

## Girls Branch Out: Portable S.T.E.M Labs

The National Science Foundation has conducted several studies on the number of women entering S.T.E.M related fields. While the number of graduates is steadily increasing, there are still pay gaps and gender inequalities in fields such as engineering and technology. If I received a grant for \$1,000,000, I would develop a program to encourage girls to pursue S.T.E.M. careers and build confidence in their ability to be successful. Developing a strong foundation will help increase the number of young women who want achieve their dream occupations in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics and in return continuing, to further advance women's achievements in our society.

Judith Kersey broke the glass ceiling at the Kennedy Space Center by being the first woman guidance systems engineer. She later went on to create a phenomenal program called, "Introducing Girls to Engineering Workshop." This workshop introduced Engineering activities to over 1800 girls over in the first four years. My vision would expand on her ideas by creating a Portable S.T.E.M. Lab. I would convert two ordinary tractor trailers into four hands-on learning labs for young women. The S.T.E.M would cycle through numerous topics such as Biology, Aeronautics, Physics, Coding, etc. I would plan to cover as many areas of interest as possible, making the learning experience wide spread and intriguing. Staffed by prominent women in S.T.E.M related fields, the learning labs would also include young women in college pursuing degrees in these fields.

These portable S.T.E.M learning labs would travel around the state of Florida and provide opportunities for middle and high school aged girls to express their interest in the sciences in a safe and encouraging environment without fear of judgement or ridicule. Eventually, when additional funding is available, girls would be transported to Kennedy Space

Center. Their weekend visit would include a behind the scenes tour, information sessions with female engineers, scientists, and astronauts and lots of fun

S.T.E.M professions are often lifelong pursuits. Even today, with the additional focus on the sciences, many girls are still turned off by entering a field in many ways still dubbed “a man’s world.” With these portable S.T.E.M Labs, Girls will be able to branch out and explore new topics and hopefully choose S.T.E.M professions, and in return continue to advance women’s achievements in our modern world.