Program Contacts:
Keliann LaConte, 720-974-5835
Principal Investigator, STEAM Equity Project
Professional Development Manager, SSI/NCIL
klaconte@spacescience.org

Sarah Ostman
Communications Manager
ALA Public Programs Office
sostman@ala.org

Media Contact:
Karly Pitman, 720-974-5874
Executive Director
pitman@spacescience.org

IMMEDIATE RELEASE December 14, 2020

12 RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES SELECTED TO RECEIVE FUNDING TO OFFER BILINGUAL EXHIBITIONS AND STEAM PROGRAMMING

Boulder, Co. December 14, 2020

The Space Science Institute's National Center for Interactive Learning (SSI/NCIL), the American Library Association (ALA), Twin Cities PBS (TPT), Institute for Learning Innovation (ILI) and Education Development Center (EDC) are pleased to announce 12 rural public libraries that will participate in a project to bring culturally responsive and gender equitable STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) learning to library patrons, especially often-underreached Hispanic/Latino populations. The project is generously funded through the National Science Foundation.

Through the STAR Net STEAM Equity Project, library partners will each receive $15,000 over four years to participate in professional development activities, support community collaborations and purchase STEAM learning materials.

In partnership with library staff and their community collaborators, the project will empower tweens and their families to pursue equitable STEAM learning and career paths by leveraging their existing strengths, interests, and diverse cultures. Selected libraries will host the following traveling STEAM exhibitions and develop associated programs and outreach kits with their collaborators and community members.

- Soy Super: Conozco, aprendo, crezco / I'm Super: I learn, grow, change
- Somos Super Creativ@s: Resolvemos, ingeniamos, construimos/ We're Super Creative: We solve, build, engineer
- Soy Super Curious@: Observo, exploro, pregunto / I'm Super Curious: I observe, explore, wonder

The link for the STEAM Equity partner libraries and their collaborators is now live at http://www.ala.org/tools/programming/steamequity/libraries.

In northwest Arkansas, the Berryville Public Library will partner with a local soccer club, the North Arkansas College and Arkansas Immigrant Defense — all organizations with strong connections to the local Hispanic/Latino community — to reach new learners, particularly young people.

> "In order to set tweens on paths for STEAM learning and careers, it is imperative that tweens and their families feel like STEAM learning belongs to them," wrote Berryville Public Library Director Julie Hall in her winning proposal. "If tweens and their families feel excluded from learning environments because of their culture, gender, economic status, or any other reason, they will quickly associate their experience of exclusion with all similar activities, and likely abandon continued explorations."

Through a two-part application process, applicants were judged by peer reviewers on several criteria, including programming plans, involvement of partner organizations and community need. Selected libraries serve populations of 25,000 or less, have a Hispanic/Latino population that is at least twice the national average for rural communities, and represent 12 states.

The United States' ability to compete economically and find innovative solutions to emerging problems is increasingly dependent on a workforce that is skilled in STEM disciplines. To solve tomorrow's problems and continue exploring our world and our universe, diverse and creative thinkers must be welcomed into STEAM learning and empowered to pursue STEM careers.

With more than 60 million individuals, the Hispanic/Latino population is now the U.S.' largest ethnic minority group and the fastest growing segment of the rural population. However, Hispanics/Latinos earned 13.5 percent of science and 10

2

[percent of engineering bachelor's degrees](#) nationwide and make up only 7.5 percent of the [U.S. science and engineering workforce](#). Hispanic women/Latinas are even more underrepresented, making up only about 2 percent of [STEM occupations](#).

Public libraries are hubs for lifelong learning, especially in rural communities that may not have easy access to the scientific and academic centers in more urban locations, and they can bridge the gap to better prepare the next generation of Hispanic/Latino Americans for careers in STEM.

The STAR Net STEAM Equity Project offers a wealth of expertise and [free resources](#) from ALA's [Public Programs Office](#) and [Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services](#), in collaboration with [Space Science Institute's](#) [National Center for Interactive Learning](#) (project lead) and [Twin Cities PBS](#) (TPT) and their [SciGirls](#) program. The project builds on the STAR Library Network, or STAR Net (where "STAR" stands for Science-Technology Activities and Resources), which offers free STEAM Ahead @ Home resources and a searchable [STEM Activity Clearinghouse](#). Librarians and library workers are invited to use STEAM learning resources, including gender equitable and culturally responsive digital media, hands-on activities and family resources from the award-winning PBS series, *SciGirls* and *Latina SciGirls*.

About the STAR Library Network (*STAR Net*)
Libraries across the country have been reimagining their community role to strengthen community-based learning and foster critical thinking, problem solving, and engagement in STEAM learning. Public libraries serve people of all races, ages, and socio-economic backgrounds. They often serve as "on-ramps" to STEAM learning by creating environments that support intergenerational explorations and welcome newcomers to the community.

STAR Net is a hands-on learning network for libraries and their communities across the country (www.starnetlibraries.org). *STAR Net* focuses on helping library professionals build their STEM skills by providing activities, resources and training. In addition to its STEM Activity Clearinghouse, *STAR Net* offers blogs, a webinar series, workshops at conferences, and a monthly e-newsletter. *STAR Net* is built upon a strong network of collaborators and partners, led by SSI's NCIL. Additional partners include the American Library Association's Public Programs Office, American Society of Civil Engineers, Collaborative Summer Library Program, Lunar and Planetary Institute, University of Colorado, University of Virginia, and many others.

About the STEAM Equity project

STAR Net STEAM Equity's library outreach advisors are Veronica Casanova, librarian at the Tulare County (Calif.) Library System's Exeter Branch Library; Miguel Ruiz, supervising librarian at Evanston (Ill.) Public Library; and Flo (Florencia) Trujillo, President of REFORMA de Nuevo Mexico (NM).

The project's planning committee includes Cheryl Juárez, who contributes over 25 years of experience creating professional development models and curricula; Dr. Damary Bonilla-Rodriguez, a national leading authority on leadership development, especially as it pertains to diversity and inclusion; and Maddie Correa Zeigler, an informal science educational consultant and grant proposal developer.

With the support of the project team, participating public library workers will:

- Collaborate and co-create gender-equitable STEAM exploration pathways* with community leaders (especially those serving Latinx populations) and youth.
- Actively encourage tweens and their families to engage and persist in STEAM explorations in the library and beyond.
- Grow in their ability to work with community collaborators to initiate and sustain STEAM learning opportunities for female and Latinx populations.

Together, participating library partners and project leadership will:

- Learn how library workers can more effectively support tween interest and persistence in STEAM learning in their rural communities.

- Share what we are discovering about STEAM learning and community collaboration with library workers, educators, and those in STEAM-related professions.

About SSI's National Center for Interactive Learning (NCIL)

NCIL is dedicated to expanding the understanding and participation of families, youth, teachers, and citizens in science and technology (http://ncil.spacescience.org). We foster collaboration between STEM professionals and educators to bring the wonder of science and engineering directly to people. Our programs span a range of audience needs and delivery methods, including traveling museum and public library exhibitions; educational videos and websites; hands-on resources and activities; educator workshops; and digital games and apps. Our programs are designed to be accessible to all, and to inspire the next generation of STEM innovators. They reach a nationwide audience with inspirational, fun, and innovative STEM experiences.

About SPACE SCIENCE INSTITUTE

Space Science Institute (SSI) is a nonprofit, public benefit research and education 501(c)(3) corporation founded in 1992 with a vision to expand humankind's understanding and appreciation of planet Earth, our Solar System, and the universe beyond. SSI's mission is to (a) enable scientists to make new discoveries, (b) increase science and technology literacy for people of all ages and backgrounds, and (c) inspire youth to pursue science-technology education and career opportunities. It is headquartered in Boulder, Colorado, with locations distributed across the U.S. and internationally.

www.spacescience.org

SSI scientists work on many prestigious space missions, including but not limited to the Mars Exploration Rovers, Rosetta, Mars and Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiters, Mars Science Lander, Juno, ExoMars, OSIRIS-REx, and Mars 2020. Areas of research also include heliophysics, observational astronomy (with such facilities as Hubble Space Telescope, SOFIA), and exoplanets (Kepler).

About the American Library Association

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. For more information, visit www.ala.org.