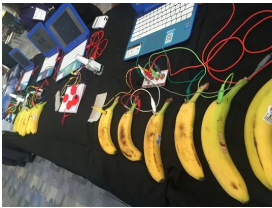


Conversations: Startups need our students to buck up

Kim Covington, Special for The Republic | azcentral.com Published 5:00 a.m. MT Oct. 12, 2016

Arizona SciTech is collaborating with Arizona Commerce Authority to convince companies that the Phoenix region is the center of STEM and innovation



(Photo: Arizona SciTech and Connect Zen)

If you have not noticed, Arizona's tech community is growing "giga" fast. The deadline to increase STEM graduates just got tighter.

The Arizona Commerce Authority's data of new startups and overall businesses in the Phoenix Metro region explain the sense of urgency:

- Phoenix Metro in 2014
 - 5,489 new companies
 - 92 new startups for every 1,000 companies
 - 80 startups per 1,000 companies, nationally
- Phoenix Metro businesses utilizing extensive STEM in 2016
 - 11,754 business locations
 - Employing 186,681 people in those industries in 2016
 - Adding 17,163 jobs from 2011

In December, software companies WebPT and Galvanize are set to bring more than 800 new employees to the area as they renovate a 120,000 square-foot building on Grant Street.

How can the Arizona Commerce Authority continue to attract even more companies and convince them that the Phoenix region is the center of STEM and innovation? How will they convince startups that we've got the talent to build their workforce?

Enter Arizona SciTech



About 1,000 people and 80 exhibitors enjoyed the Arizona SciTech Festival Kickoff Conference. (Photo: Arizona SciTech and Connect Zen)

Arizona SciTech is collaborating with ACA to help.

"There is a surge of interest from schools to get more engaged in STEM-related education," said Dr. Jeremy Babendure, executive director of Arizona SciTech Festival Initiative and assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry at Arizona State University and the University of Arizona. "From Hackathons, to coding to making, there is interest to empower students from elementary through college to tinker and invent. Long term, this will fuel Arizona's SciTech ecosystem where student skills meet the workforce demand."

Arizona SciTech is a state-wide celebration of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM, or STEAM when you include the arts) through a series of more than 1,000 expos, workshops, conversations, exhibitions and tours held in diverse neighborhoods throughout the state like Chandler Science Spectacular, ASU's Night of the Open Door, and Tempe's Geeks Night.

Go [here \(http://azscitech.com/events\)](http://azscitech.com/events) to find events across the state: <http://azscitech.com/events> (<http://azscitech.com/events>)

Chief Science Officers



Chief Science Officers pictured with White House Chief Technology Officer Megan Smith at the Summer Training Institute at Grand Canyon University in July. The CSO Initiative aims to increase STEM interest. (Photo: Arizona SciTech and Connect Zen)

Along with the series of expos, the AZ SciTech just kicked off its new Chief Science Officers Initiative. It's the first of its kind in the U.S. in which sixth- to 12th-grade students are elected by their classmates to be liaisons or ambassadors to the community and private industry for science, technology, engineering and math.

CSOs organize STEM opportunities for their schools, such as speakers, workshops and field trips, empowering them to be a passionate and respected voice for STEM in the community.

This summer White House Chief Technology Officer Megan Smith met with the CSO Founders to congratulate them on spearheading this movement, empowering them with even more ideas.

North Valley CSOs from Sierra Verde Stem Academy and Ironwood, Cactus Shadows and Mountain Ridge high schools met with State Rep. Heather Carter about STEM workforce barriers. Students and schools can learn more about the Chief Science Officers program [here](http://azscitech.com/events) (<http://azscitech.com/events>): <http://chiefscienceofficers.org/> (<http://chiefscienceofficers.org/>).

So if we are to meet the deadline to meet the needs of our growing STEM economy and cultivate the pipeline, we may need to look to those teen ambassadors to engage their peers, educators, business owners and lawmakers to increase awareness and opportunities for all students ... our future workforce.

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