

# 2015 ANNUAL REPORT



## About this report

The Science Festival Alliance (SFA) is a professional association of independent science and technology festivals. We are dedicated to supporting both new and existing festivals, and to fostering an international conversation about how to make public science events more meaningful, entertaining, and instructive.

This annual report provides information in two distinct categories:

- 1) **member activities**—the accomplishments of the independently organized science festivals that comprise SFA membership; and
- 2) **network activities**—SFA efforts that support the exchange of inspiration, advice, and resources among members.

Science festivals are the unique product of the communities in which they take place. Most science festivals feature scores of activities, many of which change substantially from year to year. This makes it a challenge to succinctly summarize even one science festival, let alone the operations of all of the SFA's many members. Nevertheless, this annual report provides a useful snapshot of SFA member activities in 2015 based on voluntary self-reporting.



Nebraska Science Festival



GZA looks down from a crane ride at Beakerhead



Rio Grande Science and Arts Festival (RiSA)

“We’ve had tools and cool materials in our hands all day... we haven’t even made it to the last room yet, and I can’t wait to do some of these things with the rest of our family at home.”

Attendee at TinkerFest



## A Letter from the Manager

January 28, 2016

No one can organize a festival without experiencing an emotional rollercoaster ride. Even seasoned professionals still feel the intensity of preparation, the anxiety before big moments, and the rush of success. This ride is pronounced for new festivals, and it usually takes a few years before a festival team is ready to take stock and consider realistic long-term plans.

For the first time in 2015, more than half of SFA member festivals were at or over that three-year mark. This heralds a turning point in our growth curve. New science festivals continue to launch every year, but there is also a new critical mass of experienced teams ready to advance the conversation about how science festivals fill strategic roles in the communities they serve.

One product of this maturation is a greater number of data points and case studies for the impact of science festivals. Collectively, we have now proven not only that a science festival can do incredible things in a single week, but also that festivals can be catalysts for transformative change. Still, it is challenging for a lone festival to document these

impacts year over year. This is why two-dozen science festivals started work in 2015 on EvalFest: a five year, collaborative, multi-site festival evaluation effort described on page 6.

Another product of maturation is the recognition that the rise of science festivals is furthering an entire professional class of activity. Especially in major metro markets, science festivals are setting the stage for independent science performances to take their game to the next level. With a growing network of roughly four-dozen festivals, it is now reasonable to include a tour of festivals as part of a business model for science productions. In 2015 the Science Live project (described on page 7) took a look across the live public science events sector, and found that, just as in other industries, festivals serve as the tent pole productions that elevate professional practice.

Ben Wiehe  
Manager, Science Festival Alliance  
MIT Museum



SkySci Fest (Southern Kentucky Science Festival)



Texas A&M Physics and Engineering Festival



Maine Science Festival

“It is truly a remarkable experience to see the look of amazement on the faces of children discovering that science is really fun and exciting. But the magic of the Philadelphia Science Festival is a whole lot more. In a large organization like ours it brings together people who would not normally know each other, but now volunteer side by side, sharing the wonders of science with the community.”

Festival collaborator, Robert Bartosz, Jefferson College of Biomedical Sciences, Thomas Jefferson University

## 2015 Science Festival Alliance Members

**Arizona SciTech Festival \*\***  
January 30 – March 31, 2015

**Arkansas Science Festival \*\***  
October 3-10, 2015

**Atlanta Science Festival \*\***  
March 21-28, 2015

**Bay Area Science Festival \*\***  
October 22 – November 7, 2015

**Beakerhead**  
September 16-20, 2015

**Cambridge Science Festival \*\***  
April 17-26, 2015

**Celebrate Science Indiana \*\***  
October 3, 2015

**Charleston STEM Fest\*\***  
February 7, 2015

**City of STEM (Downey, CA)**  
April 6 - 11, 2015

**Colorado Springs Science Festival \*\***  
October 3-11, 2015

**Connecticut Science and Engineering Festival**  
October 8, 2015

**Dayton Regional Science Festival**  
November 6-7, 2015

**Eureka! Festival**  
June 12-14, 2015

**Flagstaff Festival of Science**  
September 18-27, 2015

**iExplore STEM Iowa**  
July 2, 2015

**Indian River Lagoon Science Festival**  
September 26, 2015

**Jacksonville Science Festival \*\***  
February 19-21, 2015

**Las Vegas Science & Technology Festival**  
April 24 – May 2, 2015

**LISoundFest: Long Island Sound Science Festival**  
November 7, 2015

**Louisiana STEM Expo \***  
February 28, 2015

**Maine Science Festival \***  
March 20-22, 2015

**Maryland STEM Festival \***  
November 6-15, 2015

**Mind Trekkers**  
Multiple Dates

**MSU Science Festival \*\***  
April 15-19, 2015

**National Math Festival**  
April 18, 2015

**Nebraska Science Festival \*\***  
April 10-18, 2015

**New Hampshire TechFest \*\***  
October 24, 2015

**North Carolina Science Festival \*\***  
April 10-26, 2015

**Philadelphia Science Festival \*\***  
April 24 – May 2, 2015

**Randolph College Science Festival**  
March 26-29, 2015

**Rio Grande Science and Arts Festival (RISA)**  
November 5-7, 2015

**St. Petersburg Science Festival \*\***  
October 16-17, 2015

**San Diego Festival of Science & Engineering \*\***  
March 14-21, 2015

**Science Festival of the Capital Region \*\***  
November 11-15, 2015

**ScienceWorks TinkerFest \*\***  
May 15-17, 2015

**SCOPE STEAM (Missouri)**  
July 2-4, 2015  
September 19 - 21, 2015

**Sitka WhaleFest**  
November 5-8, 2015

**SKySci Fest (Southern Kentucky Science Festival) \*\***  
February 5, 2015

**spectrUM Science Learning Tent at the Arlee Celebration \*\***  
July 2-4, 2015

**SUBMERGE! \***  
October 3, 2015

**Texas A&M Physics and Engineering Festival \*\***  
March 28, 2015

**Virginia Science Festival**  
September 26 – October 3, 2015

**Waco Cultural Arts Fest - SCIENCEFEST**  
September 25-27, 2015

**Wisconsin Science Festival \*\***  
October 22-25, 2015

**Youngstown Regional Science and Technology Festival**  
September 20, 2015

\* = First Year Celebrating  
\*\* = EvalFest participant

“Many of our students live at or below the poverty line. To be able to have someone who can relate to them show them how professionals act and see science in action is beyond valuable.”

Teacher participating in Atlanta Science Festival

### Celebrating in 2016 or later:

Minnesota Science and Technology Festival  
USA Science and Engineering Festival  
WILD Science Jackson Hole

## 2015 SFA Member Activity by the Numbers \*

**1,992,687** Total number of people who visited an SFA member festival

**4,250** Total number of events and programs produced by SFA member festivals

**246** SFA member festival events that drew more than **1,000 visitors**

**33** SFA member festival events that drew more than **10,000 visitors**

**53%** Percent of SFA member festivals employing at least one FTE employee in 2015

**\$7,767,759** Combined budgets for SFA member festivals in 2015

“The scope of this festival was far beyond what I could have even imagined. It was the best weekend of my daughter’s life!”

Attendee at inaugural  
Maine Science Festival

**\$3,009,812** Combined value of marketing and PR generated by SFA member festivals

**10** Number of SFA member festivals with a budget over \$250,000 in 2015

**19** Number of SFA member festivals with a budget of \$50,000 or less in 2015

**15,482** STEM practitioners taking an active role in an SFA member festival

**12,843** Volunteers helping out SFA member festivals in 2015

**3,868** Organizations collaborating with an SFA member festival in 2015

\* Unless otherwise indicated, figures reflect data reported by all 45 SFA member festivals celebrating in 2015.



Flagstaff Festival of Science

## Festivals Make the News: A Sampling of SFA Members in the Media

ARIZONA  
**Daily Sun**

**Science Festival Truly Exploring New Horizons**

The University of Texas  
**Rio Grande Valley**

**Rio Grande Science and Arts Festival Demonstrates  
Common Goals of Science and Art**

**TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL**

**Morehead Planetarium Receives \$1M Donation**

**Omaha World-Herald**

**Forest Full of Life for Nebraska Science Festival**

“There’s a lot of bad blood between stakeholders in our higher education system... Luckily, there are successful and growing events already in place that can point the way forward... Case in point: this weekend’s Wisconsin Science Festival.”

Excerpt from weekly newspaper *Isthmus*,  
October 22, 2015

MILWAUKEE • WISCONSIN  
**JOURNAL SENTINEL**

**Wisconsin Science Festival Can Inspire the  
Next Generation**

**Bangor Daily News**

**Science Isn’t Just for Lab-coat Wearing Researchers**

Montreal  
**families**

**Eureka Festival: A Not To Miss Science Event  
at the Old Port**

**Atlanta**  
MAGAZINE

**Atlanta Science Festival Gets Geeky With Beer**



Kelvin the Robot, the North Carolina Science Festival mascot, catches President Obama's eye, causing a stir on Twitter.



# EvalFest

EvalFest is a five-year project funded by the National Science Foundation and led by staff associated with the North Carolina Science Festival, Bay Area Science Festival, and Karen Peterman Consulting. The overarching goals of EvalFest are to better understand the impact of science festivals by collecting and analyzing data across 24 festivals, and to build the capacity of all science festivals to conduct effective and valuable evaluations. EvalFest is organized as a community-created multi-site evaluation, allowing participating science festival organizers and evaluators to drive the conversation about what is important to measure and how to go about it.

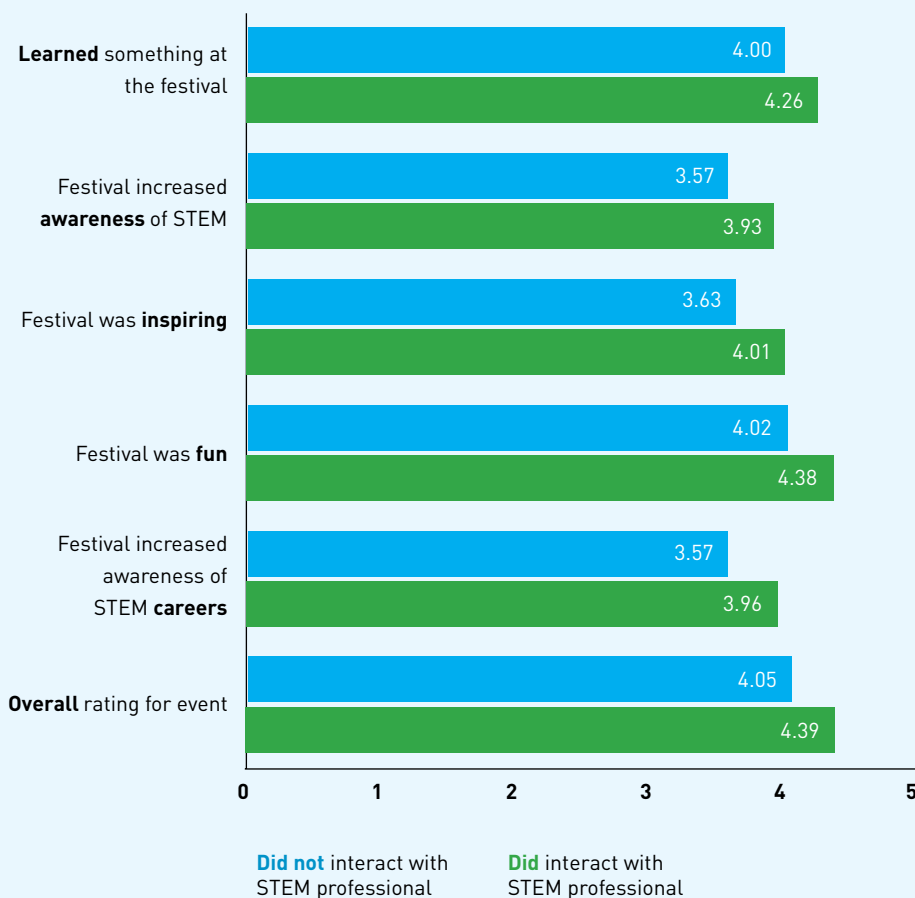
EvalFest kicked off its first full year with a launch meeting in January of 2015. By the end of the year the team had developed several evaluation toolkits available on

[www.sciencefestivals.org](http://www.sciencefestivals.org), and presented at meetings of IPSEC, the American Evaluation Association, and the American Geophysical Union.

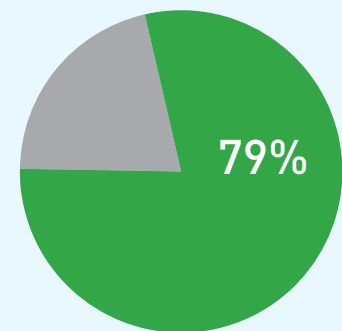
Crucially, in its first year Evalfest implemented an attendee survey across all 24 participating festivals. Evalfest coordinates the use of a shared set of iPads for this purpose, which logged 53,800 miles in shipping from festival to festival. In 2015 over 10,600 surveys were collected, each of which included a set of common questions. Participating festivals can now conduct real-time analysis of their festival data via EvalFest's data dashboard.

EvalFest continues through 2020. Some initial collective findings are presented here, but look for additional resources, news, and festival analysis through SFA communications and through [www.evalfest.org](http://www.evalfest.org).

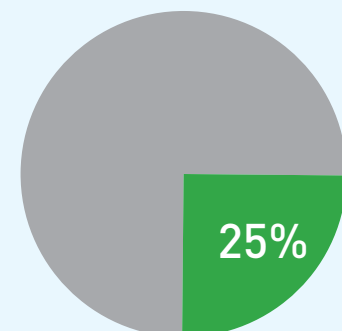
Respondents that interacted with a **STEM professional** at a festival rated their experience higher than those that did not.



79% of survey respondents **interacted with a STEM professional** at participating festivals



25% of survey respondents said this was their **first encounter** with a STEM professional in a year



## SFA Activity in 2015

Over the years, the SFA has grown to encompass both a free membership system and multiple funded projects. The membership system is overseen by a voluntary committee, and funded projects are administered according to the terms of grant proposals. In 2015, the Science Festival Alliance Council met for the first time. The SFA Council is comprised of representatives from SFA members, and has taken on work under the categories of: governance, membership, strategic initiatives, and planning for the International Public Science Events Conference (IPSEC).

### Major Funded Projects

For the third year in a row, National Science Foundation grant No. DRL-1223256 served as the foundation of support for SFA activity. One product of this funding was a completely redesigned website, which launched at [www.sciencefestivals.org](http://www.sciencefestivals.org) in the spring of 2015. An important addition to the website is a searchable, publicly available resource center.

With funding from the Simons Foundation, the SFA launched Just Add Science in 2015. This project supports festival activity that “reaches people where they are.” After a competitive application process, nine festivals were selected to take on new initiatives that integrate science experiences into existing cultural gatherings. We will be following along in 2016 as festival teams experiment with bringing science into open-air markets, sporting events, parades, and other cultural festivals.

Also in 2015, SFA staff managed a Phase I grant from the Science Learning+ funding program. The resulting one-year project—called Science Live—took a sector-wide approach

to live public science events, and considered what might be done to bridge related practice and research across the US and UK. A summary of this project, including a report surveying the public science events landscape, is available at [www.livescienceevents.org](http://www.livescienceevents.org).

### SFA Network Roundup

The 2015 International Public Science Events Conference (IPSEC) was the single most important networking moment of the year for the SFA. Past iterations of IPSEC were designed as pre-conferences of much larger professional meetings. Last June, IPSEC met for the first time as a stand-alone conference, drawing more than 150 professionals from across the world to MIT’s Media Lab. Plans are underway for a second freestanding IPSEC in June of 2016.

Other SFA activity in 2015 included a significant presence at the following:

- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Annual Meeting, San Jose, CA
- Science Learning+ Conference, London, UK
- Public Libraries & STEM National Conference, Denver, CO
- Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) Annual Conference, Montreal, QC
- Accelerating Math & Science Literacy, Simons Foundation Ideas Workshop, New York, NY

“Participating in the Science Festival Alliance has allowed the Science Museum of Western Virginia and Virginia Tech to launch an approachable and rare opportunity for everyday Americans to experience science.”

Erma Williams, Business Manager, Science Museum of Western Virginia, Virginia Science Festival



SKySci Fest (Southern Kentucky Science Festival)



## SFA Networking by the Numbers

**100%** percentage of SFA members that communicated with fellow SFA members

**83%** participated in conference calls and webinars on specific topics

**78%** attended IPSEC

**64%** shared planning documents with other SFA members

**58%** presented on festivals at a professional conference

**53%** visited or hosted a visit from another SFA member

**42%** initiated conversations with funders or collaborators about participating in another SFA member festival



“As the SFA evolves and matures, the network continues to be an incredible resource for ideas, connections, and possibilities, all relating to making public science events more effective and more engaging.”

Jonathan Frederick, Director, North Carolina Science Festival





MSU Science Festival



Youngstown Regional Science and Technology Festival



Jacksonville Science Festival



ScienceWorks TinkerFest



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Cambridge, MA 02139

Online:  
[www.sciencefestivals.org](http://www.sciencefestivals.org)

Email:  
[connect@sciencefestivals.org](mailto:connect@sciencefestivals.org)

Phone:  
(617) 806-6369

Cover photos clockwise from top left:

Rio Grande Science and Arts Festival (RISA)

PHOTO BY: PAUL CHOUY/UTRGV

Texas A&M Physics and Engineering Festival

PHOTO BY: TIM ST. MARTIN

Eureka Festival

PHOTO BY: ROLAND LORENTE

Beakerhead

PHOTO BY: NEIL ZELLER PHOTOGRAPHY

## Supported by:



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FOUNDATION

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