

Frequently Asked Questions

about the Flagstaff Festival of Science In-School Speaker Program

How long has the Flagstaff Festival of Science been offering the In-School Speaker Program?

This program has been bringing scientists and STEM professionals into K-12 classrooms for more than 15 years. Since 2009, we have had more than 200 different scientists and STEM professionals from 47 different organizations volunteer to give presentations to K-12 classrooms. Also since 2009, we have had more than 630 K-12 educators from 42 different schools participate in the program by requesting STEM presenters for their classes. This program brings science to life for an estimated 4000 to 6000 students each year, which, since 2009, equates to reaching a total of up to 80,000 K-12 students!

How and when does the program come together?

The Flagstaff Festival of Science recruits STEM and STEAM professionals (e.g., scientists, engineers, doctors) who are interested in volunteering their time and energy to give presentations to K-12 students and educators. The process begins when speakers indicate their commitment by filling out a presenter registration form. By early August we have a list of presenters, their areas of expertise, presentation topics, and preferred grade level audiences. Later that month, the Festival shares this list with STEM educators in all Flagstaff and Northern Arizona schools. Educators review the list for presenters who would be a good fit for giving presentations to their class(es). Typically, they are seeking presenters who will fulfill a curriculum need, or reinforce concepts that are being introduced to their students. Those educators fill out a registration form, requesting up to 3 choices for classroom presenters. In early September we make a master matching list, and share with the presenters, a list of all the educators who requested them, along with their contact information. Finally, the presenters initiate contact with the educators who requested them and arrange the details (logistics, timing, topics) of their presentations. This usually takes place in mid- to late September or October. Some presenters also like their contact information to be shared with the educators, so educators can initiate communications. Presentations take place throughout the school year, often into the spring semester.

What are the benefits of the program?

For *presenters*, we are aware that you may not receive funding or professional support for outreach activities. However, giving presentations to K-12 students and educators is an investment in the future, as it helps promote and improve overall science literacy in our society and pave the way for the next generation of scientists and the future STEM workforce. It's also incredibly rewarding and stimulating to see the enthusiasm for STEM topics from young learners, hear their great questions, and see their faces light up when they learn something new. It also reminds you of ***why*** you do what you do, and just how cool it is to be a scientist, or an engineer, or a doctor, etc. It also helps improve your STEM communication skills, including the skills needed to communicate with your professional colleagues.

For *educators*, it brings STEM topics to life for your students. It helps them make connections and see examples of real STEM professionals working in our community, and see practical applications of the STEM topics covered in school. The content of the presentations may complement what you have been teaching, or it may introduce something new for your students. It also allows students to identify with STEM professionals on a human level, seeing them as the regular people that they are. Bringing in STEM experts also enhances your knowledge and understanding of the content you are teaching.

Do we have to schedule presentations during the 10 days of the Flagstaff Festival of Science?

No. The In-school Speaker Program runs throughout the entire school year. Although most presentations happen in the fall, before the December holidays, some presentations can happen in the spring. Once presenters and educators are connected, they can schedule the timing of the presentations whenever it works best for everyone.

Is there a way for program participants to give feedback about the program and make suggestions?

Yes! Each year in February, we send surveys to all the presenters and educators who participated in the program. Based on this feedback, we make modifications to various aspects of the program, like the registration process, recruitment, or how information on the webpage is presented, etc.

Can you remind me of what I signed up to present?

Understandably, we sometimes get this question from presenters who signed up to give in-school presentations and then have to wait several months to hear about their requests. The answer is, “Yes.” Just send us an email and we will remind you.

Do you offer technical support for presenters who may be new to giving classroom presentations, or who are looking for ways to improve their science communication skills to K-12 audiences?

Yes! We offer free workshops for presenters that include tips and best practices for communicating STEM topics to broad audiences, including K-12 students and educators. Stay tuned to our Education Initiatives webpage for information about the next presenter workshops.

If I get requests from multiple educators from the same grade at the same school, can I ask them to combine classes, or arrange presentations for the same day?

Yes! You can ask, and often this works out. Once you are in communication with the educators who requested you, you can work together to arrange the logistics and timing of your presentations to maximize efficiency.

My team of educators would like to participate in the program together and request a presenter for all our classes. Can we register together, or do we each need to register (fill out the form) separately?

Either way works. However, if we have separate registration forms from each educator, we can better keep track of all the educators who participate. We prefer individual signups for tallying the overall statistics and impact of the program. But, either way, your requests will be shared with the presenter(s).

What happens if I miss the deadline for signing up / registering for the program?

If you are a *presenter*, the deadline for signing up is sometime in mid-August. This gives us time to put together the master list of presenters, their topics, intended grade levels, and then share that info with educators. There is a short grace period after the posted deadline, but once we send out the master list, it's too late to add you for the current year.

If you are an *educator*, we give you access to the master list of presenters 8 to 10 days after the start of the school year (to give you time to get settled into a routine). Then, you have 10 to 14 days to review the list, make decisions about who you'd like to request, and fill out the educator registration form. The deadline is usually in early September. Once educators have made their requests and we have created the master matching list, it's too late to add you. However, if you miss the deadline, email us to see if we have a list of other presenters who are willing to be contacted directly to arrange presentations.

Once educators make requests for presenters, who is responsible for initiating contact?

Because it is the presenters who are volunteering their time to speak in classrooms, we want to be respectful of their time, so we offer them the opportunity (and responsibility) of initiating contact with the educators who request them. However, some presenters like it when educators reach out to them, so that is also an option.

I'm a teacher; what happens if I don't get any of my presenter choices?

Unfortunately, this can happen, but it is very rare. See FAQs below for possible reasons for missed connections. Over the years, out of many hundreds of educators who requested presenters, there are only a few known instances of an educator not getting any of their three requests. Understandably, this is frustrating. We will always try to make sure this does not happen. If you are not getting your requests, let us know via email and we will try to follow up. Don't give up.

I'm a presenter; what happens if I don't get any requests from educators for my presentations?

This is rare, but it does happen from time to time. It is primarily a function of the content that educators need to cover in their curricula. If you have a topic that is not clearly related to the K-12 STEM curricula, it's hard for educators to justify the time. When filling out the presenter registration form, it helps to make the title and description of your STEM presentation content appealing to K-12 audiences – and bonus points if you can relate it to the appropriate K-12 STEM education standards.

I'm a teacher; what happens if the presenter(s) I requested never contacted me, or didn't respond to me?

The first thing to do is check your spam / junk folder. If you still can't find an email from them, well, unfortunately this happens occasionally, so try to be understanding. We do ask presenters to take the responsibility to initiate contact with the educators who request them (because presenters are the ones volunteering their time). But sometimes life happens, and they have changes in their priorities, schedule, or available time. Or perhaps it just slipped off their radar and they forgot – scientists are busy. If they did contact you, and you responded, your response might have been filtered into *their* spam / junk folder. Another possibility is that scientists may not respond to requests from educators who teach grades that are different from the grade levels to which they want to present (for example, if a second-grade teacher requests a presentation from someone whose topic is aimed at the high school level).

I'm a presenter; what happens if I email an educator who requested me, and they never get back to me?

The first thing to do is check your spam / junk folder for a response. If there is no response, well, this happens from time to time, so try to be understanding. Your email may have been filtered into their spam / junk folder. Or perhaps their curriculum, schedule, or priorities changed after they requested you and they just couldn't find the time to fit you in. Or perhaps it just slipped off their radar and they forgot – teachers are busy. Life happens and we all have to be understanding and forgiving.

Having said all that, keep in mind that concise, clear, unambiguous communication is a key to success. *The purpose of communication is not merely to be understood, but so that you cannot possibly be misunderstood.* Over-communication, repetition of details, and follow up / confirmation emails can't hurt.