

Two Companies Collaborate around Shared Desired Outcome to Build the Workforce of Tomorrow



First published on The Conference Board Giving Thoughts Blog on November 30, 2016

We often talk cross-sector collaboration, but we don't often hear about companies working together to solve a social problem. CH2M and Dow are doing just that. Interestingly, they count each other as both customers and suppliers—strategic business partners. Together they partnered with the Smithsonian Science Education Center to create the Dow-CH2M Smithsonian Teacher Scholar Program.

As part of the program, Dow and CH2M identified teachers from strategic locations in which the companies have a strong presence—for example, California, Louisiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Texas. These teachers attended Smithsonian Science Education Academies for Teachers (SSEATs), week-long academies designed to heighten STEM teachers' ability to inspire and enlighten their students. The teachers then took their experiences back to their classrooms. They continued their professional growth through peer networking, mentoring and interaction with Dow and CH2M employee volunteers.

"I loved participating in the class because it gave me an opportunity to see and hear real research and find ways to emulate that in my classroom," says Gordon Culver, high school teacher, Frankenmuth High School, Michigan. "It was also exciting to have a direct connection between real-world research and the things that can happen with my students."

Both companies support efforts around building the workforce of tomorrow and environmental sustainability. The teachers were divided into three cohorts with each focusing on one of the following elements: Biodiversity, Energy's Innovations and Implications, or Earth's History and

Global Change. This program is an example of the companies utilizing their core competencies along with philanthropic dollars and intellectual capital through their employee volunteer programs.

“At a time in corporate giving when so many social issues are pressing around the world, it is even more critical to collaborate with other funders with whom you share similar values and interests,” said Ellen Sandberg, executive director, CH2M Foundation. “The multiplier effect comes into full force, thus leading to even greater impact. Partnering with Dow has meant greater engagement between the two companies than ever before, benefiting both the community and the business relationship.”

“We realize that in order to tackle the challenge of building the STEM workforce of tomorrow, one company cannot do it alone,” said Meredith Morris, global STEM leader, the Dow Chemical Company. “We were extremely proud to expand our collaboration with the Smithsonian Science Education Center to include our key business partner, CH2M. It is exciting that we are able to combine our aligned global citizenship and sustainability strategies and engage the passion and skills of our employees to collaborate on a program that will empower educators in communities that are important to us.”

Initial feedback from the program is positive and shows that it has sparked enthusiasm in the teachers and subsequently benefited their students. “I think it has made an immense impact on my teaching strategies,” said April Languirand, fifth grade teacher, Lakewood Elementary, Louisiana. “I have a degree in history and am a huge history nerd. Science has never been my passion, until now! The program piqued my interest in science like never before. It also made me think about why I didn’t like science as a student. I have put a lot more effort into making lessons fun for my students—being excited about the lesson and then passing that excitement on to my students.”

Rhonda Wendel, fifth grade science and social studies teacher, Danbury Elementary, Texas, said: “I have shared with my students that there are so many choices of careers in science that I didn’t even know existed. The careers that the experts discussed opened up a whole new world for me to share with my students.”

The desired outcome if the Dow-CH2M Smithsonian Teacher Scholar Program is to build the workforce of tomorrow and the anecdotal feedback received so far certainly points to long-term success!