



The Stevens Initiative: An International Public Private Partnership to Support Virtual Exchange Programs

The Stevens Initiative, RTI International, Global Nomads Group

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The Stevens Initiative

- An international effort to build **global competence** for young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa by growing and enhancing the field of virtual exchange
- Virtual exchange = online, collaborative learning for youth (ages 15-30); facilitated; sustained
- 23 grantee organizations reaching 30,000 students in 18 countries, 31 US states
- Housed at the Aspen Institute and is a collaboration between the family of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens; the U.S. Department of State, the Bezos Family Foundation; the governments of the United Arab Emirates and Morocco; Microsoft, Twitter, Vidyo and LRNG.

Intended Outcomes

1. Quality
2. Demand
3. Access
4. Ownership
5. Affordability
6. Reach

How do we do it?

1. Grant-making
2. Practitioner support
3. Evaluation
4. Communication & Amplification
5. Matchmaking
 - ❖ Join a Program
 - ❖ Find a Partner
6. Research and Best Practices



- STEAMuseum
- 300 students in Casablanca, Morocco and Chicago, US
- Curriculum: language, STEAM, digital literacy



- Civic Technology Leadership
- Hybrid approach: 3,000 online learners, 200 virtual exchange participants, 16 in-person participants
- Student projects:
 - Combatting misinformation during electoral campaigns in Arab world
 - Supporting victims of domestic violence by enabling safe reporting of domestic abuse
 - Targeting corruption by submitting anonymous reports of bribery demands, using SMS, smartphones or the web.



- 3,300 students participating in Utah, New York, Kentucky, California, Jordan, Tunisia & Morocco.
- Global citizenship and 21st-century skills: communication, collaboration, and critical thinking.

Stakeholder Engagement (US and MENA)

1. Funding partners
 - US government
 - Morocco, UAE governments
 - US-based private foundations
2. Policymakers
 - US, MENA, global
3. Grantees
4. Educators and education leaders
5. Private sector and educational associations
6. Young people

Independent Evaluation led by RTI International

1. Why Evaluate?
2. Developmental Evaluation
3. Mixed Methods
4. Increasing Levels of Rigor
5. Engaging Stakeholders: The Evaluation Working Group

Evaluation Working Group (EWG)

Purpose:

- Develop appropriate M & E plan that is transparent and meaningful
- Build common understanding of terminology and measures
- Collectively interpret and use data coming from the evaluation to improve practice and communicate best practices
- Leverage evaluation activities of Awardees

Composition:

- Representative from each Awardee org; State Dept; Bezos Family Foundation; and Stevens Initiative staff. Facilitated by RTI.
- Monthly to quarterly virtual meetings

EWG Activities and Progress

1. RTI created cross walk of common indicators by reviewing Awardee plans
2. RTI proposed survey items for indicators for EWG feedback and critique. Following adjustments, EWG agreed to common set
3. EWG reviewed semi-annual evaluation reports, collaboratively interpret and react to emerging findings
4. In smaller groups, discuss implementation successes, challenges and potential solutions
5. Review limitations of current survey measures and survey administration practices; develop plans for improving both subsequent implementation phases
6. Program designers appreciate space and infrastructure to learn with and from each other, and participate in evaluation rather than it being done to them.

How has GNG fostered collaboration?

- **Among practitioners**
 - Virtual Exchange Coalition: discover intersecting interests and take ownership for bringing groups together; build foundation for practitioners to drive thought leadership in their field
 - Global Education Coalition: Expanding circle of practitioners beyond virtual exchange; recognizing common interests and mutual benefits
 - Advocacy for financial support in the US and Europe
 - Awareness, advocacy, and field building for virtual exchange

How has GNG fostered collaboration?

Among local partners

- Madrasati partnership: working with local NGO to foster better understanding of local contexts and increase effectiveness of recruitment efforts
- Districts, charter networks in the US: identify those with mutually reinforcing goals

With academia and research

- MIT, UPenn partnerships

What are the benefits and challenges?

- **Benefits**

- Shared resources
- Learning opportunities
- Expansion opportunities
- Field-building
- Community of practice

- **Challenges**

- Rich diversity of approaches and contexts impedes ability to define best practices and outcomes as concretely and explicitly as would be necessary to improve public understanding and support of the field
- Increased competition



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Thank you and Questions

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