

TexNET

Texas Network for Exhibit-based Learning and Teaching

TexNET partners the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History and the Exploratorium with three smaller science museums that have strong connections to rural and Spanish-speaking populations in Texas—Discovery Science Place, Laredo Children’s Museum, and Science Spectrum. TexNET, a four-year project modeled on the Exploratorium Network for Exhibit-based Teaching (ExNET), of which Fort Worth is a lead member, builds on lessons learned from past exhibit outreach models and addresses the needs of small, rural partners for exhibits, teaching resources, and staff development.

TexNET pairs annually rotating exhibit sets with professional development and capacity-building workshops. Each small museum partner hosts each set of ten exhibits for one year. Exhibit topics are 1) motion, 2) weather, and 3) sound. Workshops focus on inquiry learning techniques, science content, program and workshop design, as well as the institutional needs of each partner.

Intellectual Merit

TexNET puts rich science resources and sophisticated inquiry approaches to teaching and learning into the hands of small science museums that work extensively with rural communities. It provides high quality-science exhibits and programs to traditionally underserved audiences. The network leverages the strengths of the small and large partners to build institutional capacity and their community presence.

Broader Impact

Partner museums will be stronger, more viable institutions with a staff re-energized by professional development. New visitor-centered interpretive strategies will impact partners’ capacity to understand and meet community needs. To expand the network and reach new audiences, exhibit sets remain with the network at the end of the project. TexNET tests how informal science institutions can better support the efforts of smaller science centers and museums to create a stronger regional science education infrastructure.