



Legacy Teen Science Café Information

The Teen Science Café Network is built on **six core principles** that make every café **engaging, inclusive, and impactful**. Programs are **interactive**, with **scientist presenters** prepared to connect with teens. **Teen leaders**, supported by **adult mentors**, take active roles in planning and running events. Cafés welcome **diverse teens** and foster **strong community relationships** that strengthen both the program and the community it serves. As a Legacy Teen Science Café Host we ask that you adhere to the six **Core Design Principles of the Teen Science Café Network**:

1. Café programs are highly engaging and interactive. Teen Science Cafés are designed to spark conversation and interaction—not function as lecture series. Their popularity comes from blending a relaxed, social atmosphere (with food and drinks) with engaging discussions between teens and a STEM professional on interesting, real-world topics.

Adult leaders play a supporting role, helping teen leaders create a welcoming environment that feels both fun and educational. Teen leaders are essential to this experience—they greet attendees, collect contact information, set up a teen-friendly food space, engage with presenters and peers, lead opening and closing activities, manage technology, and often conduct video interviews with presenters.

The venue also plays a key role. It should encourage interaction, offer good acoustics, and create a comfortable, somewhat intimate setting that supports conversation and connection.

2. Scientists are carefully vetted and coached in how best to communicate with teens. Effective Teen Science Café presentations focus on storytelling, big ideas, and why the topic matters—especially how it connects to the real world. A few clear, jargon-free visuals can support the message, but simplicity is key. A strong presenter can make even complex topics engaging, while a less effective one can lose an audience quickly. That’s why we look for presenters who are natural conversationalists and storytellers, while recognizing that most will benefit from guidance. With a bit of coaching from the adult leader, STEM professionals can easily shift to a more interactive, teen-centered approach.

Once a potential presenter is identified and vetted, they receive a welcoming invitation that introduces the Teen Science Café model. If they’re interested, a follow-up email provides event details—dates, locations, and times—along with a Presenter Guide and other resources on best practices for engaging teen audiences. The adult leader then meets with the presenter to help shape the café experience, focusing on the core message: identifying the single most important idea and no more than three key takeaways to keep the presentation clear, engaging, and impactful.

3. Teens gain ownership of their program through opportunities for leadership.
Teen Leadership Teams are responsible for all aspects of their program, with adult leaders providing support in the background.

Teen leadership is at the heart of a successful Teen Science Café program. When teens take the lead in all aspects of the café—with adults supporting behind the scenes—they develop a strong sense of ownership while bringing energy, creativity, and authenticity to the experience. This is what makes the model so effective.

Adult leaders meet regularly with teen leaders—typically between café events—to reflect on what went well, address any challenges, and prepare for upcoming sessions. These meetings also provide time to plan and practice leadership roles, strengthening both confidence and teamwork among the group.

Hosting a one-day retreat before the café season begins helps build connections and a shared identity among teen leaders. Incorporating leadership training and interactive activities allows teens to shape their vision for the cafés. The retreat sets clear expectations and establishes a strong foundation for leadership throughout the season.

4. Each café site must have an adult leader who is committed to the program.

Adult leaders bring the energy and dedication needed to organize and support the initiative of teen leaders, making them the cornerstone of a successful Teen Science Café program. While many teens are eager to step into leadership roles, their success depends largely on the guidance and mentorship of the adult leader.

At its core, the adult leader's role is to foster a proactive mindset—encouraging teens to take ownership, make decisions, and do what it takes to make the program thrive. This approach empowers teens to improve, innovate, and continuously strengthen their cafés. It also creates space for them to make mistakes, learn, and grow as leaders.

An effective adult leader recognizes the importance of mentorship and the lasting impact it can have on a teen's path into adulthood. Young people benefit from strong, positive relationships with adults who model leadership, responsibility, and integrity. Supporting teen leadership development is both the most important and most challenging part of the role.

In addition, adult leaders are responsible for vetting and coaching presenters, managing schedules, communicating with parents, and ensuring consistency with the venue—all while keeping the focus on empowering teens to lead.

5. Café programs seek to attract teens with diverse motivations and life experiences.

Diversity in Teen Science Cafés goes beyond ethnicity, culture, and gender—it also includes the many different ways teens connect to and become interested in science. These programs are not just for “science kids,” but for any curious teen. In fact, many participants attend first for the social experience and may not initially see themselves as interested in science. Through the café, they gain a fresh perspective on science and scientists—one that feels more relevant, engaging, and connected to real life. For some, it even opens the door to considering a future in STEM. That’s why it’s important to actively welcome all teens, not just those already drawn to science.

Teen Science Cafés also highlight the wide range of science- and technology-related careers beyond traditional research roles—such as lab technicians, environmental specialists, surveyors, water resource professionals, science communicators, and more. Strong programs intentionally feature presenters with diverse expertise, ideally drawn from the local community, to reflect these varied pathways.

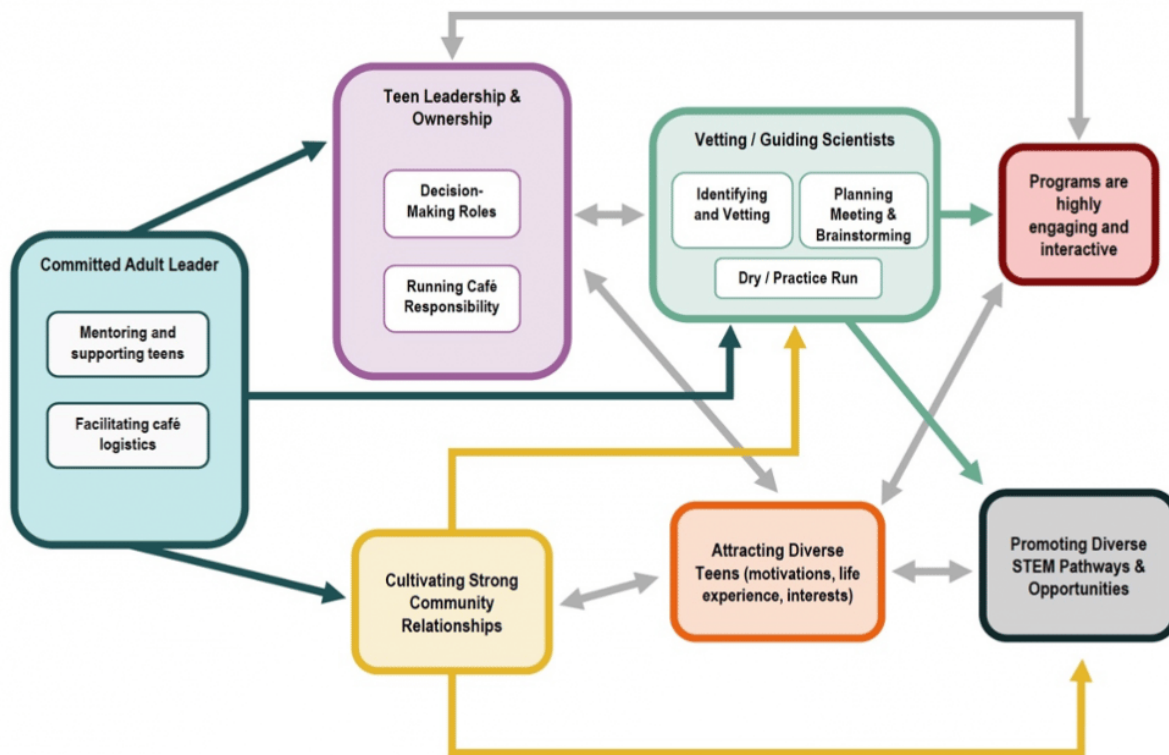
Because cafés aim to make learning meaningful and relevant, cultural awareness is essential—especially when engaging teens who have been historically underrepresented in STEM. Presenters who are unfamiliar with their audience’s experiences may unintentionally create disconnects that limit engagement. Being culturally responsive helps ensure that all teens feel seen, valued, and interested. One effective strategy is asking open-ended, approachable questions that invite participation and build connection.

6. Café organizers actively cultivate strong community relationships.

Building relationships with scientific and teen-serving organizations can increase participation of both teens and scientists, support community awareness, and sustain a teen science café program.

Partnerships are key to building and sustaining a strong Teen Science Café program. Collaborations with universities, research centers, healthcare organizations, and museums can provide a steady stream of engaging presenters, while partnerships with parents and schools help boost awareness and participation.

Working with STEM programs like science fairs, festivals, and robotics clubs keeps teens engaged, and local media can help promote events and highlight presenters. Community organizations such as 4-H, scouting groups, and Boys and Girls Clubs can also expand reach and support new café sites.



Legacy, Partners in Environmental Education awards Teen Science Café Programs funding in the form of \$1000 per semester for the first year, \$500 per semester for the second year, and \$250 per semester for the third year. In return, we ask you to

1. Use the Legacy Teen Science Café logo on all materials/paperwork
2. Conduct one organizational meeting and one Café the first semester, followed by at least 3 Teen Science Cafés each semester thereafter
3. Submit a short report for each Teen Science Café meeting
4. Submit all receipts for money spent.

If you are interested in starting a Teen Science Café at your School, fill out an application on our website at: <https://legacyenvd.org/teen-science-cafe/> Or Scan the QR Code



Legacy will review applications quarterly and select new Cafés **December 15** and **May 31** of each year according to availability. If chosen, we will contact you to set up a short phone or video chat before approving your application. If your application is approved, a Contract will be sent for completion before funding is distributed.

