

Guest Column: Building the Cross-Campus Team Behind the Largest STEM Event in Arizona

BIO5 Institute
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In 2009, the **BIO5 Institute** [1] pioneered the idea of a simple "science pavilion" concept to be held during the newly formed community event the **Tucson Festival of Books** [2]. Due to a shared mission of science outreach and community engagement, over the next several years the **College of Science** [3] joined BIO5 in expanding the original project scope to a series of booths and increased campus involvement, calling the joint effort "Science City."

When I started at the University of Arizona in March 2012, one of the institutional projects I inherited was BIO5's involvement in **Science City** [4]. One of the first meetings I had was with **Elliott Cheu**, then College of Science associate dean, who also served at that time as co-chair of the Science City executive committee. Although we agreed Science City was something the community looked forward to, our small volunteer team behind the scenes running it had become overburdened, unstructured, and therefore not as effective as it might be. We questioned whether the operational and philosophical investment was worth continuing.

Within an hour, together we reimagined an efficient cross-campus, cross-functional executive team, made up of individuals that complemented one another's strengths and had defined, mutually accountable roles and goals, which to me is the definition of a true team.

Over the course of the next months, we asked team members what their passion was, what they had experience doing, and how they saw themselves fitting into a complex, large-scale event execution puzzle. Then, we recruited strategically to fill gaps and build group capacity.

That core team has remained largely unchanged for the past six years. We have grown from a handful of people being challenged with random tasks into a well-defined, cooperative, passionate and effective team of colleagues with shared vision and trust.

The team has established an efficient and effective technological and human system for distribution of labor based on expertise and/or interest, communication and connections that is the key to our ongoing success. The foundation of the committee's work relies on regularly scheduled, in-person meetings that commence every week during the period leading up to the festival. A second pillar of the team's successful and effective work style consists in the fact that it has a clear structure, whereby the different responsibility areas are clearly divided.

Today, the Science City executive committee is the catalyst for bringing together a group of more than 1,200 volunteers from across the UA and the Southern Arizona community for the purpose of leading and organizing what is now considered the largest experiential STEM learning experience in the state of Arizona. The Tucson Festival of Books has become the third largest book festival in the country, and the only one with a focus on science.

I am proud to say that in recognition of the team's effectiveness, we have been honored with the 2017 **UA Team Award for Excellence** [5].

Using as a guide the UA's mission of improving the prospects and enriching the lives of the people of Arizona and the world through education, Science City provides diverse opportunities for tens of thousands of visitors of all ages from across the United States to experience firsthand the wonders of science and technology. Organized into thematic, interactive spaces, Science City now boasts six themed science and technology "neighborhoods" featuring more than 90 participants ? representing campus units, local businesses and industry and nonprofit organizations ? plus campus open houses and tours showcasing the UA as a top-tier research institution, a Science Café featuring UA researchers, and a Science Stage housing panels of national authors and experts presenting on diverse and timely topics.

Science City continues to grow in numbers, popularity and impact. It is an annual event that requires year-round planning and organization on the part of the executive committee and its subcommittees. Ultimately, an enormous number of UA staff, faculty and graduate and undergraduate students participate, along with many STEM-related Tucson-based businesses and nonprofit organizations, with the sole purpose of promoting science literacy and learning in our community.

University departments, programs and clubs are showcased to the public through their participation in the festival. Open houses and tours give the general public the rare opportunity to go inside UA laboratories, meet researchers and listen to lectures. Departments and programs showcase their camps, internships and community volunteer opportunities. Student clubs recruit new members and engage the community in their outreach missions.

As co-directors of Science City, both the BIO5 Institute and the College of Science have a long-held tradition and culture of honoring the land-grant mission of the UA, in addition to an emphasis on science outreach, community engagement, positively impacting our state and inspiring the next generation of scientists. We are proud to work side by side with our campus partners to execute Science City, and look forward to our 10th anniversary celebration in 2018. Learn more at **sciencecity.arizona.edu** [4].

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Links

[1] <http://www.bio5.org>

[2] <http://www.tucsonfestivalofbooks.org>

[3] <http://www.cos.arizona.edu>

[4] <http://www.sciencecity.arizona.edu>

[5] <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/above-and-beyond-employees-recognized-awards-excellence>