacher and family programs that make a difference in communities and contribute to MSI’s larger vision: to inspire and motivate children to achieve their full potential in science, technology, medicine and engineering. Come visit and find your inspiration! MSI is open 9:30–4 p.m. every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas day. Extended hours, until 5:30 p.m., are offered during peak periods. The Museum is grateful for the support of its donors and guests, who make its work possible. MSI is also supported in part by the people of Chicago through the Chicago Park District. For more information, visit msichicago.org or call (773) 684-1414 or (800) GO-TO-MSI outside of the Chicago area.

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