



LIBRARY SERVICES

- 1. Describe why your library would like to participate in this project, including community interests in STEAM topics, demographics, collections, or other resources or programming focus areas related to biology and earth science (especially those related to citizen science and hyper-local biology). What are your prior experiences with offering public programs about STEAM topics? Or about topics specifically related to birds?**

The Spring Hill Branch Library is eager to participate in this project to deepen community engagement with STEAM topics, particularly biology and earth science, in ways that are interactive, accessible, and hyper-local. We've seen growing interest among our patrons—children, teens, and adults—in hands-on science programming, nature exploration, and environmental stewardship. These interests align especially well with citizen science initiatives that allow participants to contribute meaningfully to real-world research while learning more about the ecosystems around them.

The Spring Hill Branch Library serves a diverse, intergenerational community with strong connections to local natural areas, including parks, preserves, and nearby coastal ecosystems. Many of our patrons are homeschool families, retired educators, or outdoor enthusiasts who are eager for learning opportunities grounded in local relevance. Our collection includes materials on biology, birds, Florida wildlife, climate, and conservation, and we regularly feature displays on these topics.

We have previously offered STEAM programming such as hands-on science experiments, nature talks with local experts. While we've offered general science programs, we are excited to expand specifically into ornithology, as birds are both accessible and compelling entry points into deeper scientific inquiry. Birdwatching programs, migration tracking, and habitat preservation efforts are all topics we would love to introduce or enhance through this project.

This opportunity would help us build on our STEAM foundation, empower citizen science participation, and connect our community with meaningful, place-based learning experiences

- 2. Please describe who from the library (including staff and volunteers) will support this project. Provide detailed information about their experience and planned role on the project. CVs/resumes are not required.**

Jennifer Hodges – Spring Hill Branch Library - Supervisor

Role: Project Manager

Experience: Jennifer has over 30 years of experience in environmental management and policy. She has successfully led multiple grant-funded initiatives focusing on STEM programming,



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community engagement, literacy, and digital inclusion. Jennifer's background reflects her commitment to interdisciplinary learning and sustainability. For this project, Jennifer will provide strategic direction, ensure alignment with the library's mission, and oversee compliance with grant requirements.

Belicia Torres – Spring Hill Branch Library - Library Services Assistant

Role: Program Development and Facilitation

Experience: Belicia has over (2) two years of experience coordinating environmental education programs. Belicia is a certified Florida Master Naturalist and has volunteered with the Florida Audubon's EagleWatch program, monitoring nest HN020. Belicia will be responsible for leading public workshops and training sessions related to the project.

3. Community Dialogues are an optional component of participation in this program. While your library will not have to host a Dialogue following STAR Net guidelines, we'd still like to know how you receive feedback from your patrons. Please describe how your library has incorporated patron and community feedback in the past, and how you may do so as part of this program. For example, have you collected surveys, conducted focus groups, had targeted conversations with populations who don't currently take full advantage of library services?

Our library values patron and community feedback and regularly seeks input to guide our programs and services. In the past, we have used a variety of methods to gather feedback, including printed and digital surveys following programs, informal conversations with patrons at service desks, and suggestion boxes located in public areas. We also track attendance and engagement to help evaluate the success of programs and identify areas for improvement.

To reach underserved or underrepresented groups, we have participated in outreach events and participated in community fairs where staff speak directly with residents who may not currently use the library. For example, we have engaged families, seniors, and teens to better understand their needs and interests, then used that feedback to shape program offerings, collection development, and outreach efforts.

As part of this program, we plan to continue collecting feedback through post-program surveys and informal discussions with attendees. We are also open to exploring new methods, such as brief interviews or comment boards, to ensure that the voices of all community members—including those who may not yet be regular library users—are heard and considered.



4. A major focus of the Flight Path project is to reach underserved audiences with STEAM programming. Identify at least one principal underserved audience you will reach with programming for this exhibition and make a strong case for why you have chosen this audience and how you will reach them. Please reference Census or other data in making your case. A generally underserved geographic area can be considered an underserved audience. Please note that the intent of this requirement is for you to reach new audiences or to increase reach to those audiences. Successful applicants will demonstrate plans to increase participation of their underserved audience, not merely state that they use the venue currently.

One principal underserved audience we aim to engage through the Flight Path project is the youth population in Spring Hill, Florida, particularly those from low-income households and rural areas. Spring Hill, with a population of approximately 114,804, faces significant economic challenges; the median household income is \$52,950, and nearly 20% of residents live below the poverty line. These economic factors can limit access to quality Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) education and resources.

Additionally, Hernando County's rural setting presents unique obstacles to STEAM engagement. Rural communities often lack the infrastructure and resources necessary for comprehensive STEAM programming, leading to disparities in educational opportunities.

To address these challenges and increase participation among this underserved audience, we plan to implement the following strategies:

- **Partnerships with Local Schools and Organizations:** Collaborate with schools and community organizations to host STEAM workshops and events, ensuring accessibility for students from low-income families.
- **Mobile STEAM Labs:** Develop mobile STEAM labs that can travel to various parts of the community, bringing hands-on learning experiences directly to students who may not have the means to attend events at centralized locations.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs connecting students with professionals in STEAM fields, providing guidance, inspiration, and real-world insights into potential career paths.

By focusing on Hernando County's youth, especially those from economically disadvantaged and rural backgrounds, we aim to bridge the gap in STEAM education and inspire the next generation of innovators.



5. Collaboration with STEAM organizations and individuals with STEAM expertise is very important to the success of this project, as are partnerships with community organizations that do not focus on STEAM. Please tell us what partnerships with STEAM (4H, astronomy clubs, museums, rockhounds) and community organizations (like cultural institutions, schools, churches, etc) and individuals in your community/region will help you to make your programs a success. Have you worked with these organizations/individuals before? If you'd like to partner with a new organization, what are your plans for building that partnership? Please reference BOTH types of organizations (STEAM organizations and community organizations) in your response. A letter of commitment is not required, but we do request that you confirm interest in participation with the venue, rather than sharing possible partners.

To ensure the success of our Flight Path programming, we are actively collaborating with both STEAM-focused organizations and broader community partners who bring valuable connections and insights into our community's needs.

We currently have community partnerships with the Hernando Audubon Society and the UF/IFAS Extension Hernando County. These groups bring practical expertise in environmental science through interactive activities, which align well with the Flight Path exhibition's STEAM goals. These partnerships will provide subject matter experts, materials, and volunteers to help us offer engaging programs for all ages.

6. Describe the programs you plan to implement to meet or to exceed the project requirements. Project requirements are: 2 programs for public audiences of any age. Please describe potential plans for these programs. Remember, programs can focus on your local wildlife as well!

To meet and exceed the Flight Path project requirements, the Spring Hill Library will implement two programs designed to engage the public in accessible, educational, and nature-focused STEAM experiences. Both programs will highlight the importance of local wildlife—particularly birds—and encourage participants to explore their connection to the natural environment.

1. DIY Suet Feeder Workshop (Hands-On Program for Families and All Ages):

This interactive, hands-on workshop will invite participants to create their own bird suet feeders using simple, bird-safe materials. During the program, we will discuss the types of birds that live in our region, what they eat, and how we can support them—especially in the winter or during migration periods. Participants will leave with their own homemade suet feeder, a printed birdwatching guide for our local area, and information about citizen science projects like FeederWatch and the Great Backyard



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Bird Count. This program is ideal for families and multi-generational audiences, encouraging learning through doing and fostering care for local wildlife.

2. Lecture: “Flight Path: Birds of Hernando County” (STEAM-Focused Educational Program):

Our second program will be a lecture-style presentation led by a local birding expert or naturalist from a partnering organization. The talk will explore bird species native to Hernando County, their role in the ecosystem, migratory patterns, and conservation efforts. The presentation will include a Q&A session and opportunities for attendees to sign up for related activities like birding walks, online citizen science platforms, or additional library programming. This lecture will be geared toward teens and adults but will be open to all interested learners.

Together, these two programs will promote environmental literacy, support community engagement with science, and inspire curiosity about local wildlife in a way that is educational, interactive, and inclusive.

7. Describe your general publicity plans for promoting your events and community engagement. How will your partnerships organizations described above aid in promotion?

To ensure strong attendance and community engagement, our library will implement a multi-channel publicity plan that includes both digital and in-person outreach. We will promote our Flight Path programs through our library’s website, social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram), event calendar, and e-newsletters. We will also create flyers and posters to distribute across all library branches and post in high-traffic community spaces.

Our partnerships will play a key role in expanding our promotional reach. They will share information about our events through their newsletters, bulletin boards, and family outreach channels. Additionally, we plan to engage with local media, including submitting press releases to increase awareness in the broader community. We will also encourage word-of-mouth promotion by offering simple take-home materials and using library staff and volunteers as program ambassadors.

Together, this community-focused approach to publicity will help us reach a wide and diverse audience, with an emphasis on families, youth, and underserved populations in Spring Hill.

Link to application: <https://community.starnetlibraries.org/flightpathapplication/>