

About the Summit

- What is the Smithsonian Science Education Leadership Summit or SSELS?
 - The Smithsonian Science Education Leadership Summit is a national initiative that brings teams of STEM educators together to develop and implement strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of diverse K–12 STEM teachers in their communities. During the multiday summit, teams engage in systems-change learning, create a logic model to guide their work, and receive long-term support to carry out their plans. Since 2017, the Smithsonian Science Education Center has supported more than 140 teams from 36 states and US territories in strengthening STEM teaching systems and advancing these efforts.
- Who hosts the Smithsonian Science Education Leadership Summit?
 - The Summit is hosted by the Smithsonian Science Education Center (SSEC). The SSEC is the Smithsonian’s only unit dedicated solely to K–12 formal science education, with a mission to transform science teaching and learning in collaboration with communities worldwide. The center develops inquiry-based curriculum and digital resources, provides professional development for educators, and builds leadership capacity in STEM educators. Guided by the center’s goals of innovation, inclusion, and sustainability, the SSEC works to ensure all students and teachers can meaningfully engage in science and address real-world challenges.
- What are the goals of the Summit? Why is the work of the Summit important?
 - The Summit aims to strengthen the STEM teaching workforce by supporting district and school-level systems change through the recruitment and retention of skilled K-12 STEM teachers. This work matters because shifting student demographics means classrooms are more varied than ever and having a skilled STEM teaching workforce with a wide range of knowledge and experiences is essential for effectively engaging and educating all students. A strong teaching workforce helps prepare students for STEM career pathways and equips them to be STEM-literate citizens, ultimately supporting student success, innovation, and long-term talent development in emerging STEM fields.
- Who typically participates in the Summit?

- Each team is comprised of 3-5 members. Team members include K–12 STEM teachers, school and district administrators, community partners, and potentially others who are committed to strengthening the STEM teaching workforce. Each team is supported by a **team mentor**, an education professional who offers guidance before, during, and after the Summit as teams develop and implement their logic models.

Team Eligibility and Application Process

- Who can apply to participate?
 - Teams may consist of education professionals and partners committed to strengthening their STEM teacher workforce, and each member should be able to contribute to the team's success in multiple ways. Eligible team members include at least one practicing classroom teacher and may also include administrators, school staff, community members, parents, and local school or government officials.
- How many people should be on a team?
 - Teams should include 3-5 members who bring expertise to support systems-level change. Roles include
 - A **Change Agent** builds awareness and influences district decisions (for example, a science education leader, community partner, or parent).
 - A **Data Expert** manages data collection, analysis, and reporting.
 - A **Leader** such as a principal or district administrator fosters relationships and gains buy-in.
 - A **Content Expert** (typically a STEM teacher) brings relevant research and strategies.
 - A **Project Manager** tracks progress, coordinates meetings, and keeps the team focused on its goals.
- Who must be included on each team? Who else should be a part of the team?
 - Teams are required to have at least one practicing K–12 STEM teacher. Teams may also include district-level leaders, community members, parents, or local officials. It is important that each team member be able to fulfill the needs of at least one role: A Change Agent, Data Expert, Leader, Content Expert, and/or a Project Manager.
- How are teams selected?

- Teams' application will undergo a holistic review where they will be evaluated on the following criteria:
 - Team composition – how well team members align with required team roles.
 - Clarity of idea – how well the team describes their goals and outcomes.
 - Scale of impact – how clearly the team describes their vision and indicators of success.
 - Populations served – how effectively the team addresses the needs of their communities.
- Can returning teams apply again?
 - Yes, returning teams are welcome to apply, however, prior team performance will be considered.
- How long does the application take to complete?
 - The application takes approximately one hour to complete. Before beginning an application, team leaders should know who the members of the team are.
- What information is required in the application?
 - The application requires several key pieces of information to help the Summit team understand your team and its proposed work, including:
 - **Team composition:** Who will be on your team and their roles.
 - **Team contacts and traveler information:** Primary contact details and travel logistics for team members.
 - **Organization demographics:** Information about your school, district, or organization.
 - **Proposed focus:** The area of STEM teaching or systems change that your team plans to address.
 - **Problem statement:** A clear description of the challenge your team aims to tackle.
 - **Anticipated challenges:** Potential obstacles your team expects to encounter.
 - **Stakeholder support:** Evidence of backing from administrators, colleagues, or community partners.
 - **Potential impact:** How your work could affect students, teachers, and STEM education in your context.
- What makes a strong team application?
 - A strong team application clearly identifies whether the logic model focuses on recruitment or retention and shows evidence of early planning supported by meaningful stakeholder engagement. It also defines each team member's

role and makes a compelling case for the logic model's potential to create meaningful impact during implementation.

- When is the application deadline?
 - The application deadline is January 5, 2026, at 11:59 PM ET.
- Do I need to complete the application in one sitting? Can I save the application and return to it later?
 - Teams can save their application progress and return to the form up to the application deadline.
- When will teams find out if they have been selected to participate in the summit?
 - Teams will be notified if they have been selected to participate in the Summit by January 26, 2026.

Mentorship Eligibility and Application Process

- Who can apply to be a mentor?
 - Educators, leaders, and professionals with STEM education and leadership experience can apply to be mentors.
- What are the qualifications to be a mentor?
 - Mentors must have a background as a preK-16 educator, classroom teacher, or K-12 administrator or must have had worked within a school system in the past 8 years. They should also have professional experience supporting systemic change, providing K-12 STEM educator training, promoting inclusion in the workplace, or have leadership experience within a K-12 education system.
- How are mentors selected and paired with teams?
 - Mentors are paired with a team based on their experience, background, and alignment with selected teams' needs and context.
- What support will mentors provide? What role do mentors fill for the summit?
 - **Pre-Summit:** Mentors clarify the team's goals and needs, offer guidance, and help shape the problem of practice and early logic model.
 - **During the Summit:** Mentors provide real-time support, serving as a sounding board as the team refines its logic model.
 - **Post-Summit (18 months):** Mentors stay engaged, offering ongoing guidance to help the team progress toward its goals.
- How long will mentors work with teams?

- Mentors are expected to support their teams in the weeks leading up to the Summit, during the Summit, and 18 months post-Summit.
- What information is required in the application? What information should I gather before starting the application?
 - A strong mentor application includes the potential mentor's relevant background and professional experience about their current and past involvement in STEM education, their experience supporting K-12 STEM educators, as well as any relevant travel information.
- When is the mentor application deadline?
 - The mentor application deadline is January 5, 2026, at 11:59 PM ET.
- How long does the application take to complete?
 - The mentor application takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.
- Do I need to complete the application in one sitting? Can I save the application and return to complete it later?
 - Mentors can save their application progress and return to the form to complete the application by the deadline.
- When will mentors find out they have been selected to participate in the summit?
 - Mentors will be notified if they have been selected to participate in the Summit by February 2, 2026.

Before the Summit

- What are the pre-summit meetings or trainings? What information will be shared during the meetings and trainings?
 - Team members and mentors selected to attend the Summit are expected to attend any pre-summit webinars and trainings. The pre-summit webinars and trainings provide information needed to prepare the teams and mentors for full participation in the Summit.
- Are the pre-summit meetings and trainings mandatory?
 - Yes, selected teams and mentors are expected to attend all pre-summit meetings and trainings
- What is the schedule for the pre-summit meetings and trainings?

- The schedule for pre-summit meetings and trainings will be shared with the teams and mentors who have been selected to participate in the summit.
- How should teams prepare before arriving to the summit?
 - Teams should attend all pre-Summit webinars and clearly define their focus area (recruitment or retention), problem statement, goals, and the challenges and context they aim to address. Teams should also meet to define roles and planned actions and hold at least one to two meetings with their assigned mentor to build camaraderie and strengthen alignment around a shared goal before arriving at the Summit.
- How should mentors prepare before arriving to the summit?
 - Mentors should meet with their teams to better understand their needs and context and attend all pre-summit trainings and webinars to prepare to support their team's logic model development.
- Will these meetings and trainings be recorded?
 - These meetings will be recorded and resources used during these sessions will be made available electronically/digitally.
- What should I do if I miss a meeting?
 - If you cannot attend a webinar or training, please reach out to SSEC staff member, Addy Allred (AllredA@si.edu) as soon as possible.
- Do all team members need to attend the meetings?
 - All team members should do their best to attend all relevant meetings, but team leads should be present for all pre-summit meetings and trainings.

During the Summit

- When and where will the Summit take place?
 - The summit will take place from March 27-29, 2026, in Philadelphia, PA at Drexel University.
- What is the daily schedule like? What happens on each day of the summit?
 - Teams will work together in guided sessions led by content experts, complete exercises to explore systems-level change, identify root causes of their challenges, and build their logic models. Throughout these sessions, they will also receive feedback from experts and peers to strengthen their ideas. The Summit will run from approximately 8:30 AM to 6:00 PM each day.
- What materials, supplies, or resources do I need to bring?
 - Participants are expected to bring laptops and phones to interact with presentations and access the learning platform throughout the Summit,

while all other required materials will be provided. Participants should do their best to charge electronics in advance of each day of the Summit.

- What will teams work on during the event?
 - Teams will work on addressing their problem of practice around K-12 STEM teacher recruitment or retention, by developing a strategic plan in the form of a logic model. During the Summit, presentations will provide foundational knowledge about each element of the logic model, directly informing the actions of the teams.
- What is a Logic Model and why will we develop one?
 - A logic model is a visual diagram that shows how a project or program's activities are intended to achieve specific, desired results. It maps the relationship between its resources (**inputs**), its actions (**activities** and **outputs**), and the **outcomes** (short-term, long-term, and overall impact) it hopes to achieve. It serves as a roadmap for planning, implementing, and evaluating a project or program.
- Will there be access to electrical outlets?
 - Participants are expected to arrive each day of the summit with fully charged devices; however, there will be access to a limited number of charging stations throughout the Summit venue.
- Will there be time to do other things beyond the summit?
 - Participants will have free time in the evenings after the programming ends. The day of activities normally concludes at ~6-6:30pm.
- Where will we stay during the Summit?
 - More information about the lodging provided will be released upon your acceptance into the 2026 Summit.
- Is there a dress code for the Summit?
 - Participants should dress in attire that is comfortable, and fall between casual and business casual, suitable for moving around, walking and/or standing all day.
- What will the weather be? What clothes/jackets should I bring?
 - Participants should expect highs in the mid-50s and lows in the high 30s. Participants should bring a winter jacket, hat, gloves, and boots to prepare for the weather.

After the Summit

- What commitments are expected after the Summit? How long is post-Summit engagement?

- Over the course of 18 months, teams are expected to implement their logic model, engage in quarterly check-ins, meet regularly with their mentors, and share lessons learned.
- What reporting or follow-up is required from attendees?
 - Teams and mentors must submit 4 quarterly reports over the course of 18 months.
- Will I be able to contact Smithsonian Science Education Center Staff after the summit?
 - Yes, staff will provide contact information at the end of the Summit.

Travel & Logistics

- Is travel and lodging covered? Who qualifies for sponsored travel and hotel?
 - All participants living outside a 50-mile radius of the Summit venue are eligible to receive Smithsonian Science Education Center sponsored travel and lodging. Travel to/from airports/train stations, and places of residence will not be covered by the Smithsonian Science Education Center. Participants within a 50-mile radius can still participate in the Summit but neither travel nor lodging be covered.
- When should I expect travel information to be sent?
 - Participants selected to attend the Summit are expected to share travel information with SSEC staff by February 6, 2026, for processing via a Smithsonian travel agent. Final travel information will be shared two weeks before the scheduled start of the Summit.
- Are meals provided?
 - Lunch and dinner will be provided on the first day of the summit, and both breakfast and lunch will be provided on the remaining days.
- Will I be able to inform someone of a dietary issue or food allergy?
 - Please provide any information regarding dietary issues and food allergy in the application.
- Can I bring my family? Are children welcome?
 - No, family and children will not be allowed to attend the Summit.
- What will happen if I cannot attend because of weather?
 - If you are unable to attend the summit for any reason, please inform SSEC staff member Addy Allred (AllredA@si.edu) as soon as possible.

