



## VISION

The Aspen Institute Stevens Initiative gives young people the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to prosper in an interconnected world.

## MISSION

The Stevens Initiative is an international effort to build global competence for young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by growing and enhancing the field of virtual exchange: online, international, and collaborative learning.

## INSPIRATION

Ambassador Chris Stevens was known for his uncommon goodwill toward others. Ambassador Stevens studied in Europe Spain during high school, college, and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco. These experiences shaped his view of the world, fueled his curiosity, and earned him the esteem of people everywhere he served. Even though those kinds physical exchange experiences are highly valuable, fewer than one percent of young people have the opportunity to participate in them because of limited resources.

The Stevens Initiative—conceived and developed in close partnership with Ambassador Stevens' family—aims to make similar experiences available to unprecedented numbers of young people through programs that connect youth in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa virtually in sustained and meaningful ways.

## WHAT IS VIRTUAL EXCHANGE?

The Initiative defines virtual exchange as programs that: use online technology to connect individuals and small groups between countries; are based on a curriculum and involves qualified facilitators (such as educators or others); and involve sustained communication and collaboration in real-time or asynchronously over a period of time. Virtual exchange can facilitate a cross-cultural experience that builds marketable global competencies - including communication, collaboration, empathy, language, and problem-solving - and deepens understanding of and ability to engage with people from other backgrounds.

## WHAT DOES THE STEVENS INITIATIVE DO?

### 1. Award Making and Capacity Building

The most direct method by which the Stevens Initiative supports the growth of the virtual exchange field is through awards to NGOs and educational institutions to administer virtual exchange. Through an annual open competition, the Initiative identifies opportunities to invest in virtual exchange programs. The Stevens Initiative made awards to 10 organizations in its first round and launched its second award competition in Fall 2016. The Stevens Initiative also hosts events and webinars to support its awardees.

### 2. Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation is essential for informed investment, and for this reason, the Initiative is working with an external evaluator to monitor and evaluate the work of the Stevens Initiative and its awardees. The lessons learned from evaluation will greatly contribute to the Initiative's understanding of what constitutes and what contributes to quality virtual exchange, informing the design of future competitions and the Initiative's recommendations for best practices.

### 3. Research

The Stevens Initiative will build on its efforts to survey and fill evidence gaps in the field of virtual exchange. Research activities will focus on measuring the impact of virtual exchange programs.

### 4. Communications

The Initiative will collect and share impact and success stories to spread awareness on virtual exchange. It will target audiences in both the US and the MENA region, including students, teachers, education leaders, parents, policymakers and business leaders.

### 5. Advocacy and Partnerships

The Stevens Initiative is working to build awareness and scale the use of virtual exchange across communities in the U.S. and the MENA region. In order to do so, the Initiative is developing a shared understanding of the overarching mission and goals of virtual exchange, and seeking partnerships to further its reach and impact. Through partnerships, the Initiative will also match organizations in each of these regions with peers to help them achieve their goals and expand virtual exchange programs globally.



***“Chris believed in the value of each person’s story. The Stevens Initiative honors his legacy by tapping into the power of technology to foster meaningful connections and shared respect and understanding between young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa. This is the work that Chris believed in, and would have wanted to continue.”***

**- Dr. Anne Stevens, MD, PhD, Associate Professor, Seattle Children’s Hospital, University of Washington;  
Sister of Ambassador Stevens**

**STEVENS INITIATIVE AWARDS REACH MORE THAN 21,000 YOUNG PEOPLE IN 17 COUNTRIES  
IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA AND 25 U.S. STATES.**

- 1. Global Nomads Group** integrates virtual reality video into a curriculum designed to spur young people’s thinking on global citizenship. It will reach students in California, Utah, Kentucky, New York, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.
- 2. Primarily through teacher training, iEARN** will enable 10,000 middle and high school students in the United States and across the Middle East and North Africa to work together on issues as diverse as the environment, civic education, heritage and tradition, food security, and the arts.
- 3. The National Democratic Institute** will augment an online course with a special track that offers hands-on mentorship for small international groups developing “civic technology” projects.
- 4. Soliya** connects post-secondary students in small-group, semester-long dialogue to foster cross-cultural understanding.
- 5. U.C. Berkeley** provides an opportunity, via vlog and virtual meeting environments, for Berkeley undergraduates to interact with a diverse group of peers in rural Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan.
- 6. The State University of New York COIL Center** develops and supports sustainable, campus-based exchange initiatives connecting SUNY campuses with counterparts in Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco.
- 7. Wofford College** will scale up a pilot program in Lebanon and Egypt, integrating it across disciplines.
- 8. Through a project run by Chicago Sister Cities International**, high school students in Chicago and Casablanca will work together to create an exhibit in an online science museum.
- 9. World Learning** will connect Iraqi and American youth to explore leadership development, civic rights and responsibilities, diversity, community engagement, and other social issues.
- 10. Eurasia Foundation** will design a video game that challenges young people to work together internationally to solve a community problem.

***“I learned patience. Many times, people from other countries have a different way of saying something. Sometimes it can be hard to hear, but if I stepped back and looked at it from their view I could understand.”***

**- a student from Western Kentucky**

***“The most important thing I learned during my participation in the Connect Program was that people are more similar than they often think and that constructive dialogue can achieve a lot.”***

**- a student from Kuwait**

J. Christopher Stevens Fund



[www.stevensinitiative.org](http://www.stevensinitiative.org)



[stevensinitiative@aspeninst.org](mailto:stevensinitiative@aspeninst.org)



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