



Building Skills, Strengthening Communities:

THE IMPACT OF
LEARNING FESTIVALS

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Remake Learning is a free peer network for educators and innovators in the greater Pittsburgh region. The network helps people connect, exchange knowledge, collaborate on new ideas, improve their practice, and find funding to spark more engaging, relevant, and equitable opportunities to enrich Pittsburgh's learning ecosystem. Learn more at remakelearning.org.



In 2016, Remake Learning launched its inaugural learning festival called Remake Learning Days. This joyful celebration of learning focuses on creating opportunities for youth alongside their families to experience innovative, hands-on learning activities across traditional and unique spaces. Learn more at remakelearningdays.org.

وايزز
WISE



WISE is a dynamic platform that promotes innovation in education through a diverse portfolio of initiatives in policy engagement, research, leadership, and practitioner programs. Learn more at wise-qatar.org.

A MESSAGE FROM WISE

What can students learn outside of the classroom that they would not necessarily access in formal education systems? In a world facing challenges such as poverty, conflict, inequality, unemployment, and environmental sustainability, education holds a pivotal role in addressing these issues. However, traditional education often struggles to meet the evolving needs of future generations.

As a global initiative that identifies and promotes innovative practices in education, WISE has also the duty to make some of those innovations more accessible to its community. Since 2017, our festival Doha Learning Days (previously Doha Learning Week) serves as a platform to expose children and youth in Qatar to learning opportunities that might expose them to different career paths, ignite new thematic passions or simply enable fun and learning by play.

Learning festivals are also an important component of the work of Remake Learning, a Pennsylvania-based Learning Ecosystem whose impact has been recognized by the WISE Awards in 2022. The Remake Learning Days Festival, which has been replicated in different regions in the U.S. and globally, showcases innovative collaborations among different stakeholders in education in the community and at the same time creates opportunities for new collaborations that enrich the learning opportunities children and youth can access.

Remake Learning and WISE have partnered to conduct this study and generate evidence around the urgent need for transformative approaches in education policy and practice; and the urgent need for creative modes to deliver that. Learning Ecosystems have the potential to reshape education by creating vibrant learning communities, fostering impactful ecosystems, and facilitating measurable change.

This report contributes to a toolkit of innovative solutions that can be employed to address pressing global challenges in providing quality education. With a specific focus on Learning Festivals and their capacity to foster 21st-century skills, holistic competencies, and public-private partnerships, this initiative underscores WISE's commitment to inclusivity, especially for underserved learners. In a rapidly changing world, this effort symbolizes WISE's dedication to revolutionizing education and bridging the gap between existing systems and the evolving needs of future generations.



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**"I want my children to have
a safe community, I want them
to have strong, compassionate values
and empathy for their fellow man,
and I want them to continue to have a
love of learning because I think if they do
then it will motivate them to help
make the world a better place."**

- CHATON TURNER, PARENT

FOREWORD

Ever since personality quizzes became a trendy slumber party activity in fourth grade, I identified as a learner. I grew up in an environment that was international, diverse, and supportive, where I naturally inherited the idea that learning is not synonymous to school, but exists in all areas of life.

During my time as a Youth Ambassador for Southwestern Pennsylvania's Remake Learning Days, I had the opportunity to observe fun, casual, and sometimes unexpected or spontaneous learning in others while promoting and documenting events. I developed my public speaking and content creation skills, but also experienced genuine joy and fulfillment in the celebration of learning. I interviewed families learning to design and 3D-print keychains, young museum volunteers inspired to contribute to its exhibits one day, and professors and professionals attempting to make sophisticated equipment often found in college laboratories portable and accessible to middle schoolers. These are hands-on activities that we don't get exposure to within the confines of a classroom. When initiated in an event such as a learning festival, learning gets put into the broader context of our community; we get to explore our broader interests and potential careers while meeting leaders who become our inspirations and role models.

As someone who moved to Southwestern Pennsylvania relatively recently, Remake Learning Days also introduced me to so many local organizations and great people making positive change. In no other context could a high schooler have experienced the plethora of all Pittsburgh has to offer in such a direct, accessible, and consolidated way. As this report underscores, learning festivals serve as epicenters for interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, creative thinking, and, most importantly, the democratization of information to the entire community. Although there is still much work to be done, I have immense gratitude for the people who contribute to learning festivals, who have made it clear that we are a community that values learning and will continue to meet us where we are.

I am honored to be both a beneficiary and benefactor of this effort. I write this foreword not only as a Youth Ambassador for Remake Learning Days, but also as a participant in learning festivals, a proud lifelong explorer, and an activist who believes that community-centered education is our strongest defense against inequity.

As you read this report, through its many stories, interviews, and anecdotes that represent their owners' lived experiences, I encourage you to consider the impact each interaction can have. Attending a learning festival event could be a life changing experience for a child who has never been encouraged to dream big about their future because they did not excel in school, or for someone who believed that it was too late to try something new. For high schoolers who mistook their family's expectations for their own passions; for adults who believed that they had little common language with younger generations; for students who thought their sole purpose in life was to finish school; for people with learning differences who rarely had information presented in a way that makes sense to them; for high achievers who had spent their whole life believing that their worth is determined by their report card; or for anyone who has ever been discouraged from pursuing something new, a learning festival event can help build momentum and enthusiasm.

Learning festivals are a testament to all that our communities around the world have to offer. Most importantly, they sow the seeds for individuals—adults, children, teenagers, parents, educators—to envision that they have a place to contribute back to that world in their own unique ways.

—**Elaine Gombos**

Remake Learning Days Youth Ambassador
Carnegie Mellon University, Class of 2027



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The idea that education is a shared responsibility involving schools, families, businesses, and community organizations has resurged in recent years due to a growing recognition of the importance of holistic and lifelong learning. In this evolving educational landscape, learning festivals have emerged as influential tools for reshaping the way we approach learning.

Learning festivals are community-oriented, time-bound events that bring together multiple stakeholders around a purpose or theme, with the aim of providing creative and immersive learning experiences to participants. They are a means to engage families and communities around innovative learning through hands-on, engaging activities that complement what is taught in schools and by welcoming families to learn alongside their children. Learning festivals help to foster learning ecosystems, which are made up of a range of interconnected education providers working collaboratively to expand who learns, what is learned, and where learning takes place.

The audience for this report is anyone looking to expand learning innovation and foster community connection in an effort to expand educational resources to students and their families. This includes school leaders, in-school and after-school educators, government employees, philanthropic leaders, and business leaders who want to help propel the next generation of students and future employees.

To develop this report, we drew on interviews with more than 20 festival organizers and youth participants, who shared their insights and perspectives into what makes learning festivals unique. The festivals we studied are taking place around the world - in the Global North and the Global South, with festivals taking place in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, and Oceania. The earliest learning festival we studied began in 1989 (Edinburgh Science Festival) while the festivals in other regions tended to originate in the 2010s and 2020s. These festivals are:

Remake Learning Days - a celebration of innovative experiences and opportunities for youth to develop their sense of creativity, perseverance, and curiosity. The festival originated in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania region of the U.S. and currently takes place across the U.S. and internationally, including in New Zealand, the UK, and Uruguay.

Doha Learning Days - a learning festival in Doha, Qatar that aims to increase access to meaningful, hands-on learning opportunities, broaden the definitions of learning and learning providers, and nurture a vibrant local learning ecosystem.

Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival - a festival in Limerick, Ireland that offers family-friendly activities and activities for all ages while collectively exploring what it means to be a "Learning City."

Generation Amazing Foundation Youth Festival - a festival designed around meaningful youth representation and engagement at major sporting events, including the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

Edinburgh Science Festival - a pioneering celebration of science and technology that harnesses familiar formats like theater and the arts to teach and inspire young people and people of all ages about the sciences.

The Weekender Festival - a music festival aimed at building community and raising awareness about the services and resources available to families and communities in public housing in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in the U.S.

Qatar Sustainability Week - a national campaign to educate and engage citizens about sustainability principles through activities and events held across Qatar.

This report explores how these learning festivals catalyze innovation and foster community, specifically by looking at:

- **How learning festivals build 21st century skills;**
- **The underpinning factors that lead to festivals' sustainability; and**
- **How public-private partnerships help festivals achieve their aims.**

OUR FINDINGS:

Learning festivals offer creative ways to help young people build 21st century skills like problem-solving, creativity and critical thinking. The festivals we studied have done this by providing initial exposure to a variety of skills students can go on to further develop and by structuring festival themes around key skill-building opportunities for real-time learning. Additionally, festivals elevate youth in the festival's design, make creative use of spaces that foster skill development, and link to career-readiness initiatives.

We also explored the reasons for festivals' sustainability to help understand why families and learners show up at learning festivals, why host organizations decide to participate year after year, and why festivals in new regions spring up. Through our interviews, we uncovered four underpinning factors that lead to learning festivals' sustainability. These are that festivals: strengthen the learning ecosystem by fostering meaningful and expanded collaboration among stakeholders; build trust throughout an ecosystem and especially between event hosts and families and among event hosts; leverage financial, marketing, and staffing systems of support; and adopt place-based models that authentically align to a local context.

In learning ecosystems, entities from different sectors will naturally collaborate and come together. In the case of learning festivals, the vast majority of which are run by non-governmental organizations, we saw how cross-sector partnerships took place in many forms and furthered the goals of festivals. We explore the role of governments and the private sector in contributing to learning festival aims, specifically in cases where festivals connect to broader policy initiatives like career-readiness and the role of corporate social responsibility as it relates to sponsorships and corporate volunteers.

Finally, we look at how learning festivals are currently capturing impact through common and uncommon measures as well as the challenges of capturing behavioral change, and we close with words of wisdom from festival organizers on how to create learning festivals in one's own community.

INTRODUCTION

Education is increasingly recognized as a communal endeavor, where communities work collaboratively to ensure that every child, regardless of their background, is equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in an ever-changing world. Throughout history, education has never been viewed as the exclusive responsibility of schools. In many cultures and historical periods, education involved a combination of formal instruction in schools and informal learning through apprenticeships, family teachings, and community traditions. Nevertheless, there has been a disproportionate emphasis on in-school learning, sometimes neglecting the rich array of experiences available within a community.

The idea that education is a shared responsibility involving schools, families, businesses, and community organizations has resurged in recent years due to a growing recognition of the importance of holistic and lifelong learning. This perspective acknowledges that education extends beyond the classroom and is influenced by a wide range of actors.

In this evolving educational landscape, learning festivals have emerged as influential tools for reshaping the way we approach learning. These festivals offer hands-on, engaging learning that complements what is taught in schools. And, they offer parents and caregivers an unique opportunity to learn alongside their children and discover what might be the next spark for a new passion or joyful learning moment.

Learning festivals are a means to engage communities around innovative learning. They help to foster learning ecosystems, which are made up of a range of interconnected education providers working collaboratively to expand who learns, what is learned, and where learning takes place. WISE describes the concept of a learning ecosystem as recognition “that education and learning, and the provision of support for young people more generally, is a collaborative endeavor,” noting that, “a broad diversity of actors and stakeholders has an important role to play and should be proactively involved”.¹

This report will explore examples of learning festivals taking place around the world, drawing lessons on how learning festivals build 21st century skills, the underpinning factors contributing to their impact and sustainability, and the role of public-private partnerships as festivals have taken root in more regions.

The audience for this report is anyone looking to expand learning innovation and foster community connection in an effort to expand educational resources to students and their families. This includes school leaders, in-school and after-school educators, government employees, philanthropic leaders, and business leaders who want to help propel the next generation of students and future employees.

Through collaboration, learning festivals can strengthen learning ecosystems and the demand for innovative learning opportunities for children and their families, with the ultimate goal of helping every child find their spark in life.

Learning festivals are a means to engage communities around innovative learning.

Why a Learning Festival?



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

WHY A LEARNING FESTIVAL?

Learning festivals - sometimes called innovation festivals - are community-oriented, time-bound events that bring together multiple stakeholders around a purpose or theme, such as the celebration of learning or the promotion of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM), with the aim of providing creative and immersive learning experiences to participants. These types of festivals supercharge community engagement by “enabl[ing] learners and their caregivers to discover a wide range of learning opportunities within their community.”² They often bring together a diversity of learning providers, both formal schooling providers as well as non-profit, private, and other “informal” learning providers in support of a common goal.

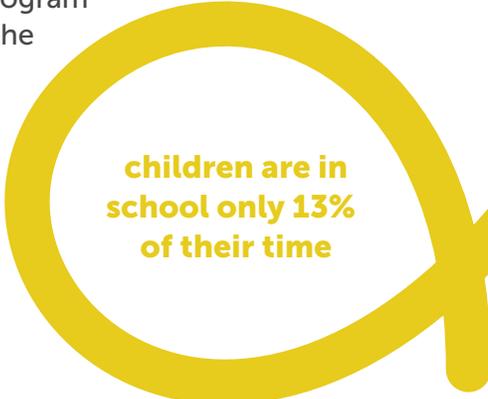
The concept of the festival has been around for millennia and has been historically intertwined with cultural and religious rituals.³ Cudny notes that as societies developed, more activities were “connected with fun and interesting experiences.”⁴ Present-day festivals come in many shapes and sizes from small-scale local events to large regional or national events that are significant to a country’s economic growth and tourism objectives.⁵ Festivals’ purposes today vary widely, though most-well known festivals are linked to the arts and entertainment sectors, such as film and music festivals. What is unique about learning festivals is that they build on these traditional festival models to showcase learning and, in doing so, bring educational and societal benefits.

To develop this report, we drew on interviews we conducted with more than 20 festival organizers and youth participants, who shared their insights and perspectives into what makes festivals special. The learning festivals we studied are taking place around the world - in the Global North and the Global South, with festivals taking place across Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, and Oceania. The earliest learning festival we studied began in 1989 (Edinburgh Science Festival) while the festivals in other regions tended to originate in the 2010s and 2020s.

The festivals we explored had diverse purposes, yet they share a common theme of building community

and enriching the experiences of those in the community - both for children and adults. Similarly, as a European Commission study on festivals found, “even when the rationales of festivals differ, what they all share is a determination to expose their audiences to novel ways of looking at and judging the world, culture and the arts but also society and politics.”⁶

Learning festivals matter because schooling alone is unable to teach young people everything they need to thrive in work and life. Moreover, we often overestimate how much time a child spends in school. A research brief by the National Association of Elementary School Principals in the United States finds that children are in school only 13% of their time.⁷ What happens during the other 87% is tremendously important. As Beth Duda, regional lead for Remake Learning Days in the Suncoast region of Florida in the United States shared, “When we hear that our children are not thriving we tend as a society to point the finger at schools and then try to jam some new program or initiative or change the curriculum in that 13 percent of time. We have an opportunity as a society, as a community, to make a difference in that out-of-school time. I hope kids are sleeping for 30 to 35% of their time, but that still leaves us 50% of the time when they are awake and out-of-school, when organizations, groups, and cultural facilities can have a great impact on high quality learning for adults and for children.”⁸



children are in school only 13% of their time

The types of experiences encountered at learning festivals can be quite powerful. Kammass Kirsch, who was the regional lead for Remake Learning Days in Southeastern Pennsylvania in the United States shared that as a former classroom teacher, she felt like some of the strongest learning moments for her students occurred outside of the classroom. For her, the festival affirms that when children and young people get outside the four walls of a classroom, they can see what learning looks like in a new light and engage in authentic and positive learning experiences.

REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

One of the world's largest and most well-known learning festivals is Remake Learning Days (RLD).⁹ Due to its size and longevity and our own up-close knowledge, we especially highlight the experiences of this festival in our report. The festival is "a celebration of innovative experiences and opportunities for youth to develop their sense of creativity, perseverance and curiosity."¹⁰ It offers a range of hands-on activities for young people and their families, taking place over multiple days in diverse settings such as libraries, tech centers, schools, museums, parks, and community centers. The festival began in the Pittsburgh (Southwestern Pennsylvania) region of the United States in 2016 and has spread to regions across the U.S. and internationally.

RLD is unique for its explicit focus on family engagement and curates events meant for the whole family. The festival strives to create a welcoming, diverse environment for families across all income levels, races, and geographies through inclusive, engaging events, the vast majority of which are free of charge. Moreover, RLD serves as a platform to amplify community resources. It showcases a variety of learning providers, from businesses, to libraries, to recreational centers to laundromats, each contributing to the festival's rich tapestry of educational experiences. In doing so, RLD not only spotlights these valuable resources but also uplifts educators through collaborations that integrate in-classroom learning with the festival content. At its core, RLD is more than a festival; it's a catalyst for a national and global

At its core, RLD is more than a festival; it's a catalyst for a national and global conversation about intergenerational learning and the value of parents and caregivers learning alongside students, as well as what the future of learning looks like.



"What happens when a superintendent sits next to a robotics professor and they start chatting? What happens when a kindergarten teacher is sitting next to an artist and they start chatting? The goal of Remake Learning is to create the conditions where those types of interactions happen all the time, it's part of the DNA here. As you start to bring people together very organically, topics of shared interest start to emerge."

—TYLER SAMSTAG, REMAKE LEARNING

conversation about intergenerational learning and the value of parents and caregivers learning alongside students, as well as what the future of learning looks like.

The festival roots trace back to the Remake Learning network, an interdisciplinary collective of educators, community leaders, and business people in the Pittsburgh region dedicated to fostering learning that addresses the challenges of a changing future. Remake Learning began in 2007 and works to cultivate engaging, relevant, and equitable learning.¹¹ The significant span of nine years between the establishment of the Remake Learning network and the first RLD festival served as a pivotal period for nurturing deep ties and a commitment to this type of innovative learning. It underscores how a solid foundation of shared values has played a crucial role in the Pittsburgh festival's success and longevity.

That said, as RLD has spread to other U.S. and international locations since 2019, different models of implementation have emerged. While a deeply rooted and aligned community is integral to the success of RLD, this community might exist prior to the start of the festival or can be built or strengthened as the festival is introduced.

The 2023 edition of Remake Learning Days took place between April 20 - June 3 in 6 regions

in Pennsylvania (Southwestern, Northwestern, Central, Northeastern, Southeastern, and South Central) as well as in Badgerland, Wisconsin; East Kentucky; Kansas City, Missouri; Knoxville, Tennessee; Suncoast Region, Florida; West Virginia; and internationally in Christchurch, New Zealand; Doncaster, UK; and 11 states within Uruguay.

Across all locations, the festivals featured 1,446 unique events held by 746 event hosts across 15 geographic locations. 93% of the events were free (and the remaining 7% of events charged a nominal fee of \$15 or less to help cover the cost of supplies or admission). 77% of events offered some form of accessibility for attendees, such as accessible and/or gender neutral restrooms, as well as holding the event at a convenient time or in an easy to reach location. The average event attendance was 124 people, ranging from events with an intimate group of five people to large-scale, school-wide events reaching 500+ attendees.¹²



“It’s very easy to stay curious if there’s a lot of ideas put out in front of you and the Remake Learning program really helps with that,”

—JAMESON DIXON, STUDENT

Across all RLD festivals, there are commonalities. Festival events are structured around six themes: Arts, Maker, Outdoor Learning, Science, Technology, and Youth Voice. In addition, responding to demand, the festival organizers have added Professional Development sessions for school, out-of-school, child care and non-traditional educators as well as events just for parents and caregivers. However, the majority of festival events are designed for youth and their families to learn alongside them.

In each participating region, a designated regional lead organization directs local efforts to implement the festival and commits to inclusively designing their festival to reach a wide audience. Their

responsibilities include securing funding support, identifying organizations to host local educational events during the festival, and planning, managing, promoting, and reporting on the festival.

To ensure the smooth execution of these roles, the Remake Learning network provides human and material resource support to each regional lead. At the headquarters level, Remake Learning Days employs two producers, who manage the festival in the Pittsburgh region while providing operations, coaching, communications, and funding support to all of the regional leads. Regional leads are asked to use some of the funding toward mini-grants to event hosts, especially hosts serving neighborhoods and families that are historically or currently marginalized. These mini-grants typically comprise a few hundred dollars (USD) to help hosts rent event space, purchase supplies and refreshments or pay employees to assist at an event after work hours or on the weekends when more families are available to attend.

RLD has demonstrated significant impact and potential for transformative change. In total, RLD has reached more than 225,000 families around the world. Given the festival’s longevity in the Pittsburgh region, a majority of impact data comes from there. An in-depth study of RLD found that families, through their participation in the festival, increased their knowledge of STEAM learning concepts, strengthened their relationships with their children, and became champions and advocates for STEAM learning.¹³

Additionally, participation by youth in out-of-school programming is 10 points higher in the Pittsburgh region than the national average.¹⁴ While the cause for this would be difficult to attribute exclusively to RLD, it is likely that the high prevalence of out-of-school learning providers and connections and alignment to formal schools that have developed through the Remake Learning network and the RLD festival have contributed to this, in addition to the encouragement of greater parent and caregiver support.

DOHA LEARNING DAYS

Doha Learning Days (DLD),¹⁵ another notable learning festival, is orchestrated by WISE, an international education organization headquartered in Qatar. WISE revolves around five distinct learning tracks: innovation for enhancing educational quality and access; ed-tech; education leadership; learning sciences; and learning ecosystems. Within the learning ecosystems track, WISE conducts research, thought leadership, and hands-on programs and organizes the DLD festival as one of its signature programs.

DLD began in 2017 with the dual aim of bolstering local engagement at WISE's biennial international summit and spotlighting Qatar's educational journey on the global stage.¹⁶ As time has passed, its focus has gradually shifted to a more localized perspective. In its 2023 edition, taking place under the banner of youth empowerment, DLD pursued three primary objectives: increasing access to meaningful hands-on learning opportunities, broadening the definitions of learning and learning providers, and nurturing a vibrant local learning ecosystem.¹⁷ Departing from its previous approach of bringing the local to the

DOHA LEARNING DAYS



global, the festival shifted to inviting the annual WISE Award winners to partake in the local event, bringing global stakeholders to the heart of the festival.

The 2023 edition of the festival featured 31 partners, 50 free activities in education, arts, entrepreneurship, technology, and science, and more than 3,500 visitors over four days. This is exponential growth from the 2021 edition that featured 7 partners, 8 activities and 150+ participants.¹⁸ The festival also caters to a diverse group of nationalities and backgrounds reflective of the population living in Qatar by offering events in Arabic and English, catering activities to varying age groups, and by not requiring a registration process or fees to enter the event.

The WISE brand and its parent-organization Qatar Foundation are well-known and respected in Qatar, which drives participation to the festival and with it an expectation that DLD will be a place for a fun, innovative, and meaningful experience. Partners contributing to the festival must follow one core rule: they must develop a meaningful, hands-on activity that festival goers can participate in. Exhibitions, talks, or product demos are not allowed as they are not as interactive.



OTHER FESTIVALS

In addition to RLD and DLD, we studied several other festivals that featured learning in some way. These festivals have various focal points ranging from lifelong learning to sports for development to science to music for good to sustainability. We explore each festival in detail below.

Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival

Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival¹⁹ is organized by a local development company in Limerick, which focuses on social inclusion. The festival is part of the Learning Limerick Partnership, a collaboration of organizations dedicated to lifelong learning. This annual event began in 2011 and initially was limited to the city. Over time, it expanded to include the surrounding county, reaching out to rural communities. Limerick joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2016 and the Irish Network of Learning Cities in 2018, which have served as key partnerships and learning opportunities for the festival organizers.

The festival has evolved over the years. While it was initially centered around family-friendly activities for all ages, it has now added an emphasis on the concept of a learning city. Limerick also hosts conferences during the festival, inviting other learning cities to participate and share their experiences. The majority of events are organized by members of the Learning Limerick Partnership, made up of local development companies, higher education institutions, further education and training centers, youth work organizations, community groups, and government bodies.

An important aspect of the festival is its inclusivity—all events are free and open to everyone, aligning with the partner organizations' commitment to social inclusion. In recent years, the festival has adopted different themes, occasionally concentrating on skills development. In 2023, the festival featured over 160 events such as community arts, well-being, guided tours, technology, cooking classes, business and enterprise, even martial arts. The most recent festival was held under the theme, "Come Learn with Me in 2023."²⁰ Funding for the festival is a collective effort, with each partner contributing to a shared fund, ensuring its sustainability.



LIMERICK LIFELONG LEARNING FESTIVAL



The Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival showcases how a city's dedication to learning and inclusion can be celebrated and shared. It provides a platform for diverse communities to explore and celebrate the joy of learning, reinforcing Limerick's status as a vibrant Learning City.

Generation Amazing Foundation Youth Festival

Generation Amazing,²¹ founded in 2010 during Qatar's bid for the World Cup, has been a trailblazer in supporting youth - particularly disadvantaged and refugee youth - through sports. One of the standout initiatives of Generation Amazing Foundation is the Youth Festival, an annual event that highlights the transformative power of football for social good. The Youth Festival takes a unique approach by aligning itself with major sporting events, making it a beacon for youth inclusion. This approach fills a crucial gap in major sporting gatherings, where youth often do not have a dedicated platform.

The festival, which was first held in 2019 alongside the FIFA Club World Cup, has evolved and adapted over the years. Even during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it continued its mission by hosting a virtual festival in 2020, bringing together 700 youth from 70 countries for workshops and sessions. In 2021, the festival's focus was on uniting youth from diverse parts of the Arab world during the FIFA Arab Cup. In 2022, the festival reached new heights when held alongside the FIFA World Cup. It invited students from around the world who had been part of a year-long school exchange program exploring how sports can address social issues. During the festival, participants engaged in workshops to develop project plans aimed at supporting their communities, with grants awarded to the top five proposals. Generation Amazing Foundation sent a delegation of 10 young women from Qatar and the broader Middle East to the 2023 edition of Common Goal's Festival²³ alongside the FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia. This initiative was supported by the European Union Delegation to the State of Qatar and the Qatar Foundation.

Through Generation Amazing Foundation's programming that includes the festival as well as a number of coaching programs, football clubs, and education and advocacy opportunities for youth, it has reached 1 million beneficiaries since



its inception.²² Initially funded by the organizing committee of the FIFA World Cup 2022, Generation Amazing Foundation is now a standalone NGO, that works to continue the legacy of the World Cup. Generation Amazing Foundation is driven by a commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in its emphasis on gender equality, quality education, reducing inequalities, good health and wellbeing, and partnerships, in addition to a belief in bottom-up, grassroots development.

Edinburgh Science Festival

Edinburgh Science Foundation, an educational charity founded in 1989 by the City of Edinburgh Council, has been a beacon of science communication excellence. While best known for organizing the renowned Edinburgh Science Festival,²³ the world's pioneering public celebration of science and technology in festival format, the foundation's influence extends beyond this flagship event. Their mission centers on year-round initiatives designed to make science and technology accessible, engaging, and culturally relevant. Their Generation Science program collaborates with schools to enhance STEM exposure and uptake.

At the heart of their work is the Edinburgh Science Festival, an annual two-week extravaganza during the March/April timeframe that draws approximately 150,000 attendees. This festival leverages the city's rich festival culture, including the famous Fringe Art Festival, to immerse visitors in the world of science, technology, and innovation. While initially envisioned for economic benefit, it has evolved into an educational and cultural celebration, blending seamlessly with the city's festival DNA. The 2023 edition of the festival welcomed attendees to experience a living laboratory under the theme, "Let's Experiment."²⁴

One of their standout strategies is harnessing familiar formats to teach people about science. Recognizing the power of integrating science into established forms of entertainment and education, they craft dynamic, hands-on workshops, exhibitions, discussions, and performances using familiar formats like theatre, music, and the arts. Their approach hinges on engaging audiences through immersive experiences and pushing the boundaries of public interaction with science.



The festival caters to a diverse audience, ranging from families with young children seeking fun and educational experiences to young adults looking for science-infused social gatherings to adults seeking more serious scientific engagement. Moreover, their community outreach ensures that attendees from various backgrounds, including those from less privileged communities, can access and enjoy the festival. Additionally, they maintain strong partnerships with tech and science sector sponsors, engaging employees from these companies in the spirit of scientific exploration.

In essence, Edinburgh Science Foundation has elevated science communication by seamlessly integrating familiar formats into their initiatives, making science not just accessible but also engaging and enjoyable for all. Their model serves as an inspiring example of how the power of science can be harnessed within the framework of familiar cultural formats and through a deliberate focus on high-quality event curation.

The Weekender Festival

The Weekender Festival,²⁵ organized by the Harrisburg Housing Authority (HHA) in Pennsylvania, represents a unique approach to addressing the needs of housing-insecure individuals and fostering trust within a community. HHA, like numerous other housing authorities across the United States, plays a pivotal role in providing housing subsidies and vouchers to low-income residents. However, what sets Harrisburg apart is its innovative approach.

To address the challenges faced by housing-insecure individuals, HHA is actively connecting residents with vital support services to address insecurities in food, health insurance, transportation, and education. Despite the clear benefits of these services, some residents hesitate to engage due to a lack of trust in government agencies. To bridge this gap, HHA organized the Weekender Festival in partnership with Levels Ready Entertainment.²⁶ The Weekender is a music festival aimed at building community and raising awareness about the services and resources available to residents, which make up approximately 10% of Harrisburg's population.

The festival, which first took place in 2018 and subsequently in 2019 and 2023 (with a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic), serves as a platform to showcase these services. It brings in musical artists



PHOTO CREDIT: BRANDYN REYNOLDS, CULTURE CAPTIVATION

THE WEEKENDER FESTIVAL



PHOTO CREDIT: BRANDYN REYNOLDS, CULTURE CAPTIVATION

from around the country to create an engaging and vibrant atmosphere. The Weekender’s mission is to provide low-income communities with the necessary experiences, tools, and opportunities to improve their quality of life, prosper, and thrive. While not a traditional learning festival, we have included it in our study given its focus on equity and lifelong learning.

The impact of the Weekender Festival is twofold. Directly, it leads to increased sign-ups and usage of services by HHA residents, as reported by the service providers. More significantly, as Communications and Compliance Director Oche Bridgeford shared, the festival fosters trust between the providers and residents and between the residents and the housing authority itself. This trust is crucial in dismantling the “us versus them” mindset that is often present in low-income housing communities.

By blurring these lines, the festival enables the development of a sense of trust between residents and the government. This indirect impact extends far beyond the immediate festival activities. It results in a greater number of residents attending information sessions when new service providers partner with HHA, as residents build trust in the housing authority’s commitment to supporting them.

The Weekender Festival’s influence reaches beyond the housing community. It hosts a large community block party within one of the largest housing authority neighborhoods and holds events outside HHA neighborhoods to encourage interaction between residents and the broader community. Initially, non-residents were hesitant to attend events in HHA neighborhoods due to concerns and stereotypes about violence in the communities. However, the festival has successfully destigmatized these fears, leading to increased mingling between residents and non-residents during the HHA block party in 2023.

This increased social interaction not only lowers stigma but also elevates social capital. Residents can now connect with individuals from outside their community, recognizing each other’s humanity and potential for valuable relationships. These interactions create opportunities beyond the festival, enriching the lives of housing authority residents and promoting equity and social cohesion within the larger community.



PHOTO CREDIT: BRANDYN REYNOLDS, CULTURE CAPTIVATION

THE WEEKENDER FESTIVAL



PHOTO CREDIT: BRANDYN REYNOLDS, CULTURE CAPTIVATION

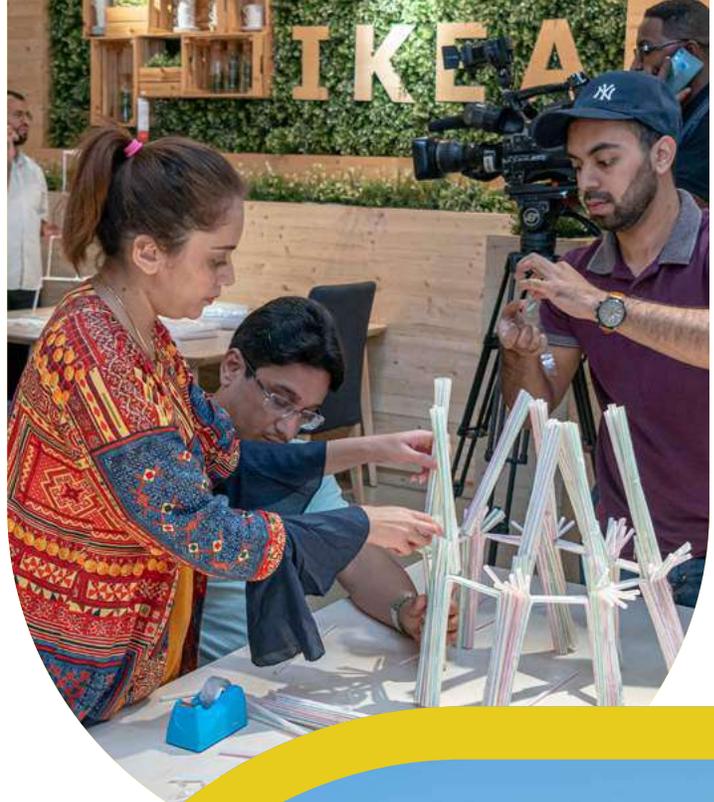
Qatar Sustainability Week

Qatar Sustainability Week (QSW)²⁷ was introduced in 2016 as an initiative by the Qatar Green Building Council. In 2022, QSW shifted to the auspices of Earthna, a subsidiary of Qatar Foundation. Earthna's mission encompasses crafting policy recommendations and fostering community behavior changes to enhance overall sustainability in hot, arid environments. The genesis of QSW stemmed from the goal to raise awareness and build knowledge and skills about sustainability through informal community-led learning opportunities. This includes learning about sustainability principles and how day-to-day actions can contribute to the cause of sustainability.

While the organizers do not officially categorize QSW as a festival, instead defining it as a national campaign, we have included it in our review due to its parallels with learning festivals. This is particularly evident in its extensive collaboration with diverse partners to host engaging public events, all centered around a specific theme. In 2022, the campaign featured 445 distinct activities spread throughout Qatar, involving over 250 partners. Numerous schools actively participate in the campaign, organizing a variety of activities tailored to their preferences and sustainability goals.

The 2023 edition of the festival was held over 8 days in November, and, in total, the campaign has reached more than 500,000 people in its seven year history.²⁸ QSW secures funding from the Government of Qatar and corporate sponsors, capitalizing on the growing emphasis on sustainability, which was augmented during Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Over the years, QSW has experienced consistent growth, both in terms of the range of activities offered and the number of partners involved. The campaign has spurred growth in the number of schools recognized as "Eco-schools" and the rising demand for sustainability-related speakers in educational institutions, marking progress in fostering sustainability awareness and action within the community.



QATAR SUSTAINABILITY WEEK



How Do Learning Festivals Build 21st Century Skills?



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

HOW DO LEARNING FESTIVALS BUILD 21ST CENTURY SKILLS?

In an environment of rapid societal, environmental, and technological change, children and young people need to acquire a range of skills and competencies to thrive in school, work and life.²⁹ These skills can include problem-solving, creativity, computational thinking, and collaboration, to name a few.

The process of skills development can be looked at within the broader frame of the Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, and Behaviors (KASB) framework that many education practitioners use.³⁰ To learn a new math skill for example, one must first have knowledge around it, have a mindset or attitude that one can do the skill, an understanding of the mechanics (e.g. develop the skills to do long division), and have the behaviors to continue using that skill (in this example, healthy behaviors around practicing the skill to further develop it).

One of the exciting things about learning festivals is that they provide access to the knowledge piece of the KASB framework by providing learners' exposure to new subjects, career paths, and interests. Festivals also help shift attitudes about what is possible. A student may not see themselves as an engineer but, after attending a session on how to code a robot, they can begin to see new possibilities. In some cases, festivals can help students with the second half of the KASB framework by helping students to develop and practice new skills in real-time, though they will need ongoing practice outside of the festival to continue to build and hone those skills.

In addition to the KASB framework, many elements of learning festivals help encourage the knowledge, skills and disposition highlighted in Remake Learning's Profile of a Learner.³¹ When Remake Learning asked its network members what they felt students needed by graduation, they realized they had a shared vision on how to support students. They hoped to provide these skills, caring relationships and confidence in students as summarized in the image to the right.

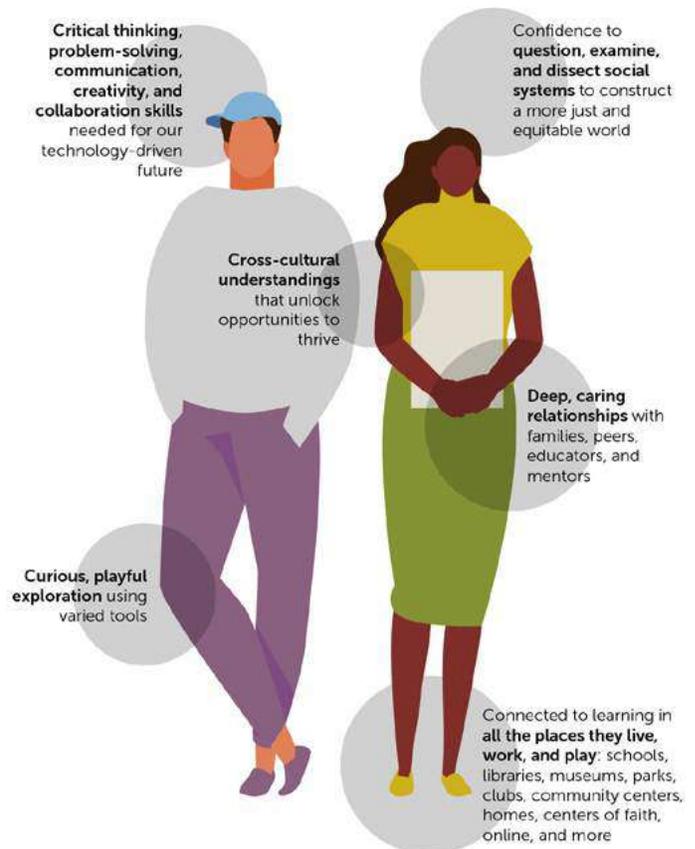


REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

LEARNER PROFILE

Meet the  **remake learning** learners

Remake Learning asked more than 100 of our network members what knowledge, skills, and dispositions today's learners need to develop by the time they graduate. These insights shape our shared vision for what learners experience by participating in programs that are part of the Remake Learning network.



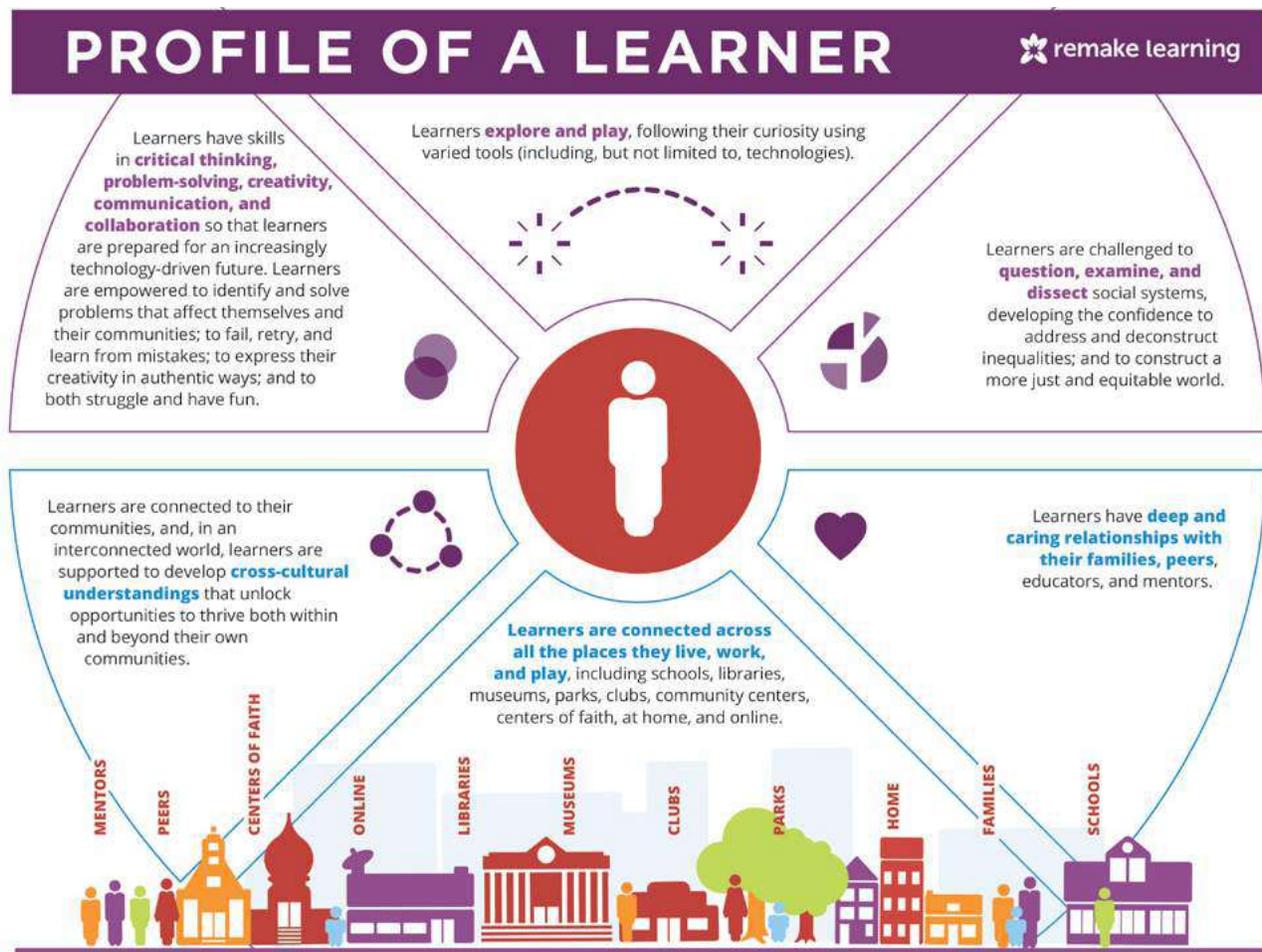
source: Remake Learning's Learning Values, remakelarning.org/about

A deeper study of the Profile of a Learner framework shows it takes skill building, the nurturing of curiosity and a community-oriented environment for a learner to thrive at their potential and support the development of 21st century skills. Remake Learning's Profile of a Learner Framework³² helps festivals think about how to touch upon all six components below when developing the most immersive experience for youth:

- Developing skills sets like critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication and collaboration,
- Letting learners explore and play,
- Connecting learners across all the places they live, play and work,
- A place for deep and caring relationships to grow with their families, peers, educators, and mentors.
- Challenging learners to question, examine and dissect social systems for a more equitable world, and
- Supporting learners in developing a cross-cultural understanding that unlocks new opportunities.

Learning festivals are creative ways to begin to build 21st century skills and below we explore how Remake Learning Days and other festivals have done this, including by:

- Providing initial exposure to a variety of skills students can go on to further develop;
- Structuring festival themes around key skill-building opportunities for real-time learning;
- Elevating youth in the festival's design;
- Making creative use of festival spaces to foster skill development; and
- Linking festivals to broader policy priorities like career-readiness initiatives.



INITIAL EXPOSURE

Learning festivals can play a strong role in providing initial exposure to new topics, especially those that students may not have access to during the school day. Through the festivals' offerings of hundreds of hands-on, engaging activities, learners can discover and explore new areas of interest. As Doha Learning Day festival organizer Shahd Dauleh noted, "[the festival] exposes you to different ways to pick up and develop different types of skills and different organizations within your community that offer topics you haven't seen or you weren't aware of."³³

Exposure can be very helpful in shifting attitudes around what learners find enjoyable or think they are capable of. The Tech, a science center in Silicon Valley in the United States, notes that "young people need 7-12 exposures to an idea before they can imagine a different future for themselves and what they do."³⁴

In some of the festival locations we studied, formal schooling tended to have a more traditional curriculum and provided less exposure to innovative 21st century learning. By showcasing exciting and relevant learning opportunities through festivals, whether that includes learning about robotics or aquatic life or photography, students can develop an initial spark they can potentially pursue in more depth later on. As Elaine Gombos, a Youth Ambassador to RLD in the Pittsburgh region, shared, "the events enabled younger kids to be able to dream big and be exposed to different things that they could do in the future and not just the classic lucrative careers you hear about a lot like doctor, lawyer, or engineer."³⁵

The idea of initial exposure was front and center in one of Suncoast Florida's Remake Learning Days events in 2023. In this event, a local flight company arranged for a helicopter to land in the yard at a public housing authority, creating a memorable experience for both children and their families. Attendees had the chance to sit inside the helicopter and play with the levers and dials and participate in hands-on activities about aviation. This event not only inspired children but also introduced them to new interests and potential careers they may not have discovered otherwise.

Initial exposure keeps kids coming back. Many of the hosts in Suncoast provided a souvenir for attendees that they could take away from the event. For instance, at a nature event, children who attended received a pair of plastic binoculars as a keepsake. Event organizers were encouraged to see children using the binoculars when attending the following day's event. As the week went on, organizers saw children who had accumulated multiple takeaways, signaling that the festival not only piqued their interest but also fostered a sense of ongoing enthusiasm and curiosity. As another example, when Youth Ambassador Elaine Gombos, attended an event at a local museum, she became inspired to volunteer with the museum over the summer. Not only was her curiosity ignited during the festival, but it also inspired a more lasting passion for learning and engagement in her community.



"Education is just too big to do alone, especially in our rural area. Remake Learning Days helps us connect like-minded educators and partners across the region, to expose our students to different career opportunities and hear from diverse voices they might not encounter within the four walls of their classroom."

— KELSI WILCOX BOYLES, REMAKE LEARNING DAYS NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

KEY SKILL-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

Learning festivals offer key skill-building opportunities for youth designed around topics of interest to them. These include experiences that not only offer academic benefit but offer culturally relevant experiences that are well-aligned to competencies young people need to thrive in an ever changing world.

By structuring events according to the six themes of: Arts, Maker, Outdoor Learning, Science, Technology, and Youth Voice, Remake Learning Days helps students to build 21st century skills in various ways. Below we explore Remake Learning Days events by their primary themes looking across regions. Other festivals we studied also offer similar opportunities for relevant, engaging learning.

“Remake Learning allows a mix of fun and learning, and so, for me, it’s the right delivery mechanism to use to develop skills.”

— ANDREW DAWSON SAWYER,
DONCASTER REMAKE LEARNING DAYS



Arts



Arts events feature hands-on learning and expression through various art forms including theatre, dance, visual art, music, photography

and videography. An example of this is an event held during Uruguay RLD on self-regulation of emotions through artistic expression. In this event, children and adolescents participated in a workshop hosted at the museum of contemporary art where they first identified their emotions as well as how they sensed their emotions and regulated them. Then, they created a painting symbolizing those emotions. Another example is the Youth Producers Meetup during RLD Pittsburgh that brought together songwriters, beatmakers, and mix engineers to share their music and meet other music makers in their community. And in another part of Pittsburgh, a local museum hosted sessions for students to learn the art of basket weaving and jewelry making through metal pounding. These art-inspired events help kids and their families unleash their inner creativity.

Maker



Maker events allow learners to tinker, build, and create with different kinds of materials. It gives students an opportunity to take things

apart and then by putting them back together, they learn how it works. Maker activities also encourage creativity and teamwork. An example of this is the event “Youth Workshop Hours Takeover: Cardboard Challenge” in State College, a town located in rural, central Pennsylvania. Students and parents were challenged to build different items like a windmill, instrument, car or costume from cardboard. Tools and extra trinkets were provided. Students and parents designed and iterated the process until they were successful with their cardboard challenge. Another example is at the library in Sarasota, Florida, where kids and parents built their own catapult from craft sticks, rubber bands and glue. Participants then hosted a competition to see which catapult could launch a marshmallow the farthest. Through maker events, families can learn how things work and maybe even be inspired to create their own inventions outside of the festival.



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

Outdoor Learning



Outdoor learning events help attendees experience and learn about the natural world. This could be exploring

nature and gaining a deeper understanding of nature's ecosystem to trying new activities outdoors. In Keyser, West Virginia, families could participate in an event called "Grow with Me: Gardening with Kids." As a celebration of Earth Day, families learned about sustainable food production and then planted their own herb garden to take home. In Kansas City, Missouri, the state park co-hosted an event where families could learn about native Missouri animals and their habitat as well as the skills they use to survive in the wilderness. Afterwards, families were able to meet a few of these animal ambassadors up close. Finally, in RLD-Southwestern Pennsylvania, an outdoor organization hosted free fishing sessions to encourage kids to try fishing at the local river. They provided the fishing rods, tools and bait for kids and their families. These events highlight how the outdoors is a natural classroom for families to explore and learn.

Science



Science events allow learners to experiment through various kinds of science ranging from

chemistry, biology, geography, and physics. In Blacksville, West Virginia, one event called "Make an Explosion! The science of volcanoes" featured a reading activity about the science behind chemical explosions before families built their very own exploding volcanoes. In Knoxville, Tennessee, a local community college featured an event that explained the chemistry and science behind hair color dye. Another example comes from Doncaster, UK, where an event called "A forensic smorgasboard!" featured an interactive tour of different forensics disciplines such as fingerprint analysis, forensics linguistics, a (lighthearted) psychopathy test and more. And, in RLD-Southwestern Pennsylvania, students learned how to build a microscope and use real science equipment as they learned about cancer research. These types of events expand the variety of options in the field of science for kids.

Technology



Technology events help learners explore their digital world through activities such as robotics and

coding. An example is from Kansas City, Missouri, where kids and their parents and caregivers could build a maze and then code a robot to complete the maze. In Rockwood, Pennsylvania, located in the south central region of the state, middle school students had the opportunity to tour a manufacturing facility and learn how robots are incorporated into the production line. At a RLD-Southwestern Pennsylvania event, a local nature center hosted an event for kids and families to learn about bird migration and used virtual reality to simulate the experience birds have when flying through urban areas with bright lights and the confusion it can cause for birds and their sense of direction. These types of events give families a peek into the different ways technology can be used.

Youth Voice



Youth Voice events help youth find leadership opportunities and amplify their voice.

Youth have the ability to express themselves in many ways from art, music, video and more. In Kansas City, Missouri, high school students took part in a "Short Storytelling" workshop where they learned the basics of crafting a short story before writing their own story and sharing it with the group. Another RLD event example from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, featured films produced by students with support and guidance from staff at the local PBS affiliate station. And, in Christchurch, New Zealand, students learned how to weave their voice in introducing different styles of music on a radio station. These types of events help elevate the work and voices of youth in a positive environment.



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

ELEVATING YOUTH IN THE FESTIVAL DESIGN

Across many of the festivals we studied, we saw how youth were meaningfully engaged in the planning and the design of festivals. These kinds of co-design and leadership activities allow young people to play an active role in their learning and provide more choices and experiences for them in the education journey.

The Southwestern Pennsylvania RLD features a cohort of Youth Ambassadors, high school students who share their unique perspective on what relevant learning means to them and their thoughts on RLD events they attend. After receiving training on the festival and media creation, the Ambassadors self-select two RLD events they are curious about, create and publish promotions sharing the events they selected, and, after attending the event, record a self-reflection about their overall experience in the form of a video, audio recording or blog post. This experience directly builds youth self-expression and leadership.

One of the Youth Ambassadors we interviewed, Kalonga Mwenda, attended an event called Streaming the Future, where teens hosted a live radio conversation about young people's goals, hopes, and visions for the future. He enjoyed the opportunity to see different ways to make learning fun and interactive. "Education does not always have to be so formal. It could be anything, like relating to other people or learning new things in a more artistic and creative way," he told us.³⁶ Being an Ambassador helped him improve his journalism skills through the process of documenting an event and capturing photos and videos. Additionally, it helped improve his confidence. He felt uncertain documenting the Streaming the Future event, which was the first event he reported on, but much more comfortable and confident documenting a second event on AfroFutures.

Another set of skills that a different youth Ambassador, Mary Bartels, strengthened was the responsibility of upholding one's commitment when other things get in the way. She offered an insightful comment about how her commitment as an Ambassador helped her be present and follow through on reporting on the event. "I feel like people underestimate this in kids growing up.

As an adult, you've had more practice of putting things behind you to be able to be professional. This experience gave me the opportunity to be like, 'I have things going on right now but I made a commitment to these people so I'm not going to let what's going on affect that.'"³⁷ She demonstrated the ability to re-center herself and to keep focused on an objective.

In the Kansas City edition of RLD, high schoolers had the opportunity to create events for younger students. As school districts are focused on ways to provide real-world learning to students, two districts jumped on the opportunity during the 2023 festival to have high school students organize events for their own communities. This was beneficial for two reasons: the high schoolers had a near-peer relationship to the younger students they aimed to engage through their events, which established a special dynamic, and the high schoolers developed valuable skills in planning, marketing, budgeting as they organized their event.

Kansas City regional lead Callen Zind provides insights into the near-peer relationship, noting that the presence of the high schoolers can push learners to try new things. For instance, during one event, Callen saw a family approach a station run by a group of high school boys, where the task was to create cardboard boats and test them in a small pool of water. Initially disinterested, a young girl was encouraged by a high school boy to give it a try. When Callen revisited the scene 15 minutes later, the young girl was enthusiastically testing her boat, discussing ideas with her mom about trying it at home, showcasing the successful engagement fostered by the high school volunteers. About the



"Choices come from experiences. The more experiences you have, the more choices you have, the better choices you can make,"

— ANDRE SAMUELS, THE CITIZEN SCIENCE LAB AND REMAKE LEARNING DAYS EVENT HOST

experience, Callen says, "I'm not sure she would have responded to an adult encouraging her the same way as the high schooler. Something about that near-peer interaction just really worked."³⁸

The 2023 Doha Learning Days festival also showcased numerous events and workshops fully led by youth. Among them, one workshop left a profound impact on participants by raising awareness about the challenges faced by young people with disabilities. The youth leaders behind this workshop chose a unique approach, focusing not on providing accessibility solutions for individuals with disabilities but on imparting literacy techniques to the general public, promoting better understanding and accommodation of disabilities. This impactful event played a pivotal role in reshaping perspectives on how different segments of society can mutually support one another while exploring avenues to empower youth with disabilities in their educational journey.

A festival that has a strong youth voice component is Generation Amazing Foundation's Youth Festival. In fact, the entire concept of GA revolves around amplifying youth voices. Executive Director Nasser Al Khori shared that GA was born out of a recognition that large-scale sporting events like FIFA, the Olympics, or the NBA often lack meaningful youth representation and engagement. There was a noticeable absence of a platform where young people could unite and actively participate in these major sports events. GA's aim was not only to have youth attend matches but also to provide a unique experience that goes beyond the game itself by offering opportunities for youth to learn about vital aspects like gender equality, cultural appreciation, and the promotion of shared values.

GA hosts workshops on leadership, public speaking, advocacy, and project planning to help attendees develop plans for solving problems in their communities. GA organizers recognize that the experience belongs to the youth, not the organization. A core aspect of their work is promoting youth voices and giving youth the platform.



"If you want real active engagement from young people, you need to ensure that they have a say and a piece in the puzzle."

—JONATHAN MISEROY,
GENERATION AMAZING FOUNDATION



PHOTO CREDIT: RE-MAKE LEARNING DAYS

CREATIVE LEARNING SPACES

The creative learning spaces of festivals represent flexible learning environments that leverage time, space, and place in new and innovative ways. RLD uplifts that learning can and does happen in many places outside of a classroom, and the festival shines a light on and celebrates this. For example, out-of-school learning providers and their unique spaces offer ways students can build skills outside of a traditional school environment. As Youth Ambassador Elaine Gombos shared, most schools do not have technical equipment, like 3D printers or laser cutters that can be found at Remake Learning Days events, which contributes to making the festival a valuable and unique place of learning. In the 2023 festival in Pennsylvania, events were featured at a dairy farm and butcher shop, among other interesting locales. These unlikely spaces can be leveraged to spark imagination around what can be considered a learning space.

Public libraries are also the site of many RLD events, where families can take advantage of books, computers, and specific programming geared toward a particular theme. In most regions, libraries exist in many neighborhoods and are more accessible to families. Libraries may also partner with other organizations that can come in to teach children and families about a specific topic or theme.

The Edinburgh Science Festival also makes creative uses of space, demonstrating the power of taking learning outside of the classroom and involving many different types of organizations. As Executive Director Simon Gage shared, one of the festival's most notable and longstanding workshops involves a simulated emergency room surgery setup. Festival organizers construct a number of operating theaters, each spacious enough to accommodate five children and an instructor, complete with the

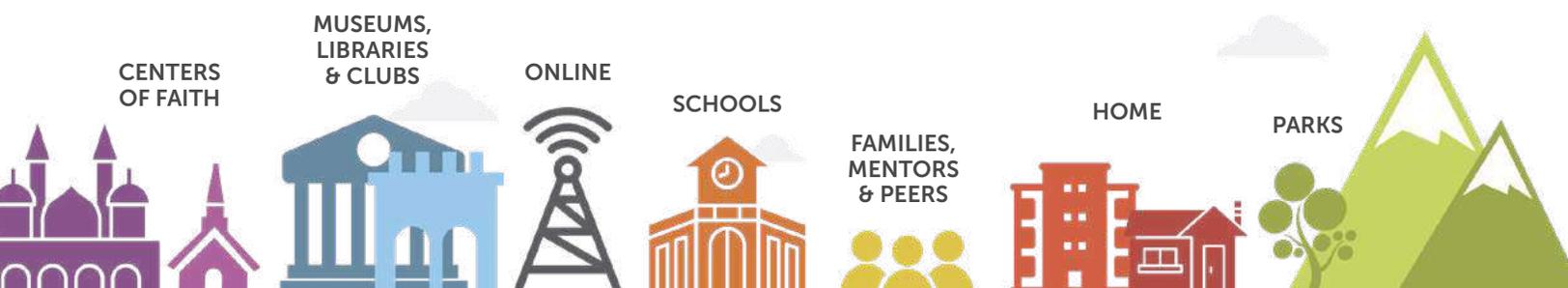


“We have learning experiences all around us and the possibility to learn is not only in a classroom, it’s everywhere.”

- INÉS LÓPEZ, REMAKE LEARNING DAYS URUGUAY

necessary equipment. Inside each theater, there is an operating table with a highly realistic body displaying various injuries and required procedures. The festival collaborates with the manufacturer of keyhole surgery equipment, allowing the children to learn and perform keyhole surgery, including tasks such as gallstone removal, using the same equipment employed by actual surgeons. The participants, while dressed in medical scrubs and following provided instructions, might also undertake procedures like removing a blood clot from the brain or tending to a wound.

Another example is hosting launch events in unexpected spaces. For Southwestern Pennsylvania’s inaugural festival, a launch event was hosted at Google headquarters and the following year a STEAM Expo was held at the professional major league baseball stadium. In Doncaster, organizers hosted a flagship event across multiple iconic spaces like museum, library, and government buildings and brought thousands of people together in these creative spaces. All of this exemplifies how festivals can uplift immersive environments that can expose learners to new worlds and possibilities.



LINKAGE TO CAREER READINESS INITIATIVES

Festivals often promote direct connection to careers, which is another way to build 21st century skills. In Pennsylvania, RLD has directly partnered with the state-level Department of Education to help K-12 students learn how hands-on employability skills connect to future careers. Under an initiative called the Career Ready PA Backpack Challenge, students can earn a “backpack badge” at eligible RLD events to include in their career portfolios. Backpack Challenge events introduce students to possible career paths, connect them with working professionals who can offer insights, and help students develop employability skills like problem-solving, decision-making, planning, and customer focus. In 2023, more than half of the RLD events across Pennsylvania provided an opportunity for students to earn their digital badge in career readiness.

Schools, especially, are eager to participate in RLD because they know it provides a range of opportunities for students to be able to select and personalize their learning around topics and careers that are of interest to them. RLD offers intentional events that allow students to create, not just consume.

Take for example an event focused on technology and engineering, called “the T&E of STEM” held in Rockwood, Pennsylvania. Students experienced a

Schools, especially, are eager to participate in RLD because they know it provides a range of opportunities for students to be able to select and personalize their learning around topics and careers that are of interest to them.

professional environment and had exposure to real world experience. They learned from experts about the engineering design process, beginning with identifying a problem and researching solutions to iterating and prototyping. This design process is learned in school but it takes on more relevance when students can see it in action at a company. In addition, students learned from the staff what it takes to be a good employee and the importance of 21st century learning skills like communication, collaboration, teamwork, and perseverance. At the end of the event, students gained insights into the different career opportunities and the different paths to achieve those opportunities.

As Northwestern Pennsylvania regional lead Kelsi Wilcox Boyles notes, “Ideally, a student attends a Remake Learning Days event and uncovers a new hobby, interest or passion that could potentially evolve into a career path. But, at the very least, they are uncovering a new community learning space and building employability skills, which are invaluable for any professional path they choose.”⁴⁰

Kansas City RLD integrated a similar initiative using the Agilities career literacy framework from The DeBruce Foundation.⁴¹ At some Kansas City events, organizers assessed each activity to articulate which Agilities - the 10 work skills used in varying degrees in every job - were involved. Students and families received passports where they could collect stamps for each Agility they employed, which encouraged families to visit all the different

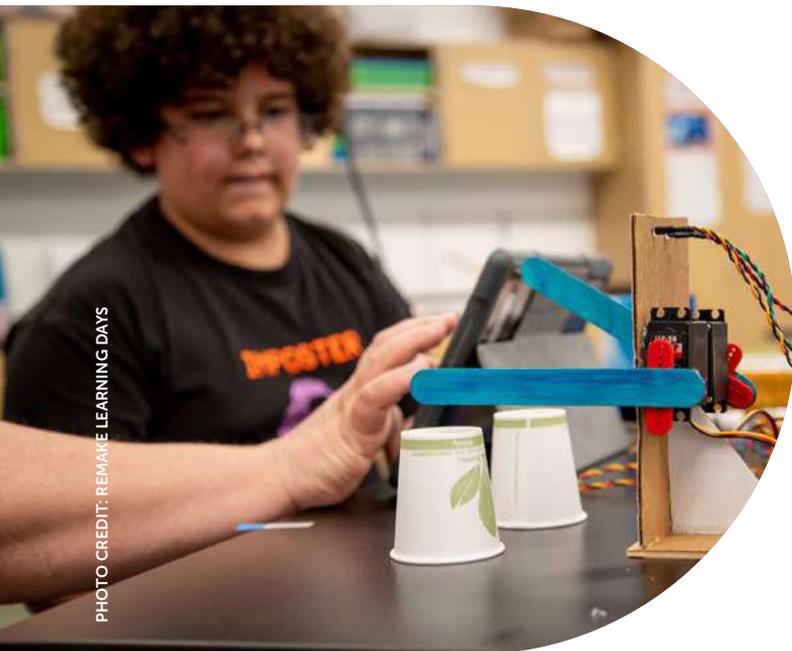


PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

activity stations and also helped students begin building a vocabulary around careers and career skills.

As an example, students who curated the “Business Town” Remake Learning Days activity for their school community had several jobs for families to try and listed the Agilities involved on their welcome sign, such as Operating Objects, Serving & Caring. At another station, activities used the Agilities of Innovating and Judging & Estimating. Families who came to each station could add a stamp for the corresponding Agilities to their passports showing their skill building. At the end of the evening, kids could show their passports to win a small prize.

Skills building activities can also be useful to older students. Qatar Sustainability Week ran an event where university students created sustainability plans for a company, presented the plans in front of company staff, and the students with the top plans received internships. This allowed all participants to build career skills and had a follow up component in which the students selected for internships could hone those skills further.

Learning festivals serve as innovative platforms for initiating the development of essential 21st-century skills. Through their diverse range of offerings, thematic structuring, creative use of space, and alignment with overarching career readiness goals, these festivals create invaluable opportunities for individuals to embark on their skill development journeys. By participating in such festivals, attendees not only gain a strong foundation in these crucial competencies but are also inspired to continue their pursuit of lifelong learning and personal growth, thereby fostering a more positive and enriching learning experience. This, in turn, contributes to a workforce that is not only more capable and adaptable but also more enthusiastic and motivated to tackle the challenges of the future.



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

What Are the Underpinning Factors that Lead to Festivals' Sustainability?



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

WHAT ARE THE UNDERPINNING FACTORS THAT LEAD TO FESTIVALS' SUSTAINABILITY?

Festivals themselves are special and, therefore, powerful. They transform spaces and bring a sense of newness. As Davies notes, "festivals are distinctive because they take people outside their normal behaviours in time and space. They provide unusual activities and evoke feelings and emotions that are very different to the regular and material routines of the workday."⁴²

By offering fun, engaging events for families, learning festivals are a break from the ordinary. They allow people to get out of their routine. For example, RLD exists to celebrate and to uplift the joy in learning. It is an intentional period of fun and discovery. Learning festivals offer unique activities that you would not find in every school and every year is different. As Getz points out, "much of the appeal of events is that they are never the same, and you have to be there to enjoy the unique experience fully."⁴³

The time-bound nature of a festival makes them a powerful learning opportunity that audiences do not want to miss. As Edinburgh Science Festival Executive Director Simon Gage notes, "because it's only two weeks we pile in with energy and excitement in a way that a science center that's open 360 days a year finds really difficult to do."⁴⁴

Many of the festivals seek to create a positive, optimistic lens of what is possible in learning. Instead of taking a deficit-lens by noting that there are not enough libraries in a community or that the hours are not accessible to families, organizers in Uruguay took a positive approach. They called attention to libraries' many

benefits by showcasing them through RLD events, which helped to generate demand for libraries and their offerings. Doha Learning Days organizer Aurelio Amaral describes the space where that festival was held as a welcoming atmosphere where attendees did not have to actively seek out a learning opportunity to experience and appreciate new ideas. Instead, families, by enjoying time together participating in hands-on activities can experience learning in a way not is not the usual delivery mode.

When we look at why families and learners show up at learning festivals, why host organizations decide to participate, why new regions and new festivals spring up, and what are the reasons festivals have staying power, these questions all fold into the notion of sustainability. Through our interviews, we uncovered four underpinning factors that lead to learning festivals' sustainability. These are, that learning festivals:

1. Strengthen the learning ecosystem
2. Build trust throughout an ecosystem
3. Leverage systems of support
4. Adopt place-based models



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

STRENGTHEN LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS

Learning festivals help to strengthen learning ecosystems in several ways: they take advantage of opportunities that can bring communities together; they help to fill gaps by thoughtfully connecting partners; and they rally partners around a shared purpose. These activities strengthen the learning ecosystem, resulting in enduring and expanded collaboration that meaningfully supports learning in a community.

Leveraging Opportunities to Bring Communities Together

At the outset, learning festival organizers leveraged opportunities to bring communities together to strengthen the learning ecosystem. For instance, Remake Learning recognized there was not enough focus on the future of learning, so it created its own community in 2007 and then showcased its community through a festival beginning in 2016. GA recognized that big sporting events were not tapping into youth and leveraged these events to provide youth with training and capacity strengthening. The Weekender recognized it could use music to leverage trust-building and information sharing about community services. In each case, learning festival organizers seized upon unique opportunities to foster community cohesion and enhance the learning landscape, ultimately setting the stage to create a strengthened ecosystem.

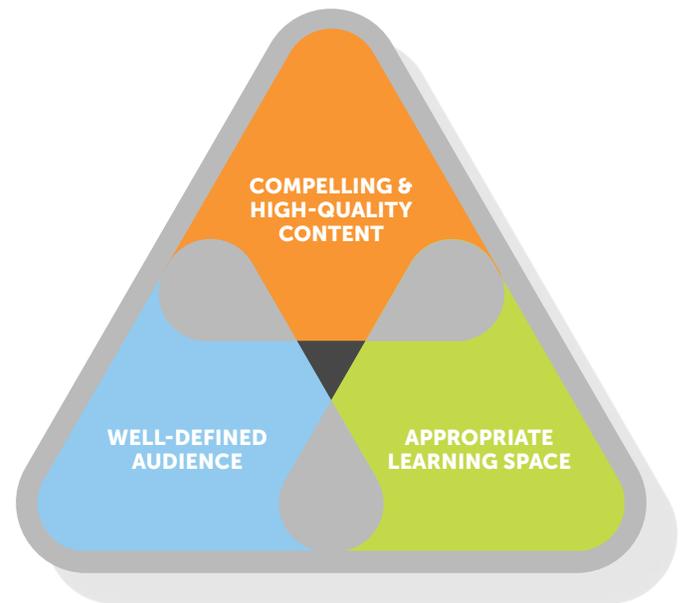
Building Intentional Partnerships

One of the first ways learning festivals can strengthen ecosystems is through the steps organizers take to identify and intentionally connect partners. When RLD co-producers work with new regions, they take them through the process of ecosystem building, using tools such as asset mapping to help communities identify how to tap into all of the sites of learning already taking place in their communities, including unconventional sites of learning, such as a grocery store or a small business. Remake Learning organizers have developed a stakeholder mapping tool for this process.⁴⁵ The tool helps to shed light on the natural allies, the learning resources, the event hosts and collaborators distinct to their region. The tool can also be used to help fill gaps.

Sometimes a region might need help identifying a particular group of organizations such as those focused on arts or outdoor learning for example, and the stakeholder mapping tool can be a valuable resource for this.

Another way to connect partners and fill gaps in to enhance the overall learning experience for festival attendees is the “triangle approach,” employed by Suncoast RLD. Organizers find that any successful event needs three key elements:

- 1) compelling and high-quality content, 2) a well-defined audience, and 3) an appropriate learning space.



Suncoast organizers work with hosts to create events with all three elements present. This approach has fostered a range of new partnerships and a more robust learning ecosystem. For instance, one school lacked the bandwidth to plan program content but had an eager audience of 900 kids and families and excellent facilities for event space. Organizers connected the school with the Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium who partnered with the school to deliver engaging content on sharks and dolphins.

We saw this matching approach in other geographies as well. In Uruguay, a library opened their doors to a media broadcaster who ran an event for youth on broadcasting their own TV show. Through the identification and connection of hosts, organizers played a pivotal role in facilitating strong stakeholder partnerships to ensure successful festival events.

Rallying Partners Around a Shared Purpose

Learning festivals serve as a central point of focus, offering co-ownership and shared purpose. Gibson and Stewart call the festival “a point of convergence”⁴⁶ and this was evident in the festivals we studied. Remake Learning Days organizers, in particular, highlighted how the festival helped to rally partners that might not otherwise have come together.

As RLD Kansas City regional lead Callen Zind noted, a network of organizations that have a common interest may exist, but if there is not something to rally around or work together on, there won't be a reason to come together. Inés Lopéz, an organizer of RLD Uruguay, encountered a similar situation. She noticed many organizations that operated in the same geographic areas and that had similar missions and goals, yet they were not connected. What brought them together was Remake Learning Days.



“There are a great many people in our community who care deeply about the success of our children and our families who are willing to step forth and take action.”

—BETH DUDA, SUNCOAST
REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

Suncoast RLD organizers discussed how the festival allows for co-ownership among after-school groups, government agencies, private businesses, and educators. As Beth Duda notes, “when we're working in our own silos and on our own things, it's kind of hard to feel that hope and that sense of excitement but when you come together with like minded folks, I think that level of excitement grows exponentially.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Limerick Lifelong Learning festival organizers reported that the annual festival is run with a sense of joint ownership among partners and this, in turn, fosters a sense of pride in the festival.

When Educate Uruguay joined RLD, they first experienced difficulty in finding stakeholders willing to participate in the festival. When they changed their approach to a simple but effective request: “Give 60 minutes of your time to share your passion with the next generation,” this call to action became the unifying factor that brought everyone together.

Co-ownership brings about shared purpose. When Educate Uruguay joined RLD at the end of 2022 to put on the 2023 festival just a few months later, they needed to not only build a network, they needed to help partners understand what types of activities they could put on that would meaningfully engage learners and families. The organizers first experienced difficulty in finding stakeholders willing to participate in the festival. When they changed their approach to a simple but effective request: “Give 60 minutes of your time to share your passion with the next generation,” they found event hosts willing to take part and it became easier to work with hosts to envisage activities they could do during the festival. This call to action became the unifying factor that brought everyone together.

Organizers in Uruguay highlighted that all partners face common challenges related to achieving equitable, high quality education for all and maintaining a connection with the land, and that this can be addressed through collaboration. Cecilia de la Paz emphasizes, “the solution is the togetherness. The solution is the ecosystem.”⁴⁸ RLD provides that sense of possibility and shared purpose that can motivate ecosystem members to embrace challenges and find solutions.

As Gregg Behr, Remake Learning Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Grable Foundation shared, “Remake Learning Days is like a buffet, where everyone can find something they like. Everyone can see themselves in it.” This helps explain the widespread appeal and inclusivity of Remake Learning Days. It offers a diverse array of opportunities and experiences that cater to various interests and needs, ultimately fostering a sense of belonging and participation among partners.

Enduring and Expanded Collaboration

This work of identifying partners, bringing them together, and working toward a shared vision has tangible benefits on the ecosystem. The networks formed through RLD are beginning to endure, and organizations can collaborate not only during the time-bound festival but on an ongoing basis, offering increased opportunities to contribute to the learning ecosystem. Through the festival, host organizations are letting go of the boundaries of their own organizations to collaborate with each other, and this meaningful partnership has continued after the festival is over.

“The solution is the togetherness. The solution is the ecosystem.”

—Cecilia de la Paz,
Remake Learning Days Uruguay



Suncoast reports greater cooperation between out-of-school time providers and school time providers, including around topics like data sharing agreements. They attribute this increased collaboration to getting to know each other and having multiple points of contact that has helped to raise the level of trust. Thanks to RLD, Doncaster Local Authority gained awareness of the wide variety of educational programs in their region. They were able to share this information with summer education providers, who, in turn, filled gaps in their programming by establishing partnerships with organizations that participated in the festival.

The development of learning ecosystems is an evolving journey of deepening relationships that may start small and grow, as Remake Learning demonstrates. In 2020, Remake Learning asked network members to share the top three ways they felt connected to the Remake Learning network. Overwhelmingly, members shared the Remake Learning Days festival as something they felt immense pride in its collective effort to celebrate learning and showcase the many organizations providing learning opportunities for families across the region. Network members reported that they

felt connected to something bigger than just them. Remake Learning Days uplifted their work and showcased how a variety of organizations were collaboratively working together to expand the learning opportunities for children.

Remake Learning Days has also leveraged national partnerships to help regions build more partnerships. For example, Common Sense Media, Learning Heroes, PBS Kids, and Digital Promise have been partners and helped regions connect with new event hosts or helped with community outreach to parents and caregivers. These extra supports provide the learning ecosystem more stability and validity of their meaningful contributions to the RLD festival.



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

BUILD TRUST THROUGHOUT AN ECOSYSTEM

Another underpinning factor of learning festivals' sustainability is that they build trust among event hosts and between event hosts and families. Trust can mean many things, so to ground our discussion, we use WISE's framing of trust as an ability to feel safe and vulnerable within one's community.⁴⁹ As trust is built on relationships, we also like Bryk and Schneider's framing of the concept of "relational trust," encompassing the four components of respect, competence, integrity, and personal regard.⁵⁰

Trust, in the case of learning festivals, applies to the trust that families feel in relation to the event hosts and the trust that event hosts and partner organizations feel toward each other. Ultimately, greater trust leads to greater alignment,⁵¹ and with that community building. We know from the literature that community building promotes social transformation and a sense of agency and responsibility; improves social structures; supports families and youth; and develops community spirit and consciousness.⁵² We saw these elements play out in several ways.

Increased Empathy Between Schools and Other Partners

As it relates to event hosts, we saw how festivals brought communities together, whether they were newly forming or long-standing, and motivated communities to want to keep collaborating. When surveyed, 81% of RLD event hosts said they would be likely to collaborate with someone from another organization in their region as a result of RLD.⁵³

This connection can develop whether or not an event host has been participating in RLD for many years. In fact, 42% of all event hosts in 2023 were first-time participants.⁵⁴ This parallels the experiences of The Weekender, in which the musical performers participating in the festival for the first time expressed that the festival was unlike any other they have performed at, causing them to feel more connected. When a festival is designed around inclusivity and community engagement, these effects can be felt almost immediately.



"The school placed trust in the out-of-school providers, recognizing that they provided complementary types of experiences that enriched, and did not compete with, the school's instructional strengths."

—KATHE CROWLEY CONN,
REMAKE LEARNING DAYS
WISCONSIN

Festivals help develop empathy among partners. In one of the RLD regions, the organizer noted the learning ecosystem had been fractured as a result of unpopular state policy decisions that undermined schools and educators and a distrust of anyone outside the formal education system. The organizer cited RLD as a way to rebuild that trust by showcasing what everyone was doing in the community and building connection.

As another example, Kathe Crowley Conn, organizer of RLD in Wisconsin notes that after multiple years of programming restrictions in schools due to COVID, the 2023 edition of RLD featured a memorable in-school event. The school openly embraced the multi-age learning approaches that out-of-school organizations bring, which was emblematic of the increasing trust that had been fostered in the region.

The organizers of Kansas City RLD have noticed increased collaboration opportunities as a result of the festival. They cited an example of an out-of-school provider who had a valuable program but struggled to gain access to local schools. Through RLD, this provider connected with school representatives and, subsequently, successfully introduced their creative math outreach program, Math-a-Palooza, to Kansas City Public Schools during Remake Learning Days. The increased empathy and trust built through planning RLD together helped foster new lasting connections.

These experiences fit with literature around schools and community groups. Jehl, Blank, and McCloud⁵⁶ explain that schools tend to have a hierarchical structure, focus primarily on academic learning, and emphasize institutional power, while community builders prioritize building relationships, trust, community betterment, and understanding power dynamics. However, when schools and communities intentionally leverage their respective strengths and acknowledge their differences, they can collaborate effectively.⁵⁷ By including all types of organizations, the festival embraces the different strengths of actors, and allows them to get to know one another, and evidence can be seen of schools becoming more open to outside groups.

RLD producer Dorie Taylor shares that as regions hold the festival, with each subsequent year, community connections deepen. This was evident in Suncoast, where a group of educators started planning what they would do for the 2024 festival shortly after the 2023 edition ended, which did not happen in the festival's first year. There was a tendency for hosts during the first year to think of their assets as their own (e.g., my content, my location, my students) but those lines of ownership are blurring. The festival is starting to become something that belongs to all and hosts are freely sharing ideas they think others can use. None of this would be possible without the increased sense of safety and relational trust that has been built.

Supportive Approaches to Reach Families

As it relates to families and community members, we found examples of ways that event hosts are helping to make families from all backgrounds feel welcome. Many of the learning festivals are grounded in equity, such as the Weekender, which explores equity from the lenses of class and race, and GA's Youth Festival, which maintains a philosophy of youth-centered, bottom-up development as opposed to a top-down, hierarchical focus.

RLD has been intentional about making the festival an event that families want to attend, by drawing on several different approaches that help to meet families' different needs. RLD with one of its partners, Digital Promise, has cataloged these approaches in a toolkit that offers insights on ensuring equitable, inclusive events and building



PHOTO CREDIT: REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

networks that reach broad groups of society.⁵⁸ A study by the Global Family Research Project (GFRP) explores some of these approaches, which collectively help to foster trust. These include: reducing barriers to attendance by holding free events, holding events at different times of the day and in a variety of locations in the community; providing participation incentives and reaching out to families to encourage attendance to get them excited about the festival; and providing resources for families to continue to engage with their children around STEAM learning even after the festival ends.⁵⁹

MEETING FAMILIES' NEEDS

- Hold events at different times of the day
- Hold events at a variety of locations to take away transportation issues
- Provide participation incentives
- Provide resources for families to continue to engage in STEAM learning

This thoughtful approach has helped families to embrace and look forward to the festival each year. This trust-building contributes significantly to families' experiences: 84% of families surveyed by the GFRP say they felt welcome and supported at the festival, and 83% reported that they are inspired to come back for other events.⁶⁰

Mary Bartels, one of the Pennsylvania Youth Ambassadors, noticed seeing lots of families at the events, which was a different experience from typical events like field trips where only kids interact with each other. She shares, “I was impressed by how much I felt like the parents were also having fun. I didn’t feel like it was just a kids’ thing. It wasn’t like their parents just took them there and sat on a bench. Parents were really involved and interested in the activities too. I think that’s really important because it almost gives parents and kids an even ground to meet at.”⁶¹

“Parents were really involved and interested in the activities too. I think that’s really important because it almost gives parents and kids an even ground to meet at.”

—MARY BARTELS, REMAKE LEARNING DAYS YOUTH AMBASSADOR



For DLD, some of the strategies they employ to increase equity are to host events in Arabic and English, cater events to different age groups, hold wheelchair accessible events and free events, and they intentionally do not have a registration process to remove barriers to entry. Yet, there are still some barriers still to reaching working class families, and the organization is trying out different strategies to make these families feel more welcome and excited to attend.

Suncoast RLD strives to reach underserved communities by going to them. The Marie Selby Botanical Gardens traveled to a public housing unit in another county for a butterfly day which culminated in attendees planting their own butterfly garden on the grounds of public housing. Subcoast RLD also produced materials in Spanish to accommodate Spanish-speaking populations.

Finally, the Weekender festival used music and fun to build trust and provide additional services to families and communities. Historically, many

residents viewed disengagement as the preferred course of action, perceiving it as a way to maintain anonymity. As organizer Oche Bridgeford told us, “disengagement perpetuates the status quo. When you’re not engaged in programming that is going to help you, like the festival’s sessions on net worth or on how to start a business, the status quo continues and that means generational poverty.”⁶² In contrast, the Weekender festival introduces a supportive opportunity for individuals and families to become actively involved in their community and gain more value than they previously realized.

Changing Attitudes Around Family Engagement

Many event hosts’ attitudes around family engagement changed in positive ways as a result of their participation in learning festivals. Beth Duda of Suncoast RLD shares that she has seen a big change in what schools and out-of-school time providers consider as family engagement, which she attributes to the hands-on learning opportunities they have been encouraged to do and have been able to experience the success of.

In Kansas City, RLD has also helped event organizers think about family engagement differently. Organizer Callen Zind explains that, “RLD has helped people think about the connection to families. If you run an after-school program, how are you engaging the parents and what are you doing so they can understand more about what the kids are learning and gaining?”⁶³ She noted that one after-school program showcased their robotics team during Remake Learning Days, turning it into an opportunity for students to teach their parents how to operate the robots. This approach reflects a growing emphasis on directly engaging families and has led to a reevaluation of how families and caregivers can meaningfully participate in their child’s learning.

Another approach to family engagement comes from the teacher education program at Penn West Clarion University, one of the event hosts at RLD-Northwestern Pennsylvania. The university includes Remake Learning Days and its connection to family engagement in its syllabus. This allows pre-service teachers to become familiar with the festival and understand how it builds family connection, so that when the students go on to become teachers, they will be natural advocates for families.

LEVERAGE SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Learning festivals have several moving pieces, require coordination between event hosts, and rely on marketing, financial, and staffing systems of support to be successful. As audiences to the festival only ever see the final product, it can be easy to overlook the systems of support that help make festivals possible. A European Commission report discussing the impact of art festivals aptly notes that “nothing that occurs automatically or always. It is rather the result of the serious effort and commitment of organisers in conjunction with specific circumstances, often linked to the local setting and its particular social history.”⁶⁴

Marketing Systems: Spreading the Word About the Festivals

Remake Learning staff provides marketing and communications support to all regional leads, which includes a suite of services provided at no cost. These include templates provided to each region for press releases and media advisories, templates for regions to market their events, access to the RLD website where event hosts can post events happening in their region, paid advertising and social media posts promoting the events, and funding to each region to support the printing and distribution of flyers and postcards advertising events.

This support was mentioned repeatedly in our interviews with regional leads as contributing to their ability to hold a successful festival. “Having somebody outside our own local world who understands what we’re going through, and who provides professional support is huge for us,” organizer Kathe Crowley Conn shared.⁶⁵ “They make the learning curve digestible,” Cecilia de La Paz added.⁶⁶ As most regional leads have never done things like ad campaigns before, Remake Learning staff support brings a value-add to regions and helps demystify unfamiliar processes.

Financial: Supporting Event Hosts to Engage

Something we heard from RLD regions was that they, in turn, try to make it as easy as possible for event hosts to participate. The mini-grant funding



supplemented by regions through their own fundraising has been key to this. One regional lead shared that the mini-grants have been very appealing to hosts, especially those who did not write the festival into their budgets. They expressed that having a couple hundred dollars to get supplies or refreshments has helped sway the decision to participate. Another regional lead shared that the mini-grant funding instills confidence in event hosts, because it demonstrates tangible support from the organizing entity and ensures that the event’s success is a shared responsibility. From an organizational perspective, mini-grant funding also helps ensure that events are hosted in marginalized and under-resourced communities to provide better access for families.

There can also be challenges around funding. RLD co-producers shared how there is a need to understand how funder priorities differ in specific regions and when looking nationally or internationally, which takes time and expertise. Other regional leads noted they did not always have bandwidth to fundraise beyond the financial support provided by Remake Learning Days so careful consideration is given to distributing mini-grants to those most in need and maximizing in-kind donations.

Staffing Systems: Leveraging Partners Over Large Staff

Two of the places where we saw creative staffing systems were in Remake Learning Days locations across Pennsylvania and in Doncaster, UK. Across Pennsylvania, most RLD regional leads are Intermediate Units (IUs), regional educational service agencies that are authorized by the state to develop and provide services to schools and help align with the overarching mission of the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Within the IUs, STEM points of contact have hours allocated that can go toward the time they spend on Remake Learning Days. This helps address time and resource issues when professionals are otherwise too busy to be actively involved.

Doncaster has previously invested in what they call systems leadership through partnerships with other governmental, education, and community organization leaders, including head teachers, former college principals and leaders of local community, creative, and charitable organizations. Doncaster recognizes the value of investing in collaborative partnerships and has done this both

figuratively and physically - inviting partners to co-lead delivery of its wider strategy and allocating a proportion of its budget to freeing up their capacity to do so. When it came time to deliver on the festival, since they already have a dedicated budget to pay for leaders in these other organizations to spend their time on strategic initiatives, it was easier to get senior level buy-in. This was also beneficial as they knew that the voice of the local authority is not as strong as the voices of education and community leaders.

Similarly, RLD producer Dorie Taylor shared that the festival allows for shared leadership that is distributed versus concentrated in one central place. At each RLD site, multiple actors and constituencies come together to produce the festival collaboratively and ownership is shared. This type of leadership model is akin to what WISE terms the network weaver model, in which everyone is considered a leader and adds value to the goal of strengthening a learning ecosystem.⁶⁷

Since staffing is very limited most of the time, festivals rely heavily on collaboration with other entities. As in the case of Remake Learning Days, the producer and co-producer oversee the national and international partners while running the day-to-day of their local festival in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Doha Learning Days and Qatar Sustainability Week are both run by a team of two, and the entire Generation Amazing Foundation is 6 full-time staff, though organizations do rely on consultants and event planners where possible. It is, thus, no surprise that the partnership model works well. MIT professor Wiehe, in his look at science festivals across the U.S. found something similar, noting "it is not possible to pull off a multi-modal festival with events serving tens of thousands in many locations and overlapping times of day without either a resource-intensive staff or a clear-headed embrace of collaboration. Faced with the decision, the majority of science festivals choose the collaborative route."⁶⁸

Wiehe's sentiment is echoed by QSW organizer Shireen Obeidat, who shares, "something like this, whether a festival or a national campaign, cannot be done by one organization on its own. The goal is to work in collaboration and to include the community. And that's actually what gave QSW its strengths."⁶⁹



Likewise, DLD leverages the partnership model to bring the festival to life. WISE hosts the festival and is in charge of weaving it together, but much of the promotion that drives participation happens through partnerships - venue and content partners alike. WISE also depends heavily on the expertise of partners within their areas of work to propose the learning opportunities that participants to the festival experience.

ADOPT PLACE-BASED MODELS

Given that learning festivals offer a welcome break from the ordinary, support ecosystem building, and introduce families and communities to new learning possibilities, it is not a surprise that they have taken off. What stands out about learning festivals is that they can thrive in vastly different contexts and have different motivations for existing. They can develop out of longstanding, established learning ecosystems or they work just as well in emerging ecosystems, serving as a force that brings new partners together. Why festivals can thrive in such different contexts is possible because they embrace place-based models, meaning they focus on the local context. Specifically, they authentically incorporate cultural norms, connect to other aligned initiatives, build upon a strong infrastructure, and embrace change.

Authentically Incorporate Cultural Norms

RLD operates in multiple regions of the U.S. and in the UK, Uruguay, and New Zealand, each with different contexts, populations, resources, celebrations, and pain points. No two RLD festivals are alike, as each reflects the local community's norms and cultural practices. As a parallel, Wiehe, in his discussion of festivals in the U.S., shares that, "each festival is a unique response to the cultural geography that makes the communities they serve a special source of pride. Many festivals consciously use meaningful cultural norms to make events resonate with local audiences."⁷⁰ For example, in RLD Christchurch, their 2023 edition of the festival was called Ōtautahi Learning Days. The festival organizers are attentive to hosting events that will resonate with the Māori people, the second largest ethnic group in New Zealand. They are attentive to providing information in English and te reo Māori

No two Remake Learning Days festivals are alike, as each reflects the local community's norms and cultural practices.

(the Māori language), using inclusive spaces and creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Connect to Aligned Initiatives

The model of RLD intentionally allows for customized events that help build and showcase the local community. As such, RLD has taken root in new regions fairly easily. Expansion has occurred organically through networking and word of mouth, and the festival has been able to connect to aligned initiatives in new regions.

Suncoast was looking for a way to reach more families in support of its work under the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, a national campaign that aims to disrupt the cycle of poverty and improve opportunities for students by focusing on early literacy. Organizers in Uruguay were looking to reach rural communities and could see that the model would support their goals to integrate their community while highlighting intergenerational learning and bringing families and young people together to learn alongside one another. "A key factor in our decision to adopt RLD was that it tapped into the zone of agency of a wide-cross section of people," shared Cecilia de la Paz.⁷¹

Kansas City organizers were looking for ways to help families demystify STEM education and RLD seemed the perfect fit. Doncaster saw similarities with Pittsburgh as a post-industrial region looking to reinvent itself, which resonated with Doncaster's own goals. What stands out is that so many regions saw the benefits of RLD to their own unique context and could see how it leveraged already aligned initiatives that organizers were committed to.

While contexts and motivations varied, regions joined RLD because the festival affirms their beliefs and existing practices. As Beth Duda explained, "the widespread participation that we are fostering with Suncoast Remake Learning Days is the same

thing that we are trying to do with the Campaign for Grade Level Reading: we want to galvanize the community. In some ways RLD has made that easier. Having an actionable festival where people are working together on something tangible has helped us speed up the attainment of trust.”⁷²

Similarly, Edinburgh Science Festival was able to extend its model to Abu Dhabi, UAE, also by leveraging aligned initiatives. Leaders in Abu Dhabi were committed to strengthening their science education and thought a festival atmosphere would help bring their community together. Even though Abu Dhabi did not have a strong existing community or a track record of putting on a science festival like Edinburgh, the festival worked just as well there. Additionally, DLD leveraged aligned initiatives by centering its festival around global summits and award ceremonies.

Build Upon Existing Infrastructure

In looking at the festivals we studied, we saw great variance in the year of establishment. Edinburgh Science launched its first festival in 1989, which was the longest running festival we studied. Remake Learning began in 2007, holding its first festival in 2016. Limerick Lifelong Learning held its first festival in 2011. Still other festivals were much younger: Doha Learning Days began in 2017, The Weekender began in 2019, and the RLD regions outside of southwestern Pennsylvania took up the initiative between 2019-2023.

While it undoubtedly helps to have a strong community before launching a learning festival, in cases where a community may still be coming together, learning festivals are still very feasible. Remake Learning Days in the Pittsburgh region was fortunate to build on a strong foundation of a developing learning ecosystem. “Thinking about where Remake Learning was when we created this festival, the festival was not the driver of the ecosystem. The festival was a product of the ecosystem,”⁷³ says Remake Learning Executive Director Tyler Samstag.

On the other hand, many RLD regions have been able to hold the festival without a longstanding network, and it has been the festival itself that has helped to strengthen these connections. Recently, Remake Learning introduced pop-up events, in which any region anywhere can hold an RLD event

without having to put on a full-fledged festival. In the 2023 festival, pop-up events were held in the U.S., in cities across Oregon, California, North Carolina, Maryland, and in international locales like Tel Aviv, Israel; Barcelona, Spain; and Bangalore, India. Pop-up events can be especially helpful if a community does not have the resources or bandwidth to implement a full festival but would still like to try creative ways to engage their community.

Another important factor is that the RLD model works equally well in cities as it does in rural and semi-urban areas, proving that there are no geographic bounds on hands-on, engaging learning that brings in the whole community. For instance, in Wisconsin, RLD happens in two regions about an hour away by car, one urban and the other more rural. In the urban region, families are generally aware of resources outside of schools and the organizations tend to know each other, but there is not perfect information sharing and uptake of resources, so RLD sought to strengthen these connections. In the rural area, families knew very little about available resources and the organizations themselves were not aware of each other, so, there, RLD sought to build the community from scratch. Despite the different geographies and contexts, the model works as well in each area.

Embrace Change

In embracing flexible, place-based models, one thing to keep in mind is to anticipate that there will be changes from year to year, or that some things just may not work. Wiehe reminds us that festivals are “inevitably ephemeral: they may refresh content, change partners and venues, and reinvent their structures from year to year.”⁷⁴

During the pandemic, festivals went virtual. Limerick noted this was a learning curve but helped to keep the festival on people’s radars. Starting back up in-person after the pandemic required rebuilding audiences and sometimes partners. Kansas City RLD organizers noted that many people moved organizations or to new towns and cities during the pandemic and this necessitated a need to seek out new champions: “When we came back together in person, half of our partner list was now in different places. You can have a great champion in one organization and when they leave, you’ve

got the challenge of figuring out if the new person feels the same way about this.”⁷⁵

Additionally, while the learning festival concept has shown it can operate in varying contexts and with different models, there have been instances where learning festivals have not worked. Remake Learning organizers have noted a couple of locations where festivals either took place and were later discontinued, or where the festival ultimately was not able to take off.

When it comes to stopping or discontinuing a festival, this can often be a natural part of the lifecycle of a new idea or innovation, as Rogers’ Diffusions of Innovations theory would suggest.⁷⁶ In Remake Learning Days regions that saw discontinuance, changing personnel played a role. Often, a champion that had supported the festival left their role and their replacement did not share the same priorities. In regions where RLD never got off the ground, it was often due to the lack of a collaborative ecosystem that encouraged co-ownership of the festival among a group of organizations versus a single entity. In both situations, it is not something to be discouraged by. The festival may have run its course in the regions where RLD had been held, bringing benefits to families and learners in the time it existed, and in other regions, partners may have wanted to go a different direction that better meets their needs.

“Festivals are inevitably ephemeral: they may refresh content, change partners and venues, and reinvent their structures from year to year.”

(WIEHE, 2014).

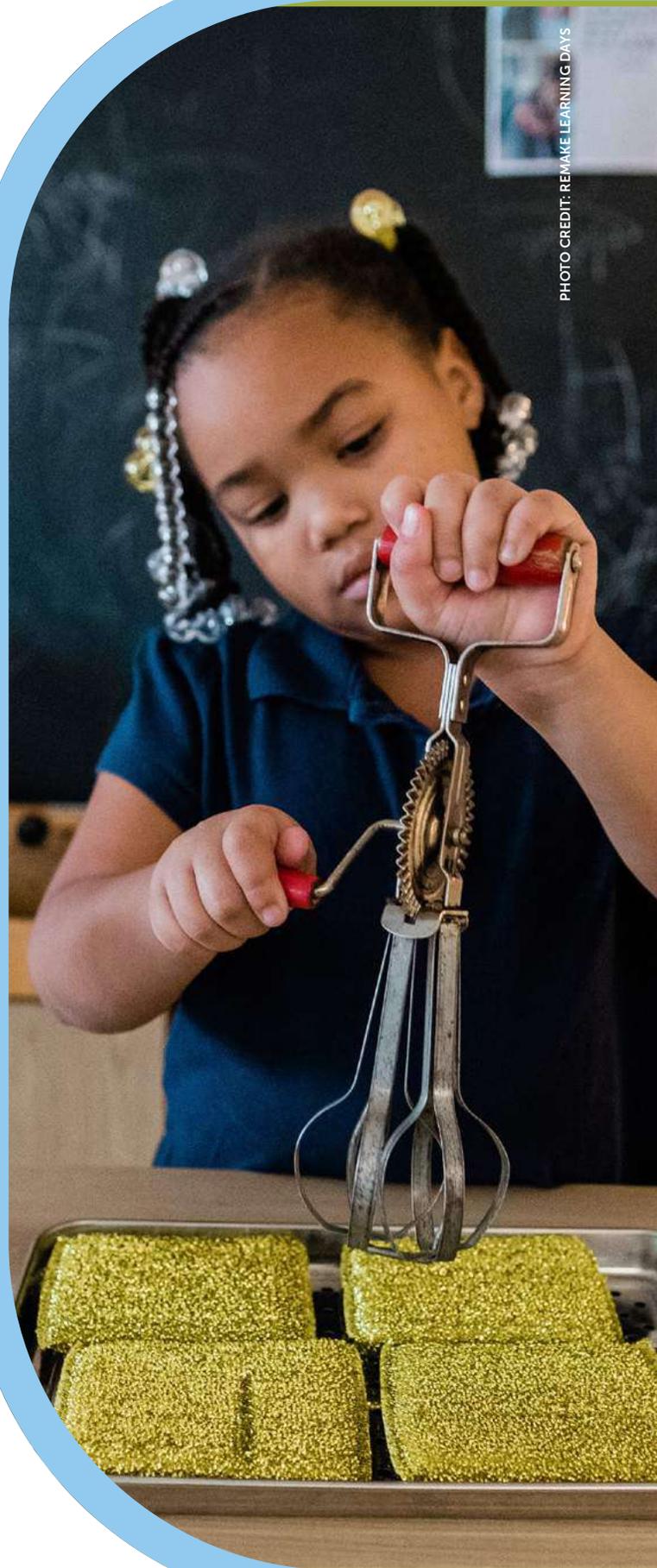


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What is the Role of Public-Private Partnerships in Supporting Learning Festivals?



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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN SUPPORTING LEARNING FESTIVALS?

To be a true ecosystem means that entities from different sectors will naturally collaborate and come together. In the case of learning festivals, the majority of which are run by non-governmental organizations, we saw how cross-sector partnerships took place in many forms and furthered the goals of festivals. This section explores the role of governments and the private sector in contributing to learning festival aims.

Government Engagement in Festivals

When we say government, this can encompass many different roles and varies by context and location. Some of the government roles in learning festivals included:

- **Elected officials and legislators (e.g., school board members, city commissioners, and county commissioners in the Suncoast region of Florida)**
- **Government officials and policymakers from national and state entities (e.g., officials from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Qatar and the Pennsylvania Department of Education)**
- **City officials (e.g., the Mayor of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania)**
- **Local government staff (e.g., officials from public libraries in the U.S. and public school principals and educators across countries)**

Government actors played several roles. They connected the festival to broader, strategic initiatives, including those related to career readiness. They provided funding, which we saw especially among the three festivals we explored in Qatar. They served as event hosts, especially in the cases of schools and libraries. They served as champions by issuing proclamations about the festival, as in Remake Learning Days, and connected the festival organizers to other parts of the government, as with the Weekender.

In addition, in the case of Doncaster, the local authority served as the regional lead organization for the festival. Long-term, their aim is that the festival becomes its own self-sustaining entity, distinct from the government. "From an ideological perspective it works better to have RLD be something that is owned by the place, as more of a grassroots type entity than something that delivers from the top down," shared Dani Adams.⁷⁷

We explore two of these themes in greater detail below: connection to broader initiatives and the role of government actors as champions.

Connection to Policy Initiatives

Learning festivals hold significant potential in helping to advance broader education and workforce policy initiatives. In Pennsylvania, Remake Learning is connected to two state policy goals: career readiness and science education standards.

Recognizing that RLD event hosts were already holding events that provided career skills to students, and families were already attending them, the Pennsylvania Department of Education



sought to collaborate with RLD. Through the Career Ready PA Backpack Challenge, students earn digital badges for gaining 21st century career skills or learning about new careers and Remake Learning Days is providing exposure and furthering the goals of preparing Pennsylvanian students for the workforce. As Career Readiness Advisor at the Pennsylvania Department of Education Laura Fridirici shares, “the partnership is a perfect match for hands-on learning to build skills needed for future careers.”⁷⁸ This collaboration has also brought high-level government buy-in from other government departments, including the Department of Labor and Industry and the Department of Agriculture, especially in the more rural parts of the state. For example, in Southeastern Pennsylvania, the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture attended one of the festival events, showcasing high-level buy-in and awareness of the festival.

With regard to the second policy initiative, state standards, the new PA-wide integrated science standards incorporate hands-on experiences and practical experimentation into science education.⁷⁹ By doing so, these standards not only enhance students’ understanding but also foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a deep appreciation for the scientific method across multiple disciplines. Learning festivals, by their very nature, serve as ideal platforms to complement and reinforce these new standards and provide a way for the whole ecosystem to support each other by reinforcing and helping achieve common goals.

“The partnership is a perfect match for hands-on learning to build skills needed for future careers.”

—LAURA FRIDIRICI,
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION



Learning festivals serve as a critical catalyst for identifying and cultivating the essential skills that will be in demand in the years to come. As AI continues to revolutionize education and workforce dynamics, it is vital to ensure that our learning ecosystems are not only responsive but also proactive in adapting to these changes. Learning festivals, with their multidisciplinary and innovative approach, can play a pivotal role in achieving this objective. These festivals provide a unique space for educators, learners, industry experts, and policymakers to come together and collaboratively chart the course for the future.

By hosting workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions, learning festivals can facilitate in-depth discussions on emerging technologies, pedagogical advancements, and the evolving needs of the job market. Furthermore, they create opportunities for participants to experiment with new learning methods, tools, and technologies, enabling them to acquire first-hand experience in the skills that will be most valuable in the AI-driven future.

Government Actors as Champions

Government actors can also serve as champions for learning festivals by displaying their support publicly. Champions have shown their support in several ways, including by issuing official proclamations, participating in events, and prioritizing resources and funding.

In Suncoast, RLD organizers have worked with city officials to have a proclamation made designating the ten days of the festival as official Suncoast Remake Learning Days in the government record.⁸⁰ This involves providing county officials with festival details to be formally announced by a government representative during an official meetings. Proclamations raise awareness among government officials about the event, provide content for sharing on social media platforms, and lend legitimacy to the festival.

Champions of the Weekender helped facilitate connections to various resources. In the festival’s early stages, a government official who later

assumed the role of Mayor was actively involved in the planning committee. This initial support from a prominent government figure has enabled the festival to garner city-wide backing and seek essential resources, such as cooperation from the fire department and police for security, which have proven instrumental in enhancing the festival's operations.

Doha Learning Days has seen government champions through their partnerships. For example, the festival's robotics makerspace program was an initiative of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. In the 2023 edition, the Minister of Education and Higher Education delivered a special address at the festival's opening. In the future, the organizers hope to align festival content to help fill gaps in public schooling through close alignment with the priorities of the Ministry.

Other groups understand that the government can be a champion and work to try to make it so. Doncaster RLD organizers try to influence the central UK government in valuing this kind of activity. They hope that through reporting the successes of the festival, the government sees that there is value in providing more informal learning opportunities rather than narrowly focusing on traditional education.



REMAKE LEARNING DAYS

PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT IN FESTIVALS

When we look at the private sector participation in learning festivals, this includes corporate sponsors and local employers, including small businesses. The roles these organizations played occurred primarily in the form of sponsorships and event hosts, with the latter linked to supporting broader career readiness goals. We explore both roles below.

Sponsorships & Corporate Social Responsibility

Many festivals look to corporate sponsorships to supplement the funding they receive from government or foundation sources. The most frequent type of support includes corporate sponsors contributing funding to a festival and being recognized in program materials with their logo.

This type of sponsorship is also evolving. Corporate sponsors may choose to highlight a festival opportunity to their employees who can serve as volunteers. In addition, the festival themes often fit into private sector organizations' own social responsibility goals, so it is advantageous for them to be involved. Doha Learning Days organizers found that most of the private sector partners they engage want to fund these types of events. They are already in the community and they see the value that learning festivals bring.

Qatar Sustainability Week organizers work with private sector partners at different points on their own sustainability journey. Some partners are already implementing substantial sustainability practices within their companies and are eager to showcase their efforts by serving as a sponsor. Other companies that are just embarking on their sustainability journey find value in sponsoring as they can start to deepen their own commitments to sustainability as well as be inspired by other corporate sponsors who are further along.

Hosting Career-Focused Events

A second way that private sector partners contribute to festivals is through their hosting of career-focused events. These events serve as a

unique opportunity to introduce young individuals to various professions and industries they might not have considered otherwise.

For example, in Pennsylvania, several events held by private sector partners helped to draw attention to careers and connections that might not be on young people's radar. Organizers across the different festivals found that local businesses are eager to help students define their passions. This proactive engagement not only broadens horizons but also encourages students to pursue their interests with enthusiasm, bridging the gap between education and real-world opportunities.

One example is a dairy farm in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. After a devastating fire, this farm rebuilt itself and incorporated robotics into its dairy farm. Robots are used to milk cows and clean the barn. Students attending this virtual event were able to view up close the use of new technology at a dairy farm and learn about new career paths in the farming industry. In Pittsburgh, a game design company opens its doors during the RLD festival for students and families to explore the inner workings of the company. They are able to test new games, have a roundtable discussion with the CEO and COO, and talk to different employees, such as game designers, musicians, marketing, production, and human resources, about their roles at the company.

Festival organizers rely on partners to produce the many different aspects of a festival. Partners extend beyond schools and out-of-school providers and frequently include government agencies and private sector organizations. The public-private partnerships within learning festivals underscore the value of collaborative efforts in education. The optics of seeing public, private, and NGO sectors working together create a compelling narrative of a shared commitment to empowering learners. These partnerships pool resources, expertise, and innovation to offer learners a holistic and dynamic educational experience that benefits the broader community.

Capturing the Promise and Potential of Learning Festivals



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CAPTURING THE PROMISE AND POTENTIAL OF LEARNING FESTIVALS

Being able to show the impact of a learning festival is important to funders, host organizations, and families alike - all of whom want to know that the efforts are contributing to tangible impact. Festivals employ various ways of tracking impact as well as ensuring feedback and continuous improvement are embodied into the DNA of festival organizations.

Impact Measurement

One of the organizations that has made significant strides in impact measurement is Edinburgh Science Foundation. The organization sets learning, emotional, and behavioral objectives for their activities and assesses the first of these two objectives by engaging with the participants to gauge their learning and emotional progress.

Almost every festival we studied used surveys as a way to measure impact in some way. RLD has a robust survey protocol that is followed at the conclusion of each festival. Surveys go out to all event hosts, asking questions around how

they found the experience and suggestions for improvement. RLD also surveys families and caregivers, asking them about what they and their child learned at the event and what they plan to do after the festival is over to continue their child's learning. This type of data helps organizers see trends in responses, understand if they are reaching their intended audiences, and develop new tactics for future years.

Limerick's Lifelong Learning festival also runs surveys for the event hosts, event attendees steering group members, and festival organizing committee members. They have also periodically hosted focus groups as part of a large-scale evaluation, when resources permitted.

GA conducted a pre- and post-survey of youth attendees at its 2021 festival to gauge attitude change as a result of attendance at the festival. These questions also allowed them to uncover that mental health was an issue that young people wanted to discuss, which festival organizers were able to add as a theme in the following year.

Organizations have also found creative ways to measure impact, including identifying uncommon measures. The Codesigning Schools Toolkit

describes common measures as more standard measures of impact, which could include academic performance or number of attendees, whereas uncommon measures are more intuitive that let you know you are heading in the right direction.⁸¹ Uncommon measures could include a powerful conversation with a parent or student who shared why the festival was meaningful to them, or as we heard from many RLD regions, how new partners are coming together and forming new attitudes around working together to improve learning.

Doncaster experienced an uncommon - and unexpected - measure from the festival, an



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increase in individuals wanting to foster, or provide temporary care and housing to, children in need. Families and community members have been able to learn about fostering from the region's fostering service which had been in attendance at the festival and later reported an uptick in inquiries. The Doncaster RLD organizers hypothesize that people who come to the festival are family-oriented, and that those who are family-oriented are looking broadly for ways they can help their community.

The impact of Remake Learning Days extends far beyond what common measures capture. As Tyler Samstag, Executive Director of Remake Learning shared, so much of what Remake Learning does is build relationships and relationships happen over time. This is a process that does not lend itself to easy measurement. Tyler notes that organizers can point to several examples of positions created, initiatives started, or programs developed because they met someone from the Remake Learning network that influenced their thinking. They also have examples of second and third order impact in which a program created through a Remake Learning connection was attended by a stakeholder who then replicated the program in their own organization and so on. This layered map of impact is hard to measure by conventional metrics, yet has created a web of meaningful connections.

As festivals seek to measure impact, they have encountered challenges. This is in part due to the difficulty of measuring behavior change. Measuring behavioral outcomes proves to be more challenging since it involves assessing long-term impacts, such as whether individuals have transformed their lives, pursued specific fields of study, or applied their learning in novel ways. These long-term effects are considerably more

intricate to evaluate, often requiring tracking individuals over a span of many years. As a response, Edinburgh Science Festival has recently incorporated this aspect into their strategy and is seeking collaboration with academic partners to help realize these long-term objectives.

For DLD, organizers had to make an important tradeoff between equity and impact measurement. They opted not to have a registration process to remove barriers to entry while consciously making the tradeoff of limited impact data that can be collected. Without the registration data, they were only able to capture the number of attendees and could not obtain additional details, yet the design better supported their overall goals.

Continuous Improvement

Several organizers discussed the importance of feedback and continuous improvement. DLD asks partners after the event is over to get their input on what went well and what could be tweaked for the next iteration. Suncoast RLD holds a celebration breakfast for its event hosts to celebrate the joy of co-producing the festival and begin to share ideas for next year. QSW looks at what went well and what could be improved on as the campaign ends so that it is fresh in organizers' minds. Like Suncoast, they also hold an appreciation event for partners to come together in one place to network and brainstorm for the next year. They have found that showing genuine and thoughtful appreciation has been a unique and powerful experience for partners that keeps them coming back.

Many regions reflect on the kinds of event hosts they have recruited and those they may need to reach out to in the next year. Southeastern Pennsylvania, for instance, noticed they did not have a lot of libraries as regional hosts, so in subsequent years they have done more outreach and now have several library hosts. Moving forward, they plan to bring in industry hosts as that is another balance they would like to achieve. There will always be more to do, but the important thing is to be responsive and open to evolving needs and embracing new perspectives.

Creating Your Own Learning Festival



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CREATING YOUR OWN LEARNING FESTIVAL

Many festival organizers had suggestions for those looking to create or strengthen learning festivals in their own communities. Their insights and experiences can serve as a valuable guide for those looking to deepening community connection, foster innovation, and expand the bounds of what is possible in education. These recommendations are:

Start Small: Though Doncaster wanted to link RLD to their skills initiative and to engage more business as event hosts, they did not have time to make this happen in the festival's first year. They reminded themselves and would share with others that, "It's perfectly ok to start small and iterate. You don't have to bite off more than you can chew."⁸²

Yvonne Lane, from Limerick's Lifelong Learning Festival shared the advice to start small with a dedicated group and to learn from other festivals as much as possible. "Start with the willing, get a good committee around you. It's important to have those partners involved in the planning, and go visit a festival near you to get a sense of what it's like."⁸³

Think Outside of the Box: Remake Learning Executive Director, Tyler Samstag recommends that regions think outside of the box as to where they can find partners. Taking an innovative approach to partnership building can lead to surprising and fruitful collaborations.



"Start small with a dedicated group and to learn from other festivals as much as possible."

—YVONNE LANE, LIMERICK LIFELONG LEARNING FESTIVAL

Intentionally Design for Equity: Do not expect people to just show up. Working alongside community-based organizations who are from and have trusting relationships with the specific communities the festival hopes to engage can lead to stronger engagement. When done thoughtfully



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and with the right people, it is possible to break down barriers in a relatively short period of time, as the Weekender showed.

Leverage Partner Competencies: For the Weekender, the Housing Authority is busy putting on the logistics of the festival and is actively seeking partnerships with organizations with the time and expertise to measure the festival's impact. This is similar to how RLD worked with the Global Family Research Project to measure the impact of the festival felt by families. Having that outside research partner to point to can help organizations strengthen impact measurement and perhaps secure new funding, while not adding to the burden of all that the organization has on its own plate.

Expect Flux: Knowing that partners can and do change is important. For the Weekender, they noted that "as long as our partner is receiving value from the partnership, it makes sense to partner. When that partner no longer receives value, it's important for us to look for new partnerships. Understanding that a partner today is not a partner forever is a hard lesson to learn, but it's a very important lesson."⁸⁴

Just Try It: Finally, the last word of advice comes from QSW. "Starting Qatar Sustainability Week was a big challenge but one worth trying. We thought let's give it a go and see if there's an appetite for it, and there was. There is no right or wrong way to do this sort of thing. You have to try several ideas and ways of doing things. Some of them will work,

CONCLUSION

For children and youth, exposure to joyful learning experiences can literally open new doors. It can open doors to a newfound passion, to building new skills, to new connections with in-school and out-of-school learning opportunities, and to the possibilities of a new career. Most importantly, it can create that “a-ha” moment for a child as they discover something new that sparks their desire to learn more. And, if this curiosity is nurtured, it can encourage our youth to become lifelong learners.

Learning festivals are instrumental in creating these “a-ha” opportunities for kids and their families. With the timebound nature of a festival, the community comes together to rally around and curate memorable experiences. It brings families together and encourages them to make the time for shared learning. It bridges the learning that happens in-school with the learning that happens after-school and out-of school, demonstrating how this alignment can enhance the learning experiences for kids. And, learning festivals also help diverse stakeholders realize the collective responsibility they have to create meaningful pathways for a child throughout their education.

Learning can happen everywhere. Schools, libraries, performing arts centers, museums, parks, farms, tech companies, businesses and community centers are all learning spaces that can help youth build 21st century skills. When these everyday spaces open their doors for youth and families to explore, it creates authentic learning experiences which can lead to new long-lasting relationships. Students will feel welcomed, and they begin to see new possibilities for themselves.

As a community, we can work together to take away the barriers for youth and families to access these learning experiences. And, through this collaboration, we grow a community’s learning ecosystem and the demand for innovative learning opportunities for all kids. A child’s community will become more rich, more colorful and more joyful. Nothing can replace the moment when a child makes a new discovery that leads them to *want* to learn even more. Ultimately, that is the goal for learning festivals — helping every child find their spark in life.



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⁸⁰ Proclamation, Board of County Commissioners Manatee County, Florida, April 2023, <https://agendaonline.mymanatee.org/OnBaseAgendaOnline/Meetings/ViewMeeting?id=374&doctype=1>.

⁸¹ "Co-Designing Schools Toolkit," <https://www.codesigningschools.com/>.

⁸² Dani Adams, Interviewed by Lauren Ziegler, July 28, 2023.

⁸³ Yvonne Lane, Interviewed by Lauren Ziegler, August 28, 2023.

⁸⁴ Oche Bridgeford, Interviewed by Lauren Ziegler, August 16, 2023.

⁸⁵ Shireen Obeidat, Interviewed by Lauren Ziegler, September 11, 2023.

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