



## Virginia's first [STEM Learning Ecosystem Community of Practice \( SLECoP\)](#)

### BACKGROUND

This community STEM movement originated, as an incubator, within Newport News' Brooks Crossing Innovation + Opportunity Center in 2018-2019. Coastal VA STEM Hub then launched as a regional effort and expanded in 2020 to serve [GO VA Region 5](#) under the Virginia Initiative for Growth & Opportunity. The City of Newport News contracted with TIES in 2020 through an open RFP to convene 12 months of regional stakeholder engagement to plan what our STEM Learning Ecosystem should be, how we would serve our communities, and approaches that these regional leaders expected to happen to support long-game STEM skill-building in our Pre-K to adult career seekers in Coastal Virginia. Over 57 regional stakeholders readily agreed upon three shared goals:

- *Champion STEM fluency and competency*
- *Support Career Focused STEM Programming that aligns Pre-K-to adult STEM programming to STEM Careers in our region*
- *Strive to be an inclusive collaborative community with a DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) focus*

In 2022, the TIES Global Community privately invited COVA STEM Hub to complete and submit an application to join this STEM Learning Ecosystem of Practice.

COVA STEM Hub funders include, among others, the City of Newport News, Society of American Military Engineers, and Virginia Peninsula Community College with the Virginia General Assembly. Several private sector industry leaders have expressed interest in supporting COVA STEM Hub and are in discussion with our STEM partners who are 501(c)(3) entities and able to receive the offers.

In May 2023, COVA STEM Hub was announced as [one of nine new STEM Hubs](#) around the world.

Coastal Virginia STEM Hub serves Region 5 of the VA Initiative for Growth & Opportunity and strives to support STEM initiatives in the cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; and the counties of Accomack, Isle of Wight, James City, Northampton, Southampton, and York.

### Strategies and Approaches:

*November 2021, October 2022, and October 2023* – COVA's SLEPCoP successfully launched the Annual STEM Exploration Community Event at Brooks Crossing Innovation + Opportunity Center in 2021. Attendance the first year was 275 people and by [2023](#) attendance reached 722.

Over the years, attendees visited from NoVA, Richmond, Accomack County, Winston-Salem, Waynesboro, and the entire Coastal Virginia area.

Year one of 2022-2023, with Virginia General Assembly funding in partnership with VPCC, created a grant opportunity for educators and non-profits to request funding for new STEM programming with a few structures. Expectations from approximately [\\$450,000](#) in grant funds to

engage and scale programming to reach 11,372 residents in one year were quickly surpassed. Based on first quarterly reports received; the 2023 grantees have engaged over 13,000 Coastal VA (Hampton Roads/Eastern Shore) residents with new STEM programming and feedback has been phenomenal. This first year's grant offer was intentionally designed to conduct a regional needs assessment. Many of the grant recipients have expanded STEM literacy and skill building in Coastal Virginia over the first and second quarters of funding, reaching many underserved communities.

*March 2023* – STEM grant opportunities were posted, soon after [2023 grant awardees were announced](#). Grant awardees spanned 15 of the 17 cities and counties in the region.

*May 2023* – COVA STEM Hub's partners were also recognized as one of [111 global STEM Learning Ecosystems](#) at the National/International Convening.

*October 2023 – ongoing* – Statewide Committee plans are in place for Norfolk to host our state's first Invention Convention in late spring of 2024. Partners would include Virginia Tech, Norfolk Innovation Corridor, Coastal VA STEM Hub, and leaders from the [Worldwide Henry Ford Organization's Invention Convention team](#).

### **Literacy & Skill building:**

[STEM Learning Ecosystems have been cited in the \\$52 billion federal CHIPS and Science ACT 2022](#). The inclusion of STEM Learning Ecosystems into the federal bill follows months of planning and coordination led by the STEM Ed Coalition with support from the STEM Learning Ecosystems Community of Practice and its backbone organization and co-founder, TIES.

### **Stakeholders and Partners:**

Partners are expanding constantly but currently include:

[TIES](#), [NIA Center for Integrative STEM Education](#), [NASA LaRC](#) and [NASA eClips](#), [NSBE Jr. Chapter of The Links](#), [VSGC](#), regional school systems, [V-POST](#), [VAST](#), [VMASC](#), [ODU's iLab](#), [SAME](#), [Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board](#), [Newport News Public Schools STEM Advisory Council](#), [USN NIWC Atlantic](#), [VASBA](#), [Nauticus Foundation](#), [Norfolk Innovation Corridor](#), [Rosie Riveters](#), [Brooks Crossing Innovation + Opportunity Center](#), [Newport News Public Library System](#), [Virginia Beach Public Library Foundation](#), [Jefferson Lab](#), [Virginia Living Museum](#), [The Mariners' Museum and Park](#), [VA Aquarium & Marine Science Museum](#), [Portsmouth Museums](#), [Virtual Science Teachers](#), [FullSTEAM with Norfolk Parks & Recreation](#), and [VA Air & Space Science Center](#).

[A STEM Learning Ecosystem Community of Practice](#) encompasses schools, after-school and summer programs, science centers, museums, libraries, teachers, businesses, and families that constitute a rich array of learning opportunities.

For further information, please call 757-355-2132 or e-mail [covastemhub@gmail.com](mailto:covastemhub@gmail.com)

<https://www.nnva.gov/2855/CoVA-STEM>