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Help budding scientists—be a Science Buddy!

May 10, 2013 | Author: Summer Allen, Graduate and Postdoc, Brown University



Science Buddies is a fantastic resource for budding scientists. It is a website that offers students both expert help and project ideas from across the sciences. The site is also a wonderful opportunity for scientists (and non-scientists) to volunteer their expertise to these students—in as little as half an hour. Read on to learn more about the resources and volunteer possibilities at Science Buddies from Amy Cowen, the site's Online Community Manager.

AAAS MemberCentral: Can you explain the main goals of Science Buddies?

Amy Cowen, Science Buddies Online Community Manager: Science Buddies' mission is to help students from all walks of life to build their literacy in science, technology, engineering, and math so they can become productive and engaged citizens in the 21st century. We have created personalized learning tools, over 15,000 pages of scientist-developed subject matter (including experiments based on the latest academic research), and an online community of science professionals who volunteer to help students who have questions about their science projects. We also have resources for teachers and parents to help support hands-on science inquiry both at home and at school.

AAAS MC: When did the Science Buddies begin? How many people have participated in its programs?

Cowen: Science Buddies was founded in 2001. It serves more than 15 million students, teachers, and parents a year. We are a small non-profit organization, and we very much appreciate volunteers who donate time and expertise to Science Buddies.

AAAS MC: How can scientists get involved with Science Buddies? What types of opportunities are there?

Cowen: We welcome scientists in all fields to join Science Buddies in supporting K-12 science literacy and in exciting students about areas of science and STEM career paths. Our "My Science Buddies" program welcomes members of the community who are interested in contributing in a wide range of ways, from testing and reviewing science activities and projects to helping procure images for projects to helping spread the word about Science Buddies by sharing us with teachers, parents, and colleagues. In addition to the many short-term volunteer opportunities, a group of volunteers help in the Ask an Expert forum where they respond to student and parent questions about science projects. We also encourage volunteers to help with local and community science fairs. We do not coordinate volunteer judging, but we do recognize volunteers who give back to their communities in this way.

AAAS MC: Can you give an example of a scientist who has been involved with a Science Buddies project?

Cowen: Certainly! Here are a few examples:

- 1 A team of researchers at MIT collaborated with us to help bring cutting-edge research from their labs into the hands of student scientists in the "[Water to Fuel to Water: The Fuel Cycle of the Future](#)" chemistry project.
- 1 This project idea on bird migration was co-developed by two researchers: "[Are We There Yet? Test How Migratory Birds Navigate.](#)"
- 1 As was this one: "[Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Saving Migratory Animals.](#)"
- 1 This success story highlights the importance of an expert from the Ask an Expert forums in helping a student with an advanced project: "[Success Story: From Newspaper to Fuel.](#)"
- 1 This project was developed by a team of Seagate employees: "[Rock On! Recording Digital Data with Magnets,](#)" as was this one: "[Less Cowbell! The Unconstrained Truth About Constrained-Layer Damping.](#)"
- 1 This project was developed with Bio-Rad and a teacher: "[Sizing It Up! How Scientists Separate Proteins.](#)"
- 1 This project was developed in collaboration with employees from OSI Pharmaceuticals: "[Crazy Crystal Creations: How to Grow the Best and the Largest Crystals,](#)" as was this one: "[Is the Gold in My Jewelry Real?](#)"
- 1 There are other examples listed on our [Academic Outreach Program page](#).

We also welcome scientists who want to get involved in brainstorming new project ideas and in reviewing and editing ideas that are in development.

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AAAS MC: How can non-scientists get involved with Science Buddies?

Cowen: The My Science Buddies program has a range of options for both technical and non-technical support. Helping spread the word about Science Buddies and making teachers and parents more aware of the many resources we offer both for the classroom and for home science is very important. Joining us in one of our social media sites is also a great way to help show your support for Science Buddies. But non-scientists are also important in reviewing and testing projects, too! We welcome anyone with a passion for exciting students about science!

AAAS MC: What is the time commitment like for these different volunteer opportunities?

Cowen: Short-term activities often take a half hour or less. These tasks are convenient and allow volunteers to help in ways that fit their schedules and areas of interest and expertise. Testing a project, with a team at work, alone, or as a family activity, might take a few hours. Volunteers who help in the Ask an Expert forums commit to helping once a week for a half hour to an hour in the forums throughout the school year.

AAAS MC: Are there any success stories from the program that you are particularly fond of and would like to share?

Cowen: Volunteers? Or students? Or teachers? We have all of them!

Here are two recent stories about volunteers:

- 1 Science Buddies Recognizes "[Volunteer of the Year](#)" Donna Hardy of Bio-Rad Laboratories is a long-term volunteer in the Ask an Expert forums, and she has made a huge difference in the science project experience for countless students and parents!
- 1 In the Physical Sciences forum, Rick Marz is a long-term and valuable Expert in the forums. He calls himself one of the last remaining experts on crystal radios. This profile might be of interest: [The Call of the Crystal Radio](#).

We've got lots of great student success stories. AND, it hasn't really been mentioned above, but our Ask an Expert program also includes top student scientists who help as student mentors and part of our team of Experts. These students receive community service credit for helping in the forums during the year.

I hope you will visit the [Science Buddies](#) website to learn more about the organization and consider volunteering your expertise!



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