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 the history of science?**

   Our library is eager to participate in this project because our community has shown a clear and growing interest in STEAM learning, especially in areas connected to biology, earth science, and the natural environment of the Florida Nature Coast. Hernando County is home to more than 210,000 residents, including families, retirees, and a large homeschool population. These groups consistently seek accessible, affordable opportunities to explore science topics, particularly those tied to local wildlife, native plants, geology, and environmental stewardship. The library has become a trusted gathering place for these learners, offering programs and collections that help them connect national scientific concepts with the unique ecosystems of West Central Florida.

   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, 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 a required component of participation in this program. While past experience conducting these Dialogues is not required, we'd like to hear how you've gathered feedback from patrons in the past, so we can better incorporate these methods of feedback gathering into our Community Dialogue plans. Participating libraries will receive extensive training and support related to conducting these community conversations. In addition to learning more about how you've gathered feedback in the past, we'd also love to hear what you'd like to focus on in your required Community Dialogue. Building partnerships? Identifying local science? Learning more about the history of science in your community? Whatever interests you!

To learn more about Community Dialogues, either to incorporate them into this project or to your libraries future plans, please visit https://www.starnetlibraries.org/deia/community-dialogues/

Our library uses a variety of methods to gather feedback from patrons, and these approaches have helped us shape programs, adjust services, and respond quickly to community interests. One of our most consistent tools is the use of post-program surveys. These surveys allow participants to share what they enjoyed, what could be improved, and which topics they would like to see us offer next. They often reveal preferences related to program format, scheduling, and the level of hands-on activity patrons are looking for. In addition to surveys, we place high value on informal, conversational feedback. Staff regularly speak with patrons at the reference desk, during programs, and throughout the library. Many of our frequent visitors feel comfortable offering suggestions or observations in these moments, which often gives us early insight into emerging interests or needs. These conversations also help us understand the experiences of patrons who may not be inclined to fill out a formal survey but are eager to share ideas in person. Digital engagement has become another helpful source of feedback. Through our social media channels, patrons comment on posts, respond to announcements, and often share suggestions for topics they would like us to cover. This has been particularly useful for reaching individuals who might not attend in-person programs but still want to participate in shaping library offerings. Messages, comments, and reactions give us a sense of what resonates with the broader community.

Using these methods—surveys, informal conversations, online engagement—we have been able to develop programs that are responsive, community-driven, and aligned with local interests. We plan to incorporate these same techniques into our Community Dialogue plans to ensure that the project reflects authentic, wide-ranging community input.

4. A major focus of the *Science Across America* 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 of the principal underserved audiences we hope to reach through the Science Across America project is youth in Spring Hill and the wider Hernando County area, particularly those from low-income households and rural communities. Spring Hill has a population of roughly 114,804 residents, with a median household income of $52,950, and nearly 20% of residents living below the poverty line. These economic realities significantly limit access to high-quality STEAM learning, extracurricular enrichment, and hands-on scientific experiences. Families facing financial hardship often cannot afford camps, museum visits, paid programs, or specialized materials, making the library one of the only accessible STEAM gateways available to local youth**.** Hernando County's rural character also contributes to disparity in STEAM engagement. Rural communities frequently lack the infrastructure, transportation access, and dedicated programming needed to support consistent science education outside of school. As a result, many children have fewer opportunities to explore science topics, interact with professionals in STEM fields, or participate in hands-on activities that build long-term interest and confidence.

To address these gaps, our library plans to implement several targeted strategies designed to increase participation among underserved youth:

• Partnerships with Local Schools and Community Organizations: We will collaborate with schools, youth groups, and after-school programs to host free STEAM workshops and events. These partnerships will help ensure that students from low-income families and remote areas can access programming without additional barriers.

• Pop-Up or Mobile STEAM Experiences: By developing mobile or pop-up STEAM labs, we can bring hands-on, inquiry-based activities directly into neighborhoods, parks, and community centers. This reduces transportation challenges and allows us to reach children who may not be able to visit the library regularly.

By focusing on youth who face economic and geographic barriers, this project will help bridge local gaps in STEAM education and empower the next generation of thinkers, problem-solvers, and 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 Science Across America 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, the Sierra Club, and the UF/IFAS Extension Hernando County. These groups bring practical expertise in environmental science through interactive activities, which align well with the Science Across America program 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. We realize your program plans may change after award, so you are not obligated to these plans. Please describe potential plans for these programs. Remember, programs can be done in collaboration with your current or future partners!

Our library plans to implement two engaging, community-focused programs that meet and exceed the project requirements while supporting broad participation across age groups. These programs are designed to be adaptable, collaborative, and closely connected to the themes of citizen science, biology, and earth science emphasized in the Science Across America project.

Program 1: "Florida Nature Detectives: A Citizen Science Exploration"

This hands-on program will introduce participants of all ages to local wildlife, native plants, and environmental observation skills. Attendees will learn how scientists collect and record field data, then practice these skills through guided outdoor activities around the library grounds—such as identifying native plants, observing pollinators, using simple tools like magnifiers, and contributing observations to a national citizen science platform. Partner organizations such as UF/IFAS Extension, local environmental educators, or Master Gardeners may assist with instruction or provide expertise. This program aims to build curiosity, strengthen community science skills, and help participants connect national scientific topics to the hyper-local ecosystems of Hernando County.

Program 2: "Earth Science in Action: Understanding Our Changing Environment"

This interactive presentation and demonstration program will focus on the natural processes that shape Florida's landscapes—from weather patterns and water cycles to soil composition, erosion, and coastal ecosystems. Participants will engage with hands-on mini experiments or demonstrations that illustrate concepts in geology, meteorology, and environmental science. Possible activities include building simple erosion models, exploring the properties of local soils, or demonstrating how groundwater flows through Florida's porous limestone. We plan to collaborate with local science educators, environmental groups, or park rangers who can provide real-world insight and highlight the importance of scientific observation in understanding local environmental change.

Both programs are designed to be inclusive, family-friendly, and flexible enough to adapt based on community interest, staffing, or partner availability. They also align closely with the library's mission to provide accessible STEAM learning experiences and support curiosity-driven exploration. By focusing on hands-on activities and connections to local ecosystems, these programs will help participants better understand the role of science in their own community and increase engagement with citizen science initiatives.

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 Science Across

America 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/science-across-america-new-opportunity-for-libraries/