Being Intentional: Creating Community, Not Another Conference

By Rochelle L. Williams, PhD
ARC Network Project Director, AWIS

The ARC Network, an initiative of AWIS, elevates thought leadership on the successes and challenges to realizing equity in STEM. Since 2009, AWIS has worked with the National Science Foundation (NSF) to convene ADVANCE institutions and NSF Gender in Science and Engineering (GSE) program to discuss synthesizing quantitative and qualitative approaches affecting gender composition and representation in STEM education workplaces.

By combining AWIS’ convening power and the ARC Network’s mission to advance equity in STEM, we’ve sought to create community, not another conference that promises a magical solution to research problems.

The 2019 Equity in STEM Community Convening builds on the momentum of the NSF ADVANCE/GSE Workshops, while simultaneously curating an experience that embodies a culture of innovation and inclusion. Traditional meeting features (i.e., poster sessions, networking coffee breaks and interactive breakout sessions) are infused with components that amplify, revolutionize and cultivate a community of researchers and practitioners.

**Amplify.**
To increase the reach and visibility of proven strategies that promote equity in STEM, additional avenues for authentic storytelling have been incorporated into this year’s programming. To start, presenters were asked to stretch themselves by submitting visual abstracts, visual summaries of their presentations instead of the traditional text-based abstract. Shifting to visual abstracts allows easy distribution of their work within the ARC Network and with external audiences using social media. In addition to having prominent keynote speakers and poster showcase, the Equity in STEM Community Convening will also feature Lightning Talks during the networking reception. The Lightning Talks will challenge presenters to outline the highlights of their work and explain its importance within five minutes.

**Revolutionize.**
The Equity in STEM Community Convening will highlight high-quality research and works-in-progress that have potential to advance and transform STEM workplaces. The Early-Stage Innovations sessions will support new researchers and practitioners looking to share the initial phase of their work or seeking feedback from the community. Experience Reports, sessions dedicated to those on the frontline of change, are designed for well-developed and/or later-stage initiatives or research.

We’ve also introduced a new priority area, ADVANCE to Market. Presentations will center on research, programs, and practices that discuss academic STEM entrepreneurship and commercialization, including social equity issues and taking diversity and inclusion research and resources to market.

**Cultivate.**
Advancing equity in STEM requires an intentional focus on creating authentic, sustainable and inclusive environments while simultaneously cultivating a community that collaborates, shares and implements promising practices and tools shown to affect change. Presenter-designed Symposia and Workshops are meant to give participants the time to reflect and create, both individually and with others. The informal setting of the Networking Breaks make way for relaxed exchanges that are crucial for the learning process.

In a world with too many conferences, too many broken promises and not enough time, you’ll leave the convening inspired to take your work to the next level and, more importantly, knowing there’s a community ready to support you in your efforts toward #EquityinSTEM.

Rochelle L. Williams, PhD, is Project Director for the ARC Network, an AWIS initiative. Dr. Williams holds a Bachelor of Science in Physics from Spelman College and both a Master of Engineering in Mechanical Engineering and Doctorate in Science and Mathematics Education from Southern University and A&M College.

To learn more about the Equity in STEM Community Convening, visit EquityInSTEM.org/community-convening/