

VIRTUAL EXCURSIONS

CREATE AMAZING STEM ENGAGEMENT
PROGRAMS ONLINE

Partnering
for Impact



An Australian Government Initiative



Team up on big ideas

Partnering with others can amplify your impact with your audiences and the community. First, you need some essentials for a good partnership.

- 1** Trust: you need to know that your partner, big or small, has your back.
- 2** Have clear expectations of roles and responsibilities. This can include branding, event preparation, speaking — whatever is involved you need to be clear who is doing what.
- 3** Create shared goals and an understanding of where goals are different but complementary.
- 4** Good planning is critical, so make sure you set up the tools to help everyone know where you're at and what's next.
- 5** Develop respectful communication and excellent listening skills.
- 6** Have a giving attitude. Partnering is about helping others as well as gaining benefits for you and your organisation.

New partner ideas: Think outside the box. How?

Come up with ideas for who you could partner with by:

- > Ask your audience
- > Look in your community of practice such as Inspiring Australia, the Virtual Excursions Australia network or Australian Science Communicators
- > Think of overlaps with other industries and organisations including the arts, culture and sport
- > Look at other organisations that may share similar goals to you, even if they do completely different things.

“Building relationships is a process. You will find over time there are certain partners you especially like to work with and you can build an even stronger relationship.”

**Karen Player, Founder,
Sydney Science Education**

What are the benefits of partnering?

- To learn from others and find peer support
- To help partners to reach their goals
- Reach larger audiences by sharing branding, marketing and cross-promoting each other
- Save money and improve your return on investment
- Raise money or build bigger awareness
- Increase your network and build relationships
- Create a bigger and better event than you could have on your own.

What is Virtual Excursions Australia?

Virtual Excursions Australia (VEA) is a collaborative network of content providers from across the country including; arts, science and education organisations. VEA has a website and a social media presence and is a portal for people wanting information about events and content providers. VEA enables learners from across Australia to have access to high quality innovative educational content.

www.virtualexcursionsaustralia.com.au



Reaching out to new collaborative partners

When reaching out to develop a partnership on a virtual event, consider the value that each new partner will bring to the table. Will this be a replication of the skills and networks that you already have, or will the additional partner enrich your collaboration with a valuable new dynamic?

There is strong value in bringing in partners from all sectors; government, non-profit organisations, SMEs and large corporations. Each partner has their own strengths and should be valued equally. Understand the needs of each organisation, including their strengths and their pain points. Be aware that the speed of decision making can vary dramatically across the different organisation types; and this needs to be accounted for during your shared project. State borders are less relevant in a digital age, however the issues you need to consider for online STEM programs are timezones, language and accessibility.

Things to consider when starting a collaboration

- How will different organisations communicate effectively?
- What are the goals of your collaboration?
- What are the barriers to your collaboration?
- How will the collaboration get funded?
- How will decisions be made?
- How will you unify your public messaging?
- What processes will you have in place to handle workflow?
- How will you assign responsibilities, timelines and documentation of your project?
- Which skill sets do you need to gather together across the consortium to be effective?
- What will the in-kind contributions from each organisation be?
- Are you going to be managing large or small project teams?
- Are your child protection policies the same across the different organisations?
- Can you get collateral sign-off quickly from each organisation's marketing teams?
- Is it possible to engage with organisations beyond traditional STEM organisations; how can you bring in culture and the arts?

The target audience should be clearly defined in a discussion amongst your consortium partners. Their characteristics, needs and abilities to connect with you remotely should form the basis of your collaborative project.

Designing your session

Once you have an idea about what you want to do and have an initial core team, it's time to design the session and plan the details. Here are some planning tips:

Brainstorm as a group.

Diversity is strength. Ask:

A What is important to the audience? Why would a participant want to come?

B What are the goals for all partners involved?

C What are your expectations for your organisation and other partners?

D How do we communicate with each other, especially when things are not working?

E How relevant is this to today's society?

F Are there opportunities for interaction and hands-on STEM/STEAM learning?

G How adaptive and responsive will we be? Will we test and invite feedback and then make changes if needed for the next event?



Photo: Virtual Excursions Australia.

Working together best practice

Have an agreement

Have something in writing that covers: shared expectations, deliverables, timeframe.

Shared work area and file store

To ensure all team members and partners can access and share ideas and contribute to plans, create shared folders and files using Google Drive, Dropbox or Microsoft Teams.

Shared project management

Tools like Trello, Asana, Basecamp, Monday, Microsoft Teams etc, even Google Docs and Sheets (online spreadsheets) are brilliant as a central point for activities and next steps. You can set up a simple structure, for example, with themes for each part of the activity or event you're going to run. It's easy to plan tasks and due dates. You can also include links to documents or other files. It's simple to tag people to let them know there is a question and you can discuss tasks within chat boxes.

Good communication processes

Ensure you have regular meetings. Check-in on progress, address any challenges and celebrate the small wins.

Hot tips!

- > Think about what unique benefits you or your organisation bring to a partnership. For example, small organisations may be: more agile and can adapt quickly, have stronger local audiences, offer diverse and rich content. Big organisations may be: better resourced, have more digital infrastructure, offer good policies and established processes attractive to Government agencies.
- > Make sure when you're partnering with others that you agree how you will share your marketing channels with each other.
- > If you're in a large organisation, connect your communication/marketing/social teams to have a shared campaign.
- > Work with communicators and performers who are comfortable with the video experience. Give shout-outs to your partners wherever you can so it's a positive experience.
- > Don't lose sight of your ROI, for example track your metrics and whether you hit your goals. Be clear on outcomes and report on them.
- > Be very mindful of how cultural and intellectual property is being shared and treated.
- > Check off on legal requirements including: privacy, trademarks and police checks.

Scenes from the National Science Week 2019 event Limelight, a collaboration between Murray Arts, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Inspiring Australia documenting the plight of the endangered Pygmy Perch through 360 animation in the round. Photos Nat Ord, Manifeasto.



What could possibly go wrong?

Short answer is, there's always something. Think about the following to help the best possible partnering emerge.

- Is your digital communications software easy to use?
- Can people outside of your organisation contribute to shared projects easily in real-time?
- Do you have a dashboard where everyone can see the status of each project and the milestones to achieve?
- Can you run brainstorming sessions with remote team members easily?
- How easy is it to onboard new people to your project?
- How will remote team members understand the processes involved?
- Do you expect large volumes of files to be generated? How will this be managed?
- How will communications and file security be managed?
- Could you do all of this remotely?
- Does your collaboration have someone who knows about current collaborative technologies and how to implement them?
- What is the timeline for training your team and third parties?
- Who will manage the inevitable helpdesk questions that will come up?
- What are your plans for when things go wrong?

Events with impact

Here are some examples of the types of partnered events you could offer.

Online science festivals

Science festivals are known for their vibrancy and entertainment. You can bring multiple providers, from diverse backgrounds together. Entertain, educate, engage and celebrate.

Some international examples:

- Cambridge Science Festival 2020
- US Science Festival
- Pint of Science
- COSI Science Festival

Citizen science projects

Enable people to contribute to science through citizen science projects. Can you run a citizen science activity online in real-time?

The Australian Citizen Science Association has a fantastic list of projects online (e.g. EyeWire, FluTracker, AstroQuest) and backyard projects (e.g. FrogID, Birddata and NatureMapr). Anyone with a mobile phone or internet connection can actively participate.

Where to find projects?

- Australian Citizen Science Association's Project Finder
- SciStarter
- Zooniverse

Working together on a challenge

Teams of people work together virtually to solve problems, design solutions, create art.

When new satellites are being built, scientists and engineers from around the world contribute to the plans and designs. Plant biologists can view samples in a remote microscope to identify species.

Read more on how to run a 'mini-build' here: [STEM Mini-builds; emulating collaboration outside of school.](#)

Hackathons

A hackathon is most commonly a 2-3 day creative, intensive competition where a diverse group of people solve problems using technology as an enabler. You don't necessarily have to know how to code: hackathons are great design, business and marketing development processes.



Above: CEO Dr James Johnson and artist Michelle Grimston at the launch of Geoscience Australia's artist in residence program.



Artists at work. Photo: Geoscience Australia



Art and rock materials. Photo: Geoscience Australia.

When to host your event

Look for a great national day/week/month to be part of! Earth Science Week, NAIDOC, National Science Week, Spark Innovation Festival or the Victorian Innovation festival, National Disability Day and more.

Working with Indigenous contributors

For ideas on appropriate acknowledgement working with Indigenous people and their content, watch this recent webinar from Aus Council Arts with Terri Janke **First Nations protocols in a digital space - Creative Connections by Australia Council for the Arts**

Content providers team up for activities presented by the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration. Photo: Fizzics Education.



Case Study: The Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, families suddenly had their children home. The US-based **Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC)** realised that they could help by offering education and entertainment. For 25 years, the CILC has connected organisations with classrooms, and is keen to connect with more Australian content providers. In March 2020, they developed their communities of learning from the start of COVID-19, connecting 20 organisations and delivering programs to 35,000 kids, parents and teachers.

The centre ran 200 programs from 25 of their key providers, for years K-6. All these sessions were live and interactive via Zoom.

Having existing relationships with a range of organisations that wanted to share their content meant they could develop content quickly.

Jan Zanetis, CILC's Managing Director says, **"I'd recommend looking for other people who are working in the same space as you. Or, find people who are engaging, for example, think about actors who are good across video"**.

Some of the challenges they faced included monetising the content. Initially, content providers volunteered their time. CILC also coordinated donations from parents and secured grants. They are currently exploring ways to make the money needed to continue running the programs.

After running the program, a survey showed 90% of respondents wanted to continue participating and 60% were open to participating during the coming school term for a fee. Through daily evaluation polls they found that 95% of respondents (parents and teachers) indicated that they would recommend the programs to others.

Pricing your programs

Pricing of your programs can create engagement in its own right. Think about your own perceptions of price, does cheaper always mean a better service or product? Free programs might potentially bring in large numbers of people, but these people equally have less investment in attending beyond curiosity, so expect last minute cancellations. Conversely, pricing a program too steeply can mean reduced engagement as you narrow the ability of the public to attend.

Not all organisations have direct funding. Think carefully about the needs of your consortium partners and what it takes for them to be involved in your collaboration. Open dialogue matters greatly here. Your goals for engagement with your target audience as well as your partner needs and the anticipated outcomes should determine how you price your online programs.



Working with virtual backgrounds.
Photo: Fizzics Education

Case Study: Sydney Science Trail

The Australian Museum and The Royal Botanic Garden are working together for National Science Week 2020 to create the **Sydney Science Trail**, a national contemporary science program delivered online as a virtual experience. The aim is to create something unique that capitalises on the strengths from both organisations. The organisations have many things in common: geographic location and a focus on natural history, research and community programs.

Tori Tasker, Creative Producer at the Australian Museum says that benefits from working together on a new online program include being able to build a nation-wide event and working alongside other people.

“Everyone is keen to work together and the support from each other as we work through a new way of presenting events, has been very valuable to me personally,” she says.

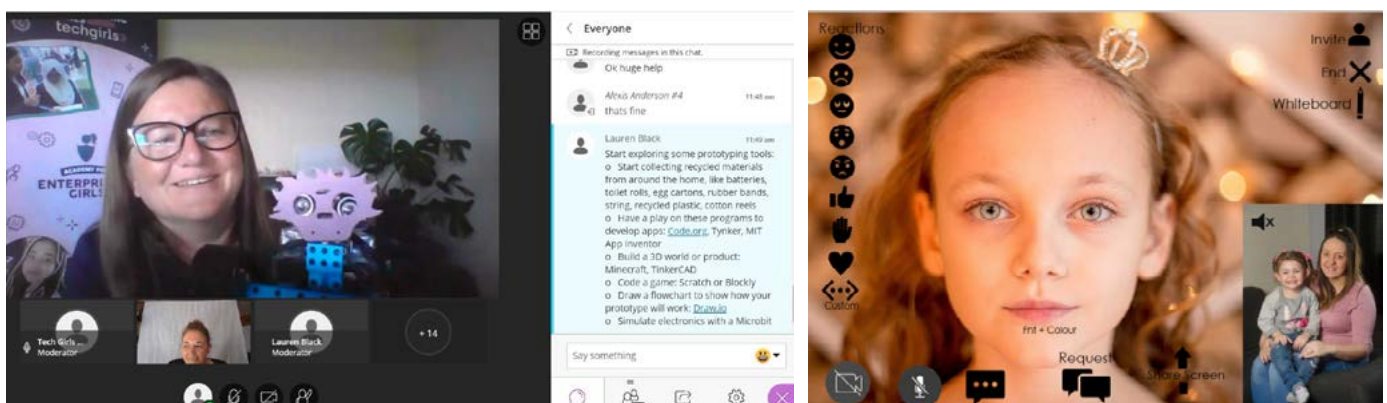
Tori recommends starting with understanding your potential partner before getting into the planning.

“Have the long-term goal in mind. Start then build. Figure out that you have the same overarching goal and what you can bring to the table.”

A couple of the challenges for forming this partnership has been the rapid change to operations as a result of COVID-19, the short time-frame to adapt, and the desire to set up a quality program before National Science Week in August 2020.



Science Week activities. Left: Free Museum Weekend 2019 © Australian Museum, photo N. Langley. Right: Science Week 2016 © Australian Museum, photo J. Horan



Case Study: Girls in STEM Design Challenge

University of Technology Sydney Women in Engineering and IT (WiEIT) has an ongoing partnership with the Tech Girls Movement Foundation. In April 2020 they delivered an online **Girls in STEM Design Challenge**. Fifty girls in Years 5–8 took part in the initiative to improve people’s lives while practicing physical distancing, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

“Partnering with Tech Girls Movement Foundation allowed us to share the workload and expertise, increase our reach, deepen our impact and leverage each other’s technology resources,” says Lauren Black, Women in Engineering and IT Program Coordinator.

Participants learnt about different jobs in STEM and about the importance of these jobs, met other like-minded girls who were into STEM, and reported that the challenge made them want to study STEM subjects at school, do a job in STEM and learn about STEM at home.

Challenges in running the event as partners included keeping each other accountable for operationalising ideas, which worked well for the online STEM Design Challenge as the event met shared objectives.

Future programs include UTS STEM x Play curriculum-integrated primary school program and the Search for the Next Tech Girl Superhero Challenge.

Left: The Girls in STEM Design challenge workshops happened virtually because of the pandemic. Right: One of the design interfaces developed by the girls. Photos: UTS.



Sapphire coast events happening in the beautiful southern NSW coast. Photos Bournda EEC, NSW Department of Education



Other partnership events

Sapphire Coast Science Festival

Sapphire Coast Regional Science Hub Sustainability Education Network has run a Science Festival every year since 2014. Previous festivals have included citizen science projects like ‘Birds of a Feather’ utilising the Atlas of Life in the Coastal Wilderness (ALCW), a project documenting biodiversity on the Sapphire Coast of southern NSW. Five online events are planned as part of the upcoming 2020 festival.

According to Doug Reckord, Principal of Bournda Environmental Education Centre, NSW Department of Education, all the hub members are passionate about increasing community awareness and involvement in regional activities and the importance of science in everyday life.

“There is a real interest in science and sustainability and a demand for quality activities for people of all ages. The Festival has also brought our organisations closer together and catalysed more effective collaboration and communication,” says Doug.

Challenges: Funding and coordinating the many partners involved. Enablers: using shared project management and collaboration tools including Basecamp software provided by 2pi software, one of the hub members; regular meetings; continuously thinking of new online models that will deliver good outcomes.

City Nature Challenge weekend

City Nature Challenge (CNC) weekend organisers from Adelaide, Geelong, Redlands City and Sydney met with citizen scientists online for “virtual parties” to identify and correct species on the iNaturalist website to be added to the Atlas of Living Australia. One of the key benefits from the partnership — between a range of organisations including universities, city councils, private and not-for-profit bodies — was being able to share diverse skills. These included: social media, WordPress, Canva, technical writing, taxonomy, and field naturalist skills.

The main challenges included achieving social media exposure, managing face-to-face training with participants working around the bushfire crisis and then COVID-19. Michelle Neil, secretary and social media moderator with the Australian Citizen Science Association says they changed their thinking and adapted, flipping their message from ‘online pizza parties’ to a ‘backyard bioblitz while in lockdown over the ANZAC Day weekend’ and ‘virtual identification party’”.

During the four-day CNC event and online identification parties more than 24,000 observations were added to Atlas of Living Australia. Worldwide the CNC in 2020 contributed over 815,000 observations to international databases.

2021 Craft ACT Artist-in-residence program

Geoscience Australia is teaming up with Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre and ACT Parks & Conservation Service. Selected artists will engage with Geoscience Australia’s geologists on the National Mineral and Fossil Collection and other Earth science research. It’s not the first time Geoscience Australia has partnered with artists. In October 2018, 50 artists from the ANU School of Art & Design partnered with Geoscience Australia to create new artworks, some of which were unveiled and exhibited at ANU’s School of Art in August 2019.

What's next for you? - Brainstorm space

What's one thing you'd like to work on?

Who are three organisations you might reach out to?

What are you planning to do?

How can the people you've connected with, and the Inspiring Australia teams, help you reach your goals?
