



North Bay Science Discovery Day 2026 Evaluation Report

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The [2026 North Bay Science Discovery Day](#) was a free, one-day STEM festival held at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds on March 7, 2026. The event brought together more than 100 organizations and an estimated 10,000 or more attendees for hands-on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning experiences designed to spark curiosity and wonder among children.



Key Takeaways

The 2026 evaluation results show that North Bay Science Discovery Day:

1. **Sparked strong public interest in STEM.** Attendees reported high levels of wonder and curiosity, increased STEM interest, stronger confidence in understanding science, and strong intent to seek out future STEM activities.
2. **Created a positive experience for attendees, volunteers, and exhibitors.** Attendees and exhibitors rated the event especially highly, while volunteers also reported positive experiences and high return intent.
3. **Strengthened the regional STEM learning ecosystem.** Exhibitors used the event to connect with families, increase awareness of their organizations, and build or strengthen relationships with other community partners.

Methods

We collected attendee exit surveys, volunteer post-event surveys, and exhibitor post-event surveys. Attendee surveys represented 963 attendees because respondents entered demographic information for members of their group.

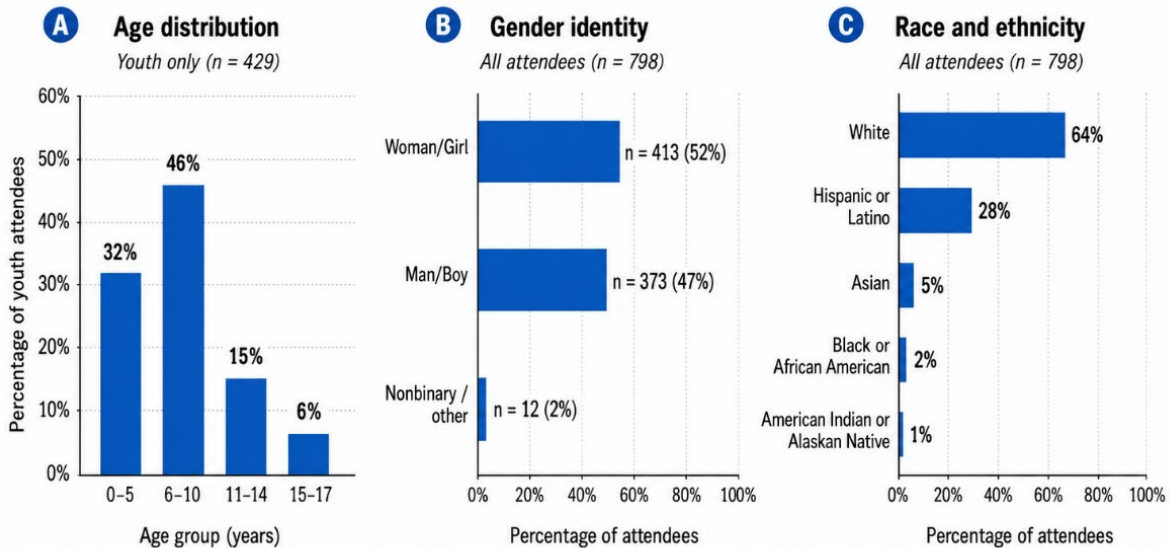
Survey Group	Responses	Total at Festival	Response Rate
Attendee	403 (represented 963 attendees)	10,000+	4.0% (9.6%)
Volunteer	64	174	36.8%
Exhibitor	51	104	49.0%

Part 1: Audience Reach and Engagement

Discovery Day primarily reached families with elementary school-aged children, especially early-elementary youth attending with adults. The attendee group was close to evenly split by gender and included substantial participation from white and Latino families. These patterns suggest that the event is reaching its intended family audience, but future promotion and exhibitor planning should continue to account for the young age of many attendees. Exhibits should be designed for upper-elementary youth but remain accessible to younger children, since the actual attendee age profile skews younger than the formal target range.

Who attended 2026 Discovery Day?

Most represented attendees were school-aged children and the adults with them, reflecting the family-centered festival format.



Note. Demographic data are person-level entries reported by attendee survey respondents for members of their group. Percentages are based on valid responses for each demographic item and may not represent all event attendees.

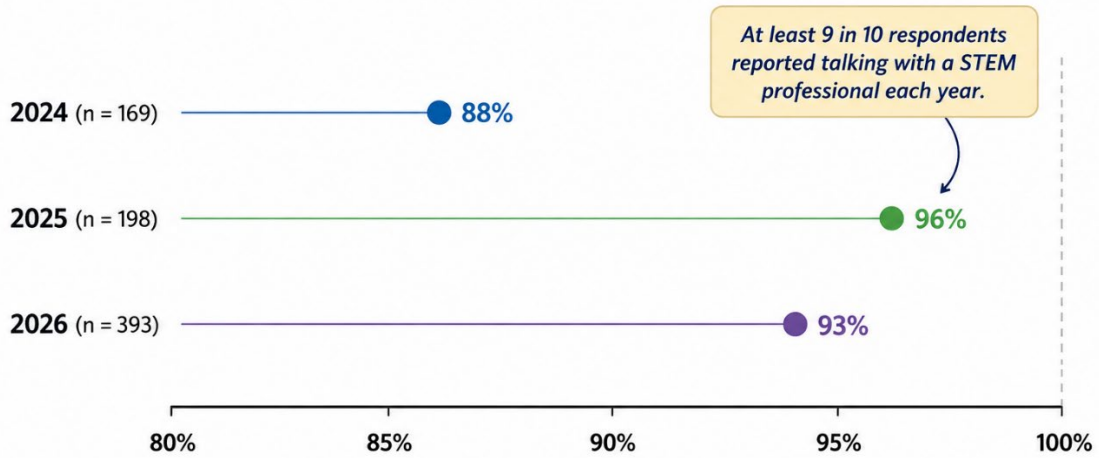


Interactions with STEM professionals

Across all three years, most attendee survey respondents reported talking with a scientist, engineer, or someone working in a STEM field. The percentage answering “Yes” was 88% in 2024, 96% in 2025, and 93% in 2026.

Most attendees reported talking with a STEM professional at Discovery Day

Percent of valid attendee survey responses answering “Yes,” 2024 to 2026

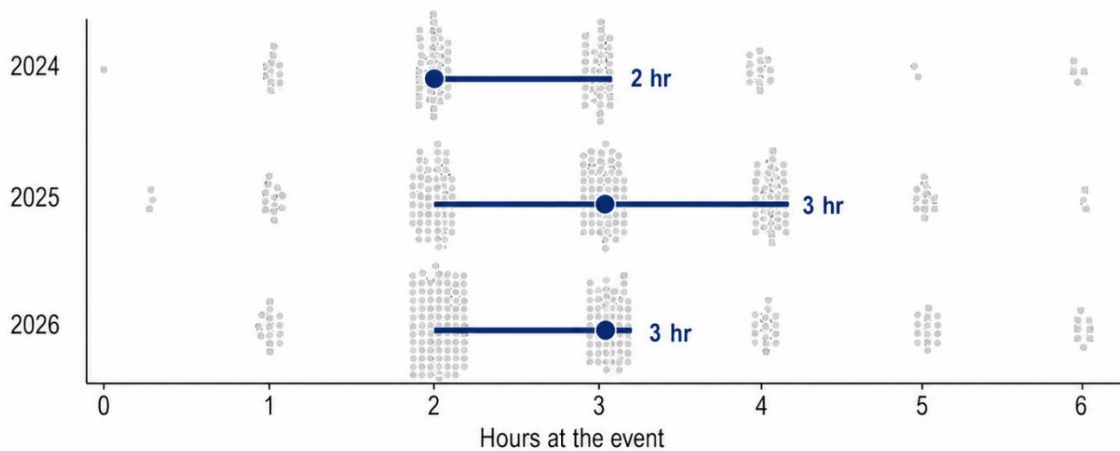


Hours at the festival

Attendees reported spending more time at Discovery Day in 2025 and 2026 than in 2024. The median length of stay increased from 2 hours in 2024 to 3 hours in both 2025 and 2026, while mean reported time increased from 2.57 hours to about 2.9 hours. The consistency between 2025 and 2026 suggests the event sustained a longer average visit time after 2024. One potential reason was weather related as it rained in 2024 but had clear/partly-cloudy warmer weather in 2025 and 2026.

Attendees stayed longer in 2025 and 2026 than in 2024

Reported hours at Discovery Day, attendee surveys, 2024 to 2026



Faint dots = individual survey responses; thick line = middle 50% of responses (IQR).

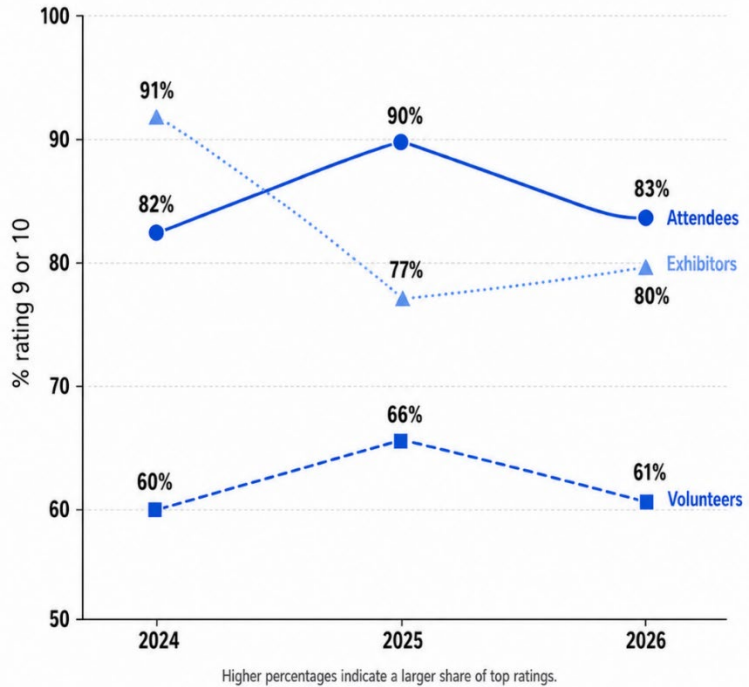


Part 2: Festival Experiences

Attendees, exhibitors, and volunteers rated the 2026 Discovery Day experience highly. On a 1 to 10 scale, attendees gave an average rating of 9.38, and 83% rated the event a 9 or 10. Exhibitors reported a similar level of satisfaction, with an average rating of 9.39 and 80% rating the event a 9 or 10. Volunteers' ratings were somewhat lower but still positive, with an average rating of 8.87 and 61% rating the event a 9 or 10. The slightly lower volunteer rating is worth monitoring, but the overall pattern is strongly positive.

Most respondents rated their Discovery Day experience highly across 2024, 2025, and 2026

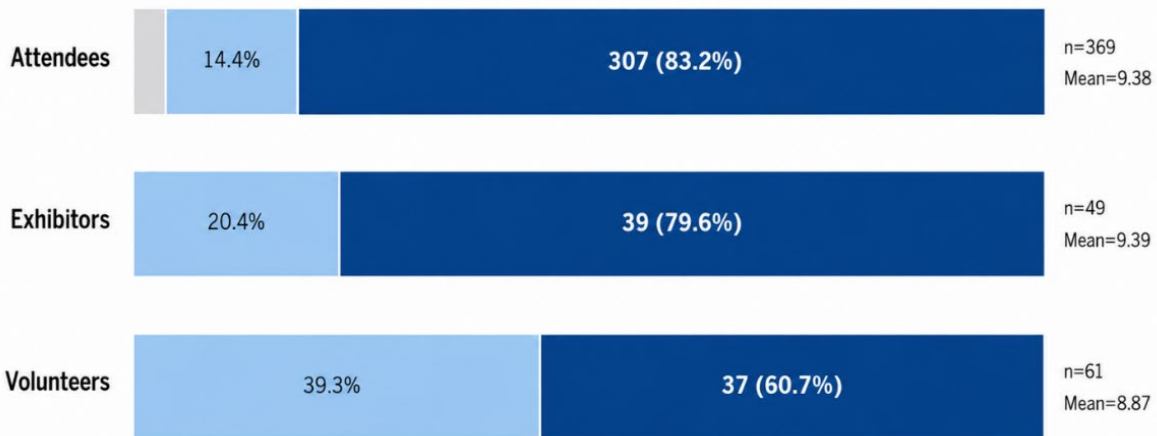
Overall experience quality. Percentage of responses rating the experience 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale.



Most attendees, volunteers, and exhibitors rated their Discovery Day experience highly

Overall, how would you rate the quality of your experience at the North Bay Science Discovery Day today?

1-6 Mixed or lower
 7-8 Positive
 9-10 Excellent / top rating



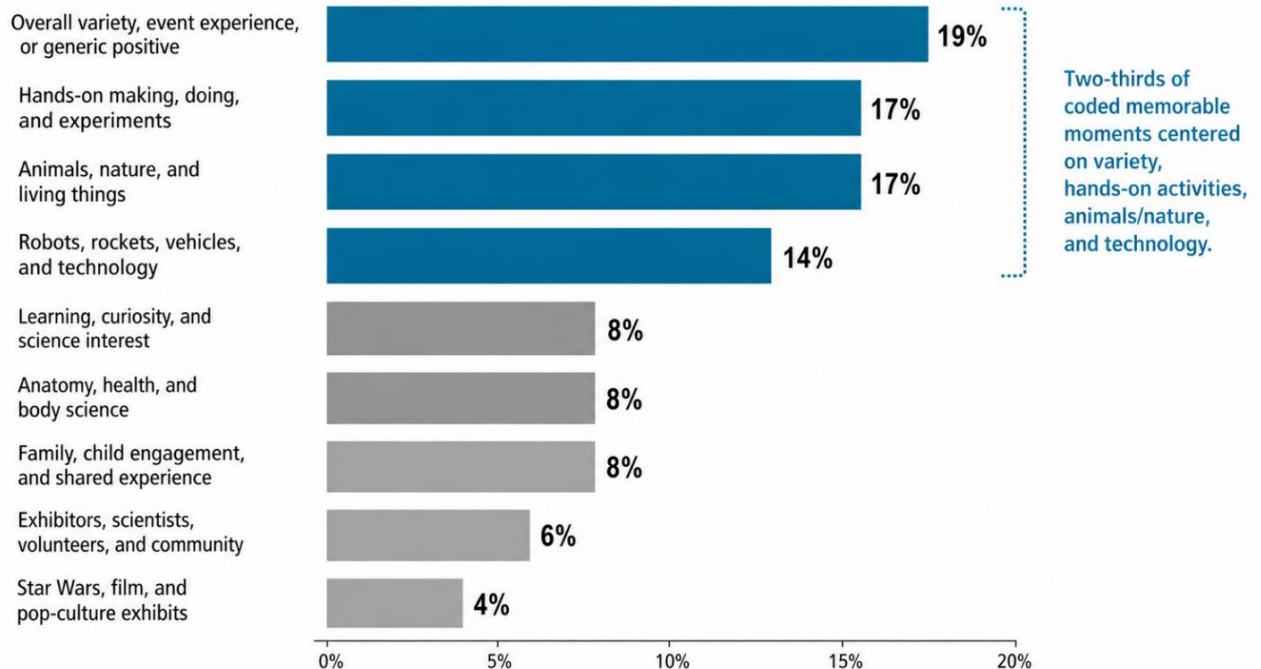
Most memorable experiences

Discovery Day was most memorable when children and families could actively touch, build, observe, test, and interact with real STEM materials. The most memorable experiences also clustered around animals, nature, sensory experiences, and visually striking exhibits. Memorable activities combined novelty with direct participation created moments of surprise, discovery, and emotional engagement.

Overall, Discovery Day successfully created a high-energy, hands-on, curiosity-building STEM experience for children and families. The clearest implication for future planning is to continue prioritizing interactive, tactile, visual, and inquiry-oriented exhibits, especially those that are accessible to younger children while still offering meaningful engagement for older youth and adults.

Attendees remembered hands-on experiences, animals, technology, and the overall festival variety most often

Percentages are based on 523 code applications across 295 substantive responses. Responses could receive more than one code.



Recommend Changes

The largest response category was “no change” or a generally positive comment, suggesting that many attendees experienced the event positively as designed. Among attendees who suggested improvements, the most common ideas focused on comfort and event logistics rather than the quality of STEM exhibits.

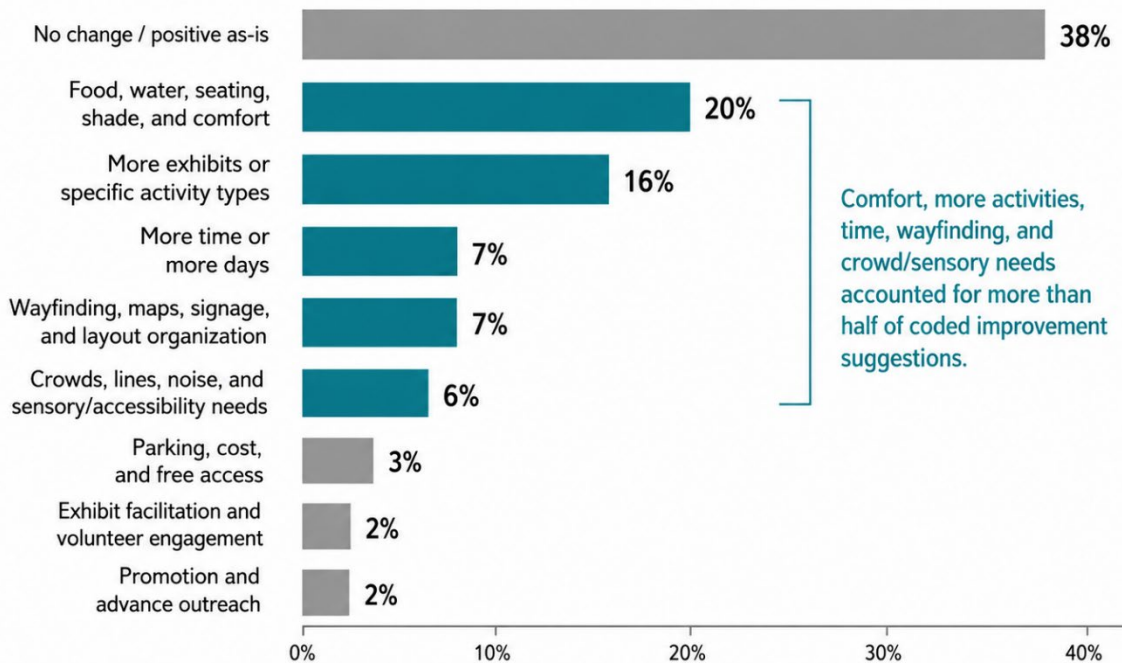
The clearest improvement area was physical comfort, including food, water, seating, shade, and places to rest. Families often stay for several hours, move between multiple buildings, and attend with young children. Adding or better marking rest areas, hydration options, seating, and shaded outdoor spaces would likely improve the attendee experience without changing the core educational model.

A second improvement area was the desire for more exhibits or more specific types of activities, especially in areas attendees remembered strongly, such as animals, robotics, engineering challenges, nature, and sensory activities.

A third area of improvement involved wayfinding, maps, signage, and layout. Improving building-level signage, map visibility, rest area labels, bathroom and hydration markings, and “what’s inside this building” signs could reduce friction and help families discover more exhibits.

Most attendees suggested no change; improvement ideas centered on comfort, more activities, and clearer navigation

Percentages are based on 246 code applications across 222 substantive responses. Responses could receive more than one code.



Part 3: Outcomes

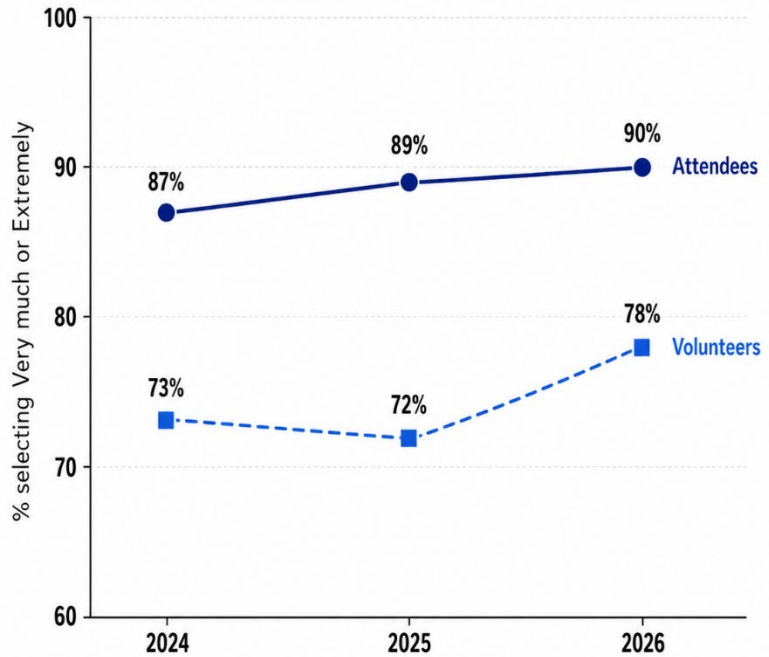
Sparking Young People’s Wonder and Curiosity

Discovery Day met its central goal of sparking wonder and curiosity about STEM. In 2026, 90% of attendees reported that the event sparked their wonder and curiosity very much or extremely. Among volunteers, 78% selected very much or extremely.

In a three-year comparison, attendee wonder and curiosity increased modestly from 2024 to 2026. The 2024-to-2026 increase was statistically significant (Holm-adjusted pairwise Welch t-tests, mean difference = 0.16 on a 1–5 scale, adjusted p = .028).

Discovery Day consistently sparked wonder and curiosity about STEM

Percentage selecting "Very much" or "Extremely"



Promoting STEM Interest

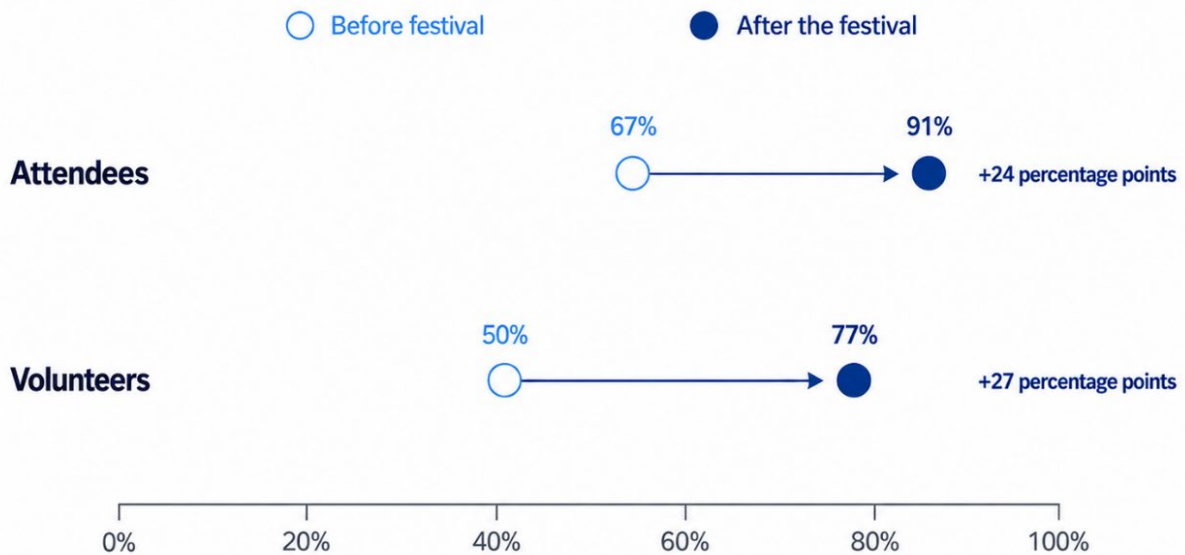
We asked people to rate their interest in STEM before-and-after Discovery Day. We found statistically significant gains for both attendees and volunteers.

- Among **attendees**, the share reporting very or extremely interested in STEM increased from 67% before the festival to 91% after the festival ($t(348) = 12.57, p < .001$).
- Among **volunteers**, the share reporting very or extremely high STEM interest increased from 50% before the festival to 77% after the festival ($t(57) = 5.25, p < .001$).

These findings suggest that Discovery Day was associated with a meaningful increase in self-reported STEM interest for both participants and volunteers.

2026 STEM interest increased after Discovery Day

Percentage reporting they were "Very interested" or "Extremely interested" in STEM



Increasing Confidence in Science

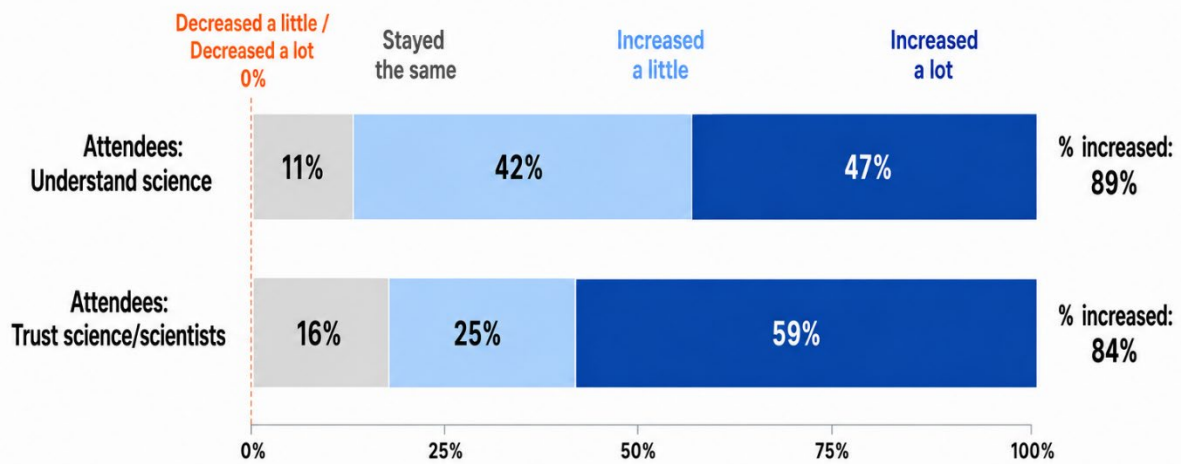
Attendees reported increased confidence related to science: 89% said their confidence in their ability to understand science increased; and 84% said their confidence that science and scientists provide trustworthy information increased.

Volunteers showed a similar pattern: 83% reported increased confidence in understanding science, and 86% reported increased confidence in science and scientists as trustworthy sources.

These findings suggest that the event not only generated interest but also strengthened confidence in science learning and trust in science.

2026 Discovery Day increased confidence in understanding and trusting science

Percentage of 2026 attendee responses



Building Continuing Motivation to Engage in STEM

The event also encouraged continued STEM engagement beyond the festival. After attending, 94% of attendees said they were likely or very likely to seek out STEM-related activities, events, or information.

This is an important result because while Discovery Day is designed as a short, public engagement experience, results show that it also helps motivate future participation in STEM learning.

Discovery Day encouraged future STEM engagement

After attending, 94% of attendees were likely to seek out STEM-related activities, events, or information

94%
likely or very likely

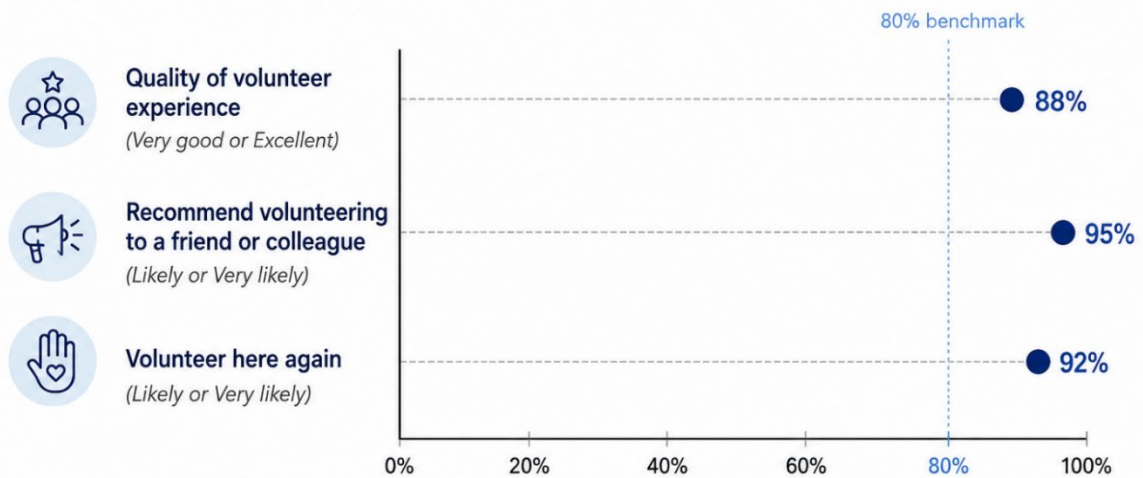


Part 4: Volunteer Motivations and Experiences

Volunteer findings were highly positive. Most volunteers said they enjoyed volunteering, would recommend volunteering at Discovery Day, and would volunteer again. Volunteers' motivations were led by community service hours and interest in science, followed by helping children learn science. These findings suggest that Discovery Day functions as both a youth-serving STEM festival and a meaningful volunteer experience, especially for high school students.

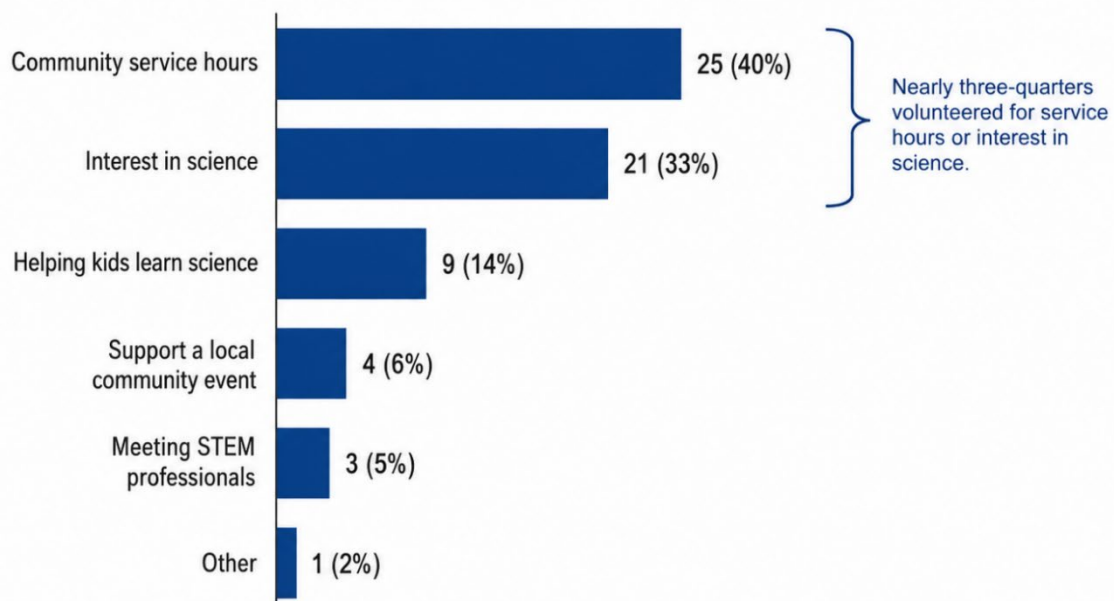
Volunteers reported strong experiences and high intent to return (2026)

Percentage of 2026 volunteers selecting the top two favorable response options



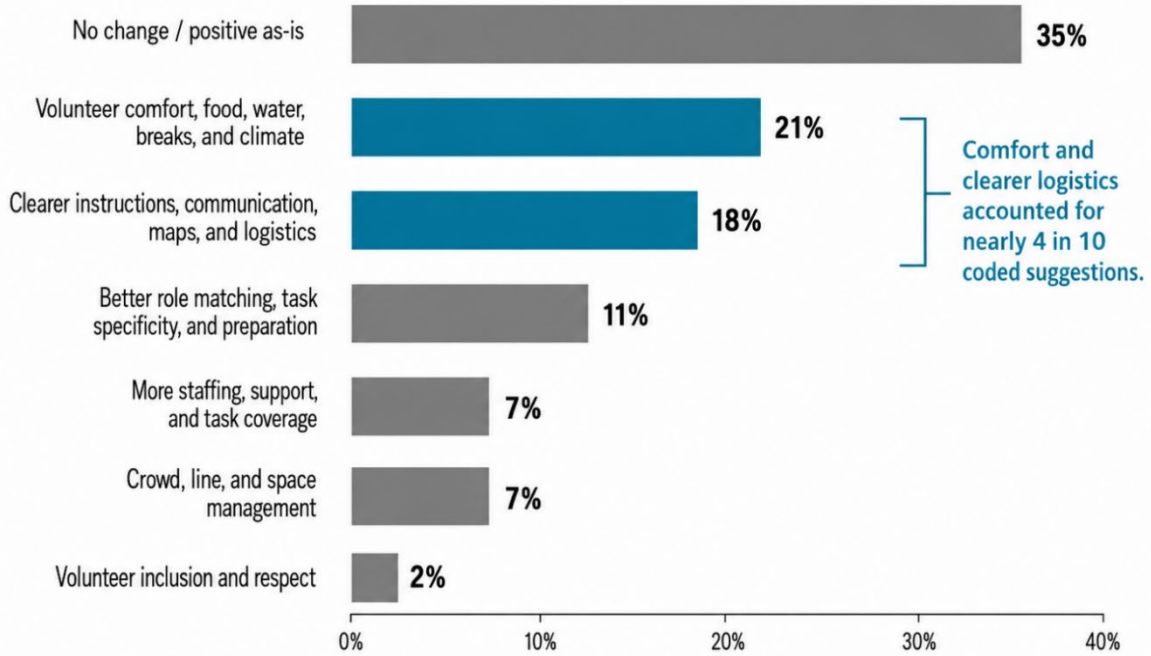
Volunteer motivations were led by service hours and interest in science

2026 volunteer survey, n = 63 valid responses



Volunteers most often said the experience worked well, while comfort and clearer logistics were the main improvement areas

Percentages are based on 57 code applications across 54 substantive responses. Responses could receive more than one code.



Non-substantive responses, including blank, N/A, and not sure, were excluded.

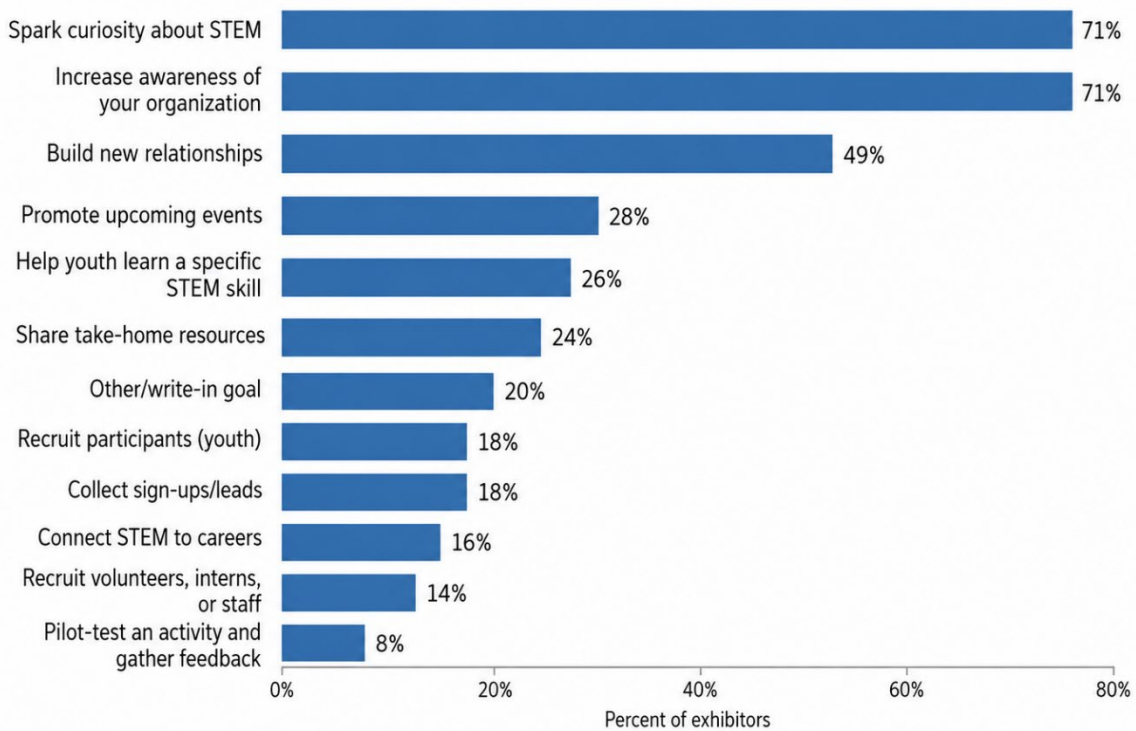


Part 5: Exhibitor Motivations and Experiences

Motivations

Exhibitors' most common goals were to spark curiosity about STEM (71%) and increase awareness of their organizations (71%). Nearly half also reported goals in building new relationships, suggesting that exhibitors viewed the event as both a public STEM engagement opportunity and a networking venue.

Exhibitors most often participated to spark STEM curiosity, build organizational visibility, and make connections

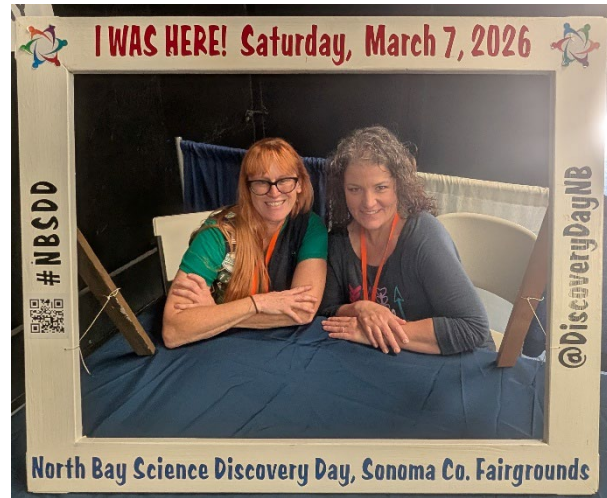


Check-all-that-apply item. Percentages exceed 100%.



Networking and partnership outcomes

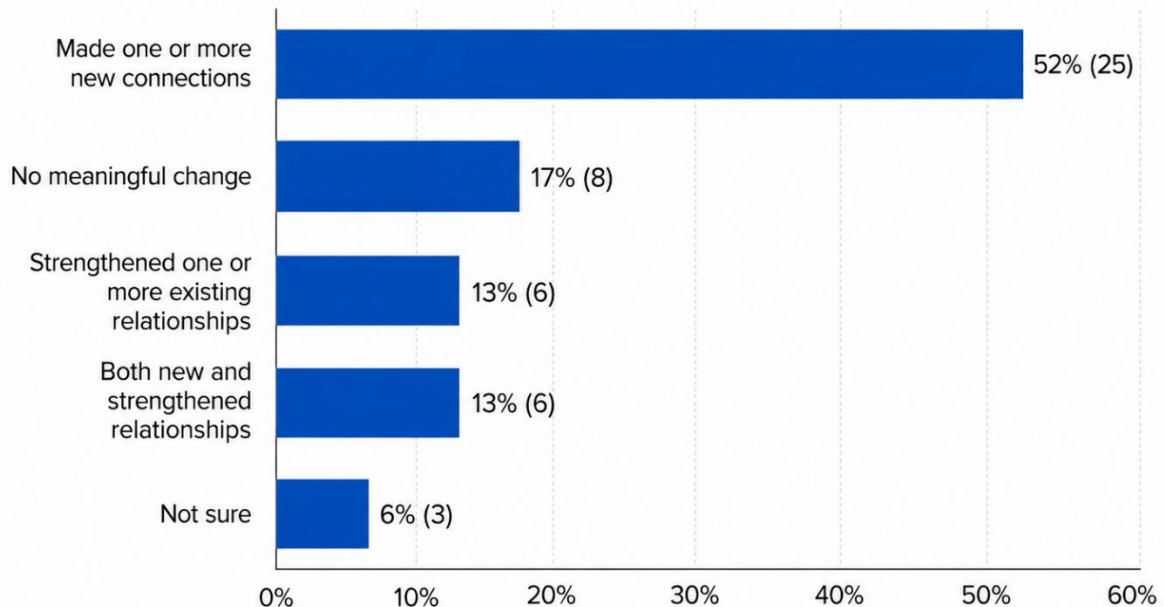
Discovery Day served as a meaningful networking and partnership platform. Among exhibitors, 77% reported making a new connection, strengthening an existing relationship, or both. New connections were especially common, with 65% reporting at least one new organizational connection.



These connections formed through informal conversations, physical proximity to related exhibitors, shared STEM and youth-development interests, and concrete follow-up opportunities. Several exhibitors described potential future collaborations, including future events, teaching or service opportunities, program sign-ups, shadowing opportunities, and follow-up with specific organizations.

These findings suggest that Discovery Day strengthens the regional STEM learning ecosystem by bringing organizations into a shared public space where collaboration can emerge naturally.

Most exhibitors reported that Discovery Day helped them make or strengthen organizational connections



Successes

Exhibitor feedback was strongly positive and reinforced several design principles for future Discovery Days.

1. The strongest educational design is hands-on engagement.

Exhibitors repeatedly described successful attendee experiences as hands-on, tactile, visual, active, and concrete.

2. The most successful exhibits were flexible for younger children.

Exhibitors noted that attendees were younger than expected, and that their activities worked because they were quick, simple, age-appropriate.

3. Exhibitor satisfaction is high, but comfort logistics matter.

The improvement comments were mostly about day-of practical needs: water, lunch, beverages, breaks, heat, air flow, noise, smells, custodial access, and booth equipment.

4. Space and layout were major strengths in 2026.

Exhibitors repeatedly praised spaciousness, building layout, booth location, and the ability for attendees to move through exhibits. The move or use of larger spaces appears to have improved the exhibitor experience.

5. Free admission remains central to the event's perceived public value.

When asked what to keep, exhibitors explicitly named free public access as important because it removed barriers and helped families attend.

6. Student volunteers are valuable but need stronger preparation.

Some exhibitors praised student volunteers, while one detailed response described a need for clearer volunteer expectations, engagement norms, and networking or booth-support skills.



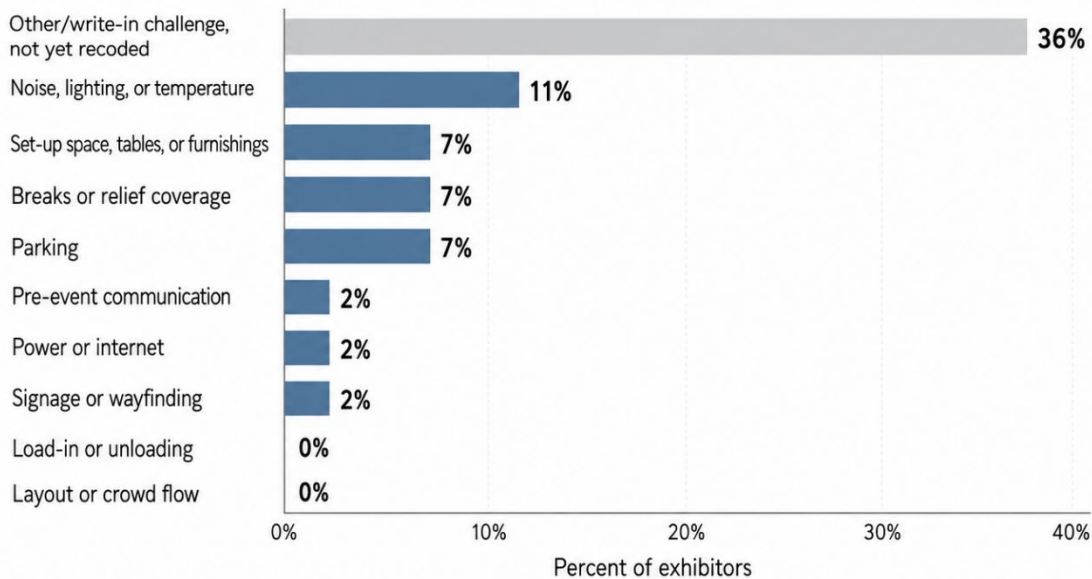
Challenges

The most common exhibitor improvement areas were practical rather than educational. Exhibitors identified needs related to comfort, hospitality, booth logistics, food, water, breaks, heat, air flow, noise, smells, custodial access, and booth equipment. These are important because exhibitor satisfaction depends on whether exhibitors can comfortably sustain a six-hour public-facing activity.

Student volunteers were also identified as both a strength and an improvement area. Some exhibitors valued student volunteers, while others wanted clearer expectations and better preparation. Future improvements could include short role cards for student volunteers, a brief booth-level orientation script for exhibitors, and clearer expectations that student volunteers should actively support engagement rather than only be present at the booth.

Half of exhibitors reported no major challenges; remaining challenges were mostly isolated logistical issues

50% reported no major challenges



Check-all-that-apply item. Percentages exceed 100%. n = 44 exhibitors. Other responses should be interpreted cautiously unless recoded.

Implications for 2027

The 2026 evaluation suggests that Discovery Day's core model is strong. The event successfully created a large-scale, hands-on STEM experience that sparked wonder and curiosity, increased STEM interest, and encouraged future STEM engagement.

For 2027, the committee should prioritize four areas.

1. Continue recruiting hands-on, tactile, visual, and inquiry-based exhibits, especially activities that are accessible to younger children while still engaging older youth.
2. Improve attendee comfort by expanding or better marking rest areas, hydration options, seating, shade, and quiet or sensory-friendly spaces.
3. Strengthen wayfinding through clearer building signs, map displays, bathroom and hydration labels, and "what's inside" signage at building entrances.
4. Improve volunteer and exhibitor support through clearer role expectations, student volunteer preparation, and stronger hospitality and break systems.

These changes would preserve what attendees, volunteers, and exhibitors value most while addressing the most common sources of friction in a large public event.



**We appreciate our volunteer planning committee and building captains!
B. Gabriela Arango, Dennis Bentley, Lyman Black, Sarah Coburn, Guy Cottle, Gary Fong,
Sarah Kangastone, Mandy Kirk, Kelly Mackura, Don Pierce, Mike Roa, Jessica Ruskin,
Jose Villagomez, Kerry Wininger, and Steven Worker.**