

CONFERENCE REPORT: THE NEW AWARDEE PROGRAM OF THE ITYC SUMMIT

Executive Summary

The groundbreaking New Awardee Program, built on the inaugural 2025 ITYC Summit, engaged ITYC awardees whose awards (including the SEA-PHAGES awards) were made in 2025 after the ITYC Summit registration closed. The program provided an opportunity for these new awardees to learn about the range of ITYC projects, explore leadership and grant management strategies, examine evidence-based practices for strengthening STEM education in 2YCs, consider effective ways to communicate about their projects, and build connections across the ITYC community.

The New Awardee Program, which took place virtually between February 27 and May 8, 2026, brought together 46 participants representing 20 funded projects. It consisted of six 2.5-hour workshop days followed by an optional 30-minute open discussion and Q&A. Each workshop day included two related sessions and addressed topics of interest to participants, which included ITYC project leaders, collaborators, and staff.

- Day 1 - Getting to know you: Introductions & learning about your ITYC projects
- Day 2 - Grant management
- Day 3 - Leadership and partnerships
- Day 4 - Supporting student success: Strategies, outcomes, & evidence of success
- Day 5 - Leveraging project evaluation
- Day 6 - Communicating project outcomes and next steps

The interactive workshop sessions included the following activities:

- Micro-poster sessions: Participants discussed their projects, using their posters.
- Panels: Experienced 2YC faculty, administrators, and evaluators spoke and answered questions about the following topics: grant management, project evaluation, and generating partnerships for project work.
- Interactive presentations: Leadership and leveraging evaluative thinking
- Small-group breakouts: Participants spent part of each workshop day in small groups discussing their experiences with the topic.

The success of the New Awardee Program was demonstrated by participant responses to evaluation surveys (daily roadchecks and an end-of-workshop (EOW) evaluation) as well as through a one-page written reflection submitted after the full workshop series. The evaluation results show that each workshop day was rated highly, that participants felt strongly that the goals of the workshop were met, and that the workshop sessions were well facilitated. Responses to the written reflections provided insights about what participants got from the program, what they contributed to the program, and advice they would give to future cohorts of ITYC awardees; these responses were synthesized. The synthesis suggests that participant confidence regarding their project and their role increased as a result of the New Awardee program. Participants developed connections with others in the workshop and considered themselves part of a community of 2YC educators. By sharing practical knowledge, lessons learned, a variety of perspectives, and encouragement, participants helped build a community where

new ITYC awardees could draw on the collective experience of their peers. The report includes a section highlighting what worked well and what could be strengthened. Participants expressed a desire for continued engagement through an ongoing ITYC community. The program created a supportive community in which participants shared strategies, learned from one another, and gained confidence in their roles as grant recipients and 2YC STEM educators.

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“Participation... has opened me to the vast breadth of projects that have been envisioned by all of the peer institutions. I now have new ideas and a new way of thinking. I am now re-envisioning what can be done at our community college.” (Participant reflection)

1. Introduction

The July 2025 inaugural in-person “Innovations in Two-Year College STEM Education (ITYC) Summit” represented a significant milestone for the advancement of STEM education in 2YCs. The Summit brought together ITYC awardees, prospective PIs, and other stakeholders from across the ITYC program and country. In addition to providing an opportunity to convene the ITYC community, the Summit established a foundation for continued collaboration, learning, and leadership across the program.

Building on the 2025 Summit (Zuber et al., 2026), the first ITYC New Awardee Program, a virtual workshop, was offered in spring 2026. This program provided an opportunity to engage ITYC awardees whose awards (including the SEA-PHAGES awards) were made in 2025 after the ITYC Summit registration closed. The goals for the virtual New Awardee program were for participants to:

- Learn about the range of ITYC projects
- Explore leadership and grant management strategies
- Examine evidence-based practices for strengthening STEM education in 2YCs
- Consider effective ways to communicate about their projects
- Build connections across the ITYC community

2. Participants

We invited the PIs and co-PIs from the 24 ITYC projects (including the SEA-PHAGES awards) funded in 2025. Invited participants included the 26 PIs and 35 co-PIs of the 2025 ITYC funded projects, as well as others associated with the projects that did not include any co-PIs. In our invitation to the PI of each award, we encouraged participation by two people from each award; for collaborative projects, we encouraged participation of the co-PIs or other PIs. Participation by more than one person per project facilitated the exchange of experiences and expertise that could strengthen projects and contributed to the collective knowledge of the ITYC community. Twenty ITYC projects (including SEA-PHAGES awards) funded in 2025 were represented in the program.

The 46 participants were from 22 2YCs, one university, and included two external evaluators. They included a variety of disciplines: biology, biotechnology, chemistry, computer science, environmental science, geography, geoscience, mathematics, physics, psychology, STEM, and student services. Participants reported a range of previous experience with NSF grants on the registration form.

- 21 were a first time PI/co-PI
- 16 had been associated with several grants
- 4 have had “a lot of proposals awarded”

Participants received a stipend for attending the sessions and submitting a final reflection on workshop insights. Of the original 46 participants, 42 qualified for the stipend and 37 completed the final steps to get a stipend.

3. Workshop Program Overview

Following an informational webinar in January 2026, this virtual workshop consisted of six 2.5-hour sessions held between February 27 and May 8, plus an optional 30-minute open discussion and Q&A after each session. Each participant completed a registration form, and they submitted a micro-poster about their project before the first workshop session.

Workshop leaders: The workshop was designed and led by the leadership team: Eric Baer, Ellen Iverson, Heather Macdonald, John McDaris, and Sharon Zuber. Guest speakers and panelists from 2YCs shared their experience and expertise with participants in workshop sessions.

Pre-workshop informational webinar: The purpose of the New Awardee Informational Webinar was to introduce potential participants to the program and to address their questions. The webinar was recorded and included an overview of the program, key dates, and micro-poster information, leaving time for questions.

Workshop topics at a glance

- Day 1 - Getting to know you: Introductions & learning about your ITYC projects
- Day 2 - Grant management
- Day 3 - Leadership and partnerships
- Day 4 - Supporting student success: Strategies, outcomes, & evidence of success
- Day 5 - Leveraging project evaluation
- Day 6 - Communicating project outcomes and next steps

Typical schedule for a workshop day

The workshop days followed a similar structure with an opening and closing session, 2 sessions separated by a break, and an optional breakout following the closing session:

12:00-12:05 ET Opening session

12:05–1:05 ET Session 1

1:05-1:20 ET Break

1:20 - 2:10 ET Session 2

2:10 -2:30 ET Closing session with daily roadcheck survey

2:30-3:00 ET Optional continued discussion & Q&A

In the opening sessions, participants were welcomed, and the results of the previous day's daily roadcheck survey responses were summarized, followed by a review of the code of conduct and community guidelines, and a preview of the day's sessions. In the closing sessions, participants were asked to think about one or more of the following questions:

- What is something you learned or gained today?
- What is something that sparked your curiosity?
- What is something you will be doing as a follow-up?

They shared their insights in small breakouts and selected one insight to share in the chat with the full workshop group. Participants were reminded about any homework and then completed a daily roadcheck survey, a short online confidential evaluation.

4. Workshop Details

The following sections summarize each workshop session. Each summary is followed by participant comments drawn from the daily roadcheck evaluations, illustrating participants' reflections and feedback on the session.

Day 1. Getting to know you: Introductions and learning about your ITYC projects

After introductions to the workshop leaders, Day 1 included a welcome from Dr. Suazette Reid Mooring and Dr. Nasser Alaraje, Program Directors, NSF Directorate for STEM Education. Participants then shared micro-posters about their projects in two 50-minute small-group breakout sessions. (Details about the micro-posters are given in the ITYC Summit report. Zuber et al., 2026) For the first session, participants were randomly grouped; for the second, groups were organized around similar projects or topics. Each presenter had 10 minutes to briefly share their project's big idea, a key activity, and a key result, and then take questions and discuss their project with breakout group members. The micro-poster session, a highly successful activity at the in-person Summit, was also a highlight in the virtual New Awardee workshop.

Quotes from the daily roadcheck survey:

- *Really cool stuff is happening at CCs!!*
- *We share a lot of the same successes and challenges with other projects. Successes - enthusiasm and buy-in from colleagues, positive feedback from students. Challenges - navigating IRB/grants office, concerns about sustainability after funding period.*
- *People seemed intrigued by my project, and they were taking notes to add some components of my project to their project and asking how I facilitate that component (journal club discussion). This made me feel valued, empowered, and confident.*
- *One project I heard about had a dedicated advisor for placing new students into the right level math course. I wonder if that could work at my institution?*

Day 2. Grant management: Addressing project management challenges

On day 2, the first session focused on strategies to address types of project management challenges:

- People and time management, balancing workload with project work, team dynamics & communication
- Administrative hurdles, infrastructure, record keeping, financial aspects
- Student recruitment, faculty recruitment

These topics were inspired by the ITYC Summit participants who identified the following areas as challenges: Implementing the work plan & managing everything, balancing work schedules with moving the project forward, timing and logistics, student and faculty recruitment.

Participants were given time to think about strategies to address one or more challenges before sharing in mixed-group breakouts of four (ideally, people from the same project were in different breakouts). After the discussion, there was a report back and sharing. In responses to the daily roadcheck, one participant mentioned learning more about "IRB, implementation, and sustainability challenges that institutions are facing and ways to solve or work around these challenges." Another awardee "gained an appreciation of this now-building community."

In the second session, the following panelists, all of whom had experience as PIs on ITYC grants, shared their experiences: Karen Kortz, Professor of Geology, Community College of Rhode Island; Kate Kozak, Instructor of Mathematics, Coconino Community College (AZ); and Jim Rabchuk, Dean, STEM Division, Oakton College (IL). These panelists addressed questions from the moderator who also took participant questions in the chat. The panelists were available for continued discussion after the session.

The panelists were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. How do you keep a project moving forward when you have multiple demands on your time?
2. What's an issue you faced in your project and how did you address it?
3. How do you set people up for effective collaboration - to put it more bluntly, how do you get everyone on your team to pull their weight?
4. What are one (or two) things you wish you'd known when you were starting?
5. Who was an ally or champion who helped you (a person who showed you the ropes)?

Quotes from the daily roadcheck reflect what participants learned:

- *So many of us are experiencing similar challenges with people, time, and moving things forward.*
- *Think of program officers and others (Fin Aid, Finance Dept, Evaluator) as allies and use them as resources.*
- *Clear communication with grant team members is essential to the success of managing the grant.*
- *As a grants administrator, I learned how to better support PI's.*

Day 3. Leadership and partnerships

Day 3 included a session on leadership for change, followed by a panel illustrating different types of partnerships. In the first session, led by Sean Tvelia, Professor of Geology & Academic Chair, Physical Science, Suffolk County Community College, participants explored how they, as leaders, could better engage other leaders, partners, allies, or champions of their projects. The session was structured around a review of the Bolman and Deal (2021) leadership frames and how the participants might use them in their work. They were then asked to reflect on how they might enhance their project - addressing a challenge, adding a partner, finding a champion - and who they might engage. In a small breakout, the participants applied what they had learned by role-playing a one-on-one conversation with an ask.

In the partnerships session, three panelists discussed how partnerships could be of value to a grant project:

- Darcy Ernst, Professor of Biology, Evergreen Valley College (CA)
Panel Role: Industry / community partnerships
- Kaatje Kraft, Professor of Geology, Whatcom Community College (WA)
Panel Role: Partnerships with other institutions
- Janine Shockley, Director of Student Services Hub and International Student Programming, Mt. Hood Community College (OR)
Panel Role: Partnerships with other units on campus

Each panelist, in turn, addressed questions through the lens of their panel role (community partnerships, partnerships with other institutions, and partnerships with other units on campus). Questions were posed by a workshop leader as another leader moderated the chat for questions from the participants. The questions included:

- Tell us more about your experiences with partnerships associated with NSF grants and how they began.
- In your experience, what are a couple of things that make for a successful partnership or collaboration on grant-funded projects in whatever context?
- A question specific to each person/type of partnership:
 - What lessons have you learned from your projects about working with industry partners? Is there advice you'd give someone looking to do that?
 - What is the value of partnering with colleagues at other institutions? What lessons have you learned about doing that well?
 - Who are hidden allies or potential partners in a campus community and what are good ways to approach them?

Panelists were available for continued conversations in the optional breakouts.

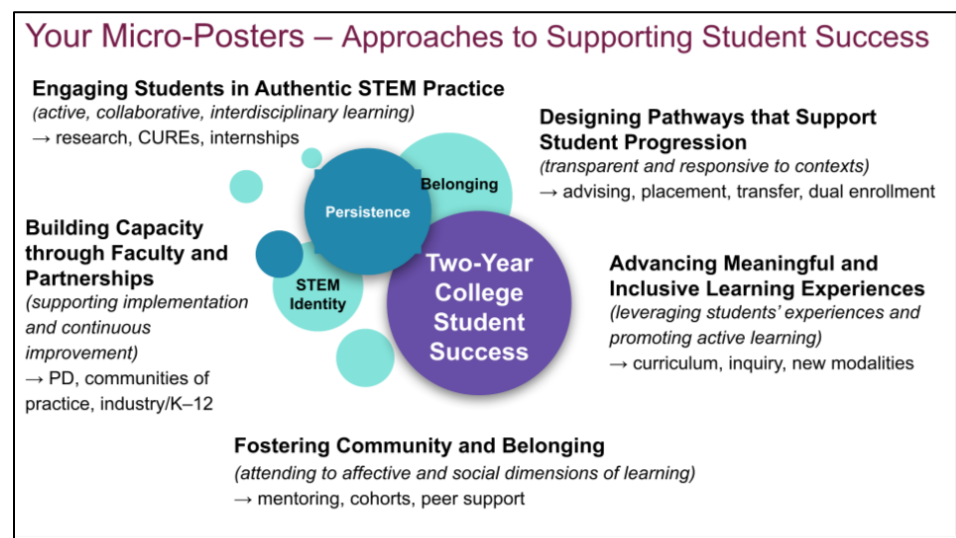
Quotes from the daily roadcheck:

- *There are different approaches to leadership, and when asking for help, different approaches are needed for different people.*
- *[I'm] confident that I am good at managing communications as part of project management and got some helpful tips about making an "ask."*
- *One key takeaway from today's sessions was understanding the importance of developing strong partnerships, along with practical strategies for how to initiate and build those connections effectively.*

Day 4. Supporting student success: Strategies, outcomes, & evidence of success

Sessions on Day 4 were led by Kalyn Shea Owens, Professor of Chemistry, and Ann J. Murkowski, Professor of Biology, both from North Seattle College. Participants in the first session were asked to examine how their project supports student success and what that looks like in practice. In the second session, they explored how their project design moves from theory to implementation.

In the first session, Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) that Advance Student Success – What Works and Why?, the presenters drew on the participants' micro-posters to identify ways their projects were supporting student success:



They also presented the following list of principles for ethical and effective teaching in undergraduate STEM education (NASEM, 2025):

1. Students need opportunities to **actively engage** in disciplinary learning.
2. Students' **diverse interests, goals, knowledge and experiences** can be leveraged to enhance learning.
3. STEM learning involves **affective and social dimensions**.
4. **Identity and sense of belonging** shape STEM teaching and learning.
5. Multiple forms of **data can provide evidence to inform improvement**.
6. **Flexibility and responsiveness** to situational and contextual factors support student learning.
7. **Intentionality and transparency** create more equitable opportunities.

In breakout groups organized by project type, participants shared an example from their own project that aligned with one or more of the seven principles and the intended student outcomes. Each group discussed how the example supported those principles, identified key insights, and selected one example and several takeaways to share with the full cohort.

The second session, Implementation: Translating Design into Practice, shifted the focus from project design to implementation. Participants reflected on a key activity or strategy in their project and identified an implementation challenge they were currently navigating. In breakout groups, they discussed strategies for addressing these challenges and identified one or two ideas to share with the full group. During the report-out, groups highlighted common implementation challenges, promising practices, and key lessons that participants could apply to their own projects.

Quotes from the daily roadcheck:

- *I AM NOT ALONE. The challenges I am facing are not uncommon.*
- *Many of us have the same struggles, and it was great to stop and focus on the student success part a bit more.*
- *I've learned we are on track with our progress and share similar concerns about faculty engagement as others have.*

Evaluation should be designed to complement the research. For instance, the research might be focused on assessing student learning gains following a new pedagogical approach, where the complementary evaluation might be more focused on the faculty who are teaching with the new approach- what is their confidence level, motivation, which may impact the student outcomes. Having an external evaluator also allows participants to give feedback that they may be less comfortable giving directly to leadership, which can be a really important role.

Ellen Iverson & Kristin O'Connell

Day 5. Leveraging project evaluation

On Day 5, the first session was designed by Ellen Iverson, SERC Director, and Kristin O'Connell, Evaluation and Education Associate at SERC, and was followed by a panel of evaluators in the second session.

The first session focused on leveraging evaluation and evaluative thinking to strengthen project implementation and outcomes. In a poll conducted at the beginning of the session, 14 of the 31 participants responding to the poll (45%) reported having no prior experience with evaluation, highlighting the importance of this topic for the new awardees.

The session introduced evaluation as a systematic process for understanding how a project is progressing, identifying opportunities for improvement, and informing decision-making throughout the project. Participants learned that evaluators complement project leaders' disciplinary expertise by helping teams identify important contextual factors, develop formative and summative evaluation plans, and collect and analyze data aligned with project goals. The session also emphasized the value of evaluators in providing an independent perspective and encouraging candid participant feedback.

Kristin O'Connell then introduced an evaluative thinking framework, which uses the questions "What?", "So what?", and "Now what?" to promote reflective decision-making. After applying the framework to an example activity, participants considered how they could use the approach in their own projects and shared their ideas using a waterfall activity, followed by group discussion.

In the second session, a panel of evaluators addressed questions about their work on NSF-funded grants. The panelists were:

- **Cameron Craft**, Evaluation and Grant Support Collaborative, LLC (EGSC)
Grant: Enhancing STEM Education with Leadership Academies in a Rural Two-Year College Context
PI: April Kilgore, Kentucky Community & Technical College System
- **Jacqueline Peña**, Empowerment through Education, LLC
Grant: Advancing STEM Success Through Course-Based Biological and AI-Driven Research Experiences at a Two-Year College
PI: Marisa (Nia) Madison, Miami Dade College
- **Kristin O'Connell**, Science Education Resource Center, Carleton College
Evaluator (external, internal) on 30+ grant-funded projects, including SAGE 2YC

Each of the panelists shared insights about the following questions:

- Give us an example where evaluation has really contributed to successful outcomes for a project (and why)?
- How have you dealt with changes to either the evaluation team or the project leadership while a project is ongoing?
- Could you give an example of a project you worked on where the evaluation (evaluation plan?) had to change after the project got started, and how you and the project leadership negotiated that change successfully?
- What one (or two) pieces of advice would you give to project leaders who are just starting out working with their project evaluators?

Quotes from the daily roadcheck:

- *Evaluators come in many forms - but in nearly all forms they are most helpful to a project when they are brought in as part of the team*
- *Evaluators can facilitate the work of the project, as well as collaborate with the PIs, rather than just being outside judges.*
- *How I can utilize the evaluator. It was nice to hear what my role should be and what their role should be.*

Day 6. Communicating project outcomes and next steps

On Day 6 in the first session, participants learned about communicating and disseminating project outcomes and writing NSF reports. The second session focused on sustaining innovations with examples from the workshop leaders' projects.

In the first session, participants reflected on their project's intended outcomes, including activities, participants, impacts, and knowledge generated. They then considered how they would communicate these outcomes both through required NSF reporting and to broader audiences. Discussion focused on tailoring dissemination strategies for a variety of audiences, including colleagues at their institution, administrators, disciplinary peers, industry partners, K–12 collaborators, NSF program officers, and other stakeholders, using venues such as conferences, workshops, podcasts, social media, and other communication channels.

Participants were eager to learn about the required NSF reports (from Day 5 roadcheck). The session provided details about the annual project report, the final annual project report, and the project outcomes report for the general public. In addition to these NSF reports, the participants learned about many other ways of communicating project outcomes creatively.

Dissemination of project outcomes to interested communities



Dissemination approaches	Possible communities
• Presentations • Publications • Webinars • Website • Social media • Podcasts • Workshops • Campus events • Disciplinary society & other conferences • Community events • Other creative approaches	• Colleagues on campus • Disciplinary colleagues • Other 2YCs in your region • STEM education community • The public • Local, regional, national decision makers • Other audiences

Creative approaches are encouraged!

In the breakouts for this session, participants were asked to consider one dissemination strategy for their project by addressing the What, Who, and Where:

- **What:** what approach, what product (presentation, article, workshop, ...)
- **Who:** audience (e.g., single or multiple disciplines; colleagues, other 2YCs, public)
- **Where:** conference, campus, journal, online

They were also asked what the intended goal of the activity was - what they would share about project/outcomes and what they hoped to achieve by the end of their award.

After the breakouts, participants were asked to consider one or both of the following questions and share with the entire group in the chat.

- How has your original dissemination strategy idea changed or been enhanced by what you discussed in the breakout?
- Did you get an idea for another dissemination strategy and/or community that you might add to your project? If so, briefly describe.

At the beginning of the second session, NSF program officer Suzette Reid Mooring emphasized the important role that 2YCs play in the STEM ecosystem and highlighted how NSF-funded projects at 2YCs contribute to advancing STEM education, broadening participation, and strengthening the nation's STEM workforce.

Dr. Mooring's remarks were followed by a session about Next steps: Sustaining your innovations. The session began with a synthesis of Summit participant suggestions for next steps on ITYC projects: Institutional adoption, additional funding, and strategic demonstration of value. This presentation was followed by a micro-panel featuring NSF project examples by workshop leaders Eric Baer, Ellen Iverson, Heather Macdonald, and John McDaris.

Quotes from the daily roadcheck:

- *Today's session was very valuable as I had no frame of reference for the report process, so hearing from Suzette and others who have experience was very valuable*
- *I learned what is important to put in the report. Especially the report from the external evaluator.*
- *Ideas for dissemination and great ideas for our poster sessions. Potentially collaborating with another group I met today*
- *We should consider the audience when deciding upon 'how' we're disseminating our information, as well as 'what' specific aspects of our project we are disseminating (how to pique their interest).*

5. New Awardee Program Success: Participant Perspectives

The success of the New Awardee program was made clear by participant responses to the daily roadchecks, end-of-workshop (EOW) evaluation, and one-page participant reflections in response to questions about their experience in the New Awardees workshop. Both numerical results and open-ended responses demonstrate that the workshop was well received by participants and suggest ways the program could be strengthened. The sections that follow highlight various components of the workshop evaluation.

1. Participant satisfaction throughout the New Awardee program
2. Degree to which program goals were met
3. Workshop design and facilitation
4. Most and least valuable aspects of the workshop
5. Participant reflection responses about New Awardee program

1. Participant satisfaction throughout the New Awardee program

The daily roadchecks gave the workshop leaders valuable feedback about what they learned or gained from the day's session, what they found most valuable, and their current satisfaction with the workshop. Highlights of each daily roadcheck were shared with participants in the next day's opening session. A few examples of responses from the daily roadchecks (including the day 6 roadcheck, which

was also the EOW) are included in the descriptions of each workshop day above. The table below gives the participants' satisfaction with each of the six days of the workshop. Although the participants' satisfaction with the program varied from day to day, overall they were very satisfied.

Daily roadcheck responses Scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = very dissatisfied and 10 = very satisfied	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mode
Day 1 Learning about ITYC projects	9.4	1.1	10
Day 2 Grant management	9.5	0.83	10
Day 3 Leadership & partnerships	9.0	1.24	10
Day 4 Supporting student success	8.1	2.30	9
Day 5 Project evaluation	8.5	1.64	10
Day 6 Communicating project outcomes; End-of-Workshop survey	9.0	1.14	10

Some participants provided more explanation where they reported less satisfaction with a topical day. It appears that those with more experience reported less satisfaction and stated that they had more experience so the content was not as valuable to them.

- *I ... would have loved it as a faculty new to running grants. But, as a more experienced person, it has been less useful.* Day 5
- *I love the idea of it and hate not giving it a 10. It just wasn't as helpful for an experienced PI.* Day 6

2. Degree to which program goals were met

Participants rated the degree to which the following goal statements of the workshop were met in the end-of-workshop evaluation. All the goal statements received high ratings. Participants gave the highest ratings to statements about opportunities to share about their project (4.0) and to learn about the range of ITYC projects (3.9) addressing Goal 1: Learn about the range of ITYC projects. Their high rating (3.9) of the statement that the program allowed them to network with and learn from other 2025 ITYC awardees addresses Goal 5: Building connections across the ITYC community.

Degree to which the following goals of the ITYC New Awardee program were met (n=37) Scale of 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree)	
Provided opportunities for me to share about my project	4.0
Gave me an opportunity to learn about the range of ITYC projects	3.9
Allowed me to network with and learn from other 2025 ITYC awardees	3.9
Gained knowledge about effective strategies for communicating my project outcomes	3.7
Learned more about how to leverage project evaluation	3.7
Discussed strategies for supporting student success with other participants	3.6
Gained knowledge around addressing project management challenges	3.6
Gained insight into leadership frames	3.6
Learned about strategies for developing effective partnerships	3.4

3. Workshop design and facilitation

Participant responses in the EOW indicate that the New Awardee program engaged participants in active learning and was well facilitated. The use of active learning strategies throughout the program supported focused discussions in and across teams and built connections among participants (supporting Goal 5: Build connections across the ITC community). Notably, the ratings for these two questions about the virtual New Awardee program are the same as those for the in-person ITC Summit, illustrating that virtual formats can be interactive, engaging, and well-facilitated.

Facilitation of the ITC New Awardee program (n=37) Scale of 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree)	
Engaged me in active learning	3.8
Workshop sessions were well facilitated	3.9

4. Most and least valuable aspects of the workshop

The EOW included open-ended questions about what aspects of the workshop (across all days) were the most and least valuable for participants. Overall, participants appreciated the opportunity to learn more about other projects funded by ITC and to learn more about and discuss ideas, challenges, and strategies of leading projects with other awardees in a context focused on 2YC STEM education.

What aspects of the workshop (across all days) were the most valuable for you? And why?

Thirty-seven participants completed the EOW evaluation and identified the aspects of the workshop they found most valuable. Their comments addressed both the overall workshop experience and specific sessions. Days 1 (micro-poster sharing), 5 (project evaluation), and 6 (communicating project outcomes) received the most number of positive comments (11); Day 3 (leadership and partnerships) had 4 responses. Many participants commented about the value of sharing challenges, ideas, and experiences about their projects, which started with the Day 1 micro-poster discussions and continued throughout the program, including days 2 (grant and project management), and 4 (supporting student success). Participant responses, which in some cases included items spanning multiple categories, were grouped into several categories that highlight the aspects of the workshop participants found most valuable and provide insight into **why** they were valuable.

A. Learning about the range of ITC projects

- I enjoyed learning about all of the other projects and PIs out there. It made the whole process feel a lot less intimidating for me (new to NSF grants).*
- I appreciated meeting other ITC grant holders and learning about their projects, as they are both interesting and inspirational.*
- Learning about the broad range of other ITC projects, to help with networking and brainstorming for future opportunities.*

B. Breakouts and panels

- Breakout rooms were great. I got to meet such a varied cast of faculty, staff, and evaluators from other 2YCs and I found that a lot of successes, challenges, opportunities, experiences were the same despite our geographic distance.*

- *The most helpful was hearing the panel leaders talk about what they were there to talk about.*
- *I enjoyed the panel discussions where I learned new aspects of the grant program process*

C. Discussing challenges, strategies, and solutions to issues related to their project and project management with other participants

- *The most valuable aspect of the workshop across all days was being able to speak with others who are in similar situations and gain insight into ways to better facilitate my project.*
- *Hearing different perspectives, sharing experiences, and discussing challenges and strategies provided practical ideas and a stronger sense of support and collaboration.*
- *Seeing how the grant should develop, how to start it, manage people, sometimes switching directions and looking into sustainability. I wish every person who gets a grant would be able to go through some kind of program like that. It helps tremendously in my situation.*

D. Evaluation

- *Unpacking the role and work with the external evaluator was hugely supportive because it is not an experience either myself or our PI have had, as first time grant awardees.*
- *Learning more about the role (and possible activities) of the evaluator and how different project groups are/plan to use their evaluator.*
- *One of the most valuable workshops for me was the one on the role of evaluation and evaluators, since I really didn't have a good idea about that process, and now I feel more informed and more appreciative of [the] evaluation process.*

E. Leadership

- *The most valuable may have been the leadership workshop as it helped to reinforce in my mind the grit PIs require to navigate institutional bureaucracy.*
- *It was helpful to think about how people at different levels of community college think about leadership - which areas they value - and how to frame things to reach them.*
- *Discussing leadership and collaboration across campus was affirming and rewarding.*

F. NSF reports

- *This last day was quite helpful because we heard from the project officer and we heard the specifics from presenters on how to structure the annual report.*
- *The second most valuable workshop was the one on the annual report, because I was alarmed by that email and wasn't sure what I would put into that report.*
- *The evaluation and annual report sessions were the aspects I was least confident about.*

What aspects of the workshop (across all days) were the least valuable for you? And why?

Of the 37 participants who responded to this question, about two-thirds identified some aspect of the program as least valuable. Notably, about one-third responded that nothing was least valuable (e.g., "N/A", "All the days were valuable"). Responses about what was least valuable fall into a few categories, listed below.

A. Leadership session

- *Role-playing in the leadership session*
- *Leadership framing; not that it wasn't interesting but I didn't get a sense of how it benefitted me directly like the other sessions.*
- *The leadership framing didn't feel particularly helpful for me. Not sure why, it just felt a bit disconnected and irrelevant*

B. Other programmatic/topical aspects: A topic or session on each of days 2-5 was identified by one or more participants as least valuable, reflecting participant differences.

- *All were valuable, but I had to leave early due to conflicting meetings for two sessions - these were the ones I learned the least from, but I plan to review the recordings to catch up on the material.*
- *The ones I wasn't able to attend due to schedule conflicts. :(I thank you for sharing some of the slides and recordings.*

C. Breakouts and panels

- *Some of the breakout sessions were less valuable than others. Sometimes the projects were so different that it was hard to relate to what they were doing because the scope was so different.*
- *Some of the breakout rooms were less engaging than others, but I think that was due to the level of engagement of the people and not the intended task during the breakout.*
- *The panel discussions were really hit or miss in terms of the amount I took away from them.*

D. Consideration of different levels of grant experience

- *Perhaps it would've [been] helpful to have some separation of new/experienced PIs for some of the sessions?? Or different levels of information for the different groups?*

5. Highlights of the ITYC New Awardee Program Synthesis of Participant Reflections

As a final part of the program, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences in the New Awardee Program. The reflection was a short writing assignment that addressed three key questions:

1. What did you get out of the New Awardee Program?
2. What did you contribute to the New Awardee Program?
3. What advice would you share with the next cohort of new ITYC awardees?

Final reflections were submitted by 42 participants (91%), and the leadership team synthesized a number of common takeaways from the responses. A full synthesis of the responses is available on the ITYC Summit website (McDaris et al., 2026). Below are some highlights. Participant quotes are in italics.

Question 1: What did you get out of the New Awardee Program?

Participants expressed a wide variety of benefits from their participation in the program, including the value of a peer community, recognizing common challenges in 2YC projects, gaining practical grant management strategies and project ideas, and building confidence.

- **Peer community and connection:** Building relationships with other ITYC awardees was consistently identified as one of the program's most valuable outcomes. Participants reported

feeling less isolated and more connected to a national community of colleagues working in similar 2YC contexts.

- **Recognizing common challenges in 2YC projects:** The recognition that institutional delays, purchasing barriers, and project pivots are common across many 2YCs reduced participant anxiety and reframed obstacles as normal parts of managing a grant.
- **Practical grant management strategies and expanding project vision:** Participants valued learning about practical grant management strategies such as working effectively with grant evaluators, evaluative thinking, annual report expectations, the option of no-cost extensions, and other strategies that were shared by panelists and workshop leaders. Learning about the breadth of projects at other 2YCs inspired participants to reconsider and expand their own project ideas.
- **Participant confidence:** Participants gained confidence in their ability to lead their projects, navigate institutional systems, and manage grant responsibilities. For some, hearing from peers provided important validation that their projects were on track and that the challenges they encountered were not unique.
- **Other themes** related to the participant responses to this first question included leadership and strategic mindsets, project expansion, and post-grant sustainability.

I left more confident in my abilities, more grounded in the outcomes and impacts of my program, and more connected to a national network of peers who are navigating the same terrain.

Participating alongside both new and previously awarded investigators created a cross-generational exchange of knowledge that was, by turns, affirming, eye-opening, and genuinely inspiring.

Question 2: What did you contribute to the New Awardee Program?

Participants expressed that they learned more than they contributed; their reflections highlighted how they enriched the workshop through active participation, practical strategies and research, peer problem-solving, and diverse professional and institutional perspectives. Curiosity was also an important contribution, prompting participants to ask questions, listen, and learn from one another.

- **Active participation and community building.** Participants strengthened discussions by asking questions, listening to colleagues' experiences, offering feedback, facilitating breakout groups, and serving as reporters or panelists; several brought project team members into the program.
- **Practical strategies and resources.** Participants shared project models, dissemination strategies, technology tools, and approaches to implementation that colleagues could adapt to their own projects.
- **Peer problem-solving and sharing lessons learned.** Participants drew on their prior grant and institutional experience to help colleagues navigate procurement, budgeting, release time, evaluation contracts, and other administrative challenges.
- **Different professional and institutional perspectives.** Department chairs, administrators, evaluators, student services professionals, and other team members brought perspectives that extended beyond the traditional PI role.

- **Curiosity.** Participants frequently framed curiosity as a tangible value they brought to both individual learning and peer-to-peer exchange throughout the workshop. As one participant commented, *“I brought a sense of curiosity, collaboration, and willingness to share openly with the [breakout groups].”*

I asked in depth questions of others to understand their experiences and their struggles.

I shared strategies on how to motivate students and help them to become more independent researchers.

I feel like I was able to be a good listener and ask questions to help others think about their projects. It was great to see how excited people are about their projects, and I enjoyed helping them refine their thinking.

Question 3: What advice would you share with the next cohort of new ITYC awardees?

When asked what advice they would give to the next cohort, participants shared both general advice about being a PI and specific advice for getting the most out of a program like the New Awardee Program.

- Advice that applies more generally to being a PI centered on **being proactive and flexible in implementing projects** by developing early and strong relationships with business and grants offices as well as other possible campus allies. Participants recognized that not every aspect of a project will proceed as planned.

The cohort also provided the following advice to new awardees about getting the most out of a program like the New Awardee workshop.

- **Embrace an open and active learner mindset.** Participants encouraged future awardees to bring both successes and challenges to the program, ask questions—even questions they might consider basic—and be willing to acknowledge when they need help.
- **Safeguard their time.** Participants recommended blocking workshop dates on calendars well in advance and making attendance an integral part of grant implementation, not as an optional add-on.
- **Build professional networks.** Participants encouraged new awardees to exchange contact information, stay connected with cohort members, reach out to previous awardees, and use peers as sounding boards when questions or challenges arise.
- **Involve members of your project teams.** Find ways to share information with co-PIs, project coordinators, evaluators, or department chairs who may not have been able to attend the workshop.

One of the most important pieces of advice we would share is to remain flexible and adaptable, as no project develops exactly as originally planned. Building strong relationships, maintaining open communication, and being willing to adjust processes are essential to long-term success.

When I entered the ITYC New Awardee Program, I did not fully anticipate the depth of what the experience would offer. What I found was a dynamic, collegial space designed for exactly the kind of growth I needed: a place to learn, engage, and ask the questions that new investigators rarely feel comfortable raising elsewhere. Participating alongside both new and previously awarded investigators created a cross-generational exchange of knowledge that was, by turns, affirming, eye-opening, and genuinely inspiring.

6. Confidence and Community Engagement

The workshop leaders were interested in exploring (1) whether the confidence of participants' ability to work on their ITYC projects changed by the end of the workshop and (2) the extent to which participants considered themselves part of a community of 2YC educators working to improve 2YC STEM education and the ways in which they reported engaging with that community.

Participants' confidence in their ability to perform their role in their project changed slightly more towards "strongly agree" by the end of the workshop based on results from the workshop registration and the end-of-workshop survey (see table below). The paired data on reported confidence between workshop registration and the end of the workshop were not statistically significant. Participants reported a high level of confidence in the registration form (pre-workshop), so a ceiling effect could have limited positive change.

Confidence Scale 1-4: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)	Registration (N=46)	EOW (N=37)	Statistical significance for paired data
Confidence in your ability to perform your role in your project	3.6	3.8	Not significant

The EOW survey and the reflections submitted by participants after the workshop provide additional insights indicating that, in general, participants reported greater confidence about their ability to work on their project at the end of the workshop. Eight of the 42 participants who submitted reflections specifically identified confidence as something they gained from the New Awardee Program. These results suggest that their confidence regarding their project and their role in the project increased as a result of the New Awardee program. One participant wrote, *"The most important thing I got out of this program was confidence."*

- *Every meeting gave me more confidence that we are doing good work and that our project is helping students and our school. I'm also much more confident that I am able to help lead this project. (EOW)*
- *The program gave me confidence that we are making meaningful progress. (Reflection)*

The project leaders were also interested in the degree to which participants considered themselves part of a community of educators working in 2YCs. Four components of our project work suggest that by the end of the workshop participants had developed connections with others working to strengthen 2YC STEM education and considered themselves part of a community of 2YC educators working to improve STEM education

1. One of the goals of the New Awardee Program was to build connections across the ITYC community. Participants strongly agreed that the workshop “allowed me to network with and learn from other 2025 ITYC awardees” with a rating on the EOW survey of 3.9/4 where 4=strongly agree.
2. Being part of a community with other colleagues working on grants in a 2YC context was mentioned in many participant reflections as the most valuable takeaway from the New Awardee Program. As one participant wrote: it is wonderful to now feel part of a community of scientists with similar student populations, goals, and challenges.
3. The pre- and post-workshop responses to the question “To what extent do you consider yourself part of a community of 2YC educators working to improve STEM education?” on a scale of 1-3 where 3 was “To a great extent.” Pre-workshop and EOW survey results are 2.4 and 2.6, respectively, and the differences between paired responses were statistically significant. Remarkably, by the end of the workshop, 24/37 respondents selected “to a great extent” and 11/37 “to some extent.”
4. In the same registration and EOW surveys, participants were asked to “check all that apply” to a series of follow-up community engagement questions. Remarkably in the EOW survey, 70 percent or more of the respondents checked four of these types of community engagement. The engagement activity with the highest response in the pre-workshop registration was “Seeking people to talk to who have experience relevant to my situation” which illustrates the interest in talking with others who have a similar experience.” Notably, the two highest responses in the EOW survey were “Engaging in deep two-way conversation in support of our educational work” (78%) and “Providing assets or resources to other community members (76%), both of which describe actions that occurred during the workshop. These questions characterize activities considered to be aspects of a community of practice (Eddy et al., 2022; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). The community of ITYC awardees could be considered part of an emerging community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Community engagement questions Scale 1-3: To a little extent (1), To some extent (2), To a great extent (3)	Registration (N=46)	EOW (N=37)	Statistical significance for paired data
To what extent do you consider yourself part of a community of two-year college educators working to improve STEM education?	2.4	2.6	p=0.03
Follow-up community engagement questions: Check all that apply			
Engaging in deep two-way conversation in support of our educational work	54% (26)	78% (29)	p=.01
Providing assets or resources to other community members	54% (26)	76% (28)	p=.01
Seeking people to talk to who have experience relevant to my situation	69% (33)	73% (27)	p<.0001
Coordinating or strategizing to achieve a shared goal	58% (28)	70% (26)	Not significant
Finding collaborators for a new project	23% (11)	51% (19)	p=.01

The workshop helped build a community where ITYC awardees could share insights, questions, challenges, lessons learned, and challenges associated with their projects, drawing on the collective experience of their colleagues who worked in a similar part of the STEM education system - 2YCs. By sharing practical knowledge, lessons learned, a variety of perspectives, and encouragement, participants helped build a community where new ITYC awardees could draw on the collective experience of their peers. Enabling these connections and collaborations in the ITYC community helps awardees better advance their own innovations in two-year college STEM education in ways that strengthen STEM student success.

- *The ITYC New Awardee Program met me where I was, helped me see how far I had come, and sent me forward with renewed purpose and new connections.*
- *it is wonderful to now feel part of a community of scientists with similar student populations, goals, and challenges.*
- *Overall, I left the program with new connections, increased confidence about our current progress, practical ideas for our project (particularly as it relates to our connection with the external evaluator) and a stronger sense of belonging within this grant community*

7. What Worked Well; What Could Be Strengthened

The project leadership team identified four elements that worked well and suggested four aspects that could be strengthened.

What worked well

1. The micro-poster session was a great way to start learning about other ITYC projects, followed by discussions that continued throughout the workshop.
2. Learning more about key aspects of grant and project management, partnerships, evaluation, and reporting processes was valuable, particularly for first-time grant awardees.
3. The combination of presentations, panels, and discussions with colleagues from different institutions and disciplines, some of whom had different roles in the projects, was empowering.
4. The interactive workshop design promoted active learning about issues related to the projects and to STEM education in 2YCs in general.

What could be strengthened

1. Either adjust sessions to reflect differences in participant experience levels or focus on first-time awardees.
2. Provide more opportunities for participants to discuss with others who have similar projects.
3. More organically integrate leadership development throughout the program.
4. Increase emphasis on the value of having more than one person per project attend the workshop.

The mix of structured sessions, breakout discussions, and time for reflection helped me think more clearly about our goals and next steps, especially with keeping the project going. I really appreciated being in a community of people who understand the 2YC context, because the feedback and examples felt relevant, realistic, and encouraging. Overall, the workshop built both confidence and momentum for me, and I think this kind of support should continue for future 2YC participants. (Participant response)

8. Looking to the Future: Professional Development and Community Support

Participants overwhelmingly expressed a desire for continued engagement beyond the New Awardee Program through an ongoing ITYC community. The most frequently requested supports included regular virtual coffee hours or quarterly check-ins, discussion forums or listservs, newsletters, and annual or regional in-person gatherings that would enable participants to share project updates, troubleshoot challenges, and build collaborations. Respondents also wanted opportunities to connect with experienced ITYC principal investigators through roundtable discussions, mentoring, and peer learning focused on projects with similar goals. In addition, they suggested topics for professional development, practical resources, and other community-building opportunities.

- Participants identified several topics for **professional development** as their projects progressed, including guidance on preparing annual reports, requesting no-cost extensions, sharing challenges and strategies with others who have similar projects, sustaining projects beyond the grant period, and identifying future funding opportunities.
- They also requested **practical resources** such as evaluation and dissemination guidance, templates for project communications and reporting, examples of successful ITYC projects and scaling strategies, and toolkits for developing one-pagers and various dissemination products.
- Many participants emphasized that ongoing **opportunities** to exchange ideas across disciplines, identify new collaborators, and learn from peers at different stages of project implementation would strengthen project outcomes and foster continued innovation within the ITYC community.

Overall, they emphasized that maintaining an active ITYC community would provide continued encouragement, practical guidance, and opportunities to strengthen both current and future projects.

This [workshop model for new awardees] seems like such a wonderful springboard for building a sustainable, long-term community around this work. The strong desire for continued engagement provides important evidence that the program met a real need that extends beyond the workshop itself. It also provides evidence for how sustained community-building could support capacity building across two-year colleges at a much larger scale.

Kalyn Owens

9. Conclusion

The New Awardee Workshop contributed directly to the ITYC program's goal of building the capacity of two-year college educators to provide innovative, evidence-based STEM education and to support student success in STEM pathways. The workshop strengthened the capacity of 2YC researchers and grant recipients to serve effectively as Principal Investigators. It also demonstrated that supporting ITYC awardees is about more than understanding grant requirements – it is about building confidence, community, and capacity. By connecting ITYC Principal investigators with peers who were navigating many of the same challenges, the workshop created a supportive community in which the participants could share strategies, learn from one another, and gain confidence in their roles as grant recipients and 2YC STEM educators.

The success of the workshop emphasized the importance of structured opportunities to build confidence, develop leadership and grant-management capacity, and establish professional

communities that could benefit the broader 2YC STEM community. We hope there will be continued investment in support for new awardees using this workshop as a model for building a stronger and more connected 2YC STEM educator community.

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