

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES

You may have designed a great Family STEM event, and are surprised that the families that you were expecting didn't attend. What went wrong? Maybe you thought the event site was accessible, but families didn't. Here are some take-aways from STEM programs who have carefully and creatively made where they host events as important as what, why, and how they do them. We hope that their lessons learned and successes inspire you.

THE WHERE MATTERS

1



Think you have the answer, think again.

When Girls Inc. of Orange County expanded its afterschool programs it decided to host a family STEM event across the programs at their Center. Since their site was close to the participating schools—in fact within walking distance for most—they expected that families would attend. They were wrong and learned that even though the program was really close, it still wasn't convenient. The program needed to be at school so that parents could pick up their kids and come to the multipurpose room. If they had first talked with families and partners at their new programs, they may have learned this. To Girls Inc.'s credit, they increased parent participation in their the next iteration!

2



Photo Courtesy of Bay Area STEM Ecosystem

For families that are not yet comfortable at a school or museum, host family STEM events at places that help take away apprehensions.

Instead of asking parents to come to the museum, David Heil, founding President of the Foundation for Family Science and Engineering, introduced Family Engineering where families gathered. He launched Family Engineering in the basements of Baptist churches where African American families felt welcomed and comfortable. They developed a huge following, thanks to families who got the word out to their fellow parishioners, friends, and neighbors about "this great thing was happening on Saturdays at the church." Other organizations have had success hosting in recreation centers in low-income housing complexes.

3



If transportation is a barrier for families, devote resources to make the trip affordable and accessible.

Girls Inc. affiliates have had success with gift cards to offset the cost to drive, bus passes, and the use of taxis or ride services. They have also partnered with local schools to have their school bus drive parents to family events. Other organizations have developed partnerships with cities for free bus passes. Families have different needs and desires, so be sure to enlist their input on what will help them participate.

4



Photo Courtesy of Bay Area STEM Ecosystem

When working with partners to put on a family STEM event, put families' needs first.

The **Bay Area STEM Ecosystem** held a summer STEM series at a Community Learning Center. Instead of asking parents to go to 10 different locations, partners came to the Community Center that was centrally located and a trusted resource for family support and community building. Given the level of participation, including repeat attendance, the choice of location clearly made it easier for families.

For more promising practices visit
www.stemnext.org/promising-practices

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